

Pablo Picasso : [brochure] The weeping woman

[Deborah Wye]

Author

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Pablo Picasso, *The Weeping Woman*

An historic achievement in modern print-making, Pablo Picasso's *The Weeping Woman* (1937) was recently added to The Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection. Immediately striking for its monumental scale, unusual for an etching, this masterful image draws the viewer in with its concentrated intensity. A frightening tangle of line and shape, the massive head is placed relatively low in the composition, heightening a sense of despair. One is confronted with a symbol of wrenching pain that can be linked not only to events in the artist's personal life, but also to the broader intellectual, social, and political climate in which it was created.

Picasso's imagination was fueled in countless ways, with the women in his life providing an ongoing source of creative energy, and the nature of the art process itself adding further avenues to explore. The expressive tools for *The Weeping Woman* were found in the workshop of Roger Lacourrière, a master printer with whom the artist uncovered the full potential of the intaglio techniques. The drawn, scratched, and scribbled marks that form this intricate pattern embody qualities unique to etching and drypoint. Their distinctive assertiveness results from ink becoming slightly raised on the surface of



Pablo Picasso. *The Weeping Woman*. 1937. Etching, aquatint, and drypoint, plate: 27 1/8 x 19 1/2" (68.9 x 49.5 cm); sheet: 30 5/16 x 22 5/16" (77 x 56.7 cm). Publisher: the artist, Paris. Printer: Lacourrière, Paris. Edition: 15 (3rd of 7 states). Acquired through the generosity of the Katsko Suzuki Memorial Fund, the Riva Castleman Endowment Fund, David Rockefeller, The Philip and Lynn Straus Foundation Fund, and Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro; Linda and Bill Goldstein, Herbert D. Schimmel, the Edward John Noble Foundation, and the Associates of the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books; The Cowles Charitable Trust, Nelson Blitz, Jr. with Catherine Woodard and Perri and Allison Blitz, Mary Ellen Meehan, and Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro; and Ruth and Louis Aledort, Carol and Bert Freidus, David Orentreich, and Susan and Peter Ralston. © 2001 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

the paper during the printing process. At the top of the head of the figure, tonal areas of grainy aquatint flow in an amorphous design, adding to an overall sense of the irrational laid bare. While not an official member of the Surrealist group, Picasso absorbed its preoccupations, which focused on the exploration and articulation of the unconscious fears and desires so vividly captured here.

In the mid-twenties, although married since 1918 to Olga Khokhlova, Picasso began a relationship with the young and voluptuous Marie-Thérèse Walter who, in 1935, bore him a child. Soon thereafter, Dora Maar entered his life. A Surrealist photographer with intellectual interests and a highly-volatile temperament, she has often been identified as the subject of *The Weeping Woman*, a motif Picasso used in nearly sixty paintings, drawings, and prints during this period. But scholars have also noted characteristics belonging to the other women with whom he remained entangled. The depiction of the forehead and nose in this composition resembles those features in other works for which Marie-Thérèse served as model, and the open, threatening mouth with prominent teeth and visible tongue are thought to reference Olga. But the most telling indication of a conflation of the competing forces in Picasso's personal life has been noted in the figure's hands: the more prominent hand suggests Dora Maar, known for nails filed to sharp points and polished bright red; the other signals Marie-Thérèse, whose nails were bitten short and jagged.

While Picasso's tumultuous relationships with women provide some possible motivations for *The Weeping*

Woman, one must also note the social and political events of that time for other instigating factors. In 1937, *Guernica*, a small town in Spain, was brutally bombed during the Spanish Civil War. Picasso was deeply affected by these tragic circumstances in his native land, and when commissioned to create a mural-size painting for the Spanish Pavilion of the Paris World's Fair, chose *Guernica* as his subject. For over forty years this twentieth-century masterpiece was on loan to The Museum of Modern Art. In accordance with Picasso's wishes, it was returned to Spain after democracy was restored. In 1981, when *Guernica* left New York, it was accompanied by a group of the artist's related drawings and prints that had been installed alongside it. Among them were two states of the print *The Weeping Woman*, whose tragic subject relates to figures depicted in the painting. It is only now that this striking image, a metaphor of both personal and universal despair, is once again here at the Museum for future generations to study and contemplate.

Deborah Wye, Chief Curator
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For further reference:

Freeman, Judi. *Picasso and the Weeping Women: The Years of Marie-Thérèse Walter & Dora Maar*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; New York: Rizzoli, 1994.

Rubin, William, editor. *Picasso and Portraiture: Representation and Transformation*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996.

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