

Les demoiselles d'avignon pablo picasso



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Les Demoiselles d'Avignon — Pablo Picasso The following essay will be written about the modernist painting; ' Les Demoiselles d'Avignon', created by the Spanish expatriate artist Pablo Ruiz Picasso in 1907. Firstly, I will describe the work as I saw it in the MOMA in New York in 2010 and I will also describe my initial reaction to seeing it. Secondly, I will write what I have found out about this piece after conducting research in the college library and on the internet, discussing its style and the period which it was made in. This will be done in order to place the work in context with other work and events in that era. Thirdly, I will briefly discuss the nature and availability of my sources, exploring any contradictory statements in certain sources and examining their differences in opinions. Finally, following my thorough research on this painting, I will give my reaction now after having done the research and I will conclude upon any differences in opinions or reactions I have now compared to before my research. ' Les Demoiselles d'Avignon' depicts five pink women that are entangled in silver and blue garments. Two of these women stand with arms raised to display their breasts, staring at you out of enormous black eyes. The other three are masked: the two at the right are wearing African masks; one of them is emerging from behind the jagged cloth while the other squats low in the fabric. Picasso assumed that these had functioned as magical protectors against dangerous spirits: this work, he said later, was his " first exorcism painting." The other masked woman wears a fleshy brown wooden contortion of a face as she stands in profile at the left of the picture. On a plate, there is a collection of beautiful symbolic fruit: a razor blade of melon with testicular grapes, an apple and a pear. Upon examination it is quite clear that this is a painting of nudes in which there is scarcely a curve to be seen - "elbows sharp as knives, hips

and waists geometrical silhouettes, triangle breasts''. Their figures are composed of flat, splintered planes instead of rounded volumes and their eyes are lopsided and asymmetrical. The Demoiselles d'Avignon are actually five prostitutes, and these are five women—obviously naked—and they're looking at the viewer as much as the viewer is looking at them. The very early studies in Picasso's sketchbooks relating to this piece show a medical student walking into this curtained room where the ladies stand. The woman on the far left now bears the traces of having being that man entering the room. Picasso, wanting absolutely no anecdotal details to interfere with the sheer impact of the work, decided to eliminate the medical student in the final painting. Therefore one can even feel a certain sense of masculinity in the sort of sculptural carving of her body and the way that very large foot is stepping toward the other women. The only remaining allusion to the brothel lies in the title: Avignon was a street in Barcelona famed for its brothel. Upon looking at this piece in MOMA New York, I was struck by one thing in particular: the fact that the African masks in the painting disguise you as something completely different – a monster, an animal, a god. Modernism is an art that wears a mask. It does not say what it means; it is not a window but a wall. Picasso picked his subject matter precisely because it was a cliché; he wanted to show that originality in art does not lie in narrative, or morality but in formal invention. This is why it's misguided to see ' Demoiselles' as a painting ''about'' brothels or prostitutes. Normal tendencies had been to lose sight of the act of creation. That's what Picasso blasts away. Modernism in the arts meant exactly this victory of form over content. Something else that I noticed about this piece was its similarity to other historical sources. One of several historical sources that Picasso

pillaged is archaic art, demonstrated clearly by figure at the left of the painting, who stands rigidly on legs that look awkwardly locked at the knee. Her right arm juts down while her left arm seems dislocated. Her head is shown in perfect profile with large almond shaped eyes and an abstracted face. She almost looks Egyptian. By the way, according to khanacademy(smarthistory. org), it is said that Picasso had purchased two archaic Iberian heads from Guillaume Apollinaire's secretary G ry Pieret, which she had stolen from the Louvre! Some have suggested that they were taken at Picasso's request. Years later Picasso would anonymously return them. Through my research in the college library, I have discovered a vast amount of interesting facts about ' Les Demoiselles'. The painting is believed to be seminal in the early development of both cubism and modern art. Before the painting was completed in 1907 Picasso had created hundreds of sketches and studies in preparation for the final work, ranging from sketches of different faces and masks to various colour studies. The main reason for the intensity with which the conception and the making of the picture has been studied is the completeness of its documentation. Picasso had developed one of the largest if not the largest study for one piece in history. The sheer quantity of material related to it first became clear in 1988 with an exhibition in Barcelona based upon ' Les Demoiselles d'Avignon'. The two volume catalogue of this exhibition reproduced every known sketch or study then considered to be related to the work. "Included were drawings from sixteen sketchbooks placed in sequence as they appear in the books along with ideas for other pictures and unrelated studies; there were also dozens of other studies and related works on canvas and wood as well as paper. Besides this mass of material, there was evidence in the form of radiographs

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and infrared photographs of an oil study on canvas beneath an otherwise loosely related painting of (' Woman with a Large Ear' 1907). Much of this material could be seen in the exhibition.'"(Green 2001: 4) Another interesting aspect of ' Demoiselles' that I discovered was the appearance of two men in Picasso's early studies of the piece. These two men play symmetrically opposed roles: an ' active' medical student and a ' passive' sailor.

Surrounded by prostitutes, the mariner client sits at a table in the centre of the brothels parlour. The student appears on the edge of the picture, "an outsider to its sexual drama" (Rubin 1994: 44). The sailor is disposed frontally and cut off at the waist by the table at which he sits; the student is shown from the side in full figure, standing. In the first sketch for the full composition, the sailor turns his head toward the medical student; later he will glance down at a cigarette he rolls. Although the display of the whores is towards the sailor, I feel that Picasso was trying to focus his and their glances toward what was an obviously unexpected interruption by the student. Picasso is obviously renowned as being the co-founder of cubism along with Georges Braque. The proto-cubist ' Demoiselles' is regarded as one of the first cubist pieces created. If Picasso had executed the finished canvas of ' Les Demoiselles' any sooner than when he did, the finished piece probably would have resembled something like the flowing pieces in his sketchbooks. However, there wouldn't have been anything there to shock or surprise his audience. That was a problem. To challenge his many competitors, Picasso had to come up with something extreme. He decided to radicalise the ' Demoiselles' by geometricising both the overall composition and the individual figures within it. The first piece of evidence we have of Picasso trying to rework the piece in a more geometric style appears in a

sketchbook from May 1907, where we see these radical drawings mixed with sketches of a more natural nature from his early studies. In the finished painting, the geometric framework of the piece is absorbed and hidden by the strong contrasts between the flesh tones of the figures and the blue-whites of the curtains in the background. The flattened curvilinear forms of the two central figures seem to emerge violently from a multifold, three-dimensional space. Through its close relationships to Greek, Iberian and African art, it is widely believed that 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon' had emerged victorious in a battle between the avant-garde artists of the analytical cubist era. I had quite a variety of sources to choose from while writing this essay. These vary between other essays, newspapers, books and websites. Since I was writing on Picasso, there was an abundance of books available at the college library, where I was able to discover a vast amount of interesting facts and details about 'Les Demoiselles' that I would never have known about. I stumbled upon a very interesting essay regarding 'Les Demoiselles' also online and this provided very useful information. I found a detailed article in 'The Guardian' and this was also very use. Other websites were also used in my research to strengthen the essay. During my research I discovered that many opinions on this piece seem to be generally the same. People feel the same regarding Picasso's cubist style and his use of themes in 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon'. I couldn't find any contradictory evidence or statements regarding this work. Fundamentally it is one piece with one idea and one general opinion. Researching for this essay was very successful. I came across the books that I was looking for in the library very easily without many problems. I didn't spend much time surfing through the internet either looking for information so overall everything went smoothly. I have learned a

lot more about Picasso and 'Les Demoiselles' after all the research I have done about the piece. Firstly, before researching this piece I never knew that the woman on the far left in Picasso's sketchbooks bears the outlines of the medical student who had been removed by Picasso. Secondly, for some reason I had always thought that Picasso may have just created this masterpiece on a spur of the moment without much preparation so obviously it came as a huge surprise to me when I discovered he had prepared hundreds of sketches and preparatory work for the piece itself. Finally, it was surprising to discover that the composition of the painting may have looked completely different if Picasso had have completed it any earlier than he did. It is funny to think that we may be looking at something completely different with a completely different opinion if were not for Picasso's determination to outclass his avant-garde rivals. Overall my reactions to this piece have completely changed since seeing it in New York. If I ever see it again I will look at it completely differently. I have come to the conclusion that Picasso put a lot of time and consideration into creating 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon'. This is evident from the mastery Picasso employs which is clearly visible in the piece itself. I have learned a valuable lesson from researching this piece and discovering interesting details about Picasso's work on it. After finding out that Picasso struggled with the appearance of the figures in the painting for many months and then created this magnificent work, it will motivate me and help me to overcome the many struggles i may have to endure while creating my own pieces.