

Picasso's 1927 Bathers, an Expression of the (Sur)Real

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Received: August 24, 2026 Accepted: September 23, 2026 Published: September 24, 2026

doi:10.5296/ijch.v13i2.24030

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijch.v13i2.24030>

Abstract

Pablo Picasso's 1927 series of Bathers—created primarily while staying at Cannes—marks one of his most powerful engagements with Surrealism. Though Picasso never officially joined the Surrealist movement led by André Breton, his work during the late 1920s aligned deeply with Surrealist explorations of subconscious desire, and biomorphic metamorphosis. Picasso's figures feature organic, fluid shapes that stretch and contort. They appear as carved totems set against flat, seaside horizons. Limbs are exaggerated or reduced to sharp appendages, transforming the familiar human anatomy into alien, architectural forms. Surrealists emphasized the tension between pleasure and anxiety. Picasso's bathers capture this dual nature—representing a sunlit setting inhabited by distorted, predatory, or vulnerable anatomical structures. The dramatic stylistic shift of 1927 coincides with a pivotal moment in Picasso's personal life: a marital crisis followed by his encounter with Marie-Thérèse Walter. Her arrival triggered a wave of intense sensual imagery in his art. The Bathers series reflects this subconscious drive—distorting the female form into abstract symbols of desire, vitality, and psychological tension that challenged conventional notions of beauty.

Keywords: Crisis, Surrealism, Apollinaire, Marie-Thérèse, Great Mother, The Real

1. Dadaism

Following the abrupt collapse of Cubism during the war and the brief resurgence of Neoclassicism after the Armistice, a new revolutionary avant-garde movement called Dadaism started to gain traction across Europe. Despite its overt rejection of reason and aestheticism in

favor of irrationality and anti-bourgeois rebellion, the new movement was still cognizant of its origins in earlier cubist developments. This is shown by the circumstance that André Breton, who had assumed the role of editor for the Dadaist magazine *Littérature* the year before, had reproduced (in the tenth issue of the new series in May) one of Picasso's 1919 paintings, *Les amoureux*.¹ Dadaism was a short-lived movement. On July 6, 1923, the last major Dada event, the *Soirée du Coeur à barbe*, was held at the *Théâtre Michel*, with films by Hans Richter (1888–1976) and Man Ray (1890–1976), music by Satie, Stravinsky (1882–1971), Darius Milhaud (1892–1974), and Georges Auric (1899–1983), costumes by Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979) and Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931); and a performance of Tristan Tzara (1896–1963)'s three-act play *Coeur à gaz*.² Throughout the evening, Pierre de Massot (1900–1969), the secretary of the journal *391* and a companion of Francis Picabia (1879–1953), proclaimed: "Picasso has fallen on the battleground" (meaning the demise of Cubism), which prompted Breton to leap onto the stage to defend him. Emerging from the remnants of Dadaism, a fresh movement called Surrealism arose.³ One of its main promoters would be Breton himself. The poet would get in contact with Picasso two months later to discuss a forthcoming book of poems, titled *Clair de terre*, that he wished would "open with a portrait of myself by you."⁴ Picasso would eventually offer him *Portrait de André Breton* for the frontispiece (Paris: Editions du Nord). Published in November, in it Breton quoted Alphonse Berget's *Le Ciel: Nouvelle astronomie pittoresque*.⁵

On May 19, a Spanish interview that de Zayas had with Picasso was published in English translation in *The Arts*, titled 'Picasso Speaks: A Statement by the Artist'. It was set to be published in French by Florent Fels the following year: "The several manners I have used in my art must not be considered as an evolution, or as steps toward an unknown ideal of painting. All I have ever made was made for the present and with the hope that it will always remain in the present. When I have found something to express, I have done it without thinking of the past or of the future. I do not believe I have used radically different elements in the different manners I have used in painting. If the subjects I have wanted to express have suggested different ways of expression I have never hesitated to adopt them. I have never made trials or experiments. Whenever I had something to say, I have said it in the manner in which I have felt it ought to be said."⁶

His remarks served as a justification for the impending shift in style that the public was soon to observe. According to Daix, since the moment he discovered cubist pictorial space, Picasso had been fascinated by the potential of combining different figurative styles. Thus, he could not remain indifferent to the power of the Surrealists' imagination in combining reality and fantasy.⁷ The Spaniard's use of chance while crafting his work and his appreciation for serendipitous discoveries were additional factors motivating him to investigate the various

¹ Baldassari 2006, 233.

² FitzGerald 1995, 146-147.

³ Cabanne 1979, 219.

⁴ Letter from September 18 cited by Baldassari 2006, 233.

⁵ Gasman 1981, 806–807.

⁶ 'Picasso Speaks,' *The Arts*, 3, no. 5, May 1923, pp. 315-26; reprinted in Barr 1946, 270-271.

⁷ Boudaille 1987, 79.

techniques endorsed by the young members of this new group as a spontaneous expression of a personal *modèle interieur*.⁸ He was likewise drawn thematically to surrealistic fantasy and the intricate quality occasionally found in the movement's work. The Surrealists sought an authentic depiction of desire and embraced femininity as the main focus of examination, notions that evidently echoed with the Spaniard.⁹ Moreover, their direct approach to eroticism avoided any resolution of clashing styles and instead centered on matters related to the imaginative process, tendencies that also formed the foundation of Picasso's stylistic variety. The artist would subsequently declare: "I believe we were, in a certain way, Surrealists before our time."¹⁰

2. Biomorphic Style

He persisted in creating pieces within a cubist style, as seen in *Partition, guitare et compotier*, retaining several of the classic items from his prior intricate paintings, like the guitar and the fruit-bowl, positioned on a sideboard, an elaborate pedestal, or a plain wooden table. But by early 1924, Picasso started painting in a biomorphic manner. As O'Brian recognizes, with their fragmented forms and flattened planes, these most decorative pictures are now all curves, quite different from those he had painted twelve years earlier."¹¹ Warncke and Walther describe how the open expressiveness of objects started to play an important role in his artworks.¹² Therefore, while symbolically, the circular shapes of the fruit bowl aim to reflect the sound hole of the guitar—not only creating a delicate interaction of solid and empty spaces, but also highlighting sexual associations for both items—, a significant attraction of the guitar for Picasso was its tangible eroticism, which he openly embraced. As Rosenblum suggests, "the anthropomorphic potential of the guitar . . . recommended it especially to a quick-change magician who could sometimes recreate it as a female nude (in Spanish popular culture, playing a guitar is often equated with love-making)."¹³ Significantly, he was also recognized for wielding an ithyphallic guitar as a boldly masculine emblem—sometimes even for his own representation.¹⁴ This appears to be true in this instance, as the elongated design of the tool creates an evocative contrast to the delicate form of the sensual compote, laden with its fruitful bounty. Formal inquiry and sexuality are interconnected.

Sexual rounded forms would come to the fore in his work for the ballet *Mercure*. By the conclusion of 1923, Comte Etienne de Beaumont acknowledged that the caliber of his private gatherings had reached a level that warranted a public space, prompting him to gradually assemble a series of theatrical performances for the upcoming summer, titled *Soirées de Paris* after Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918)'s pre-war publication of the same name (1912–1914). The initial concrete information regarding Beaumont's intentions for a new ballet titled *Les Aventuras de Mercure* is found in a letter from February 18 addressed to Satie, where he organized a meeting to talk about a commission for the upcoming season: "In confirmation of

⁸ Daix 1993, 181.

⁹ Boudaille 1987, 79.

¹⁰ FitzGerald 2001, 34-36.

¹¹ O'Brian 1994, 269.

¹² Warncke & Walther 1991, 308.

¹³ Brown 1996, 78-79.

¹⁴ Richardson 1996, 149.

our conversation yesterday evening I come to kindly request you to write for us a divertissement of eight to ten minutes, which we project to make with Picasso and Massine based on the theme of the adventures of Mercury.”¹⁵ As events unfolded, composer, choreographer, and painter would unite under a shared concept: to provoke as much upheaval as the 1917 ballet *Parade* did, but inversely: the disturbance should originate, not from the spectators, but from the show’s radical nature. Devoid of any theme or storyline, the plot ought to be intentionally mundane, disorderly, and fragmented, featuring Massine’s music at its most forceful and equally remarkable set designs by Picasso.¹⁶ The ballet’s subtitle, *poses plastique’s*, suggested that its three acts were self-sufficient, lacking any narrative link: a collection of visuals without a story aside from the abrupt “presence” of the human figures and their interaction with the stage sets.¹⁷

By deliberately disregarding all accepted standards, *Mercury* aligned itself with the extreme ideas put forth by the young Surrealists.¹⁸ It successfully directed the avant-garde toward a new path by blending different layers of perception—the visual and musical—in a tightly focused way. The combination of figures and stage designs enabled Picasso to integrate painting with sculptural aspects. Picasso placed great importance on this blend of various media. Ultimately, he excelled at dismantling entities of their typical appearance and meaning, then reconstructing them in innovative forms as a collage. The stage was arranged with canvases adorned in soft hues, with a backdrop that was interchangeable and painted either white or black, according to the scene. The initial *tableau* featured an illustration of a woman reclining on a couch, with her arms and legs, along with the couch’s legs, made from curved rattan and lattice, painted black. The figure’s head, neck, and body were adjustable, just like the stars around it.¹⁹

The public debut occurred at *Théâtre de la Cigala* on June 18.²⁰ Soon after Picasso’s curtain went up, Massine, in the role of Mercury, remembered hearing a soft hissing that ultimately turned into loud shouts. Aragon, sitting among the audience, passionately exhibited his support for Picasso, while Breton and the others bellowed from the rear of the theater.²¹ Lydia Lopokova, a ballerina of Diaghilev, observed the incident. She wrote in her diary: “Oh what a demonstration last night. *Mercury* being last on the program I went into the *proxenoi* to look steadily at the ballet and have a firm opinion about it. First *tableaux* began with cries ‘vive Picasso’ the other party replies ‘vive Erik Satie’. After the second *tableau* pro-Picasso-ists became enormous and shouted ‘Vive Picasso seul, en bas Étienne de Beaumont les garçons, et toute soirées de Paris’. I was only a few steps away from the young man who proclaimed this. Then the policemen rushed to him and arrested him. The anti-Picasso group ran to his box and shouted ‘En bas Picasso’.”²²

¹⁵ Kucan 2009, 30-32.

¹⁶ Cabanne 1979, 228.

¹⁷ Baldassari 2006, 20.

¹⁸ Monod-Fontaine 1994, 53.

¹⁹ Kucan 2009, 42-45.

²⁰ Milde 2002, 399.

²¹ Palau i Fabre 1999, 412.

²² Kucan 2009, 71.

3. Surrealism

Through his sets, Picasso was reacting to the groundbreaking changes occurring in the realms of art and thought surrounding him. The “call to order,” which had urged artists after the First World War to embrace the classical ideals of the humanist tradition, had by the mid-1920s diminished its influence, revealing a distinct need for a revitalized avant-garde. Following the dissolution of the Dada group, the Surrealists, the most argumentative and loud group in the contemporary scene, declared the supremacy and independence of the inner voice. They aimed to eliminate every barrier that separated the self from reality, removing all limitations on creativity and personal exploration. Breton, acting as their proclaimed leader, fiercely sought to recruit Picasso for his initiative.²³ In the initial version of his piece for ‘Surrealism and Painting’, released as a series of articles in *La Révolution surréaliste* from 1925 to 1927, he attributed the cubist experimentation between 1907 and 1917 as the foundation of his personal view on art.

Breton stated that all visual creations must “cater to an entirely internal model or they will not be.” Picasso had been an early advocate of this “interior model” of painting and received appropriate acknowledgment from the surrealist movement. Another member, the poet Georges Hugnet (1906–1974), also recognized the influential role of the Spaniard in shaping the surrealist movement: “The *papiers collés*, the painting-objects, the sculptures in paper and iron, and the use of posters and ordinary items, are all so many elements borrowed from life, elements completely incorporated into creativity, poetry rendered unto poetry . . . Starting from reality, he attains the essence of reality. Yet you do not recognize it any longer.”²⁴ Surrealism embodied a chaotic, rebellious, youthful, and anti-establishment mentality that resonated with Picasso’s own mindset during that period.²⁵ Picasso openly acknowledged them as the most inspiring group among the numerous artistic figures in Paris during the period between the two World Wars. As Cowling points out, “the Surrealists were as cosmopolitan, liberating, and challenging as any group of artists and intellectuals Picasso had known since settling in Paris, and they provided the kind of electrically charged environment in which invention and self-renewal thrived.”²⁶ On June 21, group members released their praise-filled ‘Hommage à Picasso’ in *Paris-Journal*, *Le Journal Littéraire*, *Comoedia*, and *Le Journal du Peuple*.²⁷ The paper stated: “It is . . . our duty to put on record our deep and whole-hearted admiration for Picasso, who defies consecration and has never ceased to explore the anxiety of our time and to express it in terms of the highest level of expression. Once again in *Mercure*, he has shown a full measure of this daring and his genius, and has met with a total lack of understanding. This event, which we regard as exceptional, proves that for Picasso, far more than any of those around him, is today the eternal personification of youth and the absolute master of the situation.”²⁸

By the summer’s conclusion, Picasso finished a series of works that might be seen as direct

²³ Léal, Piot & Bernadac 2000, 232.

²⁴ Baldassari 2006, 29-30.

²⁵ O’Brian 1994, 268.

²⁶ Cowling 2002, 454-455.

²⁷ Geelhaar 1993, 133.

²⁸ Cooper 1987, 59-60.

follow-ups to the ballet *Mercure*. Included in this collection was the oil on canvas titled *Nature morte à la mandoline*. The instrument is rendered as if it were a fish caught in a net, set off against a tablecloth with a wavy pattern and panels of shorthand pictorial notation, dotted with stars and divided into areas of dark and light blue to give the painting a night-and-day resonance.²⁹ These elements give a sense of fate, as if the artist identified with the fish out of water, trapped in a predetermined and fatal environment. As Boggs describes, “this painting is almost flat, with very little interest in standard perspective. The background, a gray turning a cream color toward the right, is scrubbed on thinly as if it were a gouache and, in that thinness, setting off the actual ‘painting’ as if it were dealing with a freely formed object cutout.”³⁰ This highlights the transient essence of the characters (mandolin/fish), who are subject to change due to their surrounding conditions.

The new style Picasso had initiated with *Mercure* expanded in 1926 in what has been termed “Curvilinear Cubism,”³¹ featuring rounded, overlapping forms that seem to stand for metamorphic change. This can be seen in the oil *Femme assise*, a successor to *Le baiser* in its erratic script. It illustrates a young woman in a pleated dress, her hands gently placed on her lap, yet the decorous dullness of the scene highlights a complex psychological conflict, as Cowling observes. Her tidy fastened lapel has transformed into a breast with a protruding nipple, and the vertically positioned mouth implies sexual aggression. A striking interplay of light cascades across her form, making her appear ensnared by the undulating shapes of the environment, intensifying the sense of profound detachment from fixed reality and an inner chaos.³² By the close of February, his wife Olga Khokhlova experienced one of her frequent meltdowns, making her a likely referent for the individual depicted on the canvas.³³

On March 1, Breton’s *La Révolution Surréaliste* (no. 6) featured a reproduction of Picasso’s oil on wood, *Trois baigneuses*.³⁴ The poet revealed to him a perception of femininity as a “dark continent”, deep and menacing. The surrealist leader urged his adherents to delve deeper into the opposite sex, as it contained a crucial element in challenging and overturning norms; the woman was seen as the desired object, the *femme-enfant*, the gateway to the extraordinary, the legendary heroine capable of saving man, being “a creature of grace and promise close in her sensibilities and behavior to the two sacred worlds of childhood and madness.”³⁵ Yet she was also the dreaded *femme fatale*, a vast and obscure depth, one that challenges comprehension. Likely adhering to these guidelines, Picasso started work on the vast canvas *L’atelier de la modiste* (*Les modistes*) around mid-March. Shadows and brightness shift in this partially imagined view of an actual studio. The delicate and shifting interplay of light and shadow causes daylight hues to appear to withdraw. In this context, the woman as a “dark continent” should be regarded as a vital part of life’s tapestry, intricately interweaving it into being. In Ancient Egypt, this task was linked to the goddess Neith, a weaver and spinner of fate. The connection persisted further with the Babylonian Ishtar and the Greek Ariadne.

²⁹ Richardson 2007, 268-269.

³⁰ Boggs 1992, 212.

³¹ Bernadac 1991, 88.

³² Cowling 2002, 482-496.

³³ Richardson 2007, 303.

³⁴ Breton 1972, 5, 7, 9.

³⁵ Mahon 2005, 18.

4. The Apollinaire Memorial and Marie-Thérèse

Sculpture was one medium in which this investigation of reality had not yet been entirely accomplished. The desire to create three-dimensional works was intense during Picasso's lifetime, and after a lengthy phase of relative dormancy, the late 1920s ultimately witnessed a blossoming of three-dimensional creations. In reality, sculpture and painting had consistently been nearly intertwined in his visual recollection, and both mediums held equal significance in addressing comparable themes. A contributing factor to this was the continuing discussion regarding the planned monument for Apollinaire. The announcement for a monument at Apollinaire's tomb had been initially revealed in December 1920, when French art critic Florent Fels declared in his avant-garde publication *Action: Cahiers individualistes de philosophie et d'art* that a collective of artists and thinkers had established a committee to design a tribute for the poet. This declaration was accompanied by a flyer soliciting donations for the initiative, which stated, "The design for the monument is an artwork by Picasso," even though no such piece had been created. Soon after, announcements appeared in the journals *Mercure de France* and *L'Esprit nouveau*. Fundraising persisted in the subsequent years, highlighted by a very successful auction of artworks contributed by artists at the *Hôtel Drouot* on June 21, 1924 (one of Picasso's paintings achieved the top price). The invitation to the exhibition before the auction, hosted at the *Galerie Paul Guillaume*, claimed that the proceeds "will be entirely allocated to the swift realization of the funeral monument ... for which Picasso has provided the design."³⁶ The *Comité Apollinaire* convened once more on November 9 at *Cimetière du Pere Lachaise* to honor the poet's passing. During the meeting, he assured them that a model of the monument would be prepared for their review by the same time the following year.

On January 8, 1927, an important event occurred in Picasso's life. He encountered Marie-Thérèse Walter—a highly alluring blonde with captivating blue-grey eyes—at six in the evening outside the *Galleries Lafayette* department store in Paris.³⁷ He was 25 years older than her. During a 1974 conversation with Pierre Cabanne, she remembered: "I was 17 years old. I was walking on the boulevard. He saw me ... He gave me a big smile. Then he approached and said, 'Mademoiselle, you have an interesting face. I would like to make your portrait.' He added, 'I think that we will do great things together ... I am Picasso'."³⁸ The artist would later admit: "The day I met Marie-Thérèse I realized that I had before me what I had always been dreaming about,"³⁹ a perfect, surreal *coup de foudre*. He told Breton that his extraordinary meeting with her was akin to the poet's "marvelous" encounters with Nadja, the character from his novel of the same name, which equally occurred in Paris on October 4, 1926 on rue Lafayette. Richardson explains, "Breton's concepts ... such as *l'amour fou*, mad love, that could only be found in the street, and that would have as its object the eternal *femme enfant*, guardian of mysteries."⁴⁰ For the Surrealists, these erotic encounters represented a

³⁶ Mahler 2015, 104.

³⁷ Cabanne 1979, 265.

³⁸ Cabanne 1974, 2.

³⁹ Widmaier-Picasso 2002, 169.

⁴⁰ Richardson 1985, 1-2.

disruptive event, capable of changing an individual.⁴¹

5. The 1927 Bathers

The oils *Composition (Figure féminine sur une plage)* and *Femme en pied*, which he created during this period mark the beginning of the highly symbolic Bathers (1927–1938).⁴² The initial segment of this extensive series began with the ink drawing album titled *Carnet des Métamorphoses* (Sketchbook 15, Carnet 35), which he continued working on until September 11. It features twenty-eight ink illustrations with Freudian connections of organic bathers, marked by their elephantine sculptural forms and their dramatically oversized sexual traits stomping around as they utilize a key to access the delicate beach cabanas.⁴³ Although likely meant as studies for Apollinaire's memorial, Zervos would disclose in 1929 that Picasso had considered suggesting them as individual monuments to decorate the Croisette, the stylish walkway separating the beach from the grand hotels in Cannes.⁴⁴

Indeed, his mind was as occupied with Marie-Thérèse as it was with this endeavor. Typically, the wish to summon his beloved blended with the impulse to honor his deceased companion. The female creatures, likely representing the initial concepts for the burial tribute, create a vibe of intensified coastal sensuality. Suitable, since these inflatable polyps—symbols of allure—were meant to honor a notable poet who was also acknowledged for his erotic novels—Picasso considered Apollinaire's most pornographic work, *Les Onze Mille Verges*, as his finest piece—they would ultimately be rejected. "I am obliged to paint them," he told Kahnweiler, "because nobody will commission them from me."⁴⁵ For the artist, explicit sexuality had become more than just a rebellion against traditional modesty, as it was for the poet. It formed a component of his exploration into the recesses of his own mind as advocated by Breton and his adherents.⁴⁶

In his inflated bathers, he conveyed a desire to reconnect with the "natural," embryonic, primal aspect of humanity. There was an implicit condemnation of enforced norms and the shallow nature of the so-called cultured elite. The covert cabana itself was an intentional challenge to the calmness and serenity present in the celebratory vibe of the Cannes beaches during that period. He infused the remnants of the few wooden cabanas that may have endured on the Côte d'Azur with the intrigue they genuinely lacked, instilling within their interiors both the anxieties and enigma of his own past and present.⁴⁷

For Gasman, the cabana represented Picasso's mind and his feeling of disconnection from reality at this critical period of his life. In his present circumstances, it mirrored the distance he sensed from others, even during his love relationship.⁴⁸ The interior of the cabana hid the chaotic, damaging energies of the artist's unconscious, and ultimately, the ever-present nature of death, seen as an irreversible return to nature. The cabanas are either fully closed or secured

⁴¹ Choucha 1992, 75-89.

⁴² Gasman 1981, 265-267.

⁴³ Milde 2002, 399.

⁴⁴ Freeman 1994, 144.

⁴⁵ Richardson 1985, 4-5.

⁴⁶ Daix 1993, 206-207.

⁴⁷ Gasman 1981, 7-49.

⁴⁸ Gasman 1981, 265-267.

with visible keys, suggesting that something important yet concealed is stored inside; or they remain partly open, allowing a peek inside, but showing nothing. They attract notice, yet resist understanding, thus inevitably capturing the fascination of the viewer. The interior theme revolves around the idea of an inherent “surreality” that exists within the unseen, inner dimensions of the apparent aspects of daily reality. If Picasso perceived, like the primitive magician, that one entity could simultaneously be symbolically another, it was because he recognized their inner connection, from within. The usual “essence of things” is, as he frequently implied, concealed within the unseen interior and connects its distinct, diverse forms into a cohesive, analogous entirety. He was likewise acquainted with the associated surrealist idea of a “central point” within the symbolic essence of reality, where contradictions are harmonized.⁴⁹

According to Richardson, Picasso believed that life and death were “intertwined”. Consequently, the inside of the cabana represented both the opposing realm of the bather as the Terrible Great Mother, symbolizing the feminine Absolute, and the elemental powers of nature. On the other hand, the white facade signified a connection between his awareness and the energies of Life, its clear surface persistently endangered by the assertive female bather seeking to seize the living space.⁵⁰ The fundamental oneness beneath external variations (even those of a sexual kind) accounts for the existence of androgynous traits in the large female bathers approaching the cabana, frequently “made up wholly of erectile tissue”.⁵¹ In certain pictures, the glans transforms into the head of the bather, the urethra turns into a tiny mouth, while the scrotum changes into breasts and buttocks.⁵² As the series progresses, the anthropomorphic variations grow increasingly intricate and twisted; erections give rise to smaller erections that transform into legs or arms grasping a symbolic key to a metaphorically secured bathing hut.⁵³

These gender-neutral figures could have been inspired by the Surrealist Michel Leiris, who stated that in the “divine” act of lovemaking, a man seeks to revert to an essential primary unity (*retourner à l’indistinction*). His bathers might discover an even older origin in the androgynous Stone Age Great Mother statues. The quintessence of the 1927 Great Mother is *Baigneuse à la cabine*, an illustration of the fundamental powers of nature or the antagonistic All. Faced with the shadows of the earth and its gravitational urge to return to beginnings, the white cabana stands as a representation of Picasso’s defiance for his existence.⁵⁴ We can view this androgynous Great Mother through a Lacanian lens as a representation of the Real, completely inaccessible to any of the conceptual frameworks humans use to structure their reality. Any effort to represent the Real fails in its attempt to align with the criteria of the Symbolic (the conceptual and representational framework through which reality is understood/formulated). Although it can never be directly encountered, one can deduce the existence of the Real from the impacts it has on the world around him. It persistently announces itself through regular intrusions into the other two categories. It is an external pressure,

⁴⁹ Gasman 1981, 101-201.

⁵⁰ Gasman 1981, 1533-1541.

⁵¹ Rosenblum 1976, 77.

⁵² Boudaille 1987, 80.

⁵³ Richardson 1985, 4-5.

⁵⁴ Gasman 1981, 267-317.

shattering representation, and causing distortion. The Real is both internal and external simultaneously; it represents the interior of the cabana and the exterior Great Mothers. The Real can only be approached asymptotically and is frequently characterized by paradoxes; it exists outside the realm of representation, yet brings about an uncontrollable disruption within it. In his attempt to grasp the ungraspable Real, Picasso projects himself into the unknown, attempting to give shape to the Great Mother through his “actions.” According to Edith Stein, men often associate themselves with their acts and what they accomplish through their body. A man’s pursuit of achievement makes him aware that he is, indeed, greater than merely his physical form. His physical presence does not define his identity; instead, it allows him to convey his spiritual nature through his actions. Picasso’s representation of the female nude is essentially “tactile” as seen in the combination of masculine and feminine protuberances.

At the beginning of September, he finished the first of his two *Carnets des Métamorphoses* (Sketchbook 15) and began work on a second (Sketchbook 11) (finished September 24), featuring “drawings depicting visceral, voluptuous shapes, from which almost invariably arise, intertwined - or reimagined - the two genders” such as *Baigneuse* and *Figure féminine*.⁵⁵ This series of meticulously crafted biomorphic sketches of Marie-Thérèse’s exaggerated form resembling his own swollen penis - hybrids formed from erectile tissue. Picasso depicts the ithyphallic silhouette of his lover solitary on a sandy shore basking under the sun with her flexible limbs and protruding breasts, and glans penis of a head.⁵⁶ The two sketchbooks he completed during this time contain numerous graphite illustrations of androgynous bather forms whose grand yet pliable bodies are extended and manipulated into various sexually suggestive configurations. Frequently, the bather possesses a key and extends to open a door, a motif explored in several artworks from this period. These sketchbooks sparked a vigorous exchange between drawing and sculpture that would persist for an additional three years. They offer the initial set of concepts that Picasso might contemplate regarding a memorial sculpture for Apollinaire’s grave. The Primordial Androgyny represented a “creation myth” as well as a “universal analogy.” As Einstein argues, with Picasso, it must be said, things and forms have “a psycho-graphic (mantic) genesis.” But he reinforced them by compensating for the isolation of the subject with tectonic analogies and constructions that lent his discoveries the authority of law. He opposed the inevitability of the unconscious with prodigious determination to achieve clearly intelligible representation. Thanks to the intensity of his mantic obsession, Picasso attained a veritably “mythic state.”⁵⁷

In November, following the yearly meeting at the poet’s tomb, the majority of the Comité Apollinaire moved to Place Gambetta to deliberate on the memorial. Picasso informed them he was nearing completion. He chose to utilize the summer sketches of bathers as a starting point for his model. Subsequently, an announcement was published in *L’Intransigeant* that declared: “Next year on the occasion of the tenth anniversary, a monument designed by Picasso will be inaugurated.” During the month, he would ask the committee to visit his studio to examine his maquette and drawings. Among the attendees was Andre Billy, one of the most vocal and traditional members. Upon reviewing the initial sketches, the committee was

⁵⁵ Chevillot, Perdrisot-Cassan & Mattiussi 2021, 396.

⁵⁶ Richardson 2007, 339.

⁵⁷ Chénieux-Gendron 2005, 221-222.

appalled—particularly Billy. In the *Journal littéraire*, critic Paul Léautaud recounted the response of the latter to the sketches: “Picasso produced a bizarre, monstrous, mad, incomprehensible, almost obscene thing, a sort of unidentifiable lump that looks as though it’s got sexual organs sticking out of it here and there. He thinks that Picasso, in fact, still hasn’t done anything for the monument and as he had the meeting with the committee, he produced any old thing from his folders.”⁵⁸ They evidently did not grasp that his sculptures expressed his wish to convey meaning through a form of symbolic conciseness: “I want to say a nude. I don’t want to make a nude like a nude. I only want to say breast, say foot, say hand, belly. If I can find the way to say it, that’s enough. I don’t want to paint the nude from head to foot, but just to be able to say it. That’s what I want. When we’re talking about it, a single word is enough. Here, one single look and the nude tells you what it is, without a word.”⁵⁹

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⁵⁸ Mahler 2015, 105.

⁵⁹ Freeman 1994, 139-140.

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Acknowledgments

Not applicable

Authors contributions

Prof. Dr. Enrique Mallen was responsible for the study, data collection and drafting of the manuscript.

Funding

Not applicable

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Macrothink Institute.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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