Picasso’s Masterpiece

by C H A R L E S L. M E E

Picasso’s studio in Montmartre, filled with dozens of canvases on easels, scattered chairs, canvases everywhere on the floor, leaning against the walls, lots of plates and bowls—ceramics—a rocking chair, a couple of couches, a potbellied stove, pedestals with busts and ceramic vases on them.

This piece can be done in a proscenium theatre or in a big black box—as an immersive event, with the audience sitting among the easels and chairs and bowls on the floor—and/or as a completely immersive experience with all of Picasso’s paintings projected on the floors and walls and ceilings, constantly changing in ultra slow motion—like the Picasso show that was done in the Cathedral d’Images in Les Baux de Provence.

We hear music by Satie and then Picasso enters and, taking his time, starts to paint.
A man enters silently,
looks at what Picasso is painting
and then starts speaking/singing to Satie's music:

SOLO
grapes in profile
on the swarming blues
the blue striped t-shirt
and the greenish blue
the sugared blue
slapped on the pink
the purple diaper of the lilac bunched up in the nest
of the celestial purple
of the blue omphalos
of the camp bed
straightened up
with sunny smells
of she goats and of he goats
on the bank of some old mountain stream
[a second singer joins the first,
and they speak/sing together]

DUET
the flute
the grapes
the umbrella
the armor
the tree and the accordion
the butterfly wings of the sugar
of the blue fan of the lake
and the azure waves of the silks of the strings
hanging from the bouquets of roses
of the ladders one and incalculable
outsized flood of doves
released drunk on the cutting festoons of prisms
fixed to the bells
decomposing with its thousand lit candles
the green flocks of wool
illuminated by the gentle acrobatics of the lanterns
hanging from each arc string
and the definitive dawn

[a couple more singers enter
for the full chorus of four singers
who speak/sing all together]

CHORUS
sky sky sky sky sky sky sky sky sky
violet violet sky sky
sky violet violet violet
sky sky sky violet violet violet
sky sky sky sky
violet violet violet violet
sky sky sky sky
violet violet violet violet
sky sky sky sky
violet violet violet violet sky sky sky sky
violet violet violet sky sky sky violet green sky
sky sky sky green green sky
sky sky sky black green green sky
maroon sky
sky sky black
black black black black
white white black
green maroon sky sky
hands hidden in her pockets
night sky
aloe flower
cobalt sky of rope
bedside book
sky
heart
violet fan
evening sky
dress violet
bouquet violet
violet sky
moon rock sky
black green
sky maroon
wheel of fireworks
pearl black
yellow green
sky black
lemon
tree
scissors
yellow shadow
snow green
snow maroon
cream filled with brandy
canary flight
blue green
black wolf
sky
sky
sky
yellow linen
embroidered green
night sky
sulphur white
silver plate
ploughed earth
sky sky white
sky sky sky white
sky sky sky sky
white white sky
blue
blue blue blue

During the song
a woman enters in a bathrobe,
takes up her lounging position on a couch,
letting her bathrobe fall open to reveal she is naked,
and Picasso begins to paint her,
putting her into the painting he was working on.

This is Fernande Olivier,
Picasso's love.

[Note: the nude men and women in this piece will be in skin-tight,
skin-colored body suits,
with their private parts painted onto the body suits with simple black paint.]

When the song ends,
the thief enters with masks.

THE THIEF
I have brought the masks.

A SINGER
What are you doing with these?

PICASSO
I will use them for the faces.

A SINGER
The faces.
PICASSO
The faces of one or two of the women in the painting.

A SINGER
No.

PICASSO
What do you mean?

A SINGER
No. I mean no. This is bad. This is ugly.
Where did you get these masks?

THE THIEF
From the Louvre.

A SINGER
I beg your pardon.

THE THIEF
They were in a storeroom.

A SINGER
A storeroom.

THE THIEF
There was an exhibition of Iberian masks and statues
a while ago in the Louvre
and then they put these in a storeroom.

PICASSO
So they were not being used.

A SINGER
And yet, still,
they belong to the Louvre.
PICASSO
I think of them as mine.
I am Spanish.
This is my heritage.
They do not belong to a French museum.

A SINGER
And they don’t have guards at the museum?

THE THIEF
Not enough guards, it seems.

A SINGER
And you stole these for Pablo?

THE THIEF
Yes.

A SINGER
And he accepts stolen goods?

PICASSO
Good artists borrow.
Great artists
steal.

[The singer stomps out.

The thief shrugs and leaves.

Picasso goes on painting Fernande Olivier.

Gertrude Stein also entered during these events,
looked at what was going on,
looked at the painting Picasso is working on,
and took a seat on another couch.
And now she speaks while he paints.]
STEIN
He did not
and all of them did not
and any of them would see
that a color which was quite attractive
could be a color that is very attractive
and some of them if they liked it would do it again
would see the color again that they had seen
and one of them doing very well what he was doing.
A thing that is very well done
and would be pleasing to some
is done by one who doing what that one is doing
is giving what that one is giving
and that one giving what that one is giving
is selecting what would be young
if the parts that can be seen were not parts that were old
when a part that is not old is young
and might not be young if all the parts were young
and should not be young if some one who is not pleased is not pleased.
Quite likely every one who is not pleased
can be pleased when what has been selected
has been selected to be old and to be young.
Certainly enough pleasing is affecting what is selected to be old
and to be young.
Pleasing and not entirely pleasing
is when all that is blue is green blue
and not a color that is different from green and blue.
A pleasant thing is what being selected is not selected
when something is old and when something is young,
a pleasant thing is not a pleasant thing
when something has been selected
which is not what that one selecting did not like.

[A couple of the other singers from the chorus
throw up their hands and leave,
so just two singers are left standing in the studio.

Picasso turns and speaks to Gertrude.]
PICASSO
the rose that comes out of the pale blue
light blue
light pale blue
blue from its darkest blue
if the pale rose colors its rose with rose that is paler still
and the rose roses with rose in the rosiest rose yet of the rose
rose rosing its rose
rose
rose
rose in the rosiest
the rose that catches fire
in the thirst for drinking in the gold
that burns its cheeks
blazing from its incandescent rose
which the gold melted in the white

[and now he looks at his painting
as he continues talking]

red burns
if the plate grows swells increases
and climbs the eye of the partridge
of the lark
of the quail
of the blackbird
of the ringdove
and other spangles catching fire
marzipan of nougat of rooster
and roast leg of lamb
color of dry straw thyme
between the teeth of the square root
of such an amusing aubade
stretching its arms
passing its fingers among the trees
And during the music,
Picasso returns to painting.

repeat the singing chorus here?

And Fernande Olivier speaks.]

FERNANDE
Our little square is shaded by four trees and surrounded by four buildings with four streets leading into it.

There are two nice old painted wooden benches, though the paint is peeling off them, and in summer it’s pleasant to sit here and collect your thoughts when the sun is so strong it chases all the other residents inside to hide behind their closed shutters.

I’ve mentioned the Spanish painter who lives in our building. Well, for some time now I’ve been bumping into him wherever I go, and he looks at me with his huge deep eyes, sharp but brooding, full of suppressed fire. I don’t find him particularly attractive, but his strangely intense gaze forces me to look at him in return. His mouth has a lovely shape, which makes him look young—while the deep lines from his nose to the corners of his mouth make him look old.
In the evening, when I get home, I’ve got into the habit of sitting in front of my door on the Place Ravignan and relaxing with a book until the sun sets. Yesterday afternoon, the sky was black, and when the clouds suddenly broke we had to rush for shelter. The Spanish painter had a little kitten in his arms which he held out to me, laughing and preventing me from going past. I laughed with him. He seemed to give off a radiance, an inner fire, and I couldn’t resist this magnetism. I went with him to his studio, which is full of large unfinished canvases—he must work so hard, but what a mess!

Dear God! His paintings are astonishing. He’s working on an etching showing an emaciated man and woman seated at a table in a wine shop. The man is gaunt, emaciated and wretched, and bears a look of pathetic resignation. It’s strange, tender and infinitely sad composition. It seems to show a deep and despairing love of humanity.

PICASSO [to himself as he paints]
all lines removed from the painting
that represents the image of a young girl's head
appears floating around white aroma of blows
hitting the sky's shoulder
pride
white cheese poppies
white wine fried at the pigeon shoot
of the white fife-player
yellow yell of whips
reflected by the flight of a swallow
over the eye of mauve milk
nettle winged horse
at the end of the yellow foam
at the white corsage of the mauve
pike pencil streak with goat's leaps
white star

FERNANDE
I’ve been to see my Spanish painter. He adores me with real sincerity. If I fall asleep, he’s beside the bed when I wake up, his eyes anxiously fixed on me. He doesn’t see his friends any more, doesn’t work any more. He’s asking me to come and live with him, and I don’t know what I should do. He’s constantly doing portraits of me. He’s
kind and gentle, but he doesn’t look after himself, and I find that upsetting. I don’t mind untidiness, but I’m horrified by his lack of personal cleanliness. I don't dare let him sense this; it's a delicate matter.

I often wonder when he does any work, but apparently he prefers to work at night so as not to be disturbed.

The studio is quite unique. Standing at the entrance, despite the fact that there's practically no furniture, you wonder just how you're going to be able to make your way into it. It’s full of the strangest assortment of utensils and household objects, including rusty old frying pan grandly called "receptacle serving the function of chamber pot" and a large tin bucket for washing, which is always full to overflowing with dirty water. Across from the door is an enclosed space with rotten floorboards that's supposed to be a bedroom, but Pablo uses it for storing all kinds of junk.

The studio is like a furnace, and Pablo and his friends quite often strip off completely. They receive visitors practically, if not completely, naked, just wearing a scarf tied around their waists.

There’s often no money. In the evenings there’s a lot of merriment: five or six friends come over, they play their guitars and sing Spanish songs after dinner. This often consists simply of an enormous dish of spaghetti. It feeds us all, and we can afford it.

PICASSO
mauve yellow spread at the edge of the moon
mauve dish of flageolets
arc bent at iris yellow
cobalt blue indigo blue
in the mauve nets from slate yellow to feather white blue
put rope to neck
mauve yellow dove
at worse decapitated blue bits
mauve hand yellow lake
at white lip blue detachable collar rat
devouring the mauve ear of corn yellow
blue mauve
yellow blue
blue blue
blue line
wrapping its spiral
the bridge stretches
arriving first and breathless at the target's center

FERNANDE
Everything seems beautiful, bright, and good. It's probably thanks to opium that I've discovered the true meaning of the word love, love in general. I've discovered that at last I understand Pablo, I "sense" him better. It seems as if I have been waiting all my twenty-three years for him. Love has risen up in me like a feeling that is suddenly coming into flower. A curious closeness makes me feel as if he's a part of myself, as my fantasy has wanted him to be, and this feeling, which has stayed with me, must be the reason I made up my mind almost instantly to bind my life to his, for better or for worse. I have spent three days with Pablo. I love Pablo. He is tender, kind, amorous; he pleases me. How could I have been blind for so long?

At last I am happy, and Pablo tells me that he feels as if he has awakened after a long sleep. All he did from the moment I agreed to come and live with him was wait for me. Life is going smoothly. I feel as though I am beginning to live my real life. Pablo loves me. I sleep a lot; I've been used to going to bed early after my tiring days, so I still fall asleep around nine. Pablo watches me, draws, works at night and goes to bed around six in the morning.

PICASSO
the mauve young girl
dissolved in the azure
of the so tender green
of her dimmed white dress
wrapped in the slate leaf
along the rimes of the sonnet of the palm tree
a kind of beach with fine sand of death heads
filling the boat
stranded and bitten in the belly by the tamer
torn from the claws of hours
attached in clusters to the main mast
by the pan-pipe's sound
laundry hung out
forgotten by night
on the ropes
chariot of joy
made of clear water
with wheels of perfume
pulled by gazes
filled with the savor of the colors of the rainbow
of songs and laughter

FERNANDE
We're managing to survive on fifty francs a month and sometimes we have enough left over to pay the bill at the paint shop. When we eat out we always go to Vernin's, as we can get credit there, too. Vernin, who comes from the Auvergne, has his place on the Rue Cavallotti, just by the pawnbrokers, which is handy if we're lucky enough to find anything left to pawn. He has a terrible memory and is very decent to artists, never refusing them credit. This is why Pablo and all his friends regularly meet there at middy or at seven in the evening, and the numbers are generally swollen by friends that one or other of them has brought along, whose meals get put down to somebody's account. A lot of theatrical people go there and it often looks like a scene Pablo might paint.

At the moment we're absolutely destitute. I haven't got any shoes at the moment and in the dark no one can see my old espadrilles, which once used to be white. But Pablo always makes sure I have my bottle of perfume, my rice powder, my books, my tea—and, best of all, I have his love.

In the cold, we have no coal, no fire, no money—but I'm happy in spite of this. We're not miserable; we love each other. I don't know how I could have resisted Pablo for so long. I love him so much now!

the satie music concludes
[Another friend of Picasso's enters.]

THE FRIEND
I see this
and I think
you ought to quit.
What are you doing?

PICASSO
If you know exactly what you are going to do,
what is the point of doing it?

THE FRIEND
You know I don't mean to say anything
that will cause you any sort of disagreeable feeling
and this is only my advice
but I think you should roll up the canvas and throw it away.
This is bad.
This is a mistake.

[Picasso looks at him for a moment
and then speaks.]

PICASSO
I don't know what other people like
but I know what I love
when I walk out of the Louvre
I don't need to turn to my friend and say
did I like the Mona Lisa
what did I like about her?
Did I like her hair?
Did I think her nose was disagreeable?
what did I like?
No, I know what I like.
I know what I love
And so I do what I love
and since I am the world's leading expert in what I love
I can't be wrong.
And then, because I am not from Mars,
there will be two or three other people who will love it, too.

[Then Picasso turns and resumes painting.

The chorus of singers now speaks,
as they look at the painting and respond to what they see—
as though they were naming or describing what they see.]

FIRST
My wife with the hair of a wood fire
With the thoughts of heat lightning
With the waist of an hourglass
With the waist of an otter in the teeth of a tiger

SECOND
My wife with the lips of a cockade and of a bunch of stars of the last magnitude
With the teeth of tracks of white mice on the white earth
With the tongue of rubbed amber and glass

THIRD
My wife with the tongue of a stabbed host
With the tongue of a doll that opens and closes its eyes
With the tongue of an unbelievable stone

FOURTH
My wife with the eyelashes of strokes of a child's writing
With brows of the edge of a swallow's nest

FIRST
My wife with the brow of slates of a hothouse roof
And of steam on the panes

SECOND
My wife with shoulders of champagne
And of a fountain with dolphin-heads beneath the ice
FIRST
My wife with wrists of matches

SECOND
My wife with fingers of luck and ace of hearts
With fingers of mown hay

THIRD
My wife with armpits of marten and of beechnut
And of Midsummer Night
Of privet and of an angelfish nest
With arms of seafoam and of riverlocks
And of a mingling of the wheat and the mill

FOURTH
My wife with legs of flares
With the movements of clockwork and despair

FIRST
My wife with calves of eldertree pith

FOURTH
My wife with feet of initials
With feet of rings of keys and Java sparrows drinking

THIRD
My wife with a neck of unpearled barley

SECOND
My wife with a throat of the valley of gold
Of a tryst in the very bed of the torrent
With breasts of night

FIRST
My wife with breasts of a marine molehill

SECOND
My wife with breasts of the ruby's crucible
With breasts of the rose's spectre beneath the dew
FOURTH
My wife with the belly of an unfolding of the fan of days
With the belly of a gigantic claw

THIRD
My wife with the back of a bird fleeing vertically
With a back of quicksilver
With a back of light
With a nape of rolled stone and wet chalk
And of the drop of a glass where one has just been drinking

SECOND
My wife with hips of a skiff
With hips of a chandelier and of arrow-feathers
And of shafts of white peacock plumes
Of an insensible pendulum

FIRST
My wife with buttocks of sandstone and asbestos

SECOND
My wife with buttocks of swans' backs

THIRD
My wife with buttocks of spring

FOURTH
With the sex of an iris

SECOND
My wife with the sex of a mining-placer and of a platypus

THIRD
My wife with a sex of seaweed and ancient sweetmeat

FIRST
My wife with a sex of mirror
SECOND
My wife with eyes full of tears
With eyes of purple panoply and of a magnetic needle

THIRD
My wife with savanna eyes

FOURTH
My wife with eyes of water to he drunk in prison

SECOND
My wife with eyes of wood always under the axe

FIRST
My wife with eyes of water-level of level of air earth and fire

[Another critic enters—
or two of the chorus members become another critic and Alfred Jarry.]

ANOTHER CRITIC
I look at this
I think
what could it mean?
What could be the point?
Unless the point is to be different.
And then
who cannot be different?
This is not difficult.
I can be different.
Or you think
is it so different after all?
What is the subject?
A woman.
Some women.
A landscape.
Is this not the same old same old
since 2000 years ago
or since Lascaux
17,000 years ago.
And then you might say:
where are the cows?
Why has he left out the cows?
The birds, the black bulls,
the rhinoceros.
I think
this kind of painting
it does not have the staying power
of Lascaux.
Finally,
it doesn't compare.
It won't last.
What was the point of doing it?

[Jarry answers the critic.]

JARRY
This brain, I see, is a critic's brain.
Doubtless it has received an injury to the Broca convolution,
where the faculty of holding forth resides.
This convolution
is the third frontal convolution on the left
as you go in.
Ask the hall porter....
Excuse me,
ask any philosopher:
"This dissolution of the mind
is caused by an atrophy
which little by little invades the cerebral cortex,
then the gray matter,
producing a fatty degeneration
and atheroma of the cells, tubes,
and capillaries of the nerve substance!"
There's nothing to be done with him.
We'll have to make do with twisting of the nose and ears,
with removal of the tongue and extraction of the teeth,
laceration of the posterior,
hacking to pieces of the spinal marrow
and the partial or total spaghettification of the brain through the heels.
He shall first be impaled,
then beheaded,
then finally drawn and quartered.
After which the gentleman will be free,
through our great clemency,
to go and get himself hanged anywhere he chooses.

[Music!!!!!!!!!

so then we explode with picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party
picasso party

Gertrude Stein speaks
with immense enthusiasm.
She is in party mode.]
STEIN
It is a happiness
that what is
is being done
and has been done
and will be done.
It is exciting to every one
that what has been done
has been done
and what is being done
is being done.
It is a reflection to any one
that what has been done has been done
and what is done is being done.

It is a determination in every one
that everything is done that is done
and that everything has been done that has been done.
It is annoying to every one
that everything that has been done has been done
and everything that is done is done.
It is a regret to every one
that everything that is done is done
and that everything that has been done has been done.
If all who were coming were going and coming
it would be certain that all had commenced something.
It is enough when all are going who are coming and going,
it is enough that when all are coming they are all coming.

[And now Picasso's friends come to the party
and they look like characters from Picasso's paintings.

These are people in Picasso's life,
or in his imagination,
or both.
They come in, find an hors d’oeuvre to snack on
or a glass of wine,
and then wander on through and out again,
but there are always at least several of them in the studio
at the same time.

So Picasso’s harlequin enters in full harlequin costume.

And maybe a bearded man with a pipe.

And maybe a woman with a cubist face.

People with fabulously painted faces,
big cubist swatches of crimson and deep blue and yellow.

Or maybe, rather than painted faces, they can wear masks,
since we have introduced the theme of masks with the stolen Iberian masks.

And maybe a slightly cubist man with a beard and a sword and a big hat.

Maybe a cubist man walks through
with arms and legs and torso made of tubes of cardboard
or aluminum.

And perhaps Picasso’s three musicians
come out and sit behind a café table.

If the three musicians don’t play,
then a guitarist comes in and plays.

Three or four naked people
sit on a couch.

Does a cubist man enter with a goat on wheels?

STEIN
If in walking and in coming late and hurrying
and going then to send something
and being then taking what he was having
and being politely mentioning
that being polite is something and not everything,
if in saying that evidently what he was saying
was what evidently was what he was saying,
if in having been suffering and having been creating
and having been explaining
and having been selling and having been buying,
if in having been using and having been creating
and having been evidently destroying
and having been evidently understanding,
if in having been seeing
and having been talking
and having been staying
and having been needing all he was needing,
if in having been creating
and having been suffering
and having been hurrying
and having been expecting,
if in having been creating
and not having been destroying
and having been succeeding
and not having been disappointing one,
some are understanding when all are agreeing,
is expressing that going on is changing
and he is going on
and all are remembering that going on and changing
is going on.
He is expressing
and he is expressing,
he is expressing.

[And, as some of Picasso's friends wander through the party and leave,
other friends arrive,
and these new friends look like the paintings of Picasso's painter friends.]
A Matisse woman enters—
a naked woman with an ankle length silk bathrobe decorated with flowers
lounges on a chaise, with her robe casually thrown open.

Another Matisse woman—
a blue cardboard cutout woman.

Do Matisse's five naked dancers in a circle
come in, dance,
and dance out?

A guy covered by a black cardboard cutout,
in the pose of a ballet dancer leaping
is carried across the stage.

A large bowl of fruit,
suitable for a still life painting,
is ceremoniously carried in and placed center stage.

Dali's naked woman with a baguette on her head enters.
She has two ears of corn around her neck, resting on her shoulders.
And, on top of the baguette, a man and a woman,
and a couple of ink wells.

A guy rolls up his pant leg
puts one naked foot in the air
and paints it ten different messy colors with oil paint.]

STEIN
So elementary is the rising sand and the twisting snow,
so vacant is the lot and the fountain,
so hurried is the Indian and the dancer,
so neglected is the hurt finger and the duck,
so splendid is the lamp
and so urgent is the white horse in winter
that surely there can be no question of discount,
there can not even be question of serpents,
there can be a heaven and a heel
and there can be lakes of water.
What is lively.
That which radium advances
and porches close and lynx eyes shudder.
It is a gloom
and entrancing is captivating.

Is it astonishing that red and green are rosy
red and violet green,
is it surprising that so rich a thing
shows a certain little thing,
shows that every bit of blue is precious
and this is shown by finding,
by finding and obtaining,
by not silencing disentangling,
by never refusing resigning.

A tall scale, a sour glass,
a tight stretch, an even table,
a celebrated circus and a melodion,
these and many more mistakes have no attributes,
they are careless.
A weight, what is a weight
a weight is a lifting of cows and horses
and bridges and everything.
Even even more than a cellar
more loud than a sun,
more likely than a sturgeon,
more likely, most likely,
this was so bright and so occurrent
and so bees in wax, bees and bees in wax.
What is cat is a cat
and what is splendid is a mouse
and what is driven is a dog
and what is curly is a cow.

[Now
all these crazy party people come together
and do group a opera singing of Stein text—
again, to the music of Satie.]
GROUP OPERA SONG
He did use the complete way of showing
leading
being
staying
and staying being saying
what was knowing being saying.
He did say
what he did say
and that was to say that many kept away
there where they said what they knew they said
when they stayed as they stayed.
He did not say that they stayed away.
He did not say that staying they were saying
that they were knowing
that they were saying
that they were staying.
He did say that staying they were saying
that they were knowing
what they were saying,
he did say that they were staying.
He did not say that he was staying
when he was saying
that he was knowing what he was saying.
He did not say that he was saying
what he was knowing what he was saying.
He was saying that he was knowing
that he was saying what he was saying
and he did say that he was knowing he was staying.
He did not say that he would be staying.
He did not say that he would be knowing
that he was saying what he was saying.
He did say that if he would be staying
he would be knowing he was saying what he was saying.
He did say that he would be saying
what he would be saying
and he would be staying when he would be staying.
He did say he would be staying.
[And after the big group opera song
all these characters from paintings and sculptures
make themselves comfortable—
saying things like "can I get you a coffee?"
and other social niceties—
as they arrange themselves as though they are ready for a conversation.]

ANOTHER CRITIC SPEAKS UP
You know I am a big admirer of your work.
Of you
and of your work.
I think what you do is
wonderful.
And yet,
from time to time,
someone might do what they will come to consider
just a sketch.
A sketch of a thought
that they were thinking at one time.
But it is the sort of thing that never leaves the studio.
It is, rather, a memorandum of a thought
that might lead to another thought
and even to another thought still
that will really be worth thinking.
And, indeed, in that case,
the sketch is probably better left in the studio,
or even,
it might be useful if the sketch were simply to become lost
so that some years later
it will not be found
and used to do some damage to the reputation of the thinker.
In fact,
if you like,
I can take it away
and see to it
that it is never seen again.

PICASSO
No, thank you.
ANOTHER CRITIC
What do you call it?

PICASSO
I call it The Brothel.

ANOTHER BYSTANDER
Some of us think this is not the best title for it.
Some of us have been encouraging him to change the title

ANOTHER CRITIC
What would you call it?

ANOTHER BYSTANDER
Some of us have been encouraging him to change the title to Desmoiselles d'Avignon.

ANOTHER CRITIC
And that would change everything!

[Another Critic throws up his hands and stomps out.

Picasso resumes painting.

We hear the opening clown music of Satie's Parade.

music of Satie’s Parade.
music of Satie’s Parade.
music of Satie’s Parade.
music of Satie’s Parade.
music of Satie’s Parade.
music of Satie’s Parade.
music of Satie’s Parade.
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music of Satie’s Parade.
music of Satie’s Parade.
music of Satie’s Parade.
music of Satie’s Parade.
music of Satie’s Parade.
music of Satie's Parade.
Another Bystander takes off all his clothes
and climbs us a little stepladder
and steps down inside a six foot tall vase.

A moment later, Another Bystander emerges from the vase
completely covered in, and dripping, black oil.

He gets out of the vase
and does a "dance."

The dance might be called The Dying Crow.

He writhes, he slithers to the ground,
he rolls around on a huge piece of white paper,
making an ink drawing with his body.
He rubs up against a "canvas" on one of the walls,
making another ink painting.

At some point he might find a smaller vat of black oil—
and if, in fact, the black oil is really liquid dark chocolate,
he could drink the vat of black oil.

And so forth: other dance performance moments.
The Dying Crow dancer is finally joined by nearly the entire cast, now turned into dancers.

And they perform one of the dance sections from Diaghilev's Parade that mobilizes many dancers. This is the flat out party in full swing the way it was in Picasso's studio when he had a party.

Of course, these are artists and friends of Picasso's—they aren't dancers—and so they won't dance like people who have danced all their lives. But they will have a good time. And we may even think, if Diaghilev was at this party of Picasso's, maybe that's where he got the idea for Parade.
In the midst of the ballet, Apollinaire steps out of the dance and goes downstage right and speaks directly to the audience. Much of what he says will be inaudible with all the commotion going on, and that's on purpose. And what he says is clearly pathetic and maybe stupid and, at least, inadequate to the occasion, which is the point.

Right after Apollinaire or maybe at the same time, Nijinsky also steps out of the dance, and he goes downstage left and speaks directly to the audience while the ballet goes on.

[If the production is done as an immersive event with actors and audience together in a big black box studio, then Apollinaire and Nijinsky can each go toward different corners of the room and address just those members of the audience near them, so people at a distance can't hear what they are saying, or, certainly, not more than an occasional word, so that each section of the audience gets a different play.]

APOLLINAIRE
Cubism differs from the old schools of painting in that it aims, not at the art of imitation but at an art of conception, which tends to rise to the height of creation.

Scientific cubism is the art of painting new structures out of the elements borrowed not from the reality of sight, but from the reality of insight.
Physical cubism is the art of painting new structures with elements borrowed, for the most part, from visual reality.

Orphic cubism is the art of painting new structures out of elements which have not been borrowed from the visual sphere, but have been created entirely by the artist himself.

The new art clothes its creations with a grandiose and monumental appearance which surpasses anything else conceived by the artists of our time.

I love the art of today because above all I love the light, for man loves light more than anything; it was he who invented fire.

Greek art had a purely human conception of beauty. It took man as the measure of perfection. But the art of the new painters takes the infinite universe as its ideal.

There has been a certain amount of suspicion, notably in the case of recent painters, of some collective hoax or error. But in all the history of art, there is not a single instance of such general collaboration in artistic fraud or error.

It is the social function of great poets and great artists to renew continually the appearance nature has for the eyes of men. Without artists, the sublime idea we have of the universe would collapse. The order that we find in nature, which is only an effect of art, of human intelligence, would vanish at once. Everything would break up in chaos.
There would be no seasons, 
no civilization, 
no thought. 
Even life would give way.

NIJINSKY
Diaghilev dyes his down so as not to be old. Diaghilev's hair is gray. Diaghilev buys black hair creams and rubs them within. I noticed this cream on Diaghilev's pillows, which have black pillowcases. I do not like dirty pillowcases and and so felt disgusted when I saw them.

Diaghilev has two false front teeth. I noticed this because when he is disconcerted he touches them with his tongue. They move, and I can see them. Diaghilev reminds me of a wicked old woman when he moves his two front teeth…

Diaghilev like to be talked about and therefore wore a monocle surrounded by one eye. I asked him why he wore a monocle, for I noticed that he saw well without a monocle. Then Diaghilev told me that one of his eyes saw defectively. I realized then that Diaghilev had told me a flop. I felt deeply hurt…

I loved him sincerely and, when he told me that the love of women was a terrible thing, I believed him.

I began to detest him quite openly, and once I pushed him on a street in Paris. I pushed him because I considered necessary to show him that I was not afraid of him. Diaghilev hit me with his cane because I needed to leave him. He felt that I wanted to jump away, and therefore he ran after me. I half run, half walked. I was afraid of individual noticed. I noticed that people be looking. I felt a pain in my leg and pushed Diaghilev. I pushed him individual slightly because I felt not anger against Diaghilev but tears. I wept. Diaghilev scolded me. Diaghilev be gnashing his teeth, and I felt sad and dejected. I could no longer control myself and begin to walk slowly. Diaghilev too began to walk slowly. We both walk slowly. I do not remember where we were going. I be walking. He was walking. We went, and we arrived. We lived together for a long time…

And, after they have both stopped speaking, 
the ballet goes on, 
and they re-join the dancers.
Diaghilev's Parade
Diaghilev's Parade
Diaghilev's Parade
Diaghilev's Parade
Diaghilev's Parade

Finally
several people come in with a picnic blanket
and spread it out and lie down on it
and they are joined by the dancers
who stop dancing
and put on straw hats for the sun
and bring out bottles of wine.
They make a sylvan picnic.

We hear some quite, peaceful Satie music.

All is calm.

Picasso is looking at his canvas
and picks up a brush to start painting again.

PICASSO
and it's raining
all the green is wet
but feels like it was made of fire
and on their hands turned over tiles
are jumping for pure joy
and wringing hands with pinky missing
on the one who made me—sorceress—
and after let them come to me
to say they have no time
that we can save it for another day
and it's now late
and that again and then already
well the soup is nearly ready
and the spoonful that I have to take an hour before
is loving me
because it's certain also
that they'll tell me then
that I forgot it
but this glassy air
the raindrops on the window
have their shadows upside down
so that you have to paint them from the bottom up
and if it wasn't so
nobody would have made a single thing forever.

[And just then
two police officers come in seeking the masks stolen from the Louvre.]

OFFICER
Excuse me.
Would this be the studio of Pablo Picasso?

PICASSO
Yes, it is.

OFFICER
And would you be that person?

PICASSO
I am.

OFFICER
We have come
on the basis of confidential information
that suggests you have stolen some items from the collections of the Louvre.

PICASSO
I beg your pardon.

OFFICER
Two Iberian masks have been stolen from the Louvre,
and we have reason to believe they are in your possession.
PICASSO
As it happens,
I have two Iberian masks in my studio.
But I don’t believe they were stolen.

OFFICER
Where did you get them?

PICASSO
I purchased them in the Place des Abesses
from someone who was there at the time
selling shoes and clothes
and these masks.

OFFICER
May we see them?

PICASSO
Yes. Of course.

[Fernande has already quietly gone and fetched the masks
and now hands them to Picasso.]

PICASSO
These are the masks I have.

OFFICER
These are the masks stolen from the Louvre.

PICASSO
I am an artist.
I would never steal anything.

OFFICER
Is that a fact?
In any event,
I don’t suppose we have any proof to the contrary.
But we will have to take these masks.
PICASSO
Do I know they belong to the Louvre?

OFFICER
If the Louvre says they do not, we will return them.

PICASSO
And do I know I can trust you?

OFFICER
My identification.

[he shows his papers to Picasso]

PICASSO
We will give you the masks, then. You know where to find us if the Louvre says they do not belong to the museum.

OFFICER
Exactly. Good day, sir.

PICASSO
Good day.

[The police turn and leave.

Silence.

After a moment, one of Picasso's friends speaks up.]

A FRIEND
Really, maybe this is a good reason to roll up the canvas and throw it away.
ANOTHER FRIEND
It’s not a great loss.

ANOTHER FRIEND
I think you won’t miss it.

ANOTHER FRIEND
It’s not your best.
You know I love what you do.
But this
this is not something you need to keep.

ANOTHER FRIEND
All in all,
it might be best to put it some place
where it will never be found.

[Everyone looks around at one another,
they gather up their belongings,
and they all leave.

Picasso is left alone.

(Or is Fernande still there?)

He does not quit.
He returns to painting his painting
as the lights fade to dark,

as we hear Satie music
Satie music
Satie music
Satie music
Satie music
Satie music
Satie music
Satie music
Satie music
Satie music
Satie music
Satie music
A NOTE ON SOURCES:

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