

# Stage at the Edge of the Sea: Picasso's Scenographic Imagination

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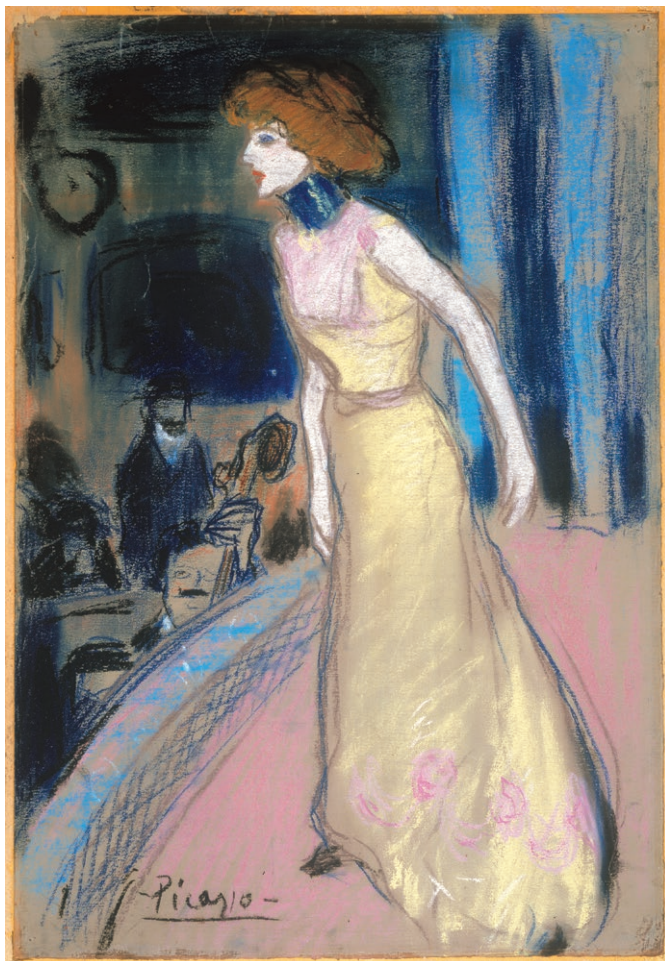
*The blue distance, which never gives way to foreground or dissolves at our approach, which does not reveal itself laid out in breadth and depth when reached but only looms more closed and threatening, is the painted distance of a backdrop. It is what gives stage sets their incomparable character.*

—Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 1928<sup>1</sup>

Pablo Picasso's fascination with the theater and its repertory of staging devices emerged early in his career (Fig. 1); it would prove to be a constant and seemingly inexhaustible source of invention, becoming especially strong in his classicizing paintings, drawings, prints, and set designs of the 1920s and 1930s. The adoption of self-reflexive scenographic conventions—including the proscenium frame, *scaenae frons* (arcade screen), *rideau de scène* (stage curtain) and back curtains, narrow forestage with side entrances, viewing boxes, orchestra pit, stage flats, footlights, prompter's box, and on- and/or offstage viewers—allowed the artist to present both images and sets in the guise of metafiction. They appear as pictures of an imaginary or dreamlike world whose dramatic effect is intensified through multiplied thresholds that trace (and sometimes subvert) distinctions between zones of illusion and reality, between the spaces of onstage representation and those of the implied or depicted beholder.

In making use of a theatrical *mise-en-scène*, Picasso both referred to and countered the Western, classical tradition of the *tableau* picture, whose temporal unity and formal coherence were assumed to demand a frontally organized composition in which human actions and passions would be rendered instantaneously legible. The eighteenth-century French philosopher and art critic Denis Diderot theorized its core aesthetic principles in these terms: "A well-composed picture [*tableau*] is a whole contained under a single point of view, in which the parts work together to one end, and form by their mutual correspondence an ensemble as real as that of the members of an animal's body."<sup>2</sup> Such a model of organic unity required the hierarchical relation of parts and focus on a significant moment, as seen from a particular perspective; the *tableau* was intended to appeal to (perhaps even to invent the illusion of) a similarly unified, omniscient viewer. According to Diderot, this viewer "should never be perplexed."<sup>3</sup> He further insisted that the artist take care that his "artfulness not be perceived," since overt displays of technical skill and exaggerated poses strike a false note

and break the realism of a scene.<sup>4</sup> As Michael Fried has brilliantly observed, for Diderot and other eighteenth-century anti-Rococo critics, "a *tableau* was visible, it could be said to exist only from the beholder's point of view. But precisely because that was so, it helped persuade the beholder that the actors themselves were unconscious of his presence."<sup>5</sup> This reading reveals the *tableau*'s paradoxical founding premise: only if the actors ignored the presence of the viewer, only if they were fully engaged in their own separate world, absorbed in their



1 Pablo Picasso, *On Stage*, ca. 1901, pastel on brown paper, 19½ × 13¾ in. (49.5 × 33.3 cm). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Bequest of A. Conger Goodyear, 1966 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph provided by Albright-Knox Art Gallery/Art Resource, NY)

own activities, would the illusion appear truthful. The realms of the observed and that of the observer must remain distinct, so that the power of omniscient viewing accrued only to the unseen observer. As Diderot put it, “He who acts and he who beholds are two very different beings”: hence they should not be permitted to meet, interact, or exchange gazes.<sup>6</sup> The threshold (the fourth wall) dividing the space of the drama from that of the spectators must remain inviolable. The tableau, then, presents a pictorial illusion that, ensconced within its proscenium frame, does not recognize itself as such.

If Picasso took up the classical tableau and its staging of a theatrical scene—a relation already affirmed in the perspective treatises of Leon Battista Alberti, with their emphasis on the representation of a dramatically conceived *istoria*—he did so from an inevitably postclassical, historically conditioned, and sometimes ironic stance.<sup>7</sup> Unlike Diderot’s ideal viewers (or those of Alberti), Picasso’s find themselves decentered, fragmented, and privy to the artifice of the scene they observe. Sometimes they are situated at an oblique angle or too close to the stage to take in its totality, or they may be split into alternative viewing positions and imaginary roles, both on and off the stage. They may be asked to witness the chiasmic interplay of the seemingly incompatible realms of ancient Greek myth, personal dream, and contemporary reality, or the parodic collision of high and low theatrical idioms. Nor do the norms of two-dimensional painting and three-dimensional theater remain securely within their silos; Picasso set the conventions of one medium against those of the other, so that their mutual contradictions both undermine medium specificity and yet affirm the modernist principle of self-reflexivity as a subversive (rather than purist) practice. He did not so much blur the distinctions between media (in an embrace of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or of “theatricality” as an intermedial, multisensory, totalizing art per se) as articulate and displace specific codes, spatial thresholds, and framing devices; he thereby heightened the beholders’ experience of theatrical artifice, the construction of illusion, and its limits. For Picasso, the observer is not only an implied addressee but also often an integral protagonist—whether within the scenario of a pictorial work or within a staged performance—and cannot be presumed out of existence.

Picasso’s interest in the theater ultimately encompassed a broad range of practices and conventions, including certain Renaissance and Baroque pictorial and sculptural models in which a direct interpellation of the viewer, or the depiction of onstage spectators, occurs. (Here I am thinking of the scenographic allusions in paintings by Jacopo Tintoretto, such as *The Miracle of the Slave* of 1548, Paolo Veronese’s *The Feast in the House of the Levi* of 1573, or Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* of 1652.) It included popular forms such as the circus, bullfight, fairground play, music hall, commedia dell’arte, puppet theater, and their representations in the art of the late nineteenth century. We should also remember that Picasso’s studio at the Bateau Lavoisier often functioned as an improvised stage, where friends, including Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob, and André Salmon, read poetry and performed extracts from the operettas of Jacques Offenbach and grand opera as well as comedies. They took turns playing illustrious poets or artists coming to view Picasso’s latest work; on one occasion Jacob delivered a hilarious impersonation of the aging Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s visit to the studio.<sup>8</sup>

Douglas Cooper, one of the most important scholars to devote serious attention to Picasso’s engagement with the theater, viewed it as a leitmotif that linked his early works—including subjects such as circus entertainers, the commedia dell’arte, and the music hall—to his collaboration with Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes (1917 to 1924), as well as to his variations on Édouard Manet’s *Dejeuner sur l’herbe* of the early 1960s. In the catalog for an exhibition organized by Denis Milhau, *Picasso et le théâtre* (1965), Cooper celebrated the artist’s early paintings and sketches of theatrical scenes for revealing the truth that lies behind the glamor

and spectacle, for creating works that “are so vibrantly alive” because he “thrusts himself into the middle of whatever scene is being played out before his eyes.”<sup>9</sup> Citing the example of Picasso’s use of Cubist-inspired flats in his designs for *Le tricorne* of 1919, Cooper argued that the reciprocal influence of painting and theater in Picasso’s work evolved from his “desire to go beyond the limiting two dimensions of painting” and to “make the figures and things he represents more palpable.”<sup>10</sup> Yet he also maintained that in his designs for *Parade* of 1917, Picasso “did not try to upset the concept of the stage as a box, but adapted himself to it in the spirit of someone who knew that, with imagination, he could find new and untried ways of exploiting its visual possibilities.”<sup>11</sup> Although Cooper’s work remains an essential resource, recent studies provide more detailed analytic and historical interpretations of Picasso’s interest in scenography and the theater generally.

In 2007, Olivier Berggruen and Max Hollein published the catalog *Picasso and the Theater* to accompany an exhibition held at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt.<sup>12</sup> In his essay, Berggruen observed Picasso’s recurring practice of inserting a painted scene within a larger work, often presenting these vignettes as if within a theatrical frame and emphasizing particular, staged poses. For Berggruen, the theater also furnished Picasso with a model for a constructed method of assembly (first developed in Cubism), one that did not impose stylistic unity, permitting distinct elements to remain potentially mobile (like set scenery). Moreover, the technique of assemblage allowed the artist to establish metaphoric relations among seemingly disparate or heterogeneous devices and motifs, so that a still life might carry allusions to a stage set.<sup>13</sup>

Already in the designs for *Parade* of 1917, as many authors have noted, Picasso exploited the collision of divergent styles and references—Cubism and a strange version of populist/mannerist realism, circus and fairground entertainment, and a set that mimics some of the staging devices of Baroque theater. Ornella Volta, writing for the Frankfurt catalog, pointed out that Picasso proposed a classical red curtain as decor; it was to be exposed by the raising and lowering of the existing curtain in the theaters where *Parade* would be performed. Eric Satie, composer of the score, then decided to frame the three numbers of the “parade” (sideshow) with the brief fugue *Prélude du rideau rouge* in homage to Picasso.<sup>14</sup> In the end, however, Picasso replaced the idea of a painted red curtain with one modeled in part on the figuratively decorated *rideau de scène* of the Teatro San Carlo in Naples that he had seen on his trip to Italy with Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes. Retaining the conceit of a stage-within-a-stage, his canvas drop curtain (almost 33 by 52½ feet, or 10 by 16 meters) represents the protagonists of both a circus and a fairground show on steeply inclined floorboards inside a tent that, incongruously, opens onto a classical landscape complete with a ruined arch. In a further hybridization of theatrical categories, Picasso portrayed the fairground tent as constructed out of the voluminous folds of red velvet curtains.<sup>15</sup>

The paradoxical mixing of high and low cultural references in *Parade* has also been addressed in the excellent analyses of Jeffrey Weiss and Juliet Bellow. Weiss has discussed *Parade*’s roots in Cubism, as well as Picasso’s satirical presentation of the Managers as onstage performers, while members of the paying audience in the Théâtre du Châtelet were made to play the role of bored spectators who fail to respond to the entreaties of the sideshow entertainers in “an allegory of the avant-garde and its hostile reception during the pre-war years.”<sup>16</sup> In her book *Modernism on Stage: The Ballets Russes and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, Bellow identified a third reference to a popular art form—the cinema and its screen—featured in the blank white rectangle at the center of the constructed stage set, placed behind the proscenium frame. She then developed the implications of this allusion to the cinema for the dancers’ theatrical presence, as they oscillate between appearing as flickering, virtual images in a “moving

picture” (the dancers entered the stage from behind the proscenium frame, and were first seen silhouetted against the white screen), and as real (if machinelike and “paper-thin”) bodies in space.<sup>17</sup> As Volta, Weiss, Bellow, and others have observed, the heterogeneity of Picasso’s styles and presentation strategies destabilized the relation of the audience to the spectacle, in a direct interpellation that put divergent modes of viewing and the observers’ own corporeality into question.

To date, among Picasso’s many designs for the theater, only *Parade* has received extensive critical interpretation. What remains unexamined is the role of *mise-en-scène* in a broad range of Picasso’s works that take up themes and figures drawn from the music hall, popular theater, *commedia dell’arte*, and Greco-Roman myth, sometimes mingled with references to the Spanish bullfight.<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly, an analysis of Picasso’s adoption of staging conventions reveals that they are employed most often when it is a question of representing human drama or performance against an evocative, if often abstracted, backdrop. After an early period of intense exploration of popular, Renaissance, and Baroque theatrical devices, culminating in the explicitly staged brothel scene in *Les demoiselles d’Avignon* and related works of 1907, the artist mostly abandoned this interest as he developed a Cubist idiom, focusing instead on smaller, more intimate paintings, primarily still lifes and nudes, along with landscapes. Such subjects seem to have been less susceptible to overtly scenographic presentation, although the artist delighted in rendering the occasional pulled-back curtain and decorative tassel, *trompe-l’oeil* picture nail and its cast shadow, fringed or rope border, as well as fragments of real and fictive framing elements, all motifs that intensify our awareness of the production—indeed, the staging—of multiple, interpenetrating zones of illusion.<sup>19</sup>

After the war, during a period in which classicism returned as a dominant style and thematic repertory in France, Picasso executed a series of still lifes before an open window at Saint-Raphaël, a seaside town in Provence. In this series, as many scholars have observed, Picasso conceived the still-life elements as theatrical props within a framed, proscenium-like setting complete with side curtains, balcony screen, allusions to folding stage flats, and backdrop in the form of an abstracted sea.<sup>20</sup> Shortly thereafter Picasso also created a series of set designs and costumes for Diaghilev’s ballet *Pulcinella*, rendered as a stage-within-a-stage, where the sea again appears as a theatrical backdrop. This ballet has received far less consideration than the earlier *Parade*, yet, according to Cooper, Picasso “liked *Pulcinella* the best of all the ballets he designed because, as he says, ‘cela correspondait le plus à mon goût personnel [it corresponded the most to my personal taste].’”<sup>21</sup> The much-reworked designs for *Pulcinella* allow us to follow the artist’s creative process in unusual detail, to witness his interest in both quoting and subverting classical theatrical devices in the construction of an overtly scenographic dreamworld. Here, all the contradictions between the fictive apparatus of the stage and its real-world Parisian site, between eighteenth-century Naples and the historical present, come into view.

Later, in the 1930s, Picasso would again introduce elements of a theatrical *mise-en-scène* to frame certain prints of the Volland Suite—those representing the blind Minotaur led by a young girl—as phantasmal dramas with allusions to Greek mythology. Certain aspects of these prints become legible only if they are understood as evoking (and contravening) the conventions of tableau staging, including illusory thresholds, narrow, horizontal forestage, side entrances and exits, depicted viewers, refigured Greek chorus, and a backdrop that assumes the form of a seemingly limitless yet impenetrable space. My final example is a small gouache and ink drawing of 1936 titled *The Remains of the Minotaur in the Costume of Harlequin*, a work that the artist selected for enlargement to a *rideau de scène* for Romain Rolland’s play *Le Quatorze-Juillet* of that year. The explicitly scenographic presentation of a symbolic battle

between two (or three? four?) hybrid, disguised figures enables the image to function equally well as a modestly scaled picture and as a stage curtain with only minor adjustments.

What these disparate examples drawn from various moments in Picasso's career reveal is the persistence of his engagement with the metalanguage of the theatrical *mise-en-scène*

and its varied functions. In particular, I bring to light the remarkably imaginative ways in which Picasso conceived its mutually articulated frames and successive, but distinct spatial zones, in which the sea frequently appears where one might expect an arcade screen, stage curtain, or other *fondale* (backdrop). It is the image of the sea—whether Picasso rendered it in the form of an implausibly flat, horizontal screen of blue (Benjamin's "blue distance") or in the form of an advancing edge articulated as an undulating line that also mimics the lower profile of a drop curtain—that marks the threshold between the narrow space of the proscenium stage and the illusory, inaccessible space that lies beyond it. Picasso thus limned and partly effaced this boundary, one of the constitutive myths of theatrical fiction.

Already in his early work, Picasso demonstrated an interest in the representation of staged action, song, or speech and its relation to the illusory spatial orders of painting. *The Actor* of winter 1904–5 takes up a theme well rehearsed in the paintings of Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and others: the poetic world of the clown, acrobat, dancer, cabaret singer, or itinerant *commedia dell'arte* entertainer who often stands as an alter ego for the artist (Fig. 2).<sup>22</sup> In *The Actor*, Picasso captured a solitary performer from a proximate, if elevated vantage point, so that even as we look down onto the floor, his elongated figure rises to dominate the pictorial field. Emerging as a luminous form set against a dark, shadowy ground, the actor addresses his invisible spectators, his words cast outward by the turn of his body, direction of his glance, and eloquent gesture of his right hand. Although arrested in what appears to be a spontaneous, momentary configuration, this gesture is an adaptation of a well-known conventional sign for speaking whose origins can be traced to classical rhetorical codes.<sup>23</sup> The actor holds out his right hand with his thumb bent inward to meet his ring and little fingers, while his index finger extends outward at an angle perpendicular to the body. This gesture, which was susceptible to variation and intended

to signify the act of speaking rather than to convey a specific message, carries both a semiotic and an expressive charge.

Picasso studied several alternative renderings of the actor's hands, along with an image of his body, on a sheet filled with pencil sketches (Fig. 3). At the top left of this sheet, he considered a raised left hand with closely aligned index and middle fingers. Further down, at the left, he tested the effect of slightly separating the thumb of the right hand from the gently curving index, middle, and ring fingers, obtaining a receptive hand that seems to



**2** Pablo Picasso, *The Actor*, 1904–5, oil on canvas, 77¼ × 45⅝ in. (196.2 × 115.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Thelma Chrysler Foy, 1952 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, provided by Art Resource, NY)

welcome or beckon. In this drawing, the flexion of the wrist and the difference between the fingers are less emphatic than they would be in the painting. The sketch of the actor in the center presents yet another version of the hand, close to the one the artist would choose for the final work. Here, a sharply angled wrist and horizontally extended index finger contrast with the jutting diagonal of the thin arm, bent at the elbow. Perhaps it was Picasso's humor that led him to place an image of a dog, resting his head and paw flat on the ground, just above the "speaking" hand that seems to float in the air. At the right, he also drew a finely modeled ear, linked to the figure of his new lover, Fernande Olivier, who appears in two profile images just below, as if to suggest the power of the speaking hand to reach the ear, to be understood through the animated language of corporeal gesture.



3 Pablo Picasso, *Study for "The Actor,"* 1904–5, pencil on paper, 17¼ × 12½ in. (48.3 × 31.7 cm). Private collection (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph from Pierre Daix and Georges Boudaille, *Picasso: The Blue and Rose Periods* [London: Evelyn, Adams and McCay, 1967], 257, no. XII.2)

In *The Actor*, Picasso combined aspects of this sketched hand and of the drawing at the center left: he retained the sharply bent wrist, but raised the thumb to meet the ring and little fingers. The sweeping movement of the artist's own hand in tracing the curve of the wrist as it flows upward to the thumb and across to the index finger supersedes the articulation of the hand's internal structure, still visible in the sketches. Indeed, the break in the wrist and serpentine flow of the extended index finger exceed what is anatomically plausible. It is this excess that makes the gesture legible as a conventional sign even as it dissolves into the materiality of the artist's own painterly mark making. Picasso rendered the speaking hand in deliberately crude, pale, dry brushstrokes that stand out against the enveloping black. Yet this thickening ground also seems to invade the physical presence of the hand, encroaching on its borders, thinning its mass, rendering it a weightless, floating form. Just below the actor's bent right arm, a dazzling spray of gray and pale rose strokes activates the pictorial ground, charging it with light and energy, while simultaneously undermining the clarity of spatial relations and the coherence of the pictorial illusion.

To isolate this hand from the body as a whole as I have done here, however, is clearly misleading; what Picasso achieved is the transformation of the actor's overall pose and gesture into a unified schema. Aristotle, one of the earliest theorists of rhetorical delivery, defined *hypokrisis* or acting as comprising two parts, the voice and the *schema*, which arises from the union of static posture and dynamic gesticulation, thus constituting the totality of the figural form or appearance. The Roman Marcus Fabius Quintilian, writing in the first century CE, retained this emphasis on what he called the *gestus*, while also providing detailed information and advice on the use of specific movements,

especially those of the hand and fingers, including the speaking gesture identified here. In addition, Quintilian distinguished between those gestures that operate via mimicry, which he denounced, and those that seem more natural, such as indexical gestures that point toward an object and ideograms that amplify the logical and emotional structure of an argument. An example of the latter is the turning of a hand that accompanies a question. Although there are some ambiguities in these definitions, Quintilian asserted that the aim of gestural language is to appeal to the spectators' emotions rather than to reason.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, he argued, "The perfection of art is to conceal art"; the orator must not be confused with the actor, who is overtly playing a role and therefore offers only simulated speech and action. Both Quintilian and his predecessor in rhetorical theory, Marcus Tullius Cicero, affirmed that an orator should never appear as a mime who imitates specific objects or single words; rather, the orator's gestures should follow and enhance the tone and logic of the whole. What remains essential to Quintilian and other theorists is that an orator's speech and *gestus* differ from

merely spontaneous, everyday speech and gesture, while conveying a strong sense of authenticity and preserving decorum.<sup>25</sup>

Nineteenth-century academic theorists of gesture and body *schema* drew on these ancient precepts that were imbued with the authority of classical Greek and Roman culture. The French Neoclassical painter and writer Jacques-Nicolas Paillot de Montabert, for example, traced his understanding of the “universal rules” of gesture to ancient art, even to that preceding the celebrated sculpture and bas-reliefs of Greece. In his tract *Théorie du geste dans l'art de la peinture, renfermant plusieurs préceptes applicables à l'art du théâtre; Suivie des principes du beau optique, pour servir à l'analyse de la beauté dans le geste pittoresque* (The theory of gesture in the art of painting, containing numerous precepts applicable to the art of theater; Followed by the principles of optical beauty, in the service of the analysis of beauty in pictorial gesture) of 1813, the author argued that “the art of gesture,” which he believed was natural and older than the “art of speech,” constitutes “the most powerful artistic means of expression” in painting.<sup>26</sup> Picasso seems to have shared this estimation; even his earliest works explore the signifying potential of the human *gestus*, without however, adopting Paillot de Montabert’s insistence that the human “pantomime” adhere to classical principles of beauty. The artist may have encountered Paillot de Montabert’s treatise, which was translated into Spanish in 1855, while he was an art student in La Coruña, Barcelona, or in Madrid, but we need not assume he read this specific work.<sup>27</sup> The values that Paillot de Montabert’s treatise on gesture promoted—truth, naïveté, appropriateness, and beauty—permeated academic training. Like other writers on the art of gesture, Paillot de Montabert frequently cited Aristotle and Quintilian, along with Plato, Cicero, Virgil, Apuleius, and others, and he identified the specific hand gesture employed by Picasso in *The Actor* as “particular to orators or to those who make speeches in public.”<sup>28</sup> The artist’s practice of haunting the museums where he lived, especially the Prado in Madrid and later the Louvre in Paris, also extended the range of his visual knowledge, from Impressionism and Symbolism to the arts of ancient Egypt, Iberia, and eventually Oceania and Africa. Classical prototypes from various periods and regions provided only one set of aesthetic options among others.<sup>29</sup> Ardengo Soffici recalled that he often ran into Picasso prowling around the museums in Paris:

He went from museum to museum nourishing himself with good ancient and modern painting; and because I did the same, it was not unusual for us to encounter one another at the Luxembourg in the little room of the Impressionists, or at the Louvre. There Picasso preferred to frequent the ground-floor rooms, pacing around and around like a hound in search of game between the Egyptian and Phoenician antiquities, among the sphinxes, basalt idols, papyri, and sarcophagi painted in vivid colors.<sup>30</sup>

Given the artist’s fascination with the full range of artistic expression, all of which existed in the present for him, it is not surprising that he often employed hybrid styles or drew on multiple sources—modern and ancient—for his subjects. As we have seen, Picasso’s *The Actor*, which fuses a classical oratorical gesture with a mimelike, Rodin-inspired figure who evokes the commedia dell’arte, makes the rhetorical strategy and *gestus* of the protagonist central to its theme and appeal to the viewer. In *The Actor*, Picasso converted the signs of speech and pose into traces of movement that become visible through the medium of painting. In focusing on the actor’s performance, Picasso returned not so much to a point of origin in the voice, or even in writing, as to the signifying potential of the embodied human subject, whose ability to speak, gesture, and read appears as simultaneous and capable of translation from one medium or capacity to another. The body figures as a kind of drawing tool and

image, a generator of mobile, corporeal hieroglyphs that operates on both cognitive and affective registers.

What of the audience and its reception? The painting situates its spectators in close proximity to the stage, whose lower threshold has been effaced as if to invite us into its illusory space. Yet we also seem to hover above the stage, so that we look down from an imaginary perch, the one assumed by the artist. By divorcing the intimate optic of the painting's observers from the more distanced one of the implied audience in the theater, Picasso denaturalized the scene, while intensifying the actor-viewer encounter. We are given the partial, emotionally charged view of a spectator in the wings, rather than the more coherent, illusory tableau seen by those in the auditorium.

In the painting, the actor assumes a suspended dancer's pose, his left foot set slightly before the right in a turned-out stance that gives him more purchase on the surrounding space than he had had in the drawing. This stance orients his lower body on a diagonal aimed toward the upper right corner of the image, even as he inclines his upper torso, bent right arm, and head toward his audience at our right. It is this shift internal to the actor's pose (which implies a slight but meaningful temporal passage) that marks him as turning toward his viewers in the theater, as directing a specific oral performance and accompanying gesture to them, although they remain unseen. This composition reverses and complicates that of two related pastels of about 1901, one titled *The Actress*, the other *On Stage* (Fig. 1). In both earlier works, a female singer leans out over the footlights, beyond which a musician in the orchestra pit and a few spectators can be glimpsed. Although *On Stage* locates its viewer in the wings, the singer's relation to her audience is more clearly legible than in *The Actor*, her pose less enigmatic. The earlier pastel also includes a set of blue curtains that open onto the darkened entrance to the side wing in the distance. In *The Actor*, what is probably a similarly curved edge of the stage floor with its footlights runs along the right side of the painting. Here, however, Picasso rendered this boundary, which defines the threshold dividing the space of the forestage from that of the spectators, in a highly ambiguous fashion.

In the Neoclassical tableau tradition, the representation of a theatrical scene works to effect an equation between the rectangular box of the stage and the horizontal format of the two-dimensional canvas. Such an equation hinges on the frontality of the action, on the distribution of the spectacle across the horizontal length of the stage as well as within its near and distal registers, so as to maintain an orientation toward the gaze of the spectators before it. This reminds us that the Greek term for "theater," *theatron*, means literally "the place where one sees." As we have observed, however, in *The Actor* Picasso eschewed this format, as well as its narrative mode of address, to produce a work that is closer to a portrait. In choosing a lateral point of view, he abandoned frontality, compressed the horizontal extension of the stage into a narrow, upright field, and brought the artifice of the theater to visibility. Rather than a pictorially unified, dramatic tableau, we encounter an iconic painting with a strongly emphasized vertical axis that focuses on the expressive singularity of the actor's pose. It is no doubt to enhance the verticality of the image that the edge of the stage floor at the right seems to rise up, culminating in a vaguely situated streak of pale gray and rose paint, probably representing a column. This vertical element functions to frame the hand gesture, preventing the dissipation of its energy within an otherwise dark and indeterminate space. Similarly, the stacking of curved and angled projecting forms at the right provides a counterpoint to the curved and angled pose of the standing actor, while closing off the area where we might expect to see the orchestra pit or the audience.

Instead we are given access to a normally hidden apparatus—the red prompter's box at the lower right.<sup>31</sup> The lateral framing of *The Actor* allows the prompter's hands to emerge



from the shadowy interior of the box, as they follow the pages of the play's text laid out on the floor. We are invited to compare the luminous, articulated, yet enigmatic gesture of the actor—one whose significance cannot be exhausted by a single meaning or function—with the disembodied, eerily lit hands of the prompter, holding the pages and keeping track of the actor's progress through the text, but not seeking to express or convey this text visually. Picasso's painting thus offers a meditation on the transformation of a text into oral performance and legible gesture, of the silent, private act of reading into its audible, public animation in a theater. It is *The Actor's* conversion of the one into the other that enables him to

achieve what Quintilian argued was the principal aim of the rhetorical category of *hypotyposis*, which he defined as “the expression in words of a given situation in such a way that it seems to be a matter of seeing rather than of hearing.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, *The Actor* figures forth what Stéphane Mallarmé, writing of the mime Paul Margueritte playing Pierrot, referred to as “a mute soliloquy that the phantom, white as a yet unwritten page, holds in both face and gesture at full length to his soul.” Painting, like the art of the pantomime for Mallarmé, “sets up a medium, a pure medium, of fiction.”<sup>33</sup>

During the course of 1905, Picasso turned to a more classicizing style, even as he continued to produce numerous paintings, drawings, and sculptures inspired by itinerant acrobats, jugglers, jesters, and commedia dell'arte entertainers. Unlike the earlier scenes of cabaret singers and dancers, these images often picture the performers outdoors, in moments of familial intimacy, relaxing, engaging in open-air play, or simply posing before an indeterminate *terrain vague*. Here, Picasso's interest in the private realm of the actor or entertainer supersedes that of public display in a theater, cabaret, or fairground booth. Only a few of these works attend to the specific staging of a drama, circus, or commedia dell'arte performance. Perhaps as a consequence, they rarely engage the relation of architectural staging and pictorial spaces and their address to a situated and embodied spectator.

Picasso executed *Woman with Child and Goat* during the summer of 1906 in the high mountains of Gósol, Catalonia (Fig. 4). As Phoebe Pool has argued, it seems likely that a Hellenistic terra-cotta from Myrina,

in what is now Turkey, which the artist may have seen in the Louvre, inspired the female nude (Fig. 5).<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the nude's body type is remarkably close to that of *Dancing Figure* (or *Eros*), and reappears, with some minor variations, in several of the artist's paintings during this period.<sup>35</sup> Like many statuettes unearthed in the Necropolis at Myrina, this figure is a hermaphrodite whose dancing pose displays sensuous pleasure in fluid movement. As one of Aphrodite's attendants, the doubly sexed Eros probably represents desire and/or fertility. In *Woman with Child and Goat*, Picasso feminized the hermaphrodite's ephebic form and rendered the gesture of its arms more classicizing (while retaining the narrow hips and strong legs). He thereby converted the terra-cotta attendant into Aphrodite herself, accompanied by



4 Pablo Picasso, *Woman with Child and Goat*, 1906, oil on canvas, 54 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 40 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (139.4 × 102.2 cm). The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, BF250 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph © The Barnes Foundation)

her attributes, a dancing goat and her son, a young Eros. The image focuses on the moment of their movement across the threshold of a parted tent curtain, as they enter and begin to traverse a shallow stage. This work has sometimes been linked to paintings such as *Two Nudes* and the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, where, as Leo Steinberg has proposed, passage through a curtain becomes a metaphor of sexual knowledge, a way of signifying the before and after of a traumatic sexual encounter.<sup>36</sup> In *Woman with Child and Goat*, however, as Margaret Werth has noted, the figures move across the threshold with remarkable grace and ease; indeed, they appear poised to embark on a joyful procession led by the young Eros.<sup>37</sup> Picasso painted the work in warm tones of deep terra-cotta, rose, beige, white, and golden ocher, hues that evoke a sunlit, serene, Mediterranean setting.

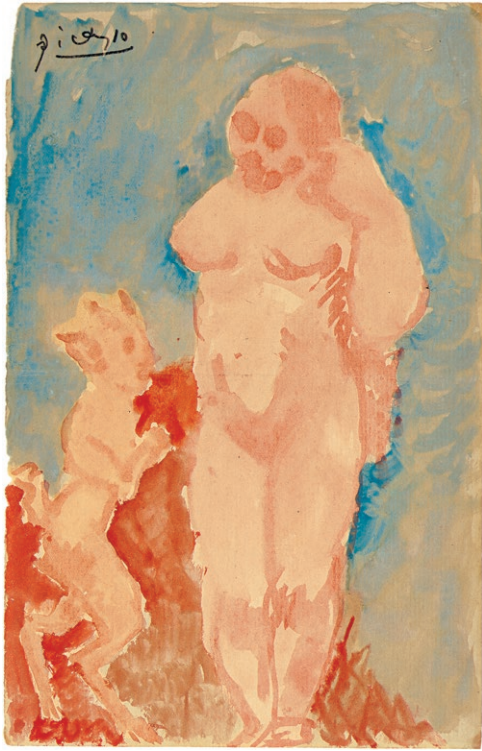
The theme is also archaizing, referring to Greek mythology and possibly to one of the earliest forms of Greek theater, the satyr play.<sup>38</sup> Although its historical origins remain unclear, the satyr play was the important fourth work following a group of three one-act tragedies; written by one author, this set constituted a tetralogy to be performed at Attic Dionysia as part of a competition. Combining elements of both tragedy and comedy, the burlesque satyr play was a short, spirited form of entertainment that has been speculatively traced to the cult of Dionysus and the festivities of his companions, the satyrs and their female companions, the maenads. The satyr play typically featured a chorus of “satyrs,” men wearing masks with goats’ horns; their singing and fanciful dancing, consisting of skips, leaps, and jumps, made them early archetypes of musicians and dancers.<sup>39</sup>

*Woman with Child and Goat* evokes the characters of a satyr play, recast in the idiom of classical naturalism. The goat, whose legs are disposed in depth so as to suggest that they are crossed, steps forward on his supporting right leg as he turns toward the nude. Picasso explored this twisting posture in two sketchbook drawings that clearly show the bent, left front leg lifted off the ground. In the painting, he chose to emphasize the goat’s torsion, crossed legs, and instability by placing the left front leg further back, but the pose still intimates the playful jumping and twisting of the satyr as well as the imminent prospect of sexual awakening, dancing, and revelry. A related watercolor, *Nude and Faun*, depends on a similar association of a Mallarméan faun with erotic desire and licentiousness (Fig. 6).<sup>40</sup> In this work, the faun, a rustic man-goat hybrid with the features of a satyr, stands upright on crossed animal legs, his phallic tail flaring upward to the left. He faces a voluptuously rendered nude, who turns her head in his direction while holding her left hand to her hair in a classical gesture evoking both narcissism and self-reflection, as well as corporeal self-containment.<sup>41</sup> (This gesture, rendered more emphatic, would reappear in the figure on the right of *Two Nudes* of late 1906.)

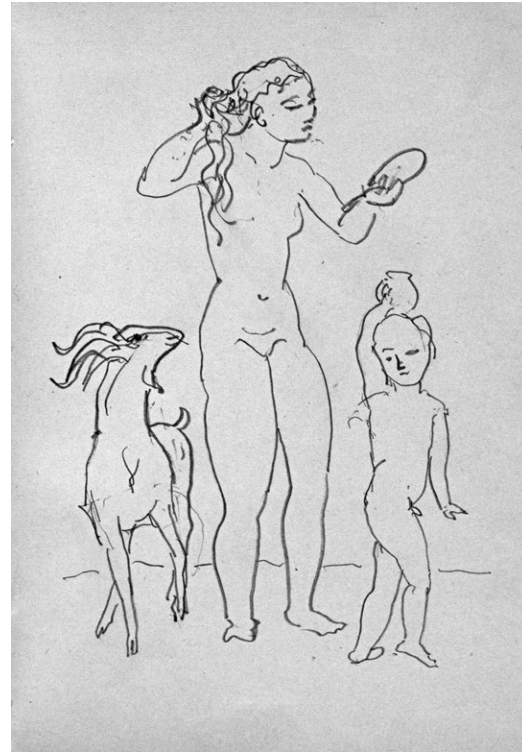
In *Woman and Child with Goat*, by contrast, the theme of sexual awakening remains in the register of allusion, conveyed through the theatrical staging of an entrance, the sensuous beauty of the nudes, their interrelated gestures, and the warm Mediterranean tonality. The male Eros carries a simple terra-cotta vase on his head, a reference to ancient vessels and ritual libations. He executes a serpentine, dancelike movement, left leg turned out, right leg moving forward, torso and head rotated toward the viewer, arms extended in opposing directions. Only the young woman in the center advances with a simple, contrapuntal step, one foot slightly before the other. Her raised hands wring the water out of her hair, a gesture that identifies her as Venus Anadyomene, Venus Rising from the Sea. Picasso had explored a related movement in a small pencil sketch, in which the nude woman arranges her luxuriously flowing hair with her right hand while holding a mirror to her face (Fig. 7). The gesture he renders in the painting, however, is less overtly narcissistic, while remaining erotically charged. Rather than gaze into a mirror, the nude inclines her head, eyes closed or nearly so, in a movement that signifies inner self-awareness. She does not address or acknowledge the viewer.



5 Dancing Figure or Eros, ca. 250–150 BCE, Myrina Necropolis, terra-cotta. Musée du Louvre, Paris (artwork in the public domain; photograph from Germaine Prudhommeau, *La danse grèque antique*, vol. 2 [Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1965], pl. 80, no. 594, published under fair use)



6 Pablo Picasso, *Nude and Faun*, 1906, watercolor, 8 × 5¼ in. (20.3 × 13.3 cm). Private collection (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph provided by Bridgeman Images)



7 Pablo Picasso, *Study for Woman with Child and Goat*, 1906, pencil, sketchbook 50r, 7¼ × 4⅞ in. (18.5 × 12.5 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris, MP1857 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph by Jacques L'Hoir/Jean Popovitch, © RMN-Grand Palais, provided by Art Resource, NY)

Picasso traced the figures' contours in reddish brown and suffused their forms with washes of terra-cotta, ocher, and ivory, so that they seem to emerge from the similarly hued pictorial support that is partly conflated with the shallow spatial recess behind the tent curtain. The golden ocher of the interior wall spills onto the curtain and the body of the goat, even as the flushed rose and terra-cotta of the nude's face reappear behind her head, beneath her feet, and on the boy's jug. Much of the curtain itself is thinly painted ground, a materialized void held to one side by the boy's twisting passage rather than by a specific gesture or physical device.

Perhaps what is most theatrical in the staging of this scene is the fact that Picasso presented it as an illusion, as a painting rendered *on* a drop curtain that refigures the parted curtains of the simple *skene*—an improvised hut or tent usually made of wood and cloth used in early Greek theater as an offstage space in a first departure from theater in the round. Here, scene and tent, both derived from *skene*, converge. (The term *proscenium*—from the Greek *proskēnion*—refers to the space before this hut or booth.) Picasso also partly conflated this depicted curtain with the canvas ground of the painting. The undulating lower edge and left side of this fictive curtain, within whose left corner Picasso signed his name, as if it were an independent picture, hangs at an oblique angle to the literal left and bottom edges of the canvas support. (Thickly applied paint within this lower, drawn border makes it appear as if the curtain were literally made of a canvas layered on top of the canvas ground.) As in *The Actor*, Picasso challenged the normative frontality, rectilinearity, and transparency of the represented scene, thereby disrupting its spatial coherence and narrative legibility. By opening a narrow interval between what appears to be a *rideau de scène*, the curtain that hangs before the stage proper, and the physical limits of the painting, he activated our awareness of these alternative frames, setting them into a *mise-en-abîme* of thresholds and borders.

Fourteen years later, after Picasso had seen his designs for *Parade* (1917) and *Le tricorne* (1919) realized in the theater to mixed reviews, he would create another series of sketches for a *rideau de scène*, set, and costumes for Diaghilev's more successful *Pulcinella* (Polichinelle or Punch).<sup>42</sup> While spending time in Rome in 1917, Léonide Massine and Diaghilev were inspired to re-create this seventeenth-century Neapolitan commedia dell'arte farce, which was

typically staged as an open-air puppet show, in the form of a modernist ballet set to music by Igor Stravinsky (after unpublished musical fragments either by or attributed to the Neapolitan composer Giambattista Pergolesi).<sup>43</sup> The performance opened at the Théâtre de l'Opéra in Paris on May 15, 1920. Although some scholars have noted that Picasso's first designs for the drop curtain seem to parody Baroque or Second Empire theater in general, while also setting the scene in Naples and including references to commedia dell'arte puppet theater, I will argue that the early drawings and gouaches reveal that Picasso took the sumptuously decorated Paris Opéra as a point of departure for an ironically site-specific design.<sup>44</sup> Picasso's preliminary sketches create a stage that mirrors the ostentatious Paris Opéra—including its proscenium stage, tiered boxes, ceiling painting, and enormous chandelier—through the distorting lens of caricature, while simultaneously opening onto the incongruous, but equally fictional world of popular Neapolitan street theater.

Charles Garnier's Opera House, the most expensive building constructed during the Second Empire, was famous for its lavish decor and complex theatrical machinery (Fig. 8). With seating for almost two thousand spectators, its ornate interior included multicolored marble friezes, gilded sculptural ornamentation, plush red curtains, and *dal sotto in su* ceiling paintings featuring Greek mythological figures. A monumental seven-ton bronze and crystal chandelier, designed by Garnier himself, hung from the cupola over the main auditorium (Fig. 9). This cupola was decorated by Jules Eugène Lenepveu's Neoclassical painting of allegorical figures representing the hours of the day and night as well as Muses playing trumpets in dramatic foreshortening against a cloud-filled sky (Fig. 10). By engaging this theme, Lenepveu referred to Italian Renaissance theatrical prototypes that portrayed the passage of time in stage designs as a means of affirming the dominion of political rule over time and space. Giorgio Vasari, for example, created a ceiling devoted to the theme of Time for a Venetian production of Pietro Aretino's *La Talanta* that included anthropomorphic depictions of the hours, with Chronos himself in the center.<sup>45</sup> Although a painting by Marc Chagall later masked Lenepveu's similarly triumphant ceiling, the original decoration still dominated the cupola in 1920.

As already mentioned, Picasso envisioned the set for *Pulcinella* as a stage-within-a-stage, a format that John Richardson has argued was meant to give the ballet the look of a Neapolitan puppet show.<sup>46</sup> This, however, is only part of the story. In two early drawings, Picasso framed the stage with a Baroque *rideaux à l'italienne*, that is, with curtains that open to either side, to disclose an architectural proscenium complete with decorative niches and panels (Fig. 11, lower left and right sketches). Set behind this facade, two tiers of viewing boxes mirror the Opera's horseshoe-shaped Salle des Spectacles, with a huge, comically bulbous chandelier hanging from the ceiling (top left and right sketches). In the middle distance, in all three sketches on this sheet, Picasso placed a fountain adorned with a statue of Neptune and flanked by mobile stage flats representing a city square, the location of much Renaissance and Baroque popular theater. Yet here, too, the reference is specific; even in reduced form, it evokes the Piazza della Borsa in Naples with its multigure Neptune fountain executed by Michelangelo Naccherino and Pietro Bernini on the basis of a design by the Roman architect Domenico Fontana. Just beyond the fountain, Picasso drew a backdrop with a fictive perspective of a Neapolitan street lined with houses that leads to the Bay of Naples, inscribing the sheet of sketches with this notation: *Toile de fond très éclairé—deux réflecteurs / un à gauche à la première coulisse dirigé sur les maisons de droite / un autre à droite à la première coulisse dirigé sur les maisons de gauche* [sic] (canvas backdrop very illuminated—two reflectors / one at left at the first wing directed toward the houses at right / another one at right at the first wing directed toward the houses at left). In two of the sketches, the distorted rectangle of the inner



**8** Charles Garnier, Salle des Spectacles, Théâtre de l'Opéra, Paris (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Shutterstock, New York)

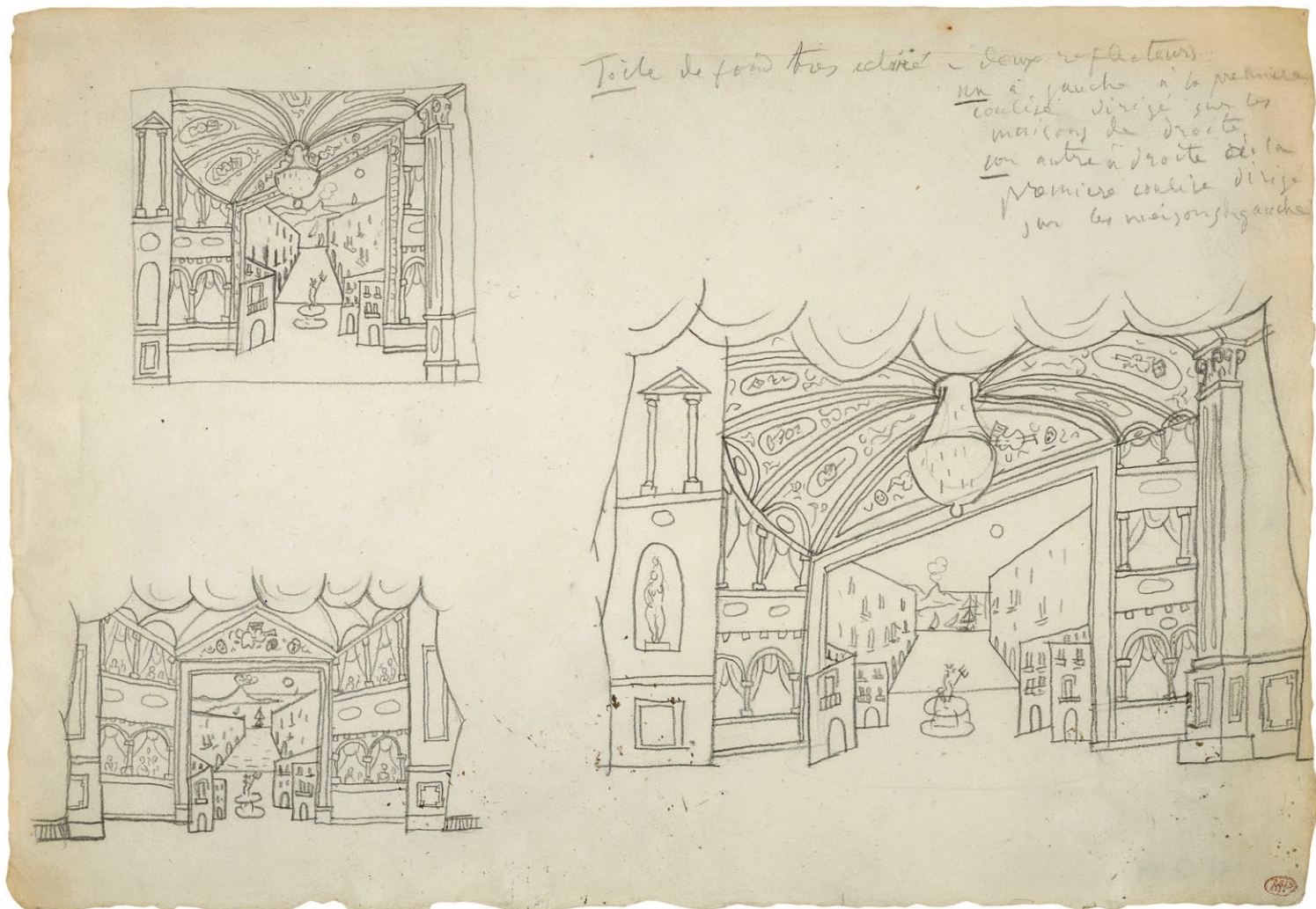
**9** Charles Garnier, chandelier, Salle des Spectacles, Théâtre de l'Opéra, Paris (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Shutterstock, New York)

**10** Jules Eugène Lenepveu, *Les Muses et les heures du jour et de la nuit*, design for the ceiling decoration of the Salles des Spectacles, Théâtre de l'Opéra, Paris, 1872, oil on canvas, 55½ × 56½ in. (141 × 142.5 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Scott Gilchrist, Archivision Inc.)



proscenium (a device already employed for the ballet *Parade*) mocks the axial symmetry and pure, rational geometries of Garnier's Opera, with its multiple framing devices, impressive rotunda, and monumental luster.

In several related drawings on another sheet, Picasso drew perspective orthogonals from the lower edges of the receding Neapolitan houses as a means of testing various ways of articulating the distinction between the stage space behind the proscenium frame and side curtains, the screen of the *scaenae frons*, and the distant, but fictive space rendered on the backdrop—or their potential unity (Fig. 12). The sketch at the lower left envisions a stage space flanked by architectural flats to right and left, terminating in a back curtain showing the sea and Mount Vesuvius, whereas the drawing above it portrays the houses on the stage both in the form of flats and as painted on the curtain, without clarifying how the actual and depicted spaces would be interrelated. At the top right, a reduced, two-arch version of a Vitruvian *scaenae frons* stands before an oversize rectangular backdrop representing a steeply pitched, illusory street between tilted houses. Most interesting, however, is the highly

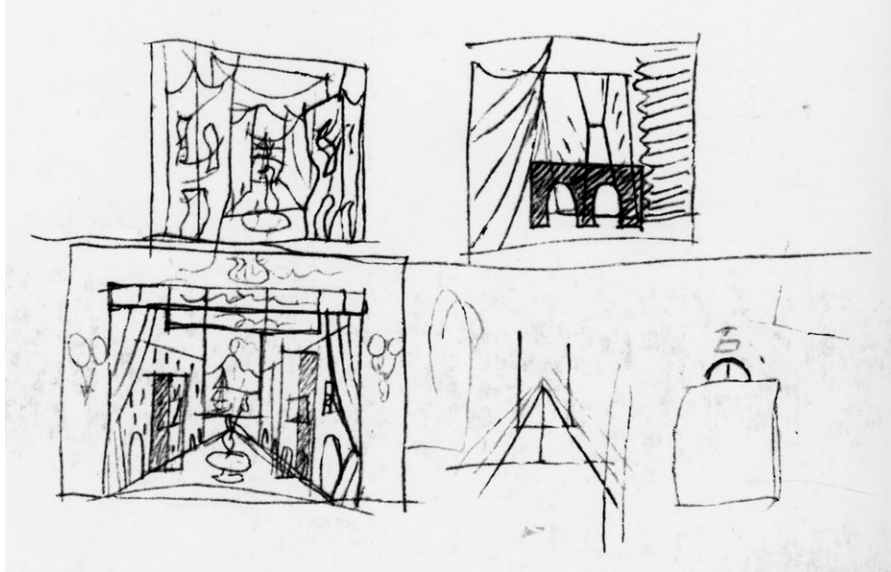


**11** Pablo Picasso, *Sketches for the Set of "Pulcinella,"* 1920, pencil, sheet 9 × 13½ in. (23 × 33.5 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris, MP1744 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph by Sylvie Chan-Liat, © RMN-Grand Palais, provided by Art Resource, NY)

abstracted drawing at the left of the lower right sketch that might almost be taken for an Albertian perspective diagram. A faintly rendered, tall narrow arch establishes a side wing at the left, set back from the perimeter of what appears to be the stage floor, marked by a simple horizontal line. Three converging orthogonals intersect this base line to either side of its center, plunging inward from the viewers' space (before the proscenium) until they meet at (or just above) the vertex of a vertical line that runs into the fictive space of a tall rectangle, presumably the back curtain. This vertical line (which defines the central orthogonal receding straight back into depth) traces the perspectival link between the stage foreground and the purely illusory space within the upright *toile de fond* (as Picasso called it). In contrast, the three canted orthogonals to either side of the central one run past the horizontal edge of the stage floor; they move outward as if to capture the space occupied by the spectators in the auditorium within a unified continuum.

Picasso's interest in the two-arch version of a Vitruvian *scaenae frons* in the upper right drawing may have been inspired by the stage designed by Andrea Palladio for the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza (inaugurated in 1585), the most famous example of its type (Fig. 13). In the Teatro Olimpico, and in other late sixteenth-century Italian theaters, the *scaenae frons* served to dissociate the stage proper from the *fondale*, with its multifocus, plunging perspectival illusion, by dividing them into separate zones: the performance took place in a narrow, horizontal forestage before the heroic Vitruvian facade, whose central Porta Reggia, or Royal Door, and two porticos opened onto divergent vistas of dramatically foreshortened city streets (made of painted wood and stucco) that the actors typically did not enter. To do so would

**12** Pablo Picasso, *Sketches for the Set of Pulcinella*, 1920, pencil, 5½ × 7⅞ in. (13 × 20 cm). Location unknown (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph from Douglas Cooper, *Picasso Theater* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1968], no. 267, published under fair use)



**13** Andrea Palladio, Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza, view of the *scaenae frons*, 1580–85 (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Cameraphoto Arte, Venice, provided by Art Resource, NY)

have been to destroy the illusion, since the perspective was distorted to give the appearance of great depth. As the plan of the backstage of the Teatro Olimpico reveals, the urban streets designed by Vincenzo Scamozzi after Palladio's death, and preserved in drawings by Ottavio Bertotti Scamozzi, were actually closed corridors offering no possibility for the actors to enter or exit (Fig. 14). They terminated in a sequence of foreshortened arches at the "far" end of the Porta Reggia that framed a painted screen simulating a continuation of the diminishing street

facades and atmospheric sky above.

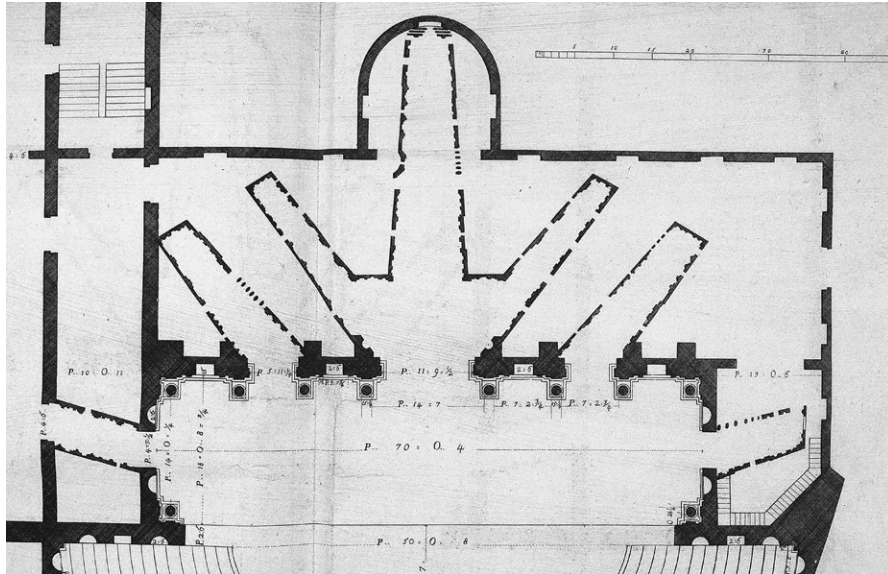
In another drawing, Picasso considered a similar division of the stage into a performance space defined by hanging curtains at its perimeter, an inner arcade screen set on an oblique angle, and a closed *fondale*, each of which ideally constitutes a separate register in relative depth (Fig. 15). Picasso, however, infused the expected spatial articulation with humorous ambiguity: he sketched a backdrop picturing the Bay of Naples with Mount Vesuvius spouting ash in the distance on a crude curtain that hangs from the pilasters of a *scaenae frons* with four open arches so that it appears *before* the arcade rather than behind it. This layering of pictorial and architectural staging devices converts the arcade into a mere support structure. A flimsy *toile de fond*, locating the dramatic action at the waterfront of the Bay of Naples, upstages the monumental heroics of the Vitruvian architectural screen; angled in opposing directions, these sets do not even obey the same laws of perspective. Ironically, the curtain also blocks access to the city views that should be visible through the arcade's central arches, thereby denying the illusion of depth. Yet the curtain also fails to mask the arches to either side, allowing us to imagine the continuation of perspectival space at the edges of the stage. (We can just catch a glimpse of a wing with a Gothic-style, pointed arch constructed of unadorned brick for entrances and exits at the far left. Its appearance in a divergent style and ordinary material further breaks the illusion of Roman and Baroque grandeur signified by the arcade.)

Folded stage flats hinder visual access to these offstage spaces. The flats represent the city houses that had been precluded from appearing through the central arches, a distinctive feature of Scamozzi's set design for

the backstage of the Teatro Olimpico. The zigzag pattern created by the houses' steeply pitched and literally angled roofs reprise, in ironically condensed and contradictory form, the effect of deep recession achieved in trompe-l'oeil architectural backdrops such as the one at the Teatro Olimpico. Picasso also employed the folded screens to complicate and sometimes to overstep the fictive borders established by the inner proscenium frame and pictorial backdrop. In one set of drawings (Fig. 11), the painted flats jut out at different angles, and the folded one at the left crosses the threshold of the inner proscenium frame to enter the forestage.

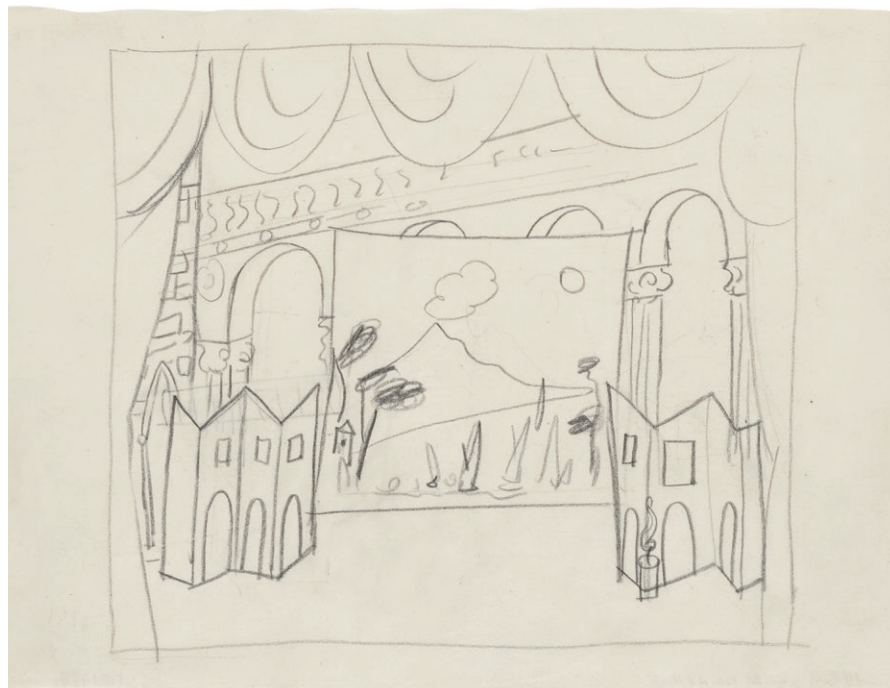
In another ambiguous drawing, Picasso placed the Neptune fountain well within what appears to be the space of the city street (Fig. 16). Given the absence of a ground line between the inner facade of columns and pediment, the tilted stage flats drawn to either side of its central vista may be understood as fictional elements painted on the backdrop or as freestanding structures. In this sketch, instead of rendering Garnier's chandelier, Picasso focused on Lenepveu's ceiling painting, reducing his grandiose, multifigure, *dal sotto in su*

14 Ottavio Bertotti Scamozzi, *Plan of the Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza*, from *Le fabbriche e i disegni di A. Palladio*, vol. 1, Vicenza, 1796, pl. 1 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © Scott Gilchrist, Archivision Inc.)



allegory to a single Muse representing Fame in triumphant flight over a toylike Greek temple.

In a more developed gouache, Picasso envisioned a proscenium arch complete with niches holding classical sculptures on its exterior (Fig. 17). In a reversal of perspectives, this arch opens onto the interior of the auditorium's upper galleries, with two tiers of red-curtained boxes from which *haut bourgeois* spectators peer out. The onstage appearance of these viewers makes them unwitting performers within the spectacle.<sup>47</sup> An ornate sunburst pattern adorns the cupola and establishes the motif of a brilliantly lit auditorium, within which a nighttime stage setting appears. At the center of the cupola, Picasso again sketched the caricature of a trumpeting allegory of Fame soaring across a stormy sky above a crudely rendered, precariously sited Greek temple. In the distance, a second proscenium frame, this time a golden rectangle decorated with raised red curtains, presents a view onto a simple, outdoor Neapolitan night scene, rendered in tones of pale lavender, gray, black, and reddish brown. Picasso painted the house facades in the form of canted stage flats on this backdrop; they project outward on either side of the small central street that leads directly to the Bay of Naples, where we find a small fishing boat pulled up to the dock. Across the bay, the moon rises over Mount Vesuvius spewing forth a naively rendered cloud of ash.



Much to Picasso's chagrin, Diaghilev rejected this highly parodic, self-referential stage design (and all but one of the costumes Picasso had designed based on the postcards of peasant costumes he had collected in Naples) as insufficiently modern. According to Stravinsky,

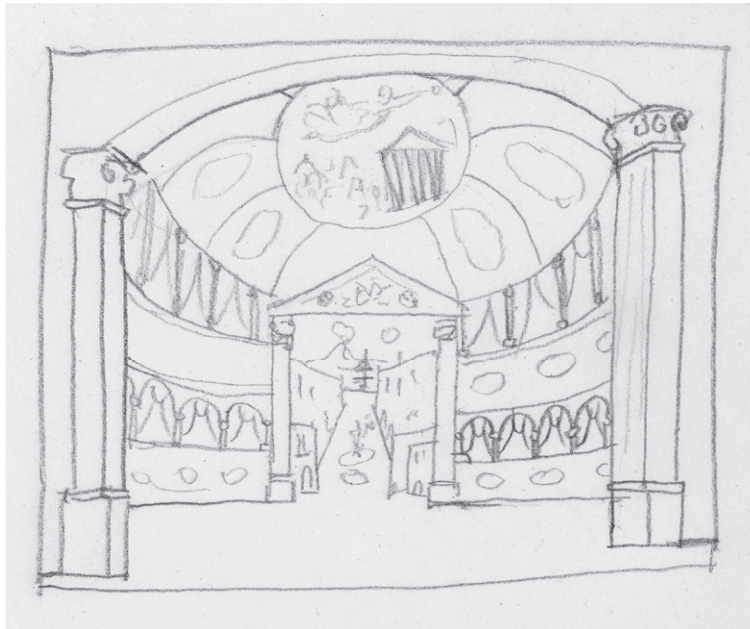
15 Pablo Picasso, *Study for the Set of "Pulcinella,"* 1920, pencil, 8¼ × 10¾ in. (21 × 27.5 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris, MP1768 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph by Thierry Le Mage, © RMN-Grand-Palais, provided by Art Resource, NY)

Picasso's original *Pulcinella* was very different from the pure commedia dell'arte Diaghilev wanted. Picasso's first designs were for Offenbach-period costumes with side-whiskered

faces instead of masks. When he showed them, Diaghilev was very brusque: "Oh, this isn't it at all," and proceeded to tell Picasso how to do it. The evening concluded with Diaghilev actually throwing the drawings on the floor, stomping on them, and slamming the door as he left. The next day all of Diaghilev's charm was needed to reconcile the deeply insulted Picasso, but Diaghilev did succeed in getting him to do a Commedia dell'Arte *Pulcinella*.<sup>48</sup>



**16** Pablo Picasso, *Study for the Set of "Pulcinella,"* 1920, pencil, 6¾ × 9¼ in. (17 × 23.5 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris, MP1745 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph by Thierry Le Mage, © RMN–Grand Palais, provided by Art Resource, NY)



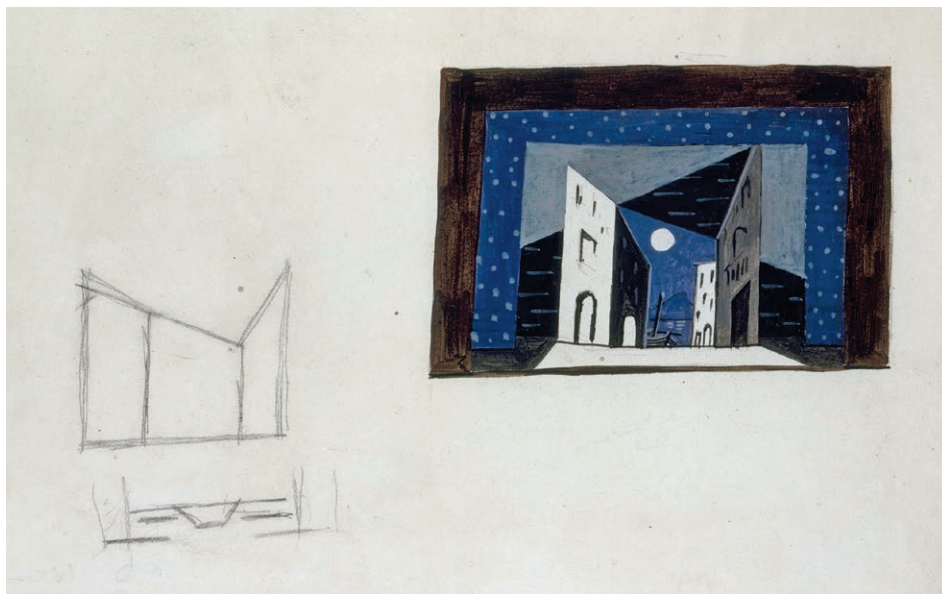
**17** Pablo Picasso, *Study for the Set of "Pulcinella,"* 1920, gouache, India ink, and pencil, 8½ × 10¼ in. (21.6 × 26 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris, MP1749 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph by Christian Jean, © RMN–Grand Palais, provided by Art Resource, NY)

Perhaps Diaghilev also worried that his beau monde spectators would not like to see themselves mirrored in a *faux naïf*, cartoonish style that mocked the extravagant decor of the Paris Opéra as well as their own elegant evening attire. Picasso's design satirized the disjunction between the social class of the Parisian audience at the Opéra and the populist, Neapolitan spectacle set in a city square that *Pulcinella* purported to be.

In the end, Picasso produced a much simpler set design for *Pulcinella*. It retains many elements of the original, stage-within-a-stage structure, while emphasizing the outdoor, night-time setting. In a small sketchbook gouache for what would be the final design, a brown-black border delimits the external rectangle of the proscenium stage, distinguishing it from a recessed, deep blue frame so that a narrow sliver of space opens between them (Fig. 18). These frames appear in the form of staggered stage flats. Picasso decorated the blue inner border with a pattern of dots that evokes a starry night, without explicitly representing the sky.<sup>49</sup> Within this speckled frame, the artist rendered the central prospect and houses to either side in the form of three separate, Cubist-inspired screens, signifying their spatial depth by the angled pitch of their geometric shapes against the similarly inclined planes of the sky and water. In the gouache drawing, these mobile flats stand on the ground with only slight deviations in angle at the sides (the pencil sketch at left shows the three flats aligned horizontally; in the lower drawing, this horizontal line appears with a trapezoidal patch of moonlight before it). Lisa Florman has observed that the central screen, which features the receding streets and distant view of the harbor, nevertheless stands *before* the other two.<sup>50</sup> Yet, given the perspectival cues offered by the side flats—in which literally angled shapes and depicted scenes conflict—it is impossible to say if we should read them as plunging into depth or projecting toward us. The flats create a spatial oscillation Picasso must have intended, enhanced by their purely rhythmic distribution of white, black, and gray.<sup>51</sup>

In the small gouache at right, an irregular block of white—an area that would be actualized in a chalk-white floor—extends outward for a few feet from the lower edge of the stage flats, before, that is, the threshold constituted by the illusory houses and bay. The street, which in the earlier, larger gouache had been rendered in depth *between* the houses arrayed to either side (Fig. 17), has now been thrust forward into the literal space *before* the houses. Picasso thus transformed the fictive central vista down a street into a horizontally extended and

**18** Pablo Picasso, *Study for a Set and Two Studies of Details for "Pulcinella,"* 1920, gouache, India ink, and pencil, sheet 9¼ × 13¼ in. (23.4 × 33.6 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris, MP1759 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph by Christian Jean, © RMN–Grand Palais, provided by Art Resource, NY)



illuminated ballet floor. The final effect, according to the English dancer Lydia Sokolova, was “so simple that it suggested the improvised screens of a troupe of strolling players, and yet it was as charged with atmosphere as the most thoughtfully composed easel painting. . . .”<sup>52</sup> A further innovation was the omission of footlights, so that all the lighting came from above, to suggest moonlight. With its flattened, nearly impenetrable image of skewed houses and bay

rendered in muted tones, Picasso’s backdrop provided a vivid contrast for the colorfully dressed, dramatically moonlit dancers.

Similar theatrical effects also structure paintings such as *The Pipes of Pan* of 1923 (Fig. 19). Harking back to his visit to Pompeii with Diaghilev and Massine in 1917, and to the classical works he had seen in Naples, Picasso simplified an earlier, multifigure erotic scene into an image of two youths before the sea, the seated one playing panpipes. A dark horizontal line drawn across most of the lower part of the image, just behind the figures’ feet, articulates the boundary between a fictive backdrop and the stage floor on which the strangely modern, somewhat stiff protagonists in white bathing trunks assume their mythic roles. The backdrop, despite its heavy stone slabs and steps evoking those the artist had seen in Pompeii, appears as a flimsy, painted screen. (A photograph taken by Diaghilev of their visit to Pompeii shows Picasso seated on a stone fountain with Massine standing behind him, surrounded by massive ruins. The postures and features of the nearly nude figures echo, in mirror reversal, those of artist and dancer in the photograph.)<sup>53</sup> Just above its lower border, the backdrop pictures an abstracted continuation of the ground in a narrow horizontal band, above which rise flat zones of deep blue sea and hazy sky, Benjamin’s impenetrable but evocative “blue distance.” Picasso also represented a shallow, ambiguous intermediary zone defined by oblique stage flats to either side of the tall steps. The figure playing the panpipes sits on an upright step, which recedes at a different angle from the one above it; or is he, implausibly, sitting on a prop painted on a flat backdrop whose lower edge reveals its fictive status? Perhaps the Pan-like figure and his attendant, who can be



**19** Pablo Picasso, *The Pipes of Pan*, 1923, oil on canvas, 80¾ × 68½ in. (205 × 174 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph by J. G. Berizzi, © RMN–Grand Palais, provided by Art Resource, NY)

read as symbolic alter egos for Picasso and Massine, should be seen as actors on a timeless stage, at once modern and ancient. Considered in this light, the classicizing scene and its harmonious setting turn into a mere facade, a dream to be achieved, in the postwar period, only in the imagination.



**20** Pablo Picasso, *Blind Minotaur Led by a Girl at Night*, The Vollard Suite, pl. 97, December 1934, aquatint, scraper, and drypoint, 9% × 13% in. (24.5 × 34.7 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, purchased with the Lisa Norris Elkins Fund, 1950 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph provided by the Philadelphia Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY)

Picasso's interest in the self-reflexive play of theatrically articulated spaces also reemerged in several of his etchings and aquatints for the Vollard Suite, executed during the mid-1930s. In a series of prints that take up the theme of the Minotaur, Picasso adapted devices from the repertory of classical and Baroque stage design, including the use of an illusory backdrop for action that unfolds across a narrow horizontal stage, the two zones divided by an arch or other scenographic device. In addition, spectators sometimes appear onstage and disparities of scale and unnatural illumination cast doubt on the theatrical unity of time and space.

*Blind Minotaur Led by a Girl at Night*, plate 97 from the Vollard Suite, situates its dramatis personae in the foreground of a shallow, ambiguously outdoor, stagelike setting framed by a proscenium arch at the left (Fig. 20). As in *Pulcinella*, the backdrop offers a view of a nighttime sea with a simple fishing boat pulled up to the shore. Stars and a small fire at the lower left supply the only visible illumination for a set of enigmatic figures: a blind Minotaur led by a young girl who bears the features of Picasso's lover Marie-Thérèse Walter, two bearded fishermen, and, at the left, an androgynous boy who assumes a contemplative pose. The small fire warms him; its semantic register comprises evocations of hearth and home, proximity, light, heat, and love. The fire, depicted on the near side of the proscenium arch, contrasts with the incompatible element of water, seen beyond the arch's frame. Their juxtaposition emphasizes the division between theatrical spatial zones. In opposition to the fire, the sea symbolizes mysterious distance, mythic travel, danger, longing, cold, and the unknown. Yet the fishermen with their nets full of fish imply an exchange between these realms, here brought into contiguity at the threshold of the fore-stage and its backdrop.

Within the cycle of the Vollard Suite, as in related works, the Minotaur frequently functions as an alter ego for the artist. A hybrid creature born of the union of a white bull (which had been a gift to King Minos of Crete by Poseidon) and Minos's wife, Queen Pasiphaë, the Minotaur lived in a labyrinth constructed beneath the royal castle, where Athenian youths were regularly sacrificed to him until Theseus succeeded in slaying the monster. Picasso shared the Surrealists' fascination with the Minotaur as a mythical figure whose lack of a human head rendered him symbolically *acephale*, unable to reason. The Minotaur thus represented the triumph of the irrational and destructive forces of the unconscious over logic, moral judgment, beauty, order, and light. And, indeed, in the early prints of the Vollard Suite, the Minotaur's virility and brute animal strength are frequently put on display in fantastic scenes of sexual struggle and violence, but these are countered by images of erotic play, celebration, and sensual repose.

In plate 97, however, in rendering the Minotaur blind—like the tragic King Oedipus—Picasso alluded to an act of sacrificial automutilation that may have been inspired by the Surrealist Georges Bataille's recently published essays.<sup>54</sup> Raising his long bestial muzzle and open mouth plaintively to the sky (in a paradoxically erect, human, and symbolically phallic form and posture), but unable to see its glittering lights, he depends on the young girl holding a dove to lead him forward.<sup>55</sup> She evokes the young Antigone, Oedipus's daughter (and half sister), who leads him out of the city of Thebes after he has gouged out his eyes on learning that he has killed his father and married his mother.<sup>56</sup> The Minotaur/Oedipus thus appears as doubly tragic; a victim of fate who is now blind and who must leave the place he had once ruled. Picasso eroticized the innocent, only inadvertently incestuous relation of the two strangely intimate figures; a chiasmic interplay of vision and touch, always interconnected in this series, structures the scene.

In *Blind Minotaur Led by a Girl at Night*, discrepancies in scale and strange contiguities of pose and gesture unsettle the relations between the figures and the mutually defined spatial registers they inhabit. The young girl and Minotaur seem oblivious of the fishermen who watch their progress with a sense of awe. Within the pictorial illusion of the print as a whole, these fishermen exist in a fictive zone, a *fondale* located *behind* the near edge of the sea. At the left, a young boy who resembles these fishermen and wears a similar headband, or fillet, leans against a box with his head profiled against the arch. This arch establishes an inner frame that encloses and delimits the space of the action. Situated on the viewers' side of this space and portrayed in a larger relative scale, he assumes an inactive, contemplative posture indicating that he will not intervene in the drama that unfolds before him. Nonetheless, as an onstage performer, he is also a protagonist in its affective register. The axis of movement, flowing across the foreground toward the left, is halted by the youth, whose extended right foot meets that of the young girl in white with reciprocal symmetry. Although the girl turns her head back to look at the Minotaur, and so cannot see the youthful spectator, she is linked to him through this subtle corporeal connection. Part of the paradox here is that these figures exist, at least implicitly, in different worlds, the boy before the proscenium arch and the girl within it. In this print, however, Picasso caused these oppositions to enter a zone of indistinction, so that figures who inhabit ostensibly incompatible realities meet, touch, and observe one another.

In plate 94, the first image of the Blind Minotaur group, executed on September 22, 1934, Picasso portrayed the girl carrying flowers (or perhaps a sheaf of wheat) and the Minotaur as mythical creatures who seem to emerge directly from this sea (Fig. 21). The girl, whose hair and dress flutter in the wind, steps forward from the water's edge, while the Minotaur's feet remain in contact with this border; both thus relate simultaneously to the



**21** Pablo Picasso, *Blind Minotaur Led by a Little Girl with Flowers*, The Vollard Suite, pl. 94, September 22, 1934, etching and drypoint, 9 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 13 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (25.1 × 34.8 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris, MP1982-153 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph by Mathieu Rabeau, © RMN–Grand Palais, provided by Art Resource, NY)

realms of sea and land. But Picasso complicated this duality by making the uneven line of the sea visually continuous with that of the dropped sail (or net?) being lifted out of the water by the fisherman at the center. The shoreline and sail refigure the lower border of a theatrical curtain, placed just behind the proscenium arch that frames the upper part of the scene. This conflation of curtain, sail, and edge of the sea emphasizes the theatrical presentation of the narrow foreground, casting it into an ambiguous spatial register.

A young boy, here clearly dressed as the fishermen's younger companion, leans against the exterior face of the arch; he both belongs to the scene, as one of its dramatic characters, and inhabits a space ostensibly before its framed enclosure, that is, the space that includes the audience. Indeed, the left vertical edge of the backcloth or curtain picturing the boat, fishermen, and sea appears just to the right of the boy's right ankle and calf; rising up from a point behind this ankle, a vertical line marks the edge of the curtain, thereby implying that he stands just before and to its left, rather than within, its fictive space. Legs crossed and arms folded in a meditative posture, the boy represents the intimate spectator (and artist?) whose proximity to the performance was only implied in *The Actor*. His presence enhances the scene's oneiric quality, rendering visible the dreamer who is aware of appearing as an observer within his own dream, and who therefore figures the liminal space between consciousness and the unconscious, between the fields of moral judgment and of desire, or, to use Freudian terminology, the superego and the id.<sup>57</sup> Both the young dreamer and the older fishermen play the role of theatrical spectators, the fishermen from the space beyond the narrow band of the stage, as if looking in from behind. Like the depicted viewers in many Renaissance and early modern paintings of miracles, these spectators enact the wonder intended to be experienced by the image's beholders and enhance a sense of the drama's mystery and otherworldliness. We might also see in them an allusion to a Greek tragic chorus, a masked group of performers that guides the audiences' responses through collective singing and commentary. Although in ancient Greece the chorus was exclusively male, its members typically impersonated young girls, slaves, or old men, because these were



**22** Pablo Picasso, *Blind Minotaur Led by a Little Girl with a Dove*, The Vollard Suite, pl. 95, November 4, 1934, etching, 9 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 11 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (23.9 × 30 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris, MP1982-154 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph by Thierry Le Mage, © RMN-Grand Palais, provided by Art Resource, NY)

characters who could not take part in the action. Powerless as agents and inhabiting a space beyond the stage proper, such individuals nonetheless functioned as important beholders and interpreters.<sup>58</sup>

Two other plates from the Vollard Suite and a watercolor should also be seen as part of this series. In plate 95, from November 4, 1934, Picasso placed an androgynous spectator wearing a sailor's shirt and bearing a classical profile and a fillet in his/her hair—in a pose that loosely evokes a *spinario*, or boy pulling a thorn from his foot—on a viewing box at the far right (this figure seems like a naively classicizing sculpture descended from a plinth, an element of decoration usually seen in the gallery niches of the *cavea* now moved to the stage) (Fig. 22). Although Picasso angled the box so that it intrudes implausibly into the domain of the sea (recalling the steps in *The Pipes of Pan*), this spectator observes the unfolding drama with such equanimity that he/she appears, like the boy in the previous print, serenely removed from it. The young girl, a near double of the seated spectator—both bear variations of the features of Marie-Thérèse Walter—here carries a dove. She and the Minotaur, his arm stretched out as he reaches forward to touch the girl's head, stride forth along a horizontal axis leading to a structure with an interior arch. This structure, which constructs the left side of the scene as a theatrical wing, takes the place occupied by the proscenium arch in plate 97. Picasso condensed the space of the forestage to a remarkably shallow rim bordered by the edge of the sea, so that the girl and the Minotaur redraw this threshold even as they walk to the left.

In plate 96, an even younger (more innocent and naive?) spectator again sits high on a box with one knee bent, hands touching a raised right foot, in a pose both casual and rigid, evocative of art more than life (Fig. 23). A boat carrying its fishermen now sails away against a stormy sky as the girl and the Minotaur advance toward the archway. Despite the complex interplay of visual and tactile modes of apprehension in these two prints, the gazes of the principal figures fail to meet and nothing impedes the flow of movement toward the theatrical archway. Perhaps these prints represent Picasso's fantasy of pure escape, of his alter ego



**23** Pablo Picasso, *Blind Minotaur Led by a Girl*, The Volland Suite, pl. 96, October 23, 1934, etching and drypoint, 9 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 11 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (23.8 × 29.8 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, purchased with the Lisa Norris Elkins Fund, 1950, 1950-129-108 (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph provided by the Philadelphia Museum of Art)

the blind Minotaur moving beyond the calm moral purview of the onstage observer and the fishermen who crane their necks to see.

One can acquire a greater sense of how the various theatrical frames and the inclusion of an onstage spectator function in these prints by comparing them with a watercolor in which these devices do not appear (Fig. 24). In a more naturalistically conceived outdoor scene, Picasso omitted the proscenium arch and removed the onstage spectator, although he retained the fishermen/chorus who still gaze at the strange protagonists with amazement and perhaps disquiet. The young girl now guides the Minotaur with her right hand extended back to grasp his, even as he reaches out with his left arm to touch her hair. The wider horizontal support of this image, in comparison to the format of the Volland Suite prints, gives the vector generated by these reciprocal gestures more scope; the figures move through an open, agitated space unconstrained by theatrical thresholds or frames at the right or left. The meaning of their passage seems more intensely subjective and absorbing, without the self-reflexive distancing effect of a scenographic proscenium arch and without the possibility of an encounter with the onstage gaze and tranquil authority of a contemplative or dreaming viewer. In this watercolor, though, as in the prints, the artist placed his figures against a stormy seascape that is infinitely expansive and yet closed, proximate and distanced, natural and mythic. It is the sea, with its theatrically articulated advancing edge, the confinement of the action to a narrow horizontal band, and the presence of the fisherman/observers (one of whom raises a curtain-like sail) that reaffirm the classical, dreamlike staging of the work.

This backdrop of sea and turbulent sky and the charged relation of the central figures to the edge of the sea from which they seem to emerge appear throughout the Blind Minotaur series as well as in subsequent related works, such as the *Minotauromachy* of 1935 (Fig. 25). Here, the multiplied onlookers play a central role in establishing the fictive status of a drama that takes place in a setting juxtaposing sea and land with an ambiguously sited, arched viewing structure. This mythic setting operates both symbolically and visually to evoke the open-air stages of ancient Greek theater, the fathomless depth of the unconscious, and the

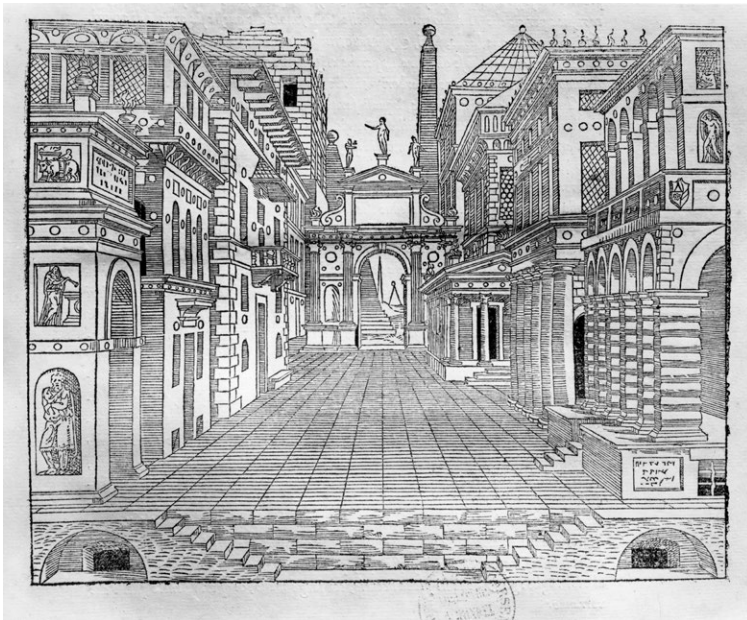


24 Pablo Picasso, *Blind Minotaur Led by a Little Girl*, 1934, gouache, watercolor, ink, and pencil on paper, 13¾ × 20 in. (35 × 51 cm). Private collection (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph © Christie's Images, provided by Bridgeman Images)

nighttime world of dreams (even at times in sunlit views). As Roland Barthes has observed, in Greek theater, the sea was one of a small repertory of sites deemed appropriate as a setting for tragedy.<sup>59</sup> Such allusions render the sea inaccessible, both temporally and spatially, however proximate it may appear; to this extent it acquires an affective aura, as defined by Benjamin.<sup>60</sup> In many of the prints, Picasso emphasized its symbolic character by making the sea appear as a kind of *scaenae frons*, an inner frame that opens onto a self-reflexively illusory world. The Renaissance *scaenae frons*, however, had offered its viewers a sense of mastery over the perspectively rendered, rationalized space of the city. Sebastiano Serlio's stage designs, for example, depended on the perspectival continuity of the space of the stage with that of the spectator, whose vision was directed toward a frontally displayed, central vanishing point (Fig. 26). In contrast, in the series devoted to the Blind Minotaur, Picasso's illogical *scaenae frons* nearly spills over into the space of the foreground drama, now grown vanishingly narrow, yet still able to support dramatic action.

In June 1936, Picasso was asked to design a curtain for a production of Romain Rolland's play *Le Quatorze-Juillet* (The 14th of July), intended to celebrate the Popular Front's first Bastille Day. Given little time to conceive a new work, Picasso selected a small gouache and ink drawing he had recently completed, *The Remains of the Minotaur in the Costume of Harlequin*, for enlargement to the size of a *rideau de scène* (Fig. 27).<sup>61</sup> The fantastic, looming figures, which draw on the artist's earlier images of the Minotaur and Harlequin, as well as the bullfight and Crucifixion, engage in epic battle against a desolate backdrop of sea and sky with an isolated, proplike tower in the right distance. Picasso endowed each of these mythical





**25** Pablo Picasso, *Minotauromachy*, 1935, etching with scraper work and engraving, state VII, 19 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 27 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (49.3 × 69.1 cm). Princeton University Art Museum, Gift of Margaret Scolari Barr (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph by Bruce M. White, provided by Princeton University Art Museum/Art Resource, NY)

**26** Sebastiano Serlio, *Design for the Stage Set of a Tragedy*, 1545, woodcut, from *Secondo libro di prospettiva*, Paris: Jehan Barbé, 1545. Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, Paris, pl. 69 (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Bridgeman/Giraudon/Art Resource, NY)

creatures with a hybrid identity, as well as a false skin, disguise, or costume that emphasizes its allegorical function. A bearded man, clothed in the skin of a horse (the horse who is sacrificed to the bull in the ring, and who would reappear as an emblem of the people in *Guernica*), supports a triumphant youth with a Greek profile and faintly indicated striped sailor’s shirt, arms held fearlessly outward, a garland of flowers in his hair. Shedding his disguise of weakness, the bearded man raises his fist to launch a rock against a brutal falcon-man with a daggerlike tongue. (There may be an allusion here to David and Goliath.) The falcon-man, whom contemporaries interpreted as an avatar of Fascism, carries the lifeless Minotaur/Harlequin, whose left arm with bent wrist drops in a gesture that signifies a Christlike, sacrificial death while also intimating a coming resurrection and salvation.

The Harlequin, this work seems to suggest, was always only the colorful costume of the Minotaur (who surely bears

some affinity to the falcon-man in his ambiguously human/animal phallic power and brutality). Harlequin, a multivalent, agile trickster, has historically been associated with Hermes Trismegistus, a psychopomp who guides souls to the afterlife. Before he became domesticated (made into a romantic figure, or a farcically impetuous and sly servant) in the modern period, Harlequin was primarily a transgressor (moving between the realms of life and death), a malevolent character or demonic sorcerer often portrayed with an animal mask, and even in the twentieth century, he often bore traces of this earlier range of meanings. Both Harlequin and Minotaur represent an eruption into the present of an uncanny, disruptive “other”; endowed with supernatural powers, they remind us of the netherworld and death.<sup>62</sup> The fatal confrontation of the artist (in his derisory, now shattered disguises as Harlequin and



**27** Pablo Picasso, *The Remains of the Minotaur in the Costume of Harlequin*, May 28, 1936. India ink and gouache, 17½ × 21½ in. (44.5 × 54.5 cm). Musée Picasso, Paris (artwork © 2019 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York; photograph by Thierry Le Mage, © RMN–Grand Palais, provided by Art Resource, NY)

Minotaur) with Fascism on the stage of political battle results in apparent defeat; perhaps we should read this as a defeat of the avant-garde generally during the crises of 1936. However, the victory of the falcon-man, who shows no signs of discarding his costume of power, is not absolute. The performance of Rolland's *Le Quatorze-Juillet* was intended to remind viewers of the history of the people's revolutionary spirit and sovereignty, and to spur its revival in the present.

The transformation of the small gouache to the scale of a *rideau de scène* required only minimal adjustments; the scene was given greater breadth through an extension of the backdrop of sea and sky to either side of the central group, and the tower at the right became a symbolically resonant ruin. But, as in the gouache, the figures stand on the threshold of a theatrical *fondale*, a distinct, illusory zone articulated by the forward, slightly rippled edge of an abstracted, mythical sea where it meets the land. Both the Minotaur and falcon-man, their rear feet making contact with the water's border, seem to have emerged from its depths, as if from the ancient past, from myth, or perhaps the unconscious, whereas the feet of the old man are firmly planted on this charged threshold. In the gouache and ink drawing, Picasso had situated his dramatis personae in a self-reflexively framed world, treating the pictorial field as a stagelike setting within which a symbolic battle of opposing forces—the

people against Fascism, life against death—could be enacted. No wonder this small gouache proved amenable to transfer to an actual stage, where Rolland's historical play dramatizing the events of Bastille Day would be performed. Originally enlarged for the Théâtre du Peuple in Toulouse and recently restored, the *rideau de scène* is now on display in this city's Musée des Abbatoirs. The trajectory of *The Remains of the Minotaur*, from a small gouache and ink drawing, to enlargement as a stage curtain, to its current status as a pictorial work exhibited in a museum, is symptomatic of the potential for reciprocity and exchange between drawing, painting, and stage design in much of Picasso's oeuvre, especially that devoted to classical or mythological subjects. In these works, many of which evoke the genre of tragedy, the topography of the imagination takes shape as a theatrical set sited by the edge of the sea. Here, proscenium arches, inner frames, curtains, stage flats, and explicitly fictional, impenetrable vistas—or their open-air counterpart, the sea—operate to distinguish the space of the action from that of the illusory backdrop, while calling this very threshold into question.

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#### NOTES

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1. Walter Benjamin, *Einbahnstrasse* (Berlin: Rowohly, 1928), <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/kurze-prosa-6570/1>: "Die blaue Ferne, die da keiner Nähe weicht und wiederum beim Näherkommen nicht zergeht, die nicht breitspurig und langatmig beim Herantreten daliegt, sondern nur verschlossener und drohender einem sich aufbaut, ist die gemalte Ferne der Kulisse. Das gibt den Bühnenbildern ihren unvergleichlichen Charakter," trans. Edmund Jephcott as *One Way Street*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 62 (translation amended).
2. Denis Diderot, entry to "Composition," in *Encyclopédie II, Lettres B–C*, critical ed. by John Lough and Jacques Proust, vol. 6 of *Oeuvres complètes de Diderot* (Paris: Hermann, 1976), 475: "Un tableau bien composé est un tout renfermé sous un seul point de vue, où les parties concourent à un même but, & forment par leur correspondance mutuelle un ensemble aussi réel, que celui des membres dans un corps animal."
3. *Ibid.*, 479: "que le spectateur ne soit jamais perplexe."
4. *Ibid.*, 480: "Observez rigoureusement les lois de la perspective; sachez profiter du jet des draperies; si vous les disposez convenablement, elles contribueront beaucoup à l'effet; mais craignez que l'art ne s'aperçoive. . . ." (Rigorously follow the laws of perspective; know how to profit from the fall of draperies; if you arrange them properly, they will contribute much to the effect; but take care that your artfulness not be perceived. . . .")
5. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 96.

6. Denis Diderot, *Salons III*, ed. Jean Sezec and Jean Adhémar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 112, quoted in Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 95–96: "Celui qui agit et celui qui regarde, sont deux êtres très différentes."

7. Leon Battista Alberti introduced his concept of *istoria*, the greatest accomplishment of the painter, in book 2 of *On Painting*. The *istoria* was founded on the composition of human bodies in space such that their proportions and actions, as well as all the other features of the work, harmonized with one another. According to Alberti, "modesty and truth should be used in every *istoria*. For this reason be careful not to repeat the same gesture or pose. The *istoria* will move the soul of the beholder when each man painted there clearly shows the movement of his own soul." Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. and intro. John R. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 77. Now a truism, this principle was enunciated here in print for the first time. Alberti's notion of *istoria* included the representation of figures who point to the main event, admonish viewers, and sometimes invite them to weep or laugh (78). In this, Alberti is clearly to be distinguished from Diderot, whose notion of the tableau precluded such appeals to beholders.

8. For a discussion of these and other theatrical activities, see Peter Read, "Au Rendez-vous des Poètes: Picasso, French Poetry, and Theater, 1900–1906," in *Picasso: The Early Years, 1892–1906*, ed. Marilyn McCully, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 214–15.

9. Douglas Cooper, "Pourquoi?," in *Picasso et le théâtre*, ed. Denis Milhau, exh. cat. (Toulouse: Musée des Augustins, 1965), 17–20; and *idem*, *Picasso Theatre* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1968), 12–13.

10. Cooper, *Picasso Theatre*, 59.

11. *Ibid.*, 24.

12. Olivier Berggruen and Max Hollein, eds., *Picasso and the Theater*, exh. cat. (Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt; Berlin: Hantje Cantz, 2007).
13. Olivier Berggruen, "The Theater as Metaphor," in Berggruen and Hollein, *Picasso and the Theater*, 27–37. For a reproduction of a sketch for a theatrically staged still life—constructed as if composed of Cubist flats—on a sheet of paper that also bears a drawing for a Manager on Horseback, see the notes for *Parade*, 48.
14. Ornella Volta, "Picasso as Playwright," in Berggruen and Hollein, *Picasso and the Theater*, 107–8.
15. *Ibid.*, 110–11.
16. Jeffrey Weiss, *The Popular Culture of Modern Art: Picasso, Duchamp, and Avant-Gardism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 167.
17. Juliet Bellow, *Modernism on Stage: The Ballets Russes and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 90–111.
18. For analyses of classical themes in Picasso's work of the 1920s and 1930s, see Lisa Florman, *Myth and Metamorphosis: Picasso's Classical Prints of the 1930s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); and Christopher Green, "Pablo Picasso: More than Pastiche, 1906–36," in *Modern Antiquity: Picasso, De Chirico, Léger, Picabia*, by Green and Jens M. Daehner, with contributions by Silvia Loreti and Sara Cochran (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 125–31.
19. On Picasso's fascination with framing devices during the Cubist period, see Christine Poggi, "Frames of Reference: Table and Tableau in Picasso's Collages and Constructions," *Art Journal* 47, no. 4 (1988): 311–22.
20. Many scholars have commented on the theatrical staging employed in the still lifes Picasso executed in Saint-Raphaël during the summer of 1919. These works have been related to Picasso's work in 1919 for Manuel de Falla's ballet *Le tricorne*, presented by Serge Diaghilev at the Alhambra Theater in London. See the analyses by Brigitte Léal, "Picasso's Stylistic 'Don Juanism': Still Life in the Dialectic between Cubism and Classicism," in *Picasso & Things*, ed. Jean Sutherland Boggs, exh. cat. (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1992), 32–34; Berggruen, "The Theater as Metaphor," 31–34; and Susan Grace Galassi, "Still Life in Front of a Window at Saint-Raphael," in *Picasso's Drawings, 1890–1921: Reinventing Tradition*, ed. Galassi and Marilyn McCully, exh. cat. (New York: Frick Collection; Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2011), 248–50.
21. Cooper, *Picasso Theatre*, 48.
22. Picasso's persistent identification with the commedia dell'arte figure Harlequin is well known and has received rich art historical analysis. For a wide-ranging, magisterial interpretation of the tendency of modern artists to identify with clowns, harlequins, and acrobats in literature and art, see Jean Starobinski, *Portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque* (Geneva: Skira, 1970). On Picasso's work in particular, see Theodore Reff, "Harlequins, Saltimbanques, Clowns, and Fools," *Artforum* 10 (October 1971): 30–43. For a recent exhibition devoted to this theme, see *Picasso Harlequin 1917–1937*, ed. Yve-Alain Bois (Rome: Complesso del Vittoriano, 2008; Milan: Skira, 2008). Bois addresses Harlequin's function as a trope for Picasso's constantly variable artistic practice, especially during the period from the end of World War I through the 1930s. Understood as a metaphor, Harlequin represents agility, craftiness, multiplicity, heterogeneity, and the play of fantasy. See Bois, "Picasso as Trickster," in *Picasso Harlequin 1917–1937*, 18–35.
23. For analyses of the language of gesture as adapted from classical antiquity during the Renaissance, see Moshe Barasch, *Giotto and the Language of Gesture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and Leo Steinberg, *Leonardo's Incessant Last Supper* (New York: Zone Books, 2001).
24. Fritz Graf, "Gestures and Conventions: The Gestures of Roman Actors and Orators," in *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 37–41.
25. *Ibid.*, 39–43.
26. Jacques-Nicolas Paillot de Montabert, *Théorie du geste dans l'art de la peinture, renfermant plusieurs préceptes applicables à l'art du théâtre; Suivie des principes du beau optique, pour servir à l'analyse de la beauté dans le geste pittoresque* (Paris: Librairie Magimel, 1813), 6–7.
27. Paillot de Montabert's treatise on gesture was translated into Spanish as *Teoría de la Belleza, con aplicación a las bellas artes y principalmente a la pintura* (Valencia: Imprenta de José Rius, 1855).
28. Paillot de Montabert, *Théorie du geste dans l'art de la peinture*, 55: "Il étoit un autre geste, particulier aux orateurs ou à ceux qui harangoient en public. . . . Les trois premiers doigts sont élevés et les deux autres fermés. Cette situation, ordinaire à toutes les mains panthées, est commune à toutes celles des statues qui représentent des orateurs, des poètes et des philosophes ou des magistrats déclamant ou discourant" (The first three fingers are raised and the other two closed. This situation, common to the hands of all [Christ] Pantocrators, is shared by all those of statues representing orators, poets and philosophers, or magistrates declaiming or speaking).
29. See Natasha Staller, "Gods of Art: Picasso's Academic Education and Its Legacy," in McCully, *Picasso: The Early Years*, 66–85; and Elizabeth Cowling, *Picasso: Style and Meaning* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 33–57. Both Staller and Cowling point out that Spanish art academies were largely based on the teaching system of the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, including the progressive study of the human form from drawings and engravings, then from plaster casts, then from the live human body (in poses that frequently mimicked those seen in ancient statuary or in paintings). Even the study of life was filtered through classical ideals and a rigorous method of simplifying or "purifying" form in order to distill its elemental essence and ennoble it. Picasso excelled in absorbing the ethos and style of classical drawing, producing rigorous, even beautiful, copies of the plates in Charles Barye's *Cours de dessin* of 1868 while he was a student at the Instituto da Guarda in La Coruña (1892–95). While there, he took Isidoro Brocos's class "Drawing from the Antique" (Staller, "Gods of Art," 83n34). He continued his formal training at La Llotja in Barcelona (1895–97) and the Academia Real de San Fernando in Madrid (1897–98). Such study was also influenced by the spread of realism during the mid-nineteenth century, and, in Spain, by the study of such masters as Diego Velázquez, José Ribera, and Francisco de Goya, among others. At the same time, Picasso also exhibited contempt for the rigid precepts and "nonsense they talk" at the Royal Academy in Madrid, preferring to sketch outdoors, haunt the Prado, and experiment with a variety of styles, including Art Nouveau. For his letter to Joachim Bas of November 3, 1897, in which he derides the Royal Academy, see Cowling, *Picasso: Style and Meaning*, 52–53.
30. Ardengo Soffici, *Ricordi di vita artistica e letteraria* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1942), 365–66: "Così girava di museo in museo nutrendosi di buona pittura antica e moderna; e poichè anch'io facevo lo stesso, non era raro che c'incontrassimo al Lussemburgo nella saletta degli Impressionisti, o al Louvre, dove Picasso batteva di preferenza nelle sale terrene aggirandosi come un braccio in cerca di selvaggina fra le antichità egiziane e fenicie, tra le sfingi, gl'idoli di sasalto i papiri e sarcofaghi dipinti a vivi colori."
31. Picasso had already depicted this box in a few earlier works, including *Pierrot and Dancer* of 1900, a painting whose frontal point of view hides the box's inhabitant.
32. Quintilian, cited in Romira Worvill, "From Prose *Peinture* to Dramatic *Tableau*: Diderot, Fénelon and the Emergence of the Pictorial Aesthetic in France," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 39 (2010): 151.
33. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Mimique" (1886), trans. Barbara Johnson as "The Mime," in *Stéphane Mallarmé: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (New York: New Directions, 1982), 69.
34. Phoebe Pool, "Picasso's Neo-Classicism: First Period, 1905–06," *Apollo* 81 (February 1965): 122, 125.
35. See, for example, *La toilette* of 1906.
36. Leo Steinberg, "The Philosophical Brothel," *October* 44 (Spring 1988): 7–74.
37. Margaret Werth, "Representing the Body in 1906," in McCully, *Picasso: The Early Years*, 277.
38. For a discussion of the origins and legacy of Greek theater, see Roland Barthes, "The Greek Theater," in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 63–88.
39. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 102. See also Lillian B. Lawler, *The Dance in Ancient Greece* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 74–91.
40. Mallarmé published *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, one of his most celebrated poems, which recounts the erotic fantasies and experiences of an awakening faun with several nymphs in a dreamlike monologue. It was first published in Paris in 1876 by Alphonse Derenne.
41. On the nude woman's hand gesture in *Two Nudes*, and the expressive force of corporeal poses generally in the *Demoiselles*, see Steinberg, "The Philosophical Brothel"; and Werth, "Representing the Body in 1906," 240–41, 279–80.
42. Cooper (*Picasso Theatre*, 43–49) offers the most complete analysis of the inspiration for this production of *Pulcinella*, the fraught collaboration of Diaghilev, Igor Stravinsky, Picasso, and Léonide Massine, and an interpretation of Picasso's evolving set designs. Although Picasso

executed two sketches for a *rideau de scène*, the final set did not include one.

43. Massine discovered the play, *Les quatre Polichinelles semblables* (1700), in a library in Naples. For a synopsis of the farcical plot, see Berggruen and Hollein, *Picasso and the Theater*, 166–81. Envisioning a production of *Pulcinella*, Diaghilev researched the Neapolitan music and comic operas of Pergolesi, finding many unfinished manuscripts and notes in various Italian conservatories and in the libraries of London. He presented copies of this material to Stravinsky, who wrote the music based on it. For the latter's account of their collaboration, see Stravinsky, *An Autobiography* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1956), chap. 5.

44. Cowling (*Picasso: Style and Meaning*, 360) describes Picasso's designs for the drop curtain of *Pulcinella* as "a perspectival auditorium-within-the-stage parodying the ornate pseudo-Baroque theatres fashionable at the time of Offenbach," as well as other Renaissance theater types and Neapolitan puppet theaters, but she does not analyze the designs for *Pulcinella* in relation to the Théâtre de l'Opéra. Similarly, Brigitte Léal writes, "On every side of the stage a series of platforms represented the boxes of a Second Empire theater, full of spectators (to interpret as an homage, perhaps a bit parodic, to Renoir's famous *La Loge* [The Theater Box] of 1874), and occupied half of the stage, closed off by a backcloth that, in turn, depicted a Neapolitan street in the moonlight, dominated by Vesuvius." Léal, "Pulcinella," trans. from the French by Cristina Rognoni, in *Picasso in Italia*, ed. Giorgio Cortenova and Jean Leymarie, exh. cat. (Verona: Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea Palazzo Forti; Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta, 1990), 139. For Cooper (*Picasso Theatre*, 46), the earliest design, revealed in sketches dated between January 22 and February 1, "was perhaps inspired by memories of the Teatro San Carlo in Naples. . . ." Cooper seems to draw this conclusion from the fact that the Baroque decor of the San Carlo stage included tiers of boxed seats and an arched proscenium; Picasso's early design includes these features as well as an inner set with a view of an arcaded Neapolitan street, a Neptune fountain, and a view of the Bay of Naples. Cooper views the second set of designs as showing an "unmistakably Parisian theatre, decorated in white and gold with red plush, whose two tiers of boxes are occupied by a fashionable audience of Second Empire bourgeois placed so that they seem to be watching the spectacle." The prominent chandelier and ceiling design of Picasso's sketches suggest, however, that from the beginning he wished to parody the very site where the ballet would be performed, setting it into ironic contrast with its Neapolitan setting and commedia dell'arte puppet theater.

45. Thomas A. Pallen, "Decking the Hall," in "Theatrical Spaces and Dramatic Places: The Reemergence of the Theatre Building in the Renaissance," in special issue, *Theatre Symposium: A Journal of the Southeastern Theatre Conference 4* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), 95–97.

46. John Richardson with Marilyn McCully, *A Life of Picasso: The Triumphant Years, 1917–1932* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 151.

47. In two drawings, Picasso also pictured the orchestra members within the set, locating them *above* the

proscenium frame and onstage spectators, but just below the overhead curtains. See Michèle Richet, *The Musée Picasso, Paris: Drawings, Watercolours, Gouaches, Pastels*, trans. Augusta Audubert (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 228, MP 1740, MP 1738.

48. Igor Stravinsky, in Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 118.

49. In a related pair of drawings on a single sheet, Picasso depicts the stars in the night sky, then has the stars migrate to the framing border. See Richet, *The Musée Picasso, Paris*, 232, MP 1757.

50. Lisa Florman, "Picasso circa 1925: Décor, the Decorative, and Difference," in Bois, *Picasso Harlequin, 1917–1937*, 49.

51. For a reproduction of a drawing on which Picasso indicated the measurements of these three stage flats, and squared the central one for transfer, see Richet, *The Musée Picasso, Paris*, 231, MP 1761.

52. Lydia Sokolova, *Dancing for Diaghilev: The Memoirs of Lydia Sokolova* (London: John Murray, 1960), 151.

53. For further discussion of this painting and its multiple references to the ancient past, as well as to Picasso's own earlier work in Gósol, Spain, see Cowling, *Picasso: Style and Meaning*, 431–38. Cowling notes that the figures and setting in *The Pipes of Pan* "look remarkably like the mirror image of a photograph Cocteau took in 1917 of Picasso with Massine at a public fountain in Pompeii" (435) but argues that the work is too generalized to be a double portrait, which, in a straightforward sense, it is not. She also remarks, "The theatrical backdrop and props confirm that in the postwar world the Ideal is a charade" (438), yet insists the work "is a demonstration of the validity of the classical tradition in the modern era" (436). No doubt she is right: *The Pipes of Pan* seems both to embody the revival of the classical tradition and to cast that revival as theater.

54. For a discussion of the relevance of Georges Bataille's texts "Rotten Sun," "Hommage à Picasso," and "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh" to Picasso's interest in blindness, self-mutilation, and sacrifice, see Florman, *Myth and Metamorphosis*, 140–95, esp. 150–65. She also emphasizes that the blind Minotaur "stirs association with specifically 'Oedipean' enucleation—in Bataille's words, 'that most horrifying form of sacrifice'" (163).

55. Florman (ibid., 140–95) analyzes Bataille's fascination with the brutal forces represented by the Minotaur, but observes that Picasso's Minotaur retains a different range of connoted meanings that includes references to the Spanish bullfight and, within the context of the Vollard Suite, to a complex set of related images. She also discusses Bataille's theorization of the hierarchy of the upright human posture and facial structure, where the eyes play a meaningful role at the summit, in contrast to the animal that has its "beginning" or prow in the mouth and jaws. This hierarchy is overturned, according to Bataille, in moments of extreme pain, when "the overwhelmed individual throws back his head while frenetically stretching his neck in such a way that the mouth becomes, as much as possible, an extension of the spinal column, in other words, in the position it normally occupies in the constitution of animals" (148, emphasis in the

original). In such cases, the distinction between man and animal is negated. As Florman points out, Bataille is in dialogue with Hegel. In the *Aesthetics*, Hegel had argued for the inherent human spirituality revealed in the verticality of the Greek profile, as contrasted with the mainly horizontal orientation of the animal's head and the prominence of the snout, which was adapted only to natural functions (149). Picasso's Blind Minotaur fuses animal and man, paradoxically raising the animal's exaggerated snout into a vertical position in the moment of anguish, as if he were an animal becoming human.

56. Many scholars have noted that the blinded Minotaur evokes Oedipus, here led by his young daughter Antigone. The presence of the cane carried by the Minotaur/Oedipus, which signifies his age and infirmity, may also be linked to the riddle of the Sphinx, correctly interpreted by Oedipus, according to which a "man" is he who walks first on four feet, then on two, and finally on three. Picasso had designed the decor for Jean Cocteau's play *Antigone*, a free adaptation of Sophocles's tragedy, in 1922.

57. For remarks on how we may be aware that we are dreaming and even direct our dreams, as well as take pleasure in observing them while in a sleeping state, see Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 580–81.

58. Ruth Scodel, *An Introduction to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58. See also Lawler, *The Dance in Ancient Greece*, 80–83. I am indebted to Sheila Murnaghan for suggesting that the fishermen function as members of a Greek chorus.

59. Barthes, "The Greek Theater," 84.

60. Walter Benjamin defines aura as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch." Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 222–23.

61. Alain Mousseigne and Jack Ligot, *Pablo Picasso: Rideau de scène pour le Théâtre du Peuple dit "Rideau de scène pour Le Quatorze-Juillet" de Romain Rolland*, exh. cat. (Milan: Skira, 1998).

62. For Harlequin's association with Hermes Trismegistus (Hermes thrice-great), see Starobinski, *Portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque*, 126–31. See also Jean Clair, "Picasso Trismégiste: Notes sur l'iconographie d'Arlequin," in *Picasso 1917–1924, Le voyage d'Italie*, ed. Clair and Odile Michel (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 15–30.

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