

## Picasso Sculpture Slide Commentary

### Slide 1: Biography

#### Photo of Picasso

Pablo Picasso is considered to be one of the greatest and most influential artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is best known for his work as a painter, but he experimented with many other art forms. He was born in Spain in 1881 and he lived to be 91 years old; he died in 1973 in France, where he spent most of his life. Picasso loved art even as a young child—his first word was “lap” for “lápiz,” which means pencil in Spanish. He was often in trouble at school for misbehaving and was sent to detention, where he would pass the time by drawing. When he was nine, he made his first painting. His father was a professional painter and an art teacher, and Picasso learned from him. It was clear that Picasso had exceptional talent, so his father enrolled him in the best art school in Spain. Picasso didn’t like formal instruction, so he stopped going. Picasso preferred to learn by watching others and experimenting on his own. He worked hard at his art and constantly challenged himself to make new discoveries.

- What do you think this place in the photo is?
- How would you describe it?
- What forms of art do you see here?

### Slide 2: Cubist Style

#### *Three Musicians, 1921*

This is one of Picasso’s paintings that was painted in a particular abstract style called Cubism, a style that was invented by Picasso and his friend, Georges Braque. In Cubism, the artist looks at an object and breaks it down into simple, geometric shapes. The artist then rearranges these shapes so that they still resemble the original object, but in a new way. Picasso once said, “I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them.” Cubism is considered one of the most important art movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

- What shapes do you see here?
- What objects do you see? What was Picasso painting?
- What do you think the title of this painting is? (*Three Musicians*)

Slide 3: Cubism in Sculpture Form  
*Guitar, 1913*

Although Picasso was trained as a painter, he also liked to experiment with making sculptures. His experimentation with different materials and techniques profoundly impacted both his own art and the art world. Picasso didn't make sculptures all the time—he did it in starts and stops. He would often experiment with sculpture when he felt “stuck” in his painting work, and he would use sculpture to push his thinking forward. Unlike his paintings that were shown at public exhibitions and sold, he kept his sculptures around his house and enjoyed them in private.

This is one Picasso's early Cubist sculptures. Before this, sculpture was mostly made from clay and plaster. Picasso created this piece out of cardboard by cutting and folding it. The unique style and use of unconventional materials were revolutionary in sculpture at that time.

- How is this similar to, but different from, the painting we just saw? What's the difference between a painting and a sculpture?
- What is this object?
- What shapes do you see here?
- What materials did he use? (*cardboard, string*)

Slide 4: Beginning of “Assemblage” With Found Objects  
*Head of a Woman, 1929-30*

“Guitar” that we just saw was made out of cardboard, and like many sculptors at that time, Picasso also sometimes used clay and plaster, but he thought it might be interesting to build things out of metal, too. He needed to learn to weld in order to do this. Welding is when you use a torch and flame to melt two pieces of metal together so that they stick like with glue. He worked in the studio of his friend, Julio Gonzalez, who taught him how to weld and build out of metal.

- What is this object?
- What shapes do you see here?
- What materials did he use? Do you recognize any of these as objects you might find in other places? (*colander*)

One of the things Picasso liked to do was to use “found objects” in his art. This means that he would take objects, often common household objects like a colander, and re-see them in new ways to help make parts of his sculptures. One of his friends once laughed because he loved to go the junkyard and look for “treasures.” She thought it was funny that Picasso was one of the most successful and richest artists ever, yet he spent much of his time happily digging around in other people's trash! The technique of building a sculpture out of several different “found objects”

became another revolutionary concept in modern sculpture and is called “assemblage” from the verb “to assemble.” Picasso was one of the first “assemblage” artists.

Slide 5: Combining Traditional Sculpting Methods With New  
*Head of a Warrior, 1933*

Picasso thought it might be interesting to combine his new idea of “assemblage” with traditional plaster modeling. He would use plaster, wood, and wire to connect several found objects together to create the shape of his sculpture and then cover it all with plaster. While this made it harder to see the found objects that created the shapes, it did give the piece a more unified look.

- What is this object? What do you think Picasso might have titled this piece?
- What shapes do you see here?
- What materials do you think might be hiding under the plaster? (Tennis balls as eyes)

Slide 6: Magical Metamorphosis  
*Bull's Head, 1943*

Picasso was very interested in the idea of “metamorphosis.” Metamorphosis means when one thing changes to take the shape of another—like a caterpillar to a butterfly. Picasso liked to take an object and encourage the viewer to see it as something different. Take a look at this:

- What is this object now? (*A bull's head*) What was it before? (*bicycle seat and handlebars*)

Picasso found the handlebars and the seat lying near each other at the town dump and began to see something new out of them.

Slide 7: More Play With Found Objects  
*Baboon and Young, 1951*

Later in his life, Picasso became a father. He had two young kids, Claude and Paloma. As always, his work was a reflection of what was important to him at the time, and he started exploring the relationship between mothers and their children in his art. He also began to build toys for Claude and Paloma, and he began to use some of their toys in his sculptures. He switched from covering his “assemblages” in plaster to covering them in bronze. This is a sculpture Picasso created from several “found objects,” and it shows his idea of metamorphosis very strongly. He used several everyday objects and put them together to create a new image.

- What is this sculpture? (*A mother baboon with her baby, hence the title Baboon and Young.*)
- Do you recognize any of the found objects that might be hiding under the bronze creating the shape of the baboon? (*The face was formed from two of Claude's toy cars—one upright and the other turned upside down. The tail was made from an automobile spring. The ears were made from cup handles, and the round belly was a large jug whose handles from the shape of the shoulders. The rest of the mom's body and the baby were modeled from clay and then the whole assemblage was cast in bronze, leading the viewer to believe that these "found objects" were always meant to be seen in this new light.*)
- How is this sculpture similar to and different from the other sculptures we have seen? (*More realistic looking although more abstract in construction, more uniform in outward appearance, more found objects used, built to realistic scale whereas before many were exaggerations*)

Slide 8: A Metaphor For the Role of Sculpture in Picasso's Life  
*The Bathers, 1956*

Picasso continued to make art throughout his entire life. This is a sculpture he made when he was 78 years old, and it pushed the boundaries of his art as much as the guitar he made 45 years earlier. This sculpture is the only one he made that uses multiple figures to create a "scene."

- What are these figures? Why might this be called *The Bathers*?
- What shapes do you see here?
- What materials did he use?
- How is this similar to, yet different from, the other work we have seen by Picasso?

This scene of six life-size wooden figures in a low box of gravel was assembled quickly from lumberyard scraps, and while technically sculptures, they look a bit like 3-dimensional drawings. Some even appear to look a bit like busted painting easels. Picasso had to spend hours preparing a canvas before he could even begin to paint on it, and these sculptures show how liberating the quickness of sculpture was for Picasso. It offered instant gratification and freedom. These figures manage to look complete, while still looking a bit rough and unfinished. They are an embodiment of what Picasso loved about sculpture: spontaneity, freedom, and experimentation.