

Picasso

The Unrecognised Aspects of Sports in Pablo Picasso's Works

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Pablo Picasso, donning a typical Catalan hat.

It is possible that the critics and interpreters of Pablo Picasso refuse to recognise in this genius of painters a style which incorporates sports characteristics. It is, of course, a matter of opinion, of placing terms on his work or taking an agnostic approach. But the existence of his art is something which cannot be denied, and in contemplating various elements in his pieces we see that Picasso was a man sensitive to sport and its motivations-to the vitality of its competitive spirit.

Picasso struggled courageously for what he believed to be the truth. He was passionate, unselfish in his profession and utilised with his artistic sensibilities all of his powers-physical, intellectual and psychological, in the same way that a champion strives to better his record, that a football player pursues victory or a boxer struggles to win. It was in this same spirit that he ceaselessly created and passed on to us his matchless works of art, and that he approached everything that was of importance to him in the course of his lifetime. His loves, his art, his women and friends, all assumed an absolute importance. Picasso was a wholly passionate, uncompromising man.

Picasso's artistic life is full of examples. Apparent were not only his enthusiasm and striving spirit, but also his unfledgling respect with regard to his colleagues and to fair-play with his rivals, who quickly became his friends-in the same way as a competitor in a sports event.

Generosity was also one of Picasso's qualities. Besides his many donations-500 of his pieces are on exhibition at the Picasso Museum in Barcelona-he also proved his loyalty to his associates. Kahnweiler recounted an anecdote which illustrated this.

He once approached Picasso with the idea that he (Picasso) should attempt to bring justice to all those artists who falsely signed his name to their works. The master replied, "How would you like me to do this ? I couldn't. I know what would happen. Seated near the judge, at the moment when he was about to sentence the accused, I would recognise that he was one of my friends."

Let us turn our attention to the life of Picasso. Born a century ago, he was introduced to painting by his father who was a drawing instructor, following in the same way as

children who are initiated into sports in the company or under the watchful eyes of their parents. At the age when a young athlete becomes fascinated by team sports, Picasso at fourteen arrived in Barcelona to begin his artistic career. His friends from Catalan introduced him to the world of painting in this Mediterranean city in an era when Barcelona was one of the centres of Impressionistic art-represented by the sculptor Manolo,

athletic stance in the purest of tradition (see illustration on the left). These two luminous examples, which are in permanent residence in Barcelona, mark for Picasso a time when the city was awakening to sport.

Afterwards, when he went to Paris, he experienced the metamorphoses of the Blue, Rose, Cubist, Impressionist, Neo-Classical and Expressionist periods. These influences, which materialised with the horrors and destruction of the war, are manifested in his famous piece "Guernica". He continued to live as a team with his associates, and his works were imbued with his love for movement, for the ocean, for nautical sports and for horse-racing-all translated onto the canvas with vitality.

When playing games with his children-Pablo, Claude, Maya and Paloma-Picasso liked to simulate boxing matches. His fascination for football is evidenced in his wonderful sculpture "Footballer", in which he harmoniously combined movement, and the purest style of football, with the aesthetic proportions of the player (see colour illustration...). In this same period, he produced "The Football Match" (1961) in which he once again blended the dynamics of action and motion which are so well-conceived in his works, even if the movement depicted is the most static in nature. He was able to create feeling and motion even when the subject lacked all sense of activity. His painting "The Young Ladies of Avignon", Cubist in style and having nothing to do with elements of sports, is a synthesis of movement and action while depicting visibly fixed positions of the posers.

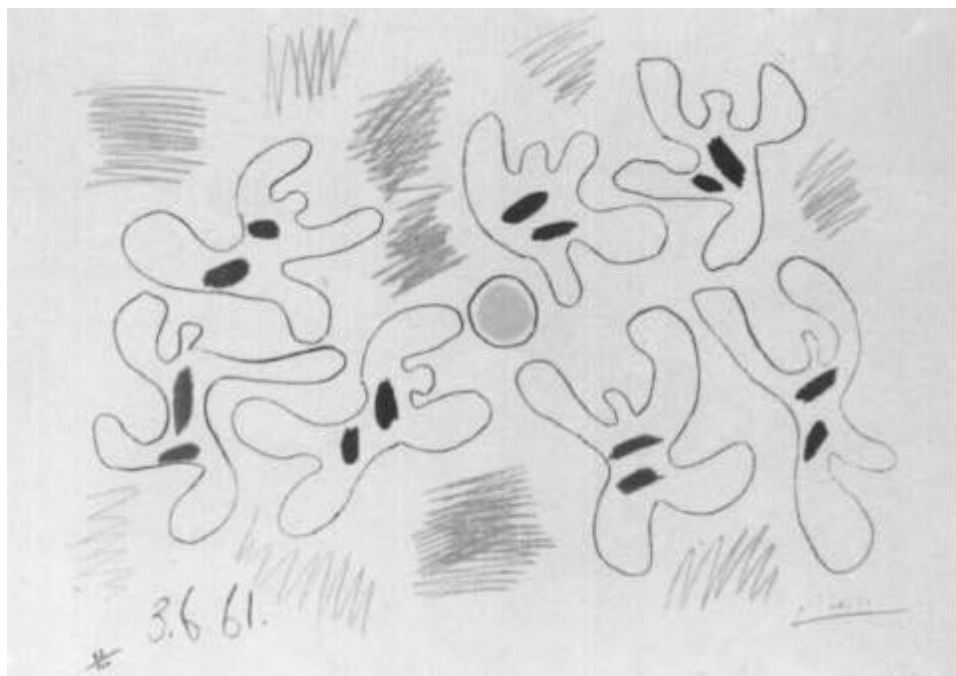


▲ "Athlete". Black and white. 1895. Charcoal drawing. Picasso's first drawing for his entrance exam to the Fine Arts School of Barcelona, done at the age of 14. Picasso Museum in Barcelona.

painters such as Nonell, Torres Garcia, Opisso, Russinol and Casas-artists who felt the necessity to live in a community of art, as members of a team.

In 1895, when the young Picasso had to pass an examination before entering the Fine-Arts School of Barcelona, he drew an athlete of the time, with his conventional moustache, and an

His celebrated series entitled "Bullfighting" best exemplifies his conception of movement, of action, of the aesthetics and the rhythms of the body. I would like to clearly establish that the author of this article never considered that the art of battling with a bull in the arena could be called a sport. The fighting with an animal does not contain the essential elements to be classified as a sports activity, even though certain commentators try-to a fault-to associate them. In each of the pieces included in the "Bullfighting" series, Picasso freezes the motion, the movement of the individual. the speed of the action, the power of the protagonists, the silhouette of the bullfighter and the horse, the bullfighter and the bull, the aesthetic qualities essential in creating art depicting sports.



"The football match". 1961 Lithography

Picasso's amazing ability to make art occupied practically every hour of his life and he was unable to devote more time to sport. Nevertheless, by the mere quality and quantity of his works, he has acquired the full right to the title of sports artist, though perhaps unrecognised as such.

We do not pretend, nor is it our objective, to summarise Picasso's art. But it seems beneficial to recall that in 1966 the city of Paris paid homage to Picasso, as never before to a living artist. on the occasion of his 65th birthday, with a magnificent exhibition at the Grand Palais, the Petit Palais and the National Library. More than one million people came to view his works during the brief weeks of their exposition.

In 1956, on the occasion of his 75th birthday, the city of London organised another exhibi-

tion in his honour. The British opinions of this extraordinary event can be summed up in these words : "It's fantastic monstrous. magical, fabulous, ugly, beautiful, comforting, fascinating. That's all. It's Picasso" A sports artist, though perhaps unrecognised as such.

It is not in vain that Picasso produced works more valuable than those of Henry Ford. For that matter, more books have been written about him than about Napoleon.

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