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Left image: Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of a Woman* 1910, oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. © 2011 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Right image: Georges Braque, *Girl with a Cross* 1911, oil on canvas. Kimbell Art Museum. Photo © MegaVision. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

Picasso and Braque

First Exhibition to Unite Works from Pivotal Years of 1910-1912

On View September 17, 2011 – January 8, 2012

April 4, 2011 - Picasso and Braque: The Cubist Experiment, 1910–1912, the first exhibition to unite many of the paintings and nearly all of the prints created by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque during these two exhilarating years of their artistic dialogue, goes on view at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA) on September 17. The international loan exhibition, featuring 16 paintings and 20 etchings and drypoints, is organized by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and the Kimbell Art Museum, with its debut in Fort Worth, TX May 29 – August 21, 2011. “This will be the first presentation ever held on the West Coast devoted to this seminal and fascinating phase of modern art, and it will forever change our understanding of the experimental link between these great masters,” states Larry Feinberg, SBMA Director.

During the years 1910 through 1912, Picasso and Braque invented a new style that took the basics of traditional European art—modeling in light and shade to suggest roundedness, perspective lines to suggest space, indeed the very idea of making a recognizable description of the real world—and toyed with them irreverently. Eik Kahng, organizing curator and SBMA Chief Curator notes, “The works that these two artists produced during this two year period remain some of the most difficult and enigmatic in all of the history of art. In this exhibition, we hope to recover the excitement and sense of the unknown that we know they both felt. It is not an exaggeration to say that Picasso’s and Braque’s experiment would clear the way for an entirely new definition of the work of art, now freed from the task of imitation in the conventional sense. All of the greatest art to follow in the 20th century is in one way or another indebted to their achievement.”

Following up on hints they found in the work of Paul Cézanne, and brimming with youthful bravado, Picasso and Braque created pictorial puzzles, comprehensible to a point but full of false leads and contradictions. Viewers pick up a few clues—a figure, a pipe, a moustache, a bottle, a glass, a musical instrument, a newspaper, a playing card—and these start to suggest a reality in three dimensions. The impression is that of a fast, modern world, with glimpses of models, friends, and the paraphernalia of drinking and smoking. But things never fully add up, either in detail or as a whole—and deliberately so. Teasingly elusive, the image is a construction of forms and signs that the artist has put together in a spirit of parody and play. The pleasure for the viewer is to let go of all normal expectations and enter into the game, which is an endlessly intriguing one.

More than any avant-garde artists before them, Picasso and Braque called into question conventional ideas about art as the imitation of reality. They collaborated so closely and like-mindedly (“roped together like mountain climbers,” in Braque’s own phrase) that their works of this period are sometimes difficult to tell apart. Their radical experiment in picture-making, which came to be known as Analytic Cubism, has been as far-reaching in its implications for art as the theories of Einstein for science.

Not surprisingly in light of its importance in the history of art, Cubism has been the subject of numerous museum exhibitions. Some of them have been dauntingly large, especially given the amount of time each of these highly complicated works demands of the viewer. The guiding principle of the present exhibition is that less can be more. It offers the kind of small, carefully calibrated selection that invites the viewer to spend time exploring each work in detail.



Left image: Full view of Pablo Picasso, *Man with a Pipe* 1911, oil on canvas. Kimbell Art Museum. Photo © MegaVision. © 2011 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Center and right images: Details of work using spectral imaging.

In some cases, the actual details of the works will capture the most attention. For the past year, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art has been working with Goleta, CA-based MegaVision to capture spectral images of select pieces in the exhibition. The quality of spectral imaging surpasses that of normal professional photography. Thanks to recent advances in the technology of LEDs (light-emitting diodes), RGB (red, green, and blue) filters have been removed from behind the lens and replaced with LED-produced RGB light, which is aimed directly onto the object that is being photographed. Beyond the visible spectrum, spectral imaging allows options for ultraviolet and infrared, which can reveal features invisible to the human eye. The elimination of the filters in the optical path allows for a higher-quality image, greater accuracy of color, and, especially important in the art world, a huge reduction of harmful light.

The spectral imaging created by MegaVision will be incorporated into interactive software that will allow visitors and online users to manipulate and study works with a level of detail and precision never before possible for museum audiences. Produced in partnership with the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and the Kimbell Art Museum, this cutting-edge visual technology introduces new ways to look at and understand the processes, relationships, and stylistic developments of this important movement. Hand-held, touch-screen computers will provide mobility and interactive media content to exhibition visitors. For the first time in a museum setting, every visitor will have the opportunity to sit in front of an actual painting by Picasso or Braque and independently zoom in on the smallest brush strokes and specks of color. This is just an example of the several explorations that this program will make available to visitors.

(For more information on MegaVision and spectral imaging, see the full release at www.sbma.net/library/files/tech%20release%20FINAL2.pdf)

Paintings in the exhibition stem from a number of distinguished collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Menil Collection and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the Tate in London, the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, and the Robert B. and Mercedes H. Eichholz Collection. The etchings and drypoints are selected from several sources, most notably the extraordinary holdings of Cubist prints in the Melamed Family Collection.

The exhibition catalogue includes essays by some of today’s most talented scholars in the field: Eik Kahng, Charles Palermo, Harry Cooper, Annie Bourneuf, Christine Poggi, Claire Barry, and Bart Devolder. It is distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London, and will be available in the Museum Store in hardcover (\$30).

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The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that presents internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA.
Open Tuesday - Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday.
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