

THE Museum REVIEW

Exhibition review: *Facing Picasso* at the Mohammed VI Modern and Contemporary Art Museum, Morocco

ZINEB BAHJI

VOLUME 3 NUMBER 1 – 2018



ISSN 2574-0296

WWW.THEMUSEUMREVIEW.ORG

The Museum Review

www.themuseumreview.org

Rogers Publishing Corporation NFP
5558 S. Kimbark Ave, Suite 2, Chicago, IL 60637
www.rogerspublishing.org

©2018 The Museum Review

The Museum Review is a peer reviewed Open Access Gold journal, permitting free online access to all articles, multi-media material, and scholarly research. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.



Exhibition review: *Facing Picasso* at the Mohammed VI Modern and Contemporary Art Museum, Morocco

ZINEB BAHJI

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African Art

Keywords Picasso in Morocco, exhibition design, exhibition review

Abstract More than one hundred works of art by Pablo Picasso were exhibited in Morocco for the first time in July 2017, at the newly-built (2014) Mohammed VI Modern and Contemporary Art Museum (MMVI). This article documents, reviews, and evaluates the exhibition, entitled *Facing Picasso*, and explicates how Picasso's works were introduced to the Moroccan public for the first time.

About the Author Zineb Bahji is a Moroccan researcher who holds a doctoral degree in Museum Studies, and is currently an independent Fulbright researcher at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. She holds a Master's degree in English Language and Culture, and a B.A. in English Studies from Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco.

This article was published on January 31, 2018 at www.TheMuseumReview.org

The exhibition *Facing Picasso* was held at Morocco's first public art museum, the Mohammed VI Modern and Contemporary Art Museum (MMVI), from May 18 - July 31, 2017. This unprecedented artistic event was made possible thanks to the National Foundation of Moroccan Museums and the Musée Picasso of Paris. For the first time in Morocco, *Facing Picasso* displayed an eclectic selection of Picasso's works of art in a retrospective that spanned over half a century, from 1899 to 1950's. Colline Zellal, conservator of the Musée Picasso, curated the exhibition with co-curator Rachid Idrissi, director of the MMVI. With a precise theme "the Artist and his Model," and a clear representation, this thematic retrospective retraced the artistic journey of the legendary Spanish artist and showed the variety and richness of his work to the Moroccan public.

Facing Picasso is both a chronological and a thematic exhibition that retraces Picasso's various artistic periods in eleven display rooms. More than one hundred works illustrate the exhibition's main theme and narrate the artistic career of this prolific modern artist. Each room focuses on a specific period of Picasso's art with a sub-theme, bringing variety and surprise into play. The wall texts in each room highlight and explain the major stylistic qualities to the viewers, and they briefly mention some of the individuals and events that influenced the life and art career of this artist.

The first gallery, entitled *Facing Picasso*, introduces the general exhibition theme through an introductory statement, a mural, and a painting. A small display space, painted in light grey and dimly lit, imparts an impression of intimacy and warmth. The text opens with the following quote by Picasso: "In my paintings, I put everything I love. Too bad, the things need to find an arrangement for themselves." The quote already suggests originality, idiosyncrasy,

and innovation in Picasso's artistic quest. The focal point in the introductory label is "the model as a leitmotiv in the iconography of Picasso;" here, the model is inevitably subject to the artist's creativity and innovation. This would be evident to the viewers as they later discover the surprisingly altered, fragmented, deconstructed, and disfigured models in Picasso's work. The label also explains that Picasso's artistic journey is to be narrated through his life: his studios, influences, plastic research, travels, events, and beloved friends and family. The label concludes that in this exhibition, Picasso's process of artistic creation is primarily reflected through his eyes.

Facing the label, a large mural is installed. The mural is based on André Villaire's 1955 monochrome photograph of Picasso's eyes and forehead, known as *The Eyes of Picasso*. Picasso's intense and determined look in this photograph prompts the idea of a vision; it reflects his idiosyncratic and original vision of artistic creation and promises a journey of art discovery through his eyes.

To the right of the mural, Picasso's quasi-realist painting *The Painter and His Model, Avignon* (1914) is hung in the center of the wall, separately. It holds attention by means of placement and low-directed lighting. The painting that seems to be an unfinished work depicts a nude woman, Picasso's model and mistress Eva Gouel, holding a piece of cloth and posing for a contemplating painter. Every element in this painting is sketched with light, almost vanishing, pencil lines: the artist, his chair, a table, and a plate of fruit on the table. The posing model is the only exception. She is placed in the middle of the painting and is in full color. Behind her sits an unfinished canvas of a landscape and stands a partly painted wall on which a clean, wooden palette hangs. The model stands out. She is the nucleus of the artist's creation and is the subject to his palette. She is subject to constant metamorphosis.

This painting recalls the return to Classicism in Picasso's artistic journey that started in 1914, after the upheaval of Synthetic Cubism. The work is displayed in the very introductory room of the exhibition to highlight his innovative approach to Classicism. It shows Picasso's experimentation with materials and styles and his unquestionable freedom of choice, as an artist, in rendering a classical work. It also highlights the variety of motifs and styles that he can creatively combine in a single work of art. This combination of artistic styles is also evident in Picasso's Neo-classical paintings, like *Seated Woman* (1920), *The Nude Women Seated* (1920), and *The Race* (1922), where realist representations, typical of High Renaissance Italian art, merge with Cubist and Surrealist stylistic qualities that demonstrate the uniqueness of his art.

The second gallery, entitled *Early Models*, represents a set of Picasso's early works in a formal and brightly lit display space. It groups a number of realist drawings and two paintings realized between 1895 and 1903. The extended label in this gallery provides a brief history of Picasso's art education in Spain, his major influences, and his first stay in Paris. The label explains that most of Picasso's earliest works depict his family members, close friends, bull-fights, and street café scenes in dramatized caricatures and dark palettes. This recalls the great masters of the Spanish Golden Age like Diego Velasquez and José de Ribera. The label also highlights his earliest painting *The Barefoot Girl* (1895) that he created at age thirteen, and it guides the viewers to focus on the mood of the work displayed in this gallery: a pensive and grave looking figure seated on a chair. This work represents the first

embodiment of the theme of “woman in armchair,” which would become a recurrent theme in Picasso’s artistic journey. According to the label, during his first stay in Paris, Picasso’s plastic exploration was enriched by the works of Paul Cézanne, Toulouse Lautrec, and Gauguin. His bohemian life with his friend Max Jacob is also highlighted; it is one of the influences that inspired and shaped the blue period. *Man in Blue* (1902-03) is an example to contemplate in this gallery. The viewers are invited to consider the main stylistic features that characterized the blue period: the monochromatic palette and deep melancholic mood of the painting.

In the same gallery, a number of Picasso’s earliest drawings and sketches are displayed in a linear sequence: *Scenes in a Café* (1898), *A Group of Men* (1902), *Woman with a Bun* (1901), *Head of a Woman with a Bun* (1902), and *Woman and Child: Face* (1903). The drawings and sketches illustrate Picasso’s early research and experimentation with the human face and head.

The monochromatic grouping is interrupted by two realist paintings: *The Barefoot Girl* (1895) and *Man in Blue* (1902-03). The paintings (oil on canvas) create a visual impact by means of color. They represent the focal points of the gallery. *The Barefoot Girl* is one of the first oil paintings by Picasso and is a masterpiece from his youth. The ordinary figure, the lighting source, and the dull empty space recall Figurative Naturalism. The figurative painting *Man in Blue* is displayed separately in the gallery. The work is selected to illustrate Picasso’s blue period (1900-04). A somber blue hue dominates the palette and inevitably casts a gloomy mood. The blank stare of the posing model, like that of *The Barefoot Girl*, imparts an impression of melancholy.

The third gallery is entitled *Around the Demoiselles*. It displays numerous preliminary drawings and paintings that Picasso realized over the course of composing his masterpiece *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon* (1907). The gallery aims to show the variety of styles and materials that Picasso creatively incorporated into his works. It highlights the influence of African art on Picasso and shows his experimentation with African art motifs to visualize and represent his models.

The wall text briefly states the multiplicity of artistic and ethnographic influences that shaped and enriched Picasso’s aesthetic vocabulary, and it highlights some of the dominant stylistic characteristics of his African period from 1907 to 1909. The wall text also includes some of the seminal moments that inspired the artist. It mentions Picasso’s visit to Gosol in 1906, where he discovered Iberian art and his visit to the Trocadero Museum of Ethnography in 1907. It concludes with a quote by Paul Cezanne: “Express nature with cylinders, spheres, and cones.” This quote demonstrates Cezanne’s influence on Picasso’s cubist evolution. Following his visit to a Cezanne retrospective held at Salon d’Automne in 1906, Picasso was inspired, and he began experimenting with Cezanne’s techniques, together with the French artist George Braque.

In the *Around the Demoiselles* gallery, the viewers face the first sculpture in the exhibition, *Figure* (1908). The unfinished totem-like oak figure brings to mind traditional African sculpture. Bold and angular in shape, it already foreshadows the motifs that dominate this gallery. Behind the figure, a large photo mural is installed (the original photograph was taken

by the American journalist Frank Gelett Burgess in 1907). It shows young Picasso in his studio at the Bateau-Lavoir in Paris where he painted *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* (1907). Two large Kanak sculptures, a large Conga drum, and an African harp sit in the background. The musical instruments in the photograph introduce yet other keywords to consider in this gallery, namely, composition, movement, rhythm, energy, and harmony.

The selected works displayed in this gallery can be described as fragments that Picasso would gather to compose his *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)*, the culmination of his three-dimensional research. As the viewers move from one work to another, they engage in a process of deconstruction and reconstruction of various shapes, patterns, lines, and motifs that are repeatedly represented in his sketches, drawings, and paintings.

Seated Nude (1906-07), *Woman with Joined Hands* (1907), *Nude Standing* and *Foot Study* (1908), *Study for Three Women: the Woman on the Right* (1908), *Nudes on a Landscape* (1909), *Study for Bathers in a Forest* (1908), and *Nude Woman Lying* (1909) represent the artist's vigorous and productive research journey and show his subjective approach to his models: fragmented body parts, mask-like faces, and distorted features of nude women. His models are always subject to the idiosyncratic vision he creatively draws from his influences.

The fourth gallery in the exhibition, *The Model and Cubism*, includes a selection from Picasso's analytical cubist works from 1909 to 1912. The section label introduces Analytical Cubism and highlights its major stylistic characteristics. The label explains that perspective and illusion are abandoned, and geometry is the new pictorial language of this revolutionary art movement of the 20th century. The models Picasso depicts in this period are women in hats, musicians, guitars, and men smoking pipes. The guitar is yet another object/model that the artist uses in his iconography. Fragmented, deconstructed, and reconstructed, this musical instrument is described in the label as an allusion to the female body. The guitar, as a model, is subject to endless metamorphosis, following the artist's creativity and inspiration.

The paintings, study constructions, and drawings displayed in this gallery guide the viewers to relate the signs, motifs, patterns, shapes, and lines in order to make meaning of Picasso's compositions. *Guitarist with Head* (1912), *Guitarist* (1912-13), *Head Study* (1913), *Man Seated on a Table* (1914-15), and *Man with Pipe Seated on a Table* (1914-15) all create an interrelated world of the artist's aesthetic vocabulary during this period. Moving through these works, the viewers can build a general view of Picasso's short hand signs to depict objects, and they can enjoy reading them in the two major artworks in this gallery: Picasso's painting *Man with Guitar* (1911) and his installation *Guitar* (1924). Both represent similar techniques applied to different artistic media. This technique introduces new compositions where simplified geometric forms reflect movement and blend perspectives, space, and time.

Man with Guitar is given special importance in the exhibition space; it is displayed on a separate exhibition wall, while the sculpture is installed to the left of it. The painting inevitably attracts attention due to its size (dimensions 60" x 30.5"). The somber palette, flattened volumes, sculptural forms, and heavy geometric shapes challenge the viewers to decipher the composition. The fragmented human figure is now an evident component in Picasso's iconography. The lines representing the strings, the shaded rosette, and the sound

hole of the guitar are decipherable. The background and foreground of the pictorial space are blended, and yet the pictorial elements compelled into the center of the painting make meaning. A human figure is seated on a pedestal-like chair and is holding a guitar. A long vertical darkened line creates spatial depth, and it depicts what looks like the corner of a room with the lettering KOU engraved on the wall.

The installation *Guitar* (1911) is a layered composition of painted sheet metal, tin box, and iron wire (4" x 25" x 10.5"). It represents Analytic Cubism in three-dimensions. The sensual shape and sound hole of the musical instrument are maintained and placed in the background of an angular composition of shapes and lines. The strings are fastened to the foreground of the composition to evoke fragmentation and movement. The composition gives the impression of a deconstructed musical instrument. The surface of the guitar opens in rigid angular shapes to reveal a sensual interior. Once more, the viewers sense rhythm and musicality in this gallery. This combination suggests that models in Picasso's artworks are like musical notes. They can be decomposed and recomposed to produce and reproduce endless creative and harmonious products.

In the gallery *The 1920's*, the viewers meet a different selection of Picasso's artworks from Classicism to Surrealism. The two major key phrases in this gallery are: stylistic ruptures and return to order. The section label briefly narrates Picasso's return to classical representations. Accuracy and precision of line replace geometry in his works, and the themes are also inspired from the classical period. They include bathing women that recall Italian Renaissance art. The label describes this stylistic shift as an interpretation of the classical ideal. It already suggests that Picasso's "return to order" was not free from experimenting and renovating. The artist's realist representations are subject to "a new sort of violence," as stated on the label. The volumes are stretched out, and the models are reduced to osseous mineral forms. The French Neoclassical painter Jean Dominique August Ingres is mentioned as one of the primary influences that inspired Picasso's classicism in this period.

The works in the gallery depict female nudes and bathers in multiple artistic forms and styles. Yet, the motif of the pensive figure seated on a chair is always present. Drawings, sketches, and paintings of serene weighty female figures and sensual female bathers, like *Bathers Watching an Airplane* (1920), *Bathers with Child* (1920), and the *Race* (1922), represent Picasso's renewed interest in the classical ideal and his inspiration from Paul Cezanne. However, three paintings in this gallery hold interest in terms of their stylistic qualities that alter the idea of classicism: *Seated Woman* (1920), *Two Bathers* (1920), and *Large Bather* (1929).

The first painting reflects Picasso's fluidity of style. It has a mannerist, naturalist, and cubist touch. This robust female figure is drawn in massive scale and quasi-angular shapes that recall Cubism. Facing the paintings *Two Bathers* (1920) and *The Large Bather* (1929), the viewers realize how these works take Picasso's experimentation with Classicism to another level. In *Two Bathers*, the disfiguration of the two female nudes is prominent; they are represented with small heads, asymmetrical breasts, large feet, and long inflated hands. On the other hand, the female figure in *Large Bather* is flattened and reduced to simple geometric shapes like circles and triangles. This brings to mind both Cubist and sculptural

perspectives. The work is also marked by a Surrealist touch represented in the conflation of the figure's hands with a bathing cabinet. This dialectic of body-object typical of surrealist installations is evident to the viewers. Right in front of this large painting, Picasso's sculpture *Sitting Woman* (1929) is displayed to highlight the sculptural qualities of the painting behind it and to help the viewers make visual connections between the two works. These works show the ease with which he combines styles. The viewers can clearly notice that Picasso's return to order is not a mere act of reproducing realist figures in the most accurate manner.

The sixth gallery is entirely dedicated to Picasso's model and muse Marie-Thérèse Walter and is baptized in her name. Sketches, paintings, prints, photographs, and a large bronze sculpture are displayed to narrate Picasso's passion for his young model. In this gallery, the vibrant palette of the displayed oil paintings creates a different mood and introduces the viewers to a new phase in Picasso's artistic journey.

The section label highlights the influence of Marie-Thérèse on Picasso's iconography in the 1930's, and it briefly narrates their secret love affair and travels between Paris and Normandy. The label states that Picasso's young mistress is endlessly represented in a large series of works. She is painted, sculpted, and drawn in renewed plastic vocabulary and a radiant palette. The motifs that Picasso articulates in representing his model are her profile, blond hair, curved forehead, prominent nose, and voluptuous body shape. The label also mentions Picasso's years of engravings (1930-37) during which he created the *Vollard Suite*, an iconic graphic series of one hundred etchings that explored the theme of sculpture.

Picasso's *Woman's Head* (1931), *Woman's Head Profile* (1931), *Reading* (1932), *Rembrandt with Palette with Marie-Thérèse as Model* (1934), *Portrait of Marie-Thérèse* (1937), *Seated Woman in a Hat* (1938), *Seated Woman in a Hat* (1939), and *Woman on Armchair and in a Hat* (1939) illustrate the main ideas of this gallery. These works demonstrate Picasso's study and research on the head and the bust as models in his works. Marie-Thérèse is at the heart of this phase of experimentation, and her presence in his life inspires new motifs and stylistic techniques: round sensual shapes, undulating lines, and saturated hues. Yet, her body is not free from distortion. It is subject to metamorphosis by means of sharp, flat, geometric shapes that the viewers experience in some representations of this model.

The large oil painting *Reading* (1932) is displayed separately, facing the bronze sculpture *Head of a Woman* (1931). The painting represents Marie-Thérèse seated on an armchair, with a book on her lap. The spatial depth is flattened, and yet four horizontal lines and a vertical one behind her create some depth in the background. She is depicted in round shapes and saturated colors. Her head and body are asymmetrical and disfigured to represent both a front and a profile view. The round forehead and prominent nose are articulated and dramatized, and the dense and weighty head imparts the impression of a sculpted stone. The sculptural touch in this painting is visually associated with the bronze sculpture in the gallery. The viewers can still recognize the round voluptuous face and prominent nose of Picasso's model in this sculpture. Yet, a set of protruding eyes replace the deep eyes represented in the painting. Their distortion becomes a necessary act to accentuate the sculptural dimension.

Analytic Cubism and Realism continue to influence this gallery. In *Seated Woman in a Hat* (1938), Marie-Thérèse is depicted with geometric shapes and lines that create multiple perspectives. Her roundness and sensuality are abandoned, and her face is further disfigured. The background and foreground of the space are blended, and the palette is muted. The peaceful and satisfied look of Marie-Thérèse is no longer there. Her lively round face and deep look are replaced with a rigid greyish face and a gloomy tired look. Here, the viewers can always sense Picasso's fascination with exploring and depicting what is beyond the superficial reality of his models, a reality that stems from his own vision.

Exploring the deep reality of Picasso's models continues in the next gallery, and yet a new relationship between the artist and his model is revealed. *Dora Maar: Face to Face between Artists* displays more than Picasso's depictions of his muse and mistress, Dora Maar. The gallery includes a set of photographs that Dora Maar, a Surrealist artist and photographer, took of Picasso to document his work between the years 1936 and 1953 in their studio in Grands Augustins. This gallery is unlike the others. It is a dialogue between two artists, intellectual companions, and lovers.

The section label briefly narrates the influence of Dora Maar on Picasso's artistic journey. In 1936, this artist enters Picasso's life and inspires new motifs in his work. Her angular shapes eclipse the roundness of Marie-Thérèse. She is at the heart of Picasso's engravings with the theme "weeping woman." However, Dora Maar is not a passive muse of Picasso. She is a productive artist in her own right, and she plays an essential role in his creative act. Dora Maar witnesses and documents the creation of Picasso's masterpiece *Guernica* (1937).

This gallery displays oil paintings, sketches, and prints: *Weeping Woman* (1937), *Woman's Head* (1938), *Seated Woman (Dora Maar)* (1938), *Woman in Blue Hat* (1938), and *Woman in Armchair and in a Hat* (1939). The gallery also displays four photographs that Dora Maar took of Picasso in his attic studio in Grands Augustins and three other photographs that Picasso modified and used to recreate prints.

The portraits of Dora Maar in this gallery are different from those of Marie-Thérèse. However, the mixed media of Realism and Analytic Cubism is always present. Dora Maar is painted in a flattened perspective and as a distorted form, and the palette is less saturated. She is represented in sharp angular shapes and lines as opposed to the seamless and sensual shapes and lines of Marie-Thérèse. Picasso's representations of Dora Maar impart an impression of tension and rigidity. He depicts her in two main moods: calm and pensive or disturbed and in pain. In the oil painting *Woman in Blue Hat* (1938), Dora Maar is seated on a chair in the middle of a confined room and holding an orb. The low ceiling and the walls seem to imprison her; they elicit a feeling of unease. The look on her face is ambiguous. She looks confused but calm, as if engrossed in deep thought. She is painted in a combination of organic and angular lines and shapes.

The *Weeping Woman VI* (1937, drawing) holds attention, and it makes a visible impression in the gallery. Dora Maar is depicted in a turbulent and agitated state of mind. She is crying and holding a handkerchief. Her face is deconstructed and distorted by means of multiple lines and shapes, and her nose is accentuated to create the visual illusion of a profile. Her tears

are depicted as long nails, which could be read as Picasso's version of the glass tears of Mater Dolorosa (mother of sorrows) in Spanish Golden Age art. Evidently, Picasso's representation of Dora Maar stems from his personal vision of her, a Kafkaesque woman who was always crying. This makes her the perfect model and human figure, for him, to communicate pain and suffering. He subdues her to a form of violence and tragedy that the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War casted on his works of the time.

Picasso's artistic journey is enriched all the more as he moves to the South of France, escaping the Second World War. His discovery of ceramics and his interest in the studio as the model of artistic creation are the two main ideas in the gallery: *The Mediterranean Years*. Like other galleries, this space includes the variety of media that Picasso used in his art, but ceramics and pottery are the elements of surprise in this gallery. Paintings, sculptures, sketches, ceramics, and pottery are displayed to narrate and illustrate Picasso's life and art in the Mediterranean years, and a video projection is included to decipher and retrace the elements of compositions in the works of this phase.

The section label briefly narrates Picasso's life in the South of France, his influences, and experimentation. It explains the main ideas of the gallery and highlights some of the works selected to illustrate them. In 1936, Picasso discovers pottery studios in Vallauris, and meets Georges and Suzanne Ramié, two potters with whom he experiments in Atelier Madoura. Picasso learns the required techniques and skills to experiment with the human figure in pottery and ceramics. In the same period, Picasso directs his attention to the studio as a model for his art; it is the space that unfolds the relationship between the artist, the model, and the work of art. It is the matrix of creation. Picasso also focuses on the kitchen as both a space for creating and living.

The sculptures displayed in this gallery reflect Picasso's endless experimentation with materials and techniques to constantly revolutionize his artistic creation. *Woman with Amphora* (1947-48) and *Woman in a Mantilla* (1949) are two artisanal ceramic sculptures that depict female human figures. The sculptures recall pre-historic and cultic pottery work, and they remind the viewers of Picasso's fascination with ethnography as a source of inspiration. The sculptures show the ease with which Picasso manipulates material to create and recreate art. His inanimate models, which are everyday objects like vases, vessels, and plates, are transformed into human figures and vice versa. The female body is inspired by the sensual shape of an amphora or a vase, and plates incarnate human faces. The visitors are familiar with this woman-object combination that they witnessed in the previous gallery *1920's from Classicism to Surrealism*. Also, the ceramic sculpture *Woman in a Mantilla* brings to mind Picasso's series of paintings depicting women in mantillas, a traditional shawl worn by Spanish women at bullfights and during holy weeks. It shows his love for Spanish festivities and the influence that the figurative representations of the Spanish master Diego Velasquez had on him.

Two large-scale oil paintings dominate the gallery: *The Kitchen* (1948) and *The California Studio* (1956). In these paintings, the model is the space of creation. It is essential in Picasso's creative process and as home to his works. The somber monochromatic painting *The Kitchen* is an abstract still-life work that depicts a kitchen by means of arrows, circles, lines, and points. Picasso deconstructs this space and reconstructs it to simplify the

elements of composition; they become mere signs of the objects depicted. Still, the work is decipherable. Decorated plates are hung on the walls, a table is set in the middle, and a plant is in the corner of the space. Three birds are depicted in the scene. The bold black lines separate the background of the work from the foreground. As the lines match in angles, they mark the ceiling and the corners of the space, and they create some depth, subtly breaking the flatness of perspective.

Picasso's new studio at La Californie in Cannes is now a model for his work; it is subject to his idiosyncratic artistic vision. In *The California Studio*, Picasso represents his space of creation in a Realist-Cubist style. It is structured with colors, lines, and shapes. The color scheme includes muted hues: black, grey, brown, and green. The naturalistic source of light in this realist representation is used to create shading and to add depth in the work. The shades and lines organize the space and define its dimensions. The decorative aspect of the studio is emphasized through detailed ornamentation that holds attention. North African and Mediterranean elements, like the fountain, the decorated doors, and the furniture, impart an impression of an Orientalist interior. The palm trees also create an Orientalist touch in the work. A blank canvas is situated right in the middle of the painting. It is an allusion to the artist, the creator, who is out of the scene, contemplating his studio.

The theme of the studio as a space for creation is not new. It dates back to the Renaissance. However, Picasso's representation of the studio, like that of Henri Matisse, breaks with the tradition through style and technique, and it also eliminates the artist from the scene to make the space itself the center of attention; it is the model that the artist subdues to his artistic and philosophical vision.

The next gallery is an artistic dialogue between Picasso and the French Impressionist painter Edouard Manet that revolutionized painting in the 19th century. The influence of Manet's masterpiece *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1862) is evident in a number of Picasso's sketches, drawings, paintings, and paper sculptures that reinvent the famous work of Manet.

The label introduces Edouard Manet and narrates the story of his work, *The Luncheon on the Grass*. In 1863, the painting was displayed in the Salon des Refusés in Paris; it caused a scandal for its subject matter and stylistic features that disregarded the academic conventions of the time. Half a century later, Picasso is interested in Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* and embarks on a journey of reinventing the work through his own style. The modernity of iconography and the pictorial technique in the work of Manet hold Picasso's attention. In the 1960's, Picasso creates a series of reproductions of this work, using a variety of artistic media. This series is described in the label as both an homage to the French master and a struggle with him.

Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* is the model for Picasso in this gallery. Picasso focuses on this work to create and recreate various representations. The variety of artistic media that the viewers experience across Picasso's oeuvre is maintained in rendering these works work. The technique of deconstructing and reconstructing the scenery is also prominent in Picasso's various reproductions.

The displayed drawings and sketches that Picasso created in the course of reproducing the work of Manet, like *Luncheon on the Grass* (1962, graphite pencil) in this gallery, show his thorough research and study of the components of the original work. He dismantles the elements of composition and studies them in a series of initial conceptions. This dedicated and vigorous research reminds the viewers of Picasso's study for his work *Les Femmes d'Alger*. The characters, elements of nature, body parts, and others are singled out, separated, deconstructed, studied, re-visualized, and transformed before being reconstructed again.

In the large oil painting *Luncheon on the Grass, after Manet* (1960), Picasso recreates the realist scene in his own style and artistic vision. The work is painted in muted colors with a greyish undertone. The roughly painted depth and perspective in Manet's work are rendered with more flatness in Picasso's. The landscape setting becomes dense and blended. Still, some pictorial illusion is maintained. The man in the hat becomes a set of dissymmetrical geometric shapes, while the other man is effaced from the scene. The woman in the background and the nude woman sitting next to the fruit basket in the lower left also become subject to Picasso's technique of body distortion and disfiguration.

Luncheon on the Grass, after Manet (1961) is yet a different variation that Picasso recreated from Manet's work to take his experimentation to another level. The palette of this oil painting holds attention. The chalky colors cast a hazy and hypnotizing atmosphere. The landscape setting is simplified and more flattened. Fewer components remain, and the characters are dramatized and further disfigured. A new character appears: a nude woman is lying on the grass, reading. The man in the scene becomes naked, and the woman in the stream is fishing with what looks like a harp in her hand. No one of the characters looks out at the viewers. They are engrossed in their own world. The picnic food is no longer there. This representation recalls Picasso's fascination with scenes of bathing or fishing that he depicted in many of his works.

Three Paper sculptures are displayed in this gallery: *After Manet's The Luncheon on the Grass, Seated Woman* (1962, paper sculpture), *After Manet's The Luncheon on the Grass, Seated Man Resting on Elbow* (1962, paper sculpture), and *After Manet's The Luncheon on the Grass, Seated Man Standing* (1962, paper sculpture). Picasso not only alters and displaces the characters of the original painting, but he also takes them out of the work. They become paper dolls living in the real world. Picasso transforms Manet's work into a theatrical scene where vivid characters are free to move, leave the scene, come back, change positions and places, engage in conversations, read, or bathe. His original techniques of artistic creation and his thematic inspirations invade the work of Manet. Picasso takes this work as a model and as an experimentation landscape to symbolically carry on a journey of innovation that the French artist Manet started decades before.

The Last Years: from the Model to the Embrace displays a number of works that Picasso realized in the last years of his life and career. The gallery focuses on the stylistic rupture Picasso had with his previous styles and the themes that appeared in these works. The subject of the model and the artist in an intimate position dominates this gallery and casts a sense of eroticism.

The section label states that in the second half of the 1960's Picasso explores a new style characterized by bright colors, naïve contouring, simple design, frontal and simplified forms, spontaneous and liberated brush gestures, and vivid eroticism. The themes that dominate these works are the sleeping nude and the artist and his model as lovers. In these works, Picasso depicts intimate love scenes of the artist and his model in the studio; he depicts them as couples to provide the extensive definition of the model. In the same years, Picasso creates his largest series of engravings, Suite 347, in the Aldo and Piero Crommelynck brothers' studio. These engravings are made with the iconography of theater and spectacle, and are charged with an erotic tone. In July 1969, Picasso's work *Woman with Pillow* causes a scandal because of its stylistic features and intense eroticism. The label concludes with the idea that Picasso's final works represent an entire life of creation wherein he reflects his quest for self discovery.

The gallery includes a variety of works: engravings from Picasso's iconic series Suite 347, paintings, sketches, and drawings. The works *Woman with Pillow* (1969) and *The Embrace* (1970) hold attention by their large size, subject, and stylistic features. In his masterpiece *Woman with Pillow*, Picasso revisits the classical theme of the nude model, but he introduces a new style. The work depicts a large disfigured nude woman lying on a pillow and crossing her legs. However, this representation is completely different from the Cubist-Realist works that the visitors faced in the previous galleries. The brush work is spontaneous and the palette is somber and almost monochromatic, with some ochre highlights. The combination of bold, seamless, and angular lines creates interesting body shapes. The forms are simplified even more, and some shading is included.

In the painting *The Embrace*, the bright, vivid palette and the overly-simplified forms illustrate Picasso's renovated style. The large painting depicts a love scene where two naked lovers embrace each other. Their bodies combine like two pieces of a puzzle to elicit the idea that one completes the other in their most intimate union. The female's face is distorted and completely simplified that it merges with the painting's blue background. The bodies are defined by means of color; some features of these bodies are fragmented and enlarged, while others are eliminated. Facing this intense erotic scene, the viewers are set in a voyeuristic position evoked by the artist.

The selected works from the series Suite 347 reflect Picasso's endlessly renewed techniques in art creation. In the works, Picasso makes the artist and his model engage in love acts in the studio, the source of creation. He recreates their love scenes through different artistic media and stylistic features to narrate stories of the artistic act and what is beyond. The engravings transform the viewers into theater spectators or voyeurs. The pencil strokes and labyrinthine chaotic lines show Picasso's free gestures in creating the characters of these spectacles.

The exhibition concludes with the gallery *Self-portrait*. This space is similar to the introductory gallery. It includes a large photo mural, a painting, and a quotation by Picasso, all set in a dimly lit grey room. The mural is based on a photo Dora Maar took of Picasso in their studio Grands Augustins in May 1937. Picasso is concentrating on his work, holding a brush in hand. Next to the mural a quote by Picasso, taken from L'Intransigeant newspaper

dated June 15, 1932, is installed on the wall: "The full interest in art is found at the beginning. Once begun, it is already finished."

In this gallery, Picasso's model is a version of the artist himself. The painting *The Young Painter* (1972) is installed to the left of the mural. This monochromatic self-portrait represents a greyish young artist in a hat, and holding a brush in hand. He is depicted as a juvenile doll-like child with a tender, innocent, and uncertain look. Picasso's freedom of rendering his work reflects his desire to paint as a child. This young childish figure concludes a rich and prolific artistic career where mastery of technique and freedom of choice in rendering a work were prominent. The simplified lines and forms reflect free gestural brushwork and suggest the artist's desire for total freedom in the creative act.

Picasso is a prolific artist who revolutionized the visual arts in the 20th century. His creation is varied and rich; he used multiple artistic media to express himself, and his art career was influenced by diverse artists and cultures and full of plastic research and experimentation. His great mastery of technique and his idiosyncratic artistic vision takes his models into an endless journey of metamorphosis.

The exhibition *Facing Picasso* attracted more than three thousand Moroccan and international visitors. For the first time in Morocco, more than one hundred works were showcased in the first National museum of art. Introducing Picasso to larger audiences required a precise theme and a clear representation. Presenting the tremendously varied and rich artistic career of this prolific modern artist demanded a concise and comprehensive narrative that is related to the selected collection, but not limited to it.

A large number of Picasso's initial conceptions dominated the exhibition. The studies, sketches, and drawings aimed at narrating his vigorous plastic research and his process of artistic creation. Displaying the masterpieces, the culmination of Picasso's artistic journey, was not the purpose of this exhibition. The main purpose was to show Picasso's original aesthetic vision in rendering his models. However, a number of iconic works were also displayed to narrate Picasso's artistic evolution and his constant quest to revolutionize art in the 20th century. With the clear and precise exhibition theme, the eclectic collection, and the support materials, this thematic retrospective clearly conveyed its intended messages to audiences.