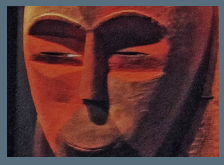
Picasso's *Demoiselles*

The Untold Origins of a Modern Masterpiece



SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

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OF A MODERN MASTERPIECE

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Cover art: (top to bottom): Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, detail, March 26, 1907. Museum of Modern Art, New York (Online Picasso Project) opp.07:001 | Anonymous artist, Adouma mask (Gabon), detail, before 1820. Musée du quai Branly, Paris. Photograph by S. P. Blier, 2013 | Postcard of people in the Bamako market (Mali), detail, 1906. François-Edmond Fortier postcard. Types de Femmes series | Anonymous artists, Republic of the Congo and Gabon masks, detail, 19th century. Leo Frobenius, Die Masken und Geheimbünde Afrikas, 1898, plate II. Illustrator: E. Hugelshofer.

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Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.

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Preface

Mysteries of the Canvas

It is hard to imagine that much more could be written about Pablo Picasso's iconic painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (plate 1). The work has been the focus of dozens of books, hundreds of articles, and several films; the canvas's centennial anniversary in 2007 heralded new interest and writing as well.[1] One of the world's most famous and complex paintings, *Les Demoiselles* still remains elusive — a work that beacons fresh engagement. Generations of scholarly writings have left the canvas rich in academic patina, but the viewer and reader often dissatisfied and hungry for more. Over a century of artistic explanation of *Les Demoiselles* has failed to answer key questions about the work. Who and what does it depict? When precisely was it painted? Why did Picasso incorporate so many disparate styles? Why did he introduce African masks? Did he repaint key figures?

Whatever the reasons for the lacunae, few would disagree with one Picasso scholar, who asks, "What is the modern art-historical equivalent of the Greatest Story Ever Told? What else but the monumental *Demoiselles d'Avignon*? . . ."[2] What "makes" *Les Demoiselles* so important in art history is not an easy question to answer. The views of scholars range from celebrating the work as

the "first truly twentieth-century painting" to decrying it as "a ruthless assault on the past," describing it as everything from a canvas that "anticipates the end of painting" to an act of "patricide against the Western tradition."[3] Consistent with these statements, art critic (and Picasso's secretary) Christian Zervos recalled hearing Picasso boldly state, "With me, a painting is a sum of destructions."[4] While some critics have seen *Les Demoiselles* as "a backwards-looking, unoriginal work of art, a recycling of the 19th century's biggest clichés," others have identified it as an act of social provocation reflecting Picasso's deep concern about the social conditions of the era (Belgian colonial activities in Congo among these).[5] In some respects all these descriptors, as diverse as they are, have certain merit, but none gets us any closer to understanding why the painting was envisioned as it was and what makes it so transformative. For these, as well as myriad other reasons, it is clear that "despite the wealth of research that has now been placed at our disposal, the picture itself remains something of an enigma."[6]

Picasso's first known engagement on the *Demoiselles* project began in October 1906, just before he turned twenty-five. The canvas was likely painted during a relatively short period of time, evidence suggests on the evening of March 26, 1907 (see chapter 2). It was created in his tiny, rather grimy studio in a rambling and drafty wooden former piano factory colloquially known to the artist's friends as the Bateau-Lavoir (the laundry boat). The entry stood adjacent to a small tree-shaded square at the summit of Mont-Sacré-Coeur. The bevy of tiny broad-windowed studios inside this structure unfolded, accordion style, down the back of the steep slope opposite rue Ravignan. Most of the residents (many of whom were artists) occupied spaces on the level immediately below the entry or on the lower floor beneath it. Max Jacob and André Salmon, who also lived here, were among Picasso's closest friends. The massive Sacré-Coeur Cathedral nearby was still under construction, and parts of the steep slopes of the butte were given to small agricultural plots and grazing sheep.[7] Set atop Paris's somewhat seedy Montmartre neighborhood in the eighteenth arrondissement, the Bateau-Lavoir remained a sizable distance from the life and main attractions of the city below. This setting provided a degree of seclusion, although Picasso and his friends made regular trips to cafés and other spots in the city center.

We know that in October 1906 Picasso was already making drawings for the work, inspired in part by an African sculpture owned by Henri Matisse (chapter 3). Most likely Picasso acquired the large canvas around the same time. If, as I have discovered Picasso first applied pigment to the canvas on March

26, 1907 (chapter 2), the process of conceiving and creating *Les Demoiselles* was a relatively long one. Of the roughly five months, most were spent on sketches or studies although the amount of actual time painting was quite curtailed. As Seckel wrote, "For many long days and nights, he drew, concretizing the abstract and reducing the concrete to essentials. Never was labor less rewarded with joy, and without his former youthful enthusiasm Picasso undertook a large canvas that was intended to be the first fruit of his experiments."[8]

By this time Picasso had been living off and on in Paris for six years and had begun to earn a reputation as a bold artist. As noted in a 1901 catalog of the Galerie Berthe Weill, "Picasso is all nerve, all verve, all impetuosity . . . he constructs brilliant, solid works which are the delight of those who have a taste for dazzling painting in colours that are sometimes crudely brutal, sometimes intentionally unusual."[9] These qualities can also be seen in *Les Demoiselles.* It was an ambitious project from the outset. As Leo Stein later told Alfred Barr about a fall 1906 visit to Picasso's studio and the "huge" empty canvas that awaited him, "Before he had painted a stroke, the artist had had [it] expensively lined as if it were already a classic work."[10] Since an expensive lining is usually added only after the painting is complete and is rarely done by the artist, most likely Picasso mentioned this to impress his patron and encourage the latter's continued interest. Picasso's efforts at this time convinced the Steins to rent a second studio for him in the lower level of the Bateau-Lavoir, where he could work on this larger-scale work in greater privacy.[11]

Questions of meaning are more complex. In a letter that André Breton penned to Jacques Doucet in 1924, some seventeen years after the work's completion, imploring him to acquire *Les Demoiselles*, which had up until then remained rolled up in Picasso's studio, Breton wrote, "Perhaps you were hoping I would talk about it more directly, but it is so difficult. And would it not be lowering it to submit it to rational critique, when what we are dealing with is, for me, a sacred image?"[12] Aura enriches and complicates our understanding of the work, thus adding not only to its sizable mystical charge but also to the thick legacy of scholarship and engagement that has accrued to it over the years. As Picasso would note, "Pictures live only by their legends — by what men differently think and say as they look at them, now or later."[13] And since this canvas was probably the most influential work of Picasso's career, one whose core elements he returned to over the course of his long life, this statement carries even more weight.

For Michael Duffy, the conservator who helped to clean the painting for its

2007 centennial celebration at the Museum of Modern Art, "There's something about it that gives you a jolt every time you get near it. . . . When you get up close you sort of lose yourself in the way the paint is applied, but when you step back you say, 'Wow! Look at this painting I'm next to!' It's always a shock."[14] Many art lovers today still join daily pilgrimages to the Museum of Modern Art's fifth-floor galleries, waiting for the swell of crowds to dissipate before them, staring with curiosity and awe at the canvas, adding to its patina-like accretion of visual and cultural power. In some ways, considering the work's unique aura, other aspects of meaning are irrelevant, but the new materials I have discovered and explore in this volume offer new and important insights into the very nature and significance of the canvas as well. Early on I accorded each of the demoiselles a name for easy identification purposes. From left to right these female subjects include the Egyptian/Asian; the half-standing Caucasian; the central Caucasian/central figure; the standing African; and the crouching African/crouching figure. Their identities help inform our understanding of the canvas.

My Engagement with the Project

I never anticipated writing about Picasso, much less this most famous of his paintings. My main research subject is African art, yet against the odds, various materials related to *Les Demoiselles* kept falling into my lap as I investigated other projects. At a certain point it seemed as if the painting challenged me to pick up the diverse pieces of its puzzle to try to make sense of it all. Over time I felt that I had little choice but to follow the trail. Eventually I came to realize that I was particularly well positioned to take up this monumental canvas anew. My expertise in African art allowed me to explore the canvas with fresh eyes, using new lines of investigation and notably different source materials. For me it was not primarily about the complexity of the composition or technique or questions of prostitution or meaning. Instead it was the variety of newly discovered (or previously undiscussed) historical sources that offered me additional clues into the painting and its many mysteries. With these materials, decoding the canvas in more complex ways became a key goal.

While some of these new sources comprise illustrated books that Picasso studied closely in this era, others include a studio receipt illuminating Picasso's favorable financial situation and ability to devote five months to this project, along with two photographs that Picasso scholars have long overlooked. One photo (figure 27) allows us to date the work more securely and also offers clues

as to the painting's meaning; a second photo (figure 151) presents Picasso's African family ties in Cuba. Other sources I have discovered that Picasso was exploring in this era range from plaster casts of important sculptural arts (figures 52–53, 62–68) to a popular American cartoon series (plate 8), and from women's fashion (figures 164–169) to colonial lithographs (figures 144–146). Each in its own way informs the canvas and what Picasso was thinking about as he worked on it.

This volume is in some ways the story of my discovery of these new Picasso sources, and particularly the sources that propelled me to take up this research subject, as well as my own journey as an art historian addressing this material. As such, there is something at once professional and personal in my quest. In this investigation I returned to fundamentals, to look at the canvas and the vast array of studies associated with it as if for the first time. I reread and reviewed what had been written. I relooked at Picasso's own statements, as well as the writings and artworks of fellow artists and friends. I explored the array of published sources that frame this era, as well as the various sites where Picasso lived and worked. I engaged with the canvas on its own terms and through the various pathways that it opened up.

The reading I offer reflects as well the methodologies I have developed over my career as an African art scholar. I use an African art specialist's eye to find insights into both the canvas and the myriad related evidence. Equally important, after many decades in which *Les Demoiselles* has been largely denuded of African imprint, I centrally reintegrate Africa, along with other influences, into the discussion. In this 1906–7 era, while the term *art nègre* (black art) may also reference Oceanic art, the key sources known to have been employed by Picasso are African works. In my exploration of this theme, I draw on a long career of engaging racially pejorative depictions and subject framing of African culture in my teaching and writing. While Picasso's engagement with African art was a largely celebratory one, the artist included an array of negative racial elements common in caricatures of the era. In a similarly paradoxical way he mockingly employs simian features in both some African renderings and his own self-portraits (figure 291). Contradictions also abound in both Picasso's treatment of women, and in his later lifestyle and political activities, in which he cojoined a wealthy Riviera life on the Côte d'Azur with membership in the French Communist party and ongoing financial support for its charities and newspaper. Paradoxes of striking complexity also enrich *Les Demoiselles*.

My engagement with *Les Demoiselles* has also been affected by my being a

female scholar. In some ways my approach is a feminist one in so far as it broadens the canvas from a simple brothel setting depicting sex workers standing before a client to a representation of women of multiple periods and contexts who not only have sex but also give birth, and through this act help populate the world. The rather subdued treatment of these women, with their genitalia covered, is consistent with this, as are the diverse global artworks — Egyptian, classical European, African, and others — on which the women in this canvas are modeled. This complexity around gender is all the more salient in light of recent discussions of misogyny regarding Picasso and the *Demoiselles* canvas specifically. While my book is not the venue to address larger misogynistic critiques of Picasso or the painting, with its perceived brothel and sex worker theme,[15] it is worth noting that the more complex female subject matter and setting discussed here make the canvas a notably different one than many have seen to date. And whereas the painting's gaze was long assumed to be male (specifically the brothel patron, or "john"), broadening the identities of the female subjects to be lovers, mothers, sisters, and daughters not only enriches the painting but also coincides with the person that Picasso most likely envisioned to be its owner and principal viewer: Gertrude Stein. A traditional brothel scene would have had far less appeal to Stein as a woman, a lesbian, and a leading art patron.

My approach more largely is an ethnographic one, a methodology framed in part around processes of artistic engagement, in which I focus my attention on the events and peoples identified with this canvas (*ethno-*, "people," and *-graphy*, "writing").[16] And, in the end, the larger narrative makes itself complete only through the reassembling of its diverse parts and the "thick description" that reveals how the research and its narrative affect the whole.[17] Consistent with this I have sought to highlight the context of my research and my role in it in the various chapters that follow. In many ways, as one scholar explains, "The story of the canvas is . . . a product of how the story is told, no less than the *Demoiselles* is a product of how it became what it is."[18]

In October 2013, I visited the now famous Bateau-Lavoir, more than a century after Picasso had painted *Les Demoiselles* there. While the building burned down in the 1970s, it was replaced with a facsimile, and the setting still carries a decided aura. On this trip I followed Picasso's shadow to other places visited while he created the painting. Some of the places he frequented no longer exist; however, many do, and still offer insight. At the modest wooden bench and table setting of the nearby Au Lapin Agile on rue Saint-Vincent (figures 4 and 5), I experienced the larger-than-life plaster sculptures that then, as now, frame the

cramped seating area as well as an ominous human skull posed above the rear corner fireplace, which recalls the tavern's earlier name, Cabaret des Assassins. This is still a site of rich conversation and aesthetic engagement. I traversed Picasso's pathways from the Bateau-Lavoir to Matisse's apartment overlooking the Seine on quai Saint-Michel, across from Notre-Dame Cathedral, to the café Le Départ around the corner on the boulevard Saint-Michel. I stopped at the Cluny Museum (now Musée national du Moyen Âge) and took in the grotesque face of a figure with a wide screaming mouth guarding the courtyard well (figure 8). For Picasso, who was fascinated with medieval art in this era, this kind of sculpture carried an appeal similar to other "primitive" works.

I traveled up the boulevard Saint-Michel from the Seine to see Gertrude Stein's apartment at 7 rue de Fleurus. Continuing on this very elegant narrow street, I turned onto the busy rue de Rennes, where Père Sauvage once sold African art to Matisse and others. I had lunch not far away at La Closerie des Lilas on boulevard du Montparnasse (figures 6 and 7). Here Picasso first met Leo Stein. It was at this brasserie that Picasso and his "gang" of artists, poets, and intellectual friends also met every Tuesday night for wide-ranging discussions about issues of the day.[19] It was likely after one such evening discussion that Picasso began to apply paint to *Les Demoiselles*' canvas. After lunch, when I stepped outside the Lilas, a sculpture across the street beckoned me from its perch at the edge of Jardin du Luxembourg (figure 280)— the *Fontaine de l'Observatoire* (1874) by Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux. This sculptural group includes four women representing distinct races and regions of the world who lift their arms to hold a giant celestial globe. The work's striking racial diversity has a similarity to Picasso's rendering of the various women in *Les Demoiselles*.

I made additional visits, on this and other trips, to cemeteries and Picasso's memorial for his friend Guillaume Apollinaire near the church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, to the plaster cast collections at the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine (figures 52, 53, and 62) that once were part of the Trocadéro museum. I visited the Petit Palais, where a fall 1906 exhibition took place that was important for Cézanne, and where Picasso's two main competitors, Matisse and André Derain, exhibited at the 1906 Salon d'Automne. Across the street from Le Petit Palais stands the even larger Grand Palais, where in 1966 the large Picasso retrospective was held. Here I explored a stunning retrospective of Georges Braque as I contemplated Picasso's changed world in the months and years following his completion of *Les Demoiselles*. From here I walked down to the Seine to the original site of the Salon des Indépendents at the Grandes Serres

de la Ville de Paris (Cours-la-Reine — also called Grande Serre de l'Alma), built for the Exposition Universelle of 1900. Picasso attended the Salon during or soon after its opening on March 20, 1907, and saw the revolutionary new paintings of Derain (*Bathers*; figure 20) and Matisse (*Blue Nude (Souvenir de Biskra)*; figure 19). In the days after this visit he put brush to his large canvas, giving life to his five women. These experiences brought me a deeper understanding of the history of the painting. Nearly every place where I walked or ate as I was shadowing Picasso in Paris inspired me to think about the canvas in a new way.

On the choice of chapter epigraphs: These statements, all of which are credited to Picasso, are intended to serve as individual guideposts to reflect the specific chapter aims and as part of the larger whole. Each of them sets out in pithy shorthand some underlying truth about the way in which Picasso worked, or the way in which he viewed and utilized his own art and that of others—his work philosophy, if you will—that helps us understand how and why Picasso looked to the past, and to the future, as he created *Les Demoiselles*. Rather than addressing each singly in the initial pages of each chapter, or as a footnote therein, I have chosen instead to integrate these together as part of the conclusions, in the final pages of the conclusion. This placement of the discussion will serve to further concretize the content and impact of these epigraphs not only for each chapter but also for the painting itself, as well as for this volume. I hope that each reader, when setting out to take the journey through this volume's co-joined visual narrative and written narratives, will also turn to these epigraphs as part of the larger experience of core signal points that complement and enhance the rich image—and reading—engagement that this book offers. A note on images: Selecting and publishing artworks involves its own complexities. Together with Duke University Press, a decision was made to include eight pages of larger color plates — reserved for works most dependent on color — while the remaining works would appear as black-and-white images. Most images are shown as smaller thumbnails, similar to those now common in Google searches and elsewhere. These images function in part as indexical references to works that can be examined closely elsewhere, for example, in the online Picasso Project.[20]

To me there is no past or future in my art. If a work of art cannot live always in the present it must not be considered at all. The art of the Greeks, of the Egyptians, of the great painters who lived in other times, is not an art of the past; perhaps it is more alive today than it ever was.

PABLO PICASSO, quoted in Ingo F. Walther, *Pablo Picasso, 1883–1973*, 24

Introduction

Most scholars today see Pablo Picasso's iconic painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (plate 1) as a work about five prostitutes who boldly stare down their male bidders, a theory rooted in part in Picasso's purported discomfort with women. The latter tensions are thought to be reflected in the strange African masks that several of the figures wear. It is hard to imagine that a work of this complexity, one that Picasso labored on for more than five months, had such a porous and, indeed, insecure foundation. In this book I reveal instead that the painting is richly layered, multivalent, and far more interesting. My reading sees these figures not only as sexual beings but also as mothers, grandmothers, lovers, sisters, and both family and race progenitors — in short as women more broadly defined in their myriad roles. This is based in large part on an array of new evidence that has escaped scholars to date, materials that inspire new questions about the painting. Through these sources I have broadened the painting's purview considerably, expanding it from its narrow brothel setting and transforming the five occupants into global women of multiple eras and identities. This reading is consistent with the larger colonial world Picasso and his friends inhabited, as well as core interests of the period in terms of both evolution and ideas of origin.

Early writers on the canvas sometimes viewed it as unfinished or as a painting that reflects several distinctive phases (generally seen as divided between

the right and left side of the canvas, the "African" figures and the others).[1] Two different artistic periods also have been proposed, whose stylistic contradictions remain unresolved.[2] Another view is that it marks within its own history the shift from narrative to allegorical painting.[3] These vantages draw their edge from the sharply angular features of the right-hand women and, even more, from the diversity of the styles with which each is rendered. We now know that the different styles were included from the outset, and the canvas changed relatively little over its history (chapter 2). Nonetheless, it was in part for this reason that many saw the painting as a transitional work.[4] This was Barr's principal framing of the canvas in the first major study of it, published in 1936, just before it came to the United States. To Alfred Barr, *Les Demoiselles* might "be called the first cubist picture for the breaking up of natural forms . . . into a semiabstract all over design of tilting shifting planes,"[5] and he identified it as "an invaluable lexicon for the early phase of Cubism."[6] Not surprisingly, African art figured prominently in the shaping of Barr's *Les Demoiselles* lexicon. While later scholars have debated the work's primacy in cubism's development, what also must be emphasized is that Barr's exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* in 1936 displayed a number of Picasso's works from this early period (figure 338), alongside African sculptures (figure 99). This was one of several vital turning points in the way that African art was understood in the West. And for this reason, Barr's perspective is also critical to understanding the larger development of the field of art history during the last century.[7] Both Robert Goldwater's seminal book *Primitivism in Modern Art* (1938) and the recent exhibition *Picasso Primitif* at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris in 2017, under director Yves Le Fur, are framed along lines of engagement that complement those earlier introduced by Barr.

Summarizing Barr's perspective, Picasso biographer John Richardson notes that the quintet of women was seen to constitute little more than "a rite of passage: what he called an 'exorcism.' *The Demoiselles d'Avignon* cleared the way for Cubism."[8] In this sense the painting assumed qualities of a "signal," evidencing where art had been and where it was going (the future); the work became something out of which something else was born. Regardless of whether the painting represents a step on the road to cubism, this vantage offers little insight into the canvas itself, or into what Picasso was thinking as he worked on it. While the artist rarely commented directly on interpretations of this or other canvases, he later insisted, "Arts of transition do not exist," and noted that "if we are to apply the law of evolution and transformation to art, then we have to admit that all art is transitory." Picasso's paradoxical statement says a lot and very little.[9]

What many researchers today identify as the most groundbreaking study on *Les Demoiselles* is a lengthy 1972 essay by Leo Steinberg, edited and republished in 1988. To Steinberg, the shock and seeming violence of this painting stemmed from the work's power of displacement, such that the beholder in assessing — like a john — the relative physical merits of women in a brothel discovers the shock of being stared at and evaluated in turn by them. The thick slashing, staccato brushstrokes and eliding forms add to the disquiet and terror of this encounter. Steinberg's powerful and thickly illustrated essay refocused attention to other aspects of the painting: "No modern painting engages you with such brutal immediacy. . . . The unity of the picture, famous for its internal stylistic disruptions, resides above all in the startled consciousness of a viewer who sees himself seen."[10] The essay was published before the trove of preliminary studies for the canvas were brought to light, but when they were, Steinberg considered them to pose little challenge to this thesis. In the end, for Steinberg, the "performative" nature of the painting is especially important — its ability to move us as viewers. Steinberg's tightly argued essay dropped Barr's cubism argument entirely (as well as questions of its African art precedents). Instead it led us at once to engage the painting's perceived subject matter (prostitutes, sex) and its reception — in particular the ways in which we experience the reverse gaze of the women's staring eyes. In the end, the argument is essentially about the spectators instead of the strangely staring women; we give the painting meaning through our responses to it.

Metaphors of eroticism, penetration, palpitation, touching, throbbing, sucking, discharging, and voyeurism fill Steinberg's text and, perforce, his reading of the painting. The fact that the five women simultaneously draw us into their space and propel us away reflects a vision deeply contradictory and paradoxical (something compared to the act of coitus itself) but also adds to the aura.[11] The article is so dense and tightly argued that it leaves us almost breathless, gulping for space in which to engage alternate evidence and viewpoints. Yet in the end it is hard to see that the stares of Picasso's demoiselles are that much different than those of the courtesans of Édouard Manet's painting *Olympia*, among others.

Whatever the problems of this theory, it has remained a dominant one, and other scholars have amplified on it: Picasso biographer Pierre Daix accordingly identified the work with Picasso's "obsessive fear of the destructive power of women."[12] Biographical interpretations added autobiographical details that seem to convey "a crisis of a personal, psychological order."[13] Not surprisingly, feminist scholars countered. One pointed out that the work had been trans-

formed into "a narrative of exclusion, . . . a story told by a heterosexual white male . . . for an audience answering to the same description."[14] Significantly, Steinberg later stepped back significantly from his highly sexualized reading, pointing out in a footnote, "Now, sixteen years later, with formalism in full retreat, my argument for the sexual charge of the picture seems almost embarrassingly banal."[15] Yet one could say without the dominant sexual charge of this argument, it is not clear what remains. Indeed, the more one thinks about Steinberg's framing, the more problematic it becomes.

Steinberg believed, like others before him (falsely, as it turns out — chapter 2), that Picasso had significantly repainted the canvas, adding African masks to several of Caucasian figures only later. For Steinberg, "the assimilation of African forms was but the final step in the continuing realization of an idea — the trauma of sexual encounter experienced as an animalistic clash, a stripping away even of personal love."[16] This theory is today as strange as it is pejorative and, indeed, rather racially perverse. This view also is notably different from an array of statements that Picasso made not only about Africans but also their arts, and in addition, his use of diverse sources, only now coming to light. These and Picasso's many studies and array of artworks from this and latter periods tell a very different story.

William Rubin, the cocurator of MoMA's *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* exhibition in 1984, expanded Steinberg's two-pronged focus on sex and beholding by furthering the exploration of personal trauma and describing the painting as a "terrifying night journey of the soul." For Rubin, Picasso's trauma had been exacerbated by the breakup with his lover, Fernande Olivier, in the summer of 1907 (an event that actually occurred several months after the canvas was completed). Rubin insisted, "For me, the final picture is less a Dionysian orgy than a sexual battleground and more a project addressing oppositional values of 'beauty and ugliness, age and youth, human and animal.'"[17] A somewhat related theory by Yve-Alain Bois evokes deeper castration fears, attributed to Picasso in a Freudian reading concomitant with the artist's shared concerns and ambitions for not only artistic success but also progeny.[18] The presence of African masks and culture here became further grist for derision. As Rubin explained, "To the extent that the 'fetishes' of tribal peoples were known at all, they were not even considered art, but extravagant artifacts of untutored 'barbarians.'"[19]

Hal Foster took the Steinberg, Rubin, and Bois narratives further while shifting them in a different direction. He addressed Picasso's canvas as "an extraordinary psycho-aesthetic move by which otherness was used to ward away

others (woman, death, the primitive)."[20] He writes that *Les Demoiselles* is only the most extreme instance of this "perfect image of the savagery that lurks in the midst of civilization."[21] For Foster, the work "coded" a "set of oppositions light/dark, rational/irrational, savage, despite its obvious prejudice."[22] The painting becomes one of Western and/or male "fear of loss," the "animalistic nature" of women, "gender subjugation," and "excessive black sexuality."[23]

While Picasso, consistent with many in his era, likely held views that today we would see as problematic with respect to Africa, and to other issues as well, the more recent dialectical framing seems strangely out of place for the earlier period; it is a notably postcolonial vision of Western guilt that does not fit with ideas and events in 1906–7. Moreover, terms such as "animalistic nature" and "excessive black sexuality" make the demoiselles canvas little more than a thick gloss of racial and gender prejudice.[24] Walter Benjamin once observed, "There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."[25] For *Les Demoiselles* this necessarily not only must enfold the violent colonial legacy of Picasso's era but also the rather barbaric readings that some scholars later proposed for this canvas.[26]

Discussions of primitivism in relation to Picasso's engagement with African art are rich and varied;[27] no discussion here will do justice to this complex topic, or heated discourses around it. The *Picasso Primitif* exhibition at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris in 2017 is one of the latest. Picasso holds an uneasy position in regard to primitivist discussions as both the genius "discoverer" of African art in the West and the one who appropriated (stole) its key forms to promote his own advancement. Working in the complex and often deeply problematic era of the brutal colonial era, to say nothing of Picasso's own difficult, sexist frisson, has charged the canvas with unique discursive and theoretical interest as well — leaving the work, according to some academics, a highly problematic canvas.[28] These concerns are often voiced in the context of the painting's purported theme of sex workers being evaluated by a client. I argue here, however, that the canvas is not a literal reference to a brothel (with prostitutes) but rather *le bordel* — "a mess" or "a complex situation" in its more common French translation — recalling the mess that the world itself represents, particularly vis-à-vis issues of race, evolution, migration, and generational identity. In key ways the canvas also references the strikingly potent, almost paradoxical complexity (*mess*) of women as both sex objects and mothers (bearers of children), vaginas being vital for both. Understood in this is that a woman by her very nature often encapsulates the idioms of both virgin and whore.

In the same way that the personal, sociopolitical, and economic background in which *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was created cannot be overlooked, we also cannot lose sight of the ethical morass in which so many African sculptures that Picasso sought to elevate to the status of "art" were collected in this era, artworks whose Western museum contexts still challenge today.[29] Picasso's extensive use of illustrated books in this canvas's preparation is interesting here too, in part because it complicates and enriches the oft-cited dualism evinced in Picasso's portrayal of brothel prostitutes on the one hand and his visit to the Trocadéro to examine African art on the other. As we will see, both issues are framed differently in this volume.

In short, this is a very different "primal" or primitivizing scene than has long been suggested,[30] incorporating as central figures Africans, certainly, but also Europeans and Asians. Moreover, I see no distinct dualism around which idioms of aggression and narcissism are engaged. Nor is the canvas necessarily about the conflict evinced around male brothel client power expressions vis-à-vis largely disempowered sexualized others (female prostitutes). While it is important not to limit the work to a simple brothel scene, defined in large measure by male privilege in fantasizing and exploitating women, what I am arguing here is for a richer, broader way to look at this canvas (not only about sex acts) that is not a simple displacement of one meaning (or reading) for a different one. Instead, the work is shaped around more complex ideas of women as mothers (grandmothers, sisters, or friends) as much as women exclusively as sexual objects. The masks donned by the African women in turn are less of interest as literal weapons or protection than as reflections of the art styles each demoiselle "wears" to distinguish her specific region and era. This vantage also counters long-standing binary views of primitive-modern, or other, since all five women represent a very different (and often earlier) place and time, Europe among these.

Moreover, Africa here is not isolated from the West but is a central part of the global whole. And in some ways, this is one of the most important things to recall about this canvas. We cannot overlook the fact that in the highly racialized colonial era in which Picasso and his contemporaries were working, Western forms of segregation were also being exported to the newly colonialized lands in Africa and elsewhere alongside European languages, religion, and infrastructure. The fact that Picasso has positioned African women here adjacent to their European comrades, in the same tightly constricted space — indeed at the very front of the canvas — is a powerful statement in any work, much less a canvas of this scale. Consistent with this, the work speaks to the imperative of

cultural, political, and artistic reintegration, whether we are talking about museum displays, art collecting practices, sources that artists use, or other arenas. In each context, what stands out is the focus on arts (and cultures) the world over stripped bare (of ritual and other superficial differences) and bridging, rather than reifying, long-standing and notably patronizing hierarchies between so-called "civilized" and "tribal," "illuminated" and "savage," rational-minded and fetish bound — advanced not only in the Enlightenment and colonial era but also in some current theoretical vantages on the canvas. In this work, in brief, we can begin to see primitivism as neither a modernist trope nor a colonial "primitivizing" one (in this era, ancient, Byzantine, medieval, and Asian works were also considered "primitive" art) but rather as something deeply embedded in the very fabric of human identity, as a referent to all societies and all times. In addressing these questions of where we come from and where we are going, this issue, in large measure, is what makes Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* so revolutionary.

L'Art nègre

There have long been questions about the importance of African art in *Les Demoiselles*, a subject that has engendered heated debates. Early on, many in Picasso's circle identified this period as his *art nègre* era (a term then referring to both African and Oceanic art) — among these Salmon, Jacob, Gertrude Stein, and Wilhelm Uhde.[31] Accordingly, in Barr's 1936 catalog, he simultaneously identified the painting as "the first cubist painting" and "the masterpiece of Picasso's Negro period."[32] André Malraux, in an interview with the artist in 1937, elaborated further on African art complexity, stating that such works "promulgated . . . the right to be arbitrary."[33]

Various scholars have explored the undercurrents of primitivism taken up by Picasso and others in this period — Yve-Alain Bois, Jack Flam, Patricia Leighten, and Ellen McBreen, among them. Primitivist tropes helped to reconnect one with the enduring legacy of the past (the primeval origins of humans) while also offering a way into the future that was unfolding.[34] Related beliefs also maintained that African works had the power to carry Europeans back to "the origins" of Europe itself.[35] Ellen McBreen notes of Matisse's work in this same era that his "precise formal borrowings were shaped by . . . larger racial and cultural fantasies, transforming African sculpture into mythic objects promising both renewal and repression. This temporal dimension . . . is signaled by the

deeply metaphoric language of time travel he would later use. . . . the principles that 'go back,' that restore life, that give us life."[36] The primitivist impact was sizable, and Picasso's engagement with its core tenets was somewhat unique, shaped around his own experiences with Africans in his hometown of coastal Málaga (figure 149) and his grandfather's encounters during travels to Cuba (figure 151).

For many, primitivism carried the "fantasy of a return to the primordial origins of man, to an earlier episode in his relationship to the objects he makes."[37] This was true for Picasso, as well, but took a somewhat more complex vantage in *Les Demoiselles*. Africa features in this, but so too do other regions and periods,[38] for Picasso features here five demoiselles from around the globe through the stylistic lens of selected artistic models from each of their respective regions.

This is consistent with the framing of primitive art in this era to include not only African and Oceanic art but also pre-Columbian, Egyptian, Asian, Greco-Roman, and medieval works. The arts of children and the insane were generally included in this taxonomy as well. Gertrude Stein noted about *Les Demoiselles* that Picasso "tended to paint in blocks like a sculptor, or in profile, the way children paint."[39] With Picasso, scientific racism was a factor, too, and the extended simian-like prognathous jaw of the standing African demoiselle at the right of the canvas is consistent with this.

In the decades ahead, opposition to the impact of African art on Picasso and his 1907 canvas grew through the scholarly efforts of many. Picasso's contradictory claims on the subject didn't help. One day Picasso extolled the beauty and power of African artworks, and on another insisted, "L'art negre? Connais pas!" (African art? Don't know anything about it!).[40] This latter comment was made long after Picasso had begun collecting African and Oceanic sculpture, so Picasso clearly knew these works well. Indeed, he insisted shortly after this comment that it was intended as a subterfuge — a deception: "The fact is, it has become too familiar to me; the African statuettes scattered almost everywhere about my home are more like witness than examples. . . . I still have a big appetite for curios and charming objects."[41]

Some have seen this to mean Picasso's opposition to the term *art nègre* because of its vagueness, or because it designated "art," or even because he was claiming a new meaning for the latter term.[42] Interestingly, in looking at Picasso's statement in its original context, he appears to have meant something quite different. The artist had been invited by the art critic Florent Fels to write a few lines for a survey the latter was publishing called "Opinions sur l'art nègre" for the April 1920 issue of his journal, *Action*. In this context, Picasso's response

comes across as decidedly jocular, even ironic, similar to the reply of Picasso's close friend Jacques Cocteau, who wrote, "*L'art nègre* has become as boring as *le japonisme Mallarméen*."[43] Moreover, in 1923, Picasso's reframing of his statement was along the same lines as Cocteau: "The fact is, [*art nègre*] has become too familiar to me."[44] To make the point even clearer, Picasso later insisted, "You must not always believe what I say. Questions tempt you to tell lies, particularly when there is no answer."[45]

There are multiple witnesses of events involving African art and Picasso at this time, including the famous evening in October 1906, when, after handling Matisse's African figure (figures 43 and 44), Picasso went home to produce the first of a group of drawings that became important for *Les Demoiselles* (see chapter 3; figures 45–49). He insisted that African sculptures are artworks — important for their visual influence and power: "When I became interested, forty years ago, in Negro art and I made what they refer to as the Negro period in my painting, it was because at that time I was against what was called beauty in the museums. At that time, for most people a Negro mask was an ethnographic object."[46] Barr recognized this early influence, yet for some scholars, African art served principally as a springboard to a different kind of aesthetic revolution. To Richardson, "*Demoiselles* was . . . an exorcism of traditional concepts of 'ideal beauty.'"[47]

Picasso's *art nègre* statement has been cited by a number of scholars over the years to argue *against* the importance of African art to the artist. Moreover in 1942, Christian Zervos insisted, "The artist formally certified that in the era when he painted the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, he ignored the art of black Africa."[48] Daix wrote much the same thing in 1970 following a group of interviews with the artist, titling his article "There Is No Negro Art in the *Demoiselles*," and therein "arguing against accepted theories" then in place about African art's impact on Picasso, "which were rejected by the artist himself."[49] Zervos and Daix, in rejecting African art's impact on *Les Demoiselles* and related works, contradicted the commentary of an array of Picasso's close friends (Stein, Salmon, Jacob, and Uhde) as well as several visitors to Picasso's studio at the time, such as Augustus John in the summer of 1907, or Gelett Burgess in 1908, or Malraux — all of whom noted Picasso's interests in "*l'art nègre*."[50]

Why recent art scholars have tended to refute the importance of African art to Picasso's work in this era leads to other questions. Some have felt that acknowledging the role of *l'art nègre* in his early oeuvre would diminish Picasso's reputation, particularly with respect to his primary place as innovator. To

Daix, the hypothesis of Picasso's African roots would not only affect our views of Picasso's "behavior" in this critical period but also would potentially decrease the value of his works.[51] Picasso's dealer, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, was one of the growing group who insisted that any resemblance between Picasso's work and African (or other "primitive" arts) was coincidental. As Kahnweiler wrote in 1948, "I must, once more, dispute the validity of the thesis of a direct influence of African art on Picasso and Braque. . . . The real question was one of convergence," that is, "in Negro art, the Cubists rediscovered their own conception of the work of art as object."[52] Convergence became the issue du jour, and in the aftermath of Malraux's 1937 interview with Picasso, published in 1973, the idea of an emotional but not aesthetic imprint of African art on the artist began to gain a hold.[53]

For Daix, the question of African influence came down to the reading of one figure, the standing female on the right wearing an African-style mask with "hatch lines" suggestive of incised facial markings. He writes, "The hypothesis of African origins of the hatch marks [on the African figure] . . . transforms the behavior of Picasso in this crucial year and in this moment. Not only are these hatch marks technically 'fauves,' but in African masks they always serve to accentuate symmetries. With Picasso, it is the inverse; they provoke the loud asymmetries, transforming the original Iberian distortions of the faces into an unsustainable barbarism."[54] Significantly, not only are the facial marks on the African demoiselle both thicker and more deeply textured than the brushstrokes of the fauves, but facial asymmetries are an important part of the African masking traditions shown in Frobenius (see plate 2 and others).

Some have argued that Picasso had already finished *Les Demoiselles* and his important visual transformation by the time he began to look seriously at African art; Paul Dermée and Pierre Reverdy have insisted that "Picasso had already completed his revolution when he first saw African sculptures."[55] We know this is not true since Picasso's engagement with Matisse's Vili figure (figures 43 and 44) in the autumn of 1906 was seminal to the development of *Les Demoiselles* five months later. Others focused instead on issues of African art and cubism. Picasso's photographer, Brassaï (pseudonym of Gyula Halász), wrote that, "The birth of Cubism owed nothing to African fetishes, that he himself had seen. African sculptures [came] only after he had completed the canvas. It is purely coincidental that what has wrongly been called his 'Negro' period corresponded to the time when he discovered African statues and masks."[56] In the end, even Barr was forced to back step on African art in relation to cubism's development,

which was increasingly seen as an exclusively Western-derived modernist practice. As late as 1994, one Picasso scholar asked with respect to *Les Demoiselles*, "Where does Africa (or any other tribal source) fit morphologically into this crouching figure's head? Nowhere, I am now convinced. . . . Yet nearly every historian willing to admit tribal influences in the *Demoiselles* at all has seen the squatter's head as the epitome of 'African' influence."[57] Any African art engagement was seen to derive essentially from Picasso's desire for magical "protection" against various personal demons, and the objects themselves were seen to serve instead largely as "*intercesseurs*, mediators." Even Stein insisted that African sculpture "consoled Picasso's vision [rather] than aided it. . . . Picasso first took as a crutch African art and later other things."[58]

These and other comments by individuals close to him aside, art scholars more recently have often turned away from addressing Picasso's use of African art sources in *Les Demoiselles* to focus instead on other issues, such as prostitution and Picasso's interest in ancient Iberian sculptures (figures 70 and 71), the latter based in part on Picasso's enduring interest in his Spanish homeland. For many scholars today, indeed, *Les Demoiselles* is in essence an "Iberian" painting, and related forms of abstraction come primarily from this source or, more generally, from the perceived "natural progression" in European art toward this end. In this development, key historical details have been left out. For example, Kahnweiler makes no mention of Iberian art in his discussion of Picasso's sources and development in the critical 1906–7 era, and, as Barr explains, "nor apparently, does any other historian or artist, including Picasso himself, until 1939."[59]

Even with the notably controversial and in some ways problematically influential *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art* exhibition at MoMA in 1984, the imprint of African art's formal impact on Picasso has tended to be dismissed by many Picasso art scholars. To the curator William Rubin, African and other works, rather than offering new forms of artistic engagement, were simply seen to derive from "complementary" cultural mindsets of individuals living in strikingly different periods (a strange comingling of the "primitive" and "modern" that some see as "sanctioning" the path toward "radical progress" that Picasso was assumed to be moving toward in this era). In Rubin's "*Primitivism*" exhibition, the focus was placed on natural "affinities" between modern art and "primitive" works, rather than direct influences.[60]

Rubin's own writing focuses largely on Picasso's purportedly troubled psychological state, arguing that the African works were little more than triggers.

In this view he advances what can only be seen today as a highly pejorative racial construct in which African forms serve as tropes and stand-ins for sexual trauma. For other scholars, such as Hal Foster, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* came to exemplify a similarly pejorative meme: a core "instance" of "savagery" at the root of "civilization."[61] As framed by Foster, the canvas addresses an "ideological nightmare" inspired by "spoils" in "an artistic coup founded on military conquest" in the long legacy of Western imperial and colonial engagement.[62] While this perspective draws on Picasso's interest in African art, it leaves out how Picasso was meaningfully engaging with Africa in new ways within the dynamic of colonialism. Despite the violent and denigrating dimensions of colonialism, it brought an end to the slave trade and in some ways helped to unite the world in new and unexpected ways, despite considerable distances in terms of culture, history, and geography. It was this that was especially important to Picasso, since his interest in African art was not only genuine but also revolutionary for this era.

Politically provocative as these ideas are, they stand outside the ways in which Picasso would engage with African art and other works as evidenced in the vast array of sketches and studies he undertook from October 1906 to March 1907 for *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, to say nothing of the striking inventiveness of this canvas itself. And, unfortunately, many art historians who write about Picasso and African art convey a certain discomfort with addressing African art. Picasso's work in this era was seen to follow largely in the footsteps of other European artists. To Daix, for example, "Gauguin, van Gogh, and Cézanne had already invented the Primitivist renewal."[63] The reasons for undervaluing or denigrating the impact of African art on *Les Demoiselles* are many, but one, no doubt, is the fact that too few of these writers are comfortable with actually looking at and analyzing African objects. And there is the larger concern of some that a painting as important as this one, a European art movement as significant as cubism, and a shift as seminal as that of modern art should not be linked to sizable influences outside the West, much less to Africa, except by way of opposition. Modern art, in the resonant words of one scholar critical of this view, could not be "exposed as a black bastard."[64] Today cubism is identified as a project (e.g., after *Les Demoiselles*) founded equally by Picasso and Braque in 1908.[65] As a result, *Les Demoiselles*, as well as Picasso's critical work on this canvas from fall 1906 to spring 1907, in which many of these ideas of African and other artistic influences are reflected, has largely been removed from a position of primacy. This revision is all the more striking since some of the most salient

innovations of both *Les Demoiselles* and cubism — namely stylistic multiplicity, assemblage, and the arbitrariness of form — came from Picasso's seeing African sculpture and the "plurality of forms" at play in these works.[66]

If today the canvas is seen by many art scholars to carry little if any African import, it is also due in part to the extraordinary impact that Leo Steinberg's article on this painting continues to have on the field. This important and in many ways canonical study leaves out Africa almost entirely. Steinberg observes, "'Is the intrusion of *art nègre* the true content of the Demoiselles?' I was recently asked by a Paris friend. I think not, because the picture's 'content' is the sum (incommensurable) of its internal and outgoing relationships. So, in the Demoiselles, the remembered forms of stiff tribal effigies are naturalized in a furnished boudoir and galvanized into Baroque agitation. . . . Whereas the scouting for 'lookalikes' is a diverting sport, releasing us from the difficulty of holding a picture in focus. Perhaps it's a question of no time to spare."[67] Steinberg's view conforms with a number of other mid-twentieth-century and later scholars. By insisting that African art played only a "residual role" for Picasso, and, similarly, no role on the development of Western modernism except by way of affinity or emotional crutch, this vantage conveniently allows one to avert any potential "embarrassment" to the Western canon in having some of its key sources come from outside Europe. The widely held view that forms such as assemblage (and related techniques; figures 122, 139, 331, and 336) come not from sources in Africa that Picasso was exploring and discussing at the time (figures 138, 142, 147, 148, and 330) but instead from roots entirely in the West is typical of this. So, too, the shifting of the origin of cubism from its early foothold in *Les Demoiselles*, as Barr maintained, to 1908, after Picasso had met Braque, speaks to the same issue in removing African art from this dialogue. Yet several 1907 and 1908 works reveal that Picasso was already exploring related cubist-linked ideas in the period in which he worked on *Les Demoiselles* or in direct consequence of it.

Sources as Evidence

Much of the meaning that has accrued to *Les Demoiselles* to date was not part of its early history and perception. For example, Kahnweiler made no mention of a title or that the painting represented a brothel.[68] Breton had little to offer by way of subject explanation other than that the canvas "defies analysis, and the laws of its vast composition cannot in any way be formulated."[69]

Several scholars contacted the artist much later in an attempt to clarify the

painting's meaning, but to no avail. In the 1940s a very frustrated Barr wrote to Zervos, "Perhaps, as in the case of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*[,] I shall have to publish certain errors and speculations so that Picasso may be aroused to deny or clarify. It is indeed harder to discover the truth about Picasso's early work than about the work of Manet, [Nicolas] Poussin, or [Diego] Velázquez."[70] Picasso's sometimes contradictory responses to questions about the painting also made things difficult:

> Much more striking — and detrimental to scholarly investigation — was the manner in which Picasso hamstrung Christian Zervos' efforts to construct an accurate *catalogue raisonné* of the numerous preparatory drawings and painted sketches for the *Demoiselles*. The artist either failed altogether to disclose the existence of a great many of these works to Zervos until many years later, or he shared them with his cataloguer but explicitly forbade him to photograph and publish them at the time he catalogued the painting itself. As a result the original Zervos catalogue devoted to this canvas and its preparatory phase is woefully incomplete.[71]

In the end Picasso "preferred to make misleading statements rather than elucidate the *Demoiselles*."[72] Similarly, Mary Mathews Gedo revealed, "Even as an elderly man, he remained especially prickly and defensive about his picture and never frankly discussed his sources, development and symbolism. In fact, his behavior went beyond mere lack of cooperation: He actively sabotaged attempts to reconstruct the exact history of the canvas. His refusal ever to acknowledge that he had repainted the right half of the picture under the initial impact of his response to African art constitutes merely the most celebrated of these actions."[73] The latter is particularly interesting, since as we now know he did not significantly repaint the African demoiselles.

Over the course of his life Picasso carefully dated and documented much of his work, and he was happy to reflect back on dates and other matters with Zervos and others. This was especially true with large and important projects. Yet Picasso was secretive and even intentionally misleading with respect to this painting. It was probably in part for this reason that Picasso kept many of his notebooks and studies for *Les Demoiselles* secret until the early 1970s, just prior to his death. Interestingly, in one of Picasso's most important sketchbooks related to this work — carnet 6 — he removed pages from several separate sketchbooks and sewed the remaining sheets together into a single volume (see chap-

ter 7 and "Sketchbooks: New Dating"). Why did he take the time and effort to do this unless he was removing work he didn't want others to see?

Some of the reasons for Picasso's defensiveness appear to lie in part in the role that illustrated books played in his work at the time. In 1908, American art critic Gelett Burgess visited Picasso in his studio and saw the canvas, after which he asked the painter about its "monstrous monolithic women," inquiring where the artist had "found his ogrillions [ogresses]?" "Where would I get them?" was Picasso's reply, accompanied by a wink.[74] Picasso's answer implies that they are from his own imagination. As Picasso explained to Daix, "I haven't used models since *Gósol* [summer 1906]. And indeed, at this time [during work on *Les Demoiselles*] I worked completely outside of all models."[75] While Picasso was no longer employing live models, he was using other kinds of sources, particularly books. Related book images not only shed new light on the 1907 painting and its development but also enable us to see different elements and relationships around it. In this period Picasso created images that reflect his engagement with these books and other sources, forms that engage idioms such as abstraction and assemblage that would become core tenets of cubism. In this light, these books are central to Picasso's transformation as an artist. These volumes, together with Picasso's sketchbooks and other images, enrich and complicate our understanding of the canvas; they also help to date a number of related works in this era.

The finding of key books that Picasso apparently used during this period transforms our understanding of both the famous canvas and Picasso's larger interests at play. He appeared to be already using some of these book sources in 1904 (see chapter 5), but it was between the summer of 1906 and the winter of 1907 that books became more central, shaping his experimentations for *Les Demoiselles* (chapter 6). These sources served in a very practical way to replace his use of live models, but more importantly they provided the artist with a treasure trove of new imagery, forms, and ideas, around which a wide range of visual experiments could be made that filled numerous sketchbooks, drawings, and paintings. These and other sources reveal his quest for pictorial reinvention.

These books offer an entirely new perspective on the canvas's meaning and subject matter. They reveal Picasso's strikingly creative approach to form and how path-forging he was at this point in his career. At the same time they enhance our understanding of how *Les Demoiselles* could also serve for him as a manifesto — a pointed assault on art of the past that also charted pathways into the future — to which he later returned for inspiration.[76] With these books, and

several other sources, we see the array of visual materials that Picasso was using at this time, comprising not only the long-acknowledged ancient Iberian head, likely important for the two Caucasian demoiselles (compare figures 70 and 71 with figure 72) and other forms. Additional sources for the Egyptian demoiselle include the small Louvre sculpture identified earlier (figures 73–76) as well as an Egyptian mask (figure 60; compare figure 61). For the standing African demoiselle, an Ijaw mask from Leo Frobenius stands out prominently (compare figures 94 and 95); for the crouching demoiselles, it is another mask from the Democratic Republic of Congo illustrated in Frobenius (compare figures 96 and 97) that is the most likely source.

Taking in hand the array of new sources that came to my attention through my African art research, it became clear that this is a story that only I can tell. I began to see how uniquely positioned I was to appreciate some of the more difficult challenges (and opportunities) that these sources posed for the artist. Picasso likely did not want the fact that he was using book images to be known for fear they would harm his growing reputation. Even later, when his reputation as a revolutionary artist was secure, he likely made sure that none of these materials saw the light of day. Today, we know that Gauguin, Matisse, and other artists of the era used illustrated books, journals, and photographs as sources, yet until very recently the use of published works of this type was seen to be problematic. This legacy of disparagement no doubt made Picasso's sources difficult to address, much less admit, and if this meant that basic questions went unanswered, so be it.

Each of these richly illustrated books, although to date unexplored by scholars in relationship to Picasso or *Les Demoiselles*, had large readership among the Paris elite at the time — among artists especially. Two volumes are German, one is English, and another is French. Several of Picasso's close friends in this period were German nationals or German and English speakers who could have furnished the books or translated parts for the artist. While we have no direct evidence that Picasso saw or studied these books (e.g., the finding of actual volumes in his collection or notes indicating these specific titles), it is clear that he knew them well, as evidenced through his changing visual and intellectual engagement with them (chapters 4, 6, and 7). These books help to answer a number of questions about *Les Demoiselles* that have remained over the century since it was created — questions of form, dating, and meaning. As with Picasso's other sources, it is important to emphasize, however, that there is very little evidence in *Les Demoiselles* or its related studies that suggests that Picasso was engaged

in directly copying the images. They were springboards to thinking about new kinds of forms and relationships.

Throughout my research, the striking mysteries of *Les Demoiselles* continued to pull at me, and the adventure that this project laid at my feet as I tracked and engaged new materials made this book an especially rewarding one to write. The bold women in this picture, now a century old, often remained foremost in my mind. At key junctures I made a point to let them tell their own stories through my findings. Throughout I also sought to open the canvas to new kinds of narratives and discursive elements that research brought to the foreground. Rather than arguing, as some have, that the picture is "recalcitrant [and] . . . eludes all of our attempts to capture and express it conceptually,"[77] I have found, thanks in large measure to these new sources and the paths they encouraged me to follow, that this painting is more transparent than it is often assumed to be, despite its rich opacities. The painting and other materials that Picasso brought together in conjunction with it served as a kind of Rosetta stone; they offered up parts of a template around which certain elements could be more readily deciphered and read. Consistent with this, I felt my role to be that of a detective exploring an unsolved case, willing the work to reveal itself more fully through the array of new evidence I was finding. In the end it was almost as if the new sources — like the women on the canvas — were goading me to follow this project through to the end. In turn, a twofold theoretical lens emerged and helped shape my exploration: ethnography, the writing of this project as a story about a set of individuals and conditions; and the pulse of creativity, those vital moments or sparks within Picasso's creative process that made him think about this painting and art more generally in notably new and revolutionary ways.

Steinberg's narrative style in some ways affected my own, although the results are very different; there is an important autobiographical element to both that helps inform our work.[78] Steinberg revealed to one of his former students, Robert Williams, that at around the age of sixteen, he was walking along a Parisian street and was approached by a prostitute whose skin looked almost blue in the nighttime light. This experience, during his first visit to the city, haunted him for years to come. Steinberg indicated that he had been "curious and had (at least at that time) no moral objection to patronizing a prostitute, but that he had a 'terrible fear of disease.'" This incident left a strong emotional imprint on Steinberg, as well as a certain aesthetic jolt. The potent cojoining of otherworldly bluish skin, penetrating eyes, shock, and fear of illness and death are noteworthy. Here, as another author noted without this background information, "The

Brothel was imprinted in Steinberg's mind."[79] In many ways, Steinberg's interpretation of *Les Demoiselles* took a similar shape. The series of discoveries that led me on my journey helped shape what I have written in equally significant ways.

While I never had anything equivalent to a frightful brothel encounter, anyone who has experienced the cojoined acts of sex and parturition (pleasure, pain, and regeneration) recognizes these as acts that in their own way seem like strange (if apt) bedfellows. In my many experiences in Africa, the sense of strangeness around these very roles, of women as objects of *both* unique sexual desire and unique untouchability are often in play. Addressing this strange paradox metaphorically, I heard myths of creation wherein the genitalia of deities are more modestly positioned within their armpits, or local languages wherein the vagina is accorded two different terms depending on the context and use. This, for me, was the world in which I began to see the powerful paradox of women as sex objects and mothers that Picasso appears also to be grappling with. It is this disquieting issue that also offers us a new lens of understanding.

Notes

Preface

1. More recent engagements include Dupuis-Labbé 2007; Row 2016; Unger 2018 "Picasso: Chapter One" 2018; Kalb 2018.

2. Chave 1994, 598.

3. Steinberg 1988, 11; Molyneux 2007, n.p.; Jones 2007; Foster et al. 2005, 84.

4. Daix 1993, 10.

5. T. J. Clark 2013; C. Green 2001a, 2; Leighten 1989, 74; Leja 1985, 67; Antliff and Leighten 2001 in passing.

6. Golding 2001, 26.

7. Jeanine Warnod provides a good description and flavor of this setting (1975, 7–16); see also Franck 2003.

8. Rubin, Seckel, and Cousins 1994, 244.

9. Quoted in McCully 2011b, 37.

10. Barr in Steinberg 1988, 63n50. See also Cousins and Seckel 1994, 148–49; and Rubin, Seckel, and Cousins 1994, 254.

According to Leo Stein, "Picasso was pleasantly childlike at times. I had some pictures relined, and Picasso decided that he would have one of his pictures too treated like a classic, though in reverse order — he would have the canvas lined first and paint on it afterwards" (Rubin, Seckel, and Cousins 1994, 254). Yet according to William Rubin

(1994, 65n206), there is no evidence that Picasso had the large canvas specially lined before he began to create "a classic work" (Leo Stein quoted in Steinberg 1988, 63). Rather, the lining was done after it had been completed.

11. McCully 2011b, 203.

12. Rubin, Seckel, and Cousins 1994, 182.

13. Flanner 1957, 74.

14. Interview with Michael Duffy in Trachtman 2004.

15. Hannah Gadsby in *Nanette* 2018. In some ways Gadsby's perspectives are based on earlier writings about the canvas and the artist, such as Steinberg 1972; Huffington 1988; Rubin 1994.

16. There are numerous studies of anthropology and art, though relatively few dealing with European art history. Among these, see Westermann 2005. Other studies exploring various aspects of this topic include Mitchell 1986; Freedberg 1991; Iser 1993; De Bruyn 2006; and Belting 2014.

17. Geertz 1977. Jack Goody (1997) addresses the ways that representations are prone to change during revolutions and their aftermath.

18. Anderson 2002, 4.

19. Sabin 2002, 94.

20. See Mallen 1997–2018. The List of Illustrations includes the related SHSU numbers that begin with the prefix OPP (Online Pablo Picasso). Works in the public French collections works are available at http://www.culture.gouv.fr/public/mistral/joconde_fr. Specific museum websites also carry many of the Picasso images, among these the Museum of Modern Art and the Musée national Picasso (Paris). We are fortunate to have several richly illustrated books on Picasso in this period, notably, Alan Wofsy Fine Arts 2012, 2014; Dagan 2008; McCully 1997, 2011b; Richardson 1991, 1996; Rubin 1994; Seckel 1988; and Staller 2001.

Introduction

1. Boggs, Golding, and Rosenblum 1964, 11; Cooper 1970, 22–23.

2. Seckel 1994a, 222.

3. Rubin 1994.

4. See Barr 1936 and Golding 1994, among others.

5. Barr 1936, 30.

6. Barr 1936, 30; Barr 1946, 56.

7. Daix 1993, 62; Laude 1968; Goldwater 1938; Conrad [1902] 1980, 48; Foster 2004, 14; Barr 1936, 30.

8. Richardson 1991, 475.

9. Barr 1946, 270–71.

10. Steinberg 1988, 12.

11. Chave 1994, 598; Bois 1988b, 130. On aura, see Benjamin 1969, 223. See also Robinson 2013. On art and paradox, see Didi-Huberman 2005; Steinberg 1988, 72n59.

12. Daix 1988a, 136.

13. Rubin 1994, 13. On Picasso's bibliography, see Richardson 1991 and 1996. Leo Steinberg (1972) and William Rubin (1983) invoked this bibliographical view, the latter linking events in part to Picasso's breakup with Fernande Olivier. For related discussion and critique, see Krauss 1981; C. Green 2000, 242; Anderson 2002, 115.

14. Chave 1994, 607 and 598. See also Duncan 1989 and Doane 1991.

15. Steinberg 1988, 72n59.

16. Steinberg 1988, 54.

17. Rubin 1988, 49n69. See also Golding 1994, 106; Golding 2001, 22; Foster 2004, 33; Foster et al. 2005, 78; Grillo 2010, n.p.

18. Bois 1988b, 138.

19. Rubin 1984a, 38.

20. Hal Foster (1985, 46) here draws on Yve-Alain Bois's writing on Picasso's anxieties around the female sex, Medusa tropes, and Freudian castration concerns (Bois 1988b, 130–41, 172–73; Freud 1950). Foster (2004, 36) added to this argument, drawing in part from Richard Wollheim, the fear of Freud's Wolf Man, in which the viewer is "suspended between desire and identification, attraction and anxiety . . . [as well as the] intuitive tapping of the psychic forces of such events as the primal scene."

21. Foster 2004, 12.

22. Foster 1985, 58.

23. Foster 2004, 12, 14; Chave 1994, 606.

24. Clifford 1981, 561.

25. Benjamin 1940.

26. Leighten 2013; more generally, see Benjamin 1999, 248.

27. See, among many others, Fabre 1985; Laude 1968; Leighten 1990; Flam and Deutch 2003; as well as J. Green 2017. Herding (1992) is one of several scholars to link the core stylistic innovations of the work to the avant-garde, and to interdisciplinary questions in literature, philosophy, and psychology.

28. "Pablo Picasso was one of the worst offenders of the 20th century in terms of his history with women," yet his works likely will remain on view, said Yale University Art Gallery director Jock Reynolds in a *New York Times* essay discussing a recent decision to forestall an exhibition of Chuck Close at the National Museum of Art in Washington, DC. Reynolds quoted in Poegrebin and Schuessler 2018.

29. See, for example, Clifford 2007.

30. See, among others, Foster 1985.

31. Rubin 1994, 103; see also Rubin 1984b, 260.

32. Barr 1936, 30.

33. Malraux 1974, 171.

34. C. Sweeney 2004, 19; McBreen 2014, 8. See also Fabian 1983.

35. McBreen 2014, 63.

36. McBreen 2014, 114.

37. McBreen 2014, 49.

38. It was in part because of Picasso's interest in African art that his early dealer, Paul Guillaume, promoted key connections between Picasso's oeuvre and Africa that circulated in the years ahead.

39. Quoted in Seckel 1994a, 252. See also Cohen 2017.

40. Picasso quoted in Fels 1920, 23–26.

41. Richardson 1996, 26; Seckel 1994a, 216.

42. Fitzgerald 2014, 58; Chave 1994, 605.

43. In Debaene 2002, n.p.

44. Richardson 1996, 26. See also Rubin, Seckel, and Cousins 1994, 216.

45. Quoted in Schwarz 1988, 116.

46. Quoted in Gilot and Lake 1964, 248.

47. Richardson 1996, 32.

48. Zervos 1942 in J. J. Sweeney 1941, 191; Seckel 1994a, 216.

49. Daix 1970; Daix 1993, 76.

50. Stein 1933, in passing; Rubin 1994, 103. See also Malraux 1974, 17–19.

51. Daix 1977, 88 and note 28. He is referring here to Barr 1946, 55, 56, 257.

52. Quoted in Chave 1994, 605.

53. Malraux 1974.

54. Daix 1977, 88 and note 28. The hypothesis that he is referring to here is that of Barr 1946, 55, 56, 257.

55. Quoted in Madeline 2006b, 19.

56. Brassaï 2002, 32.

57. Rubin 1994, 115–16: "Some have even suggested particular sources, such as the stylized contorted masks of the Songye people. But apart from the fact that such masks were not visible in France prior to World War I, they are like virtually all other tribal art, consistently symmetrical in character, whereas the croucher's head is nothing if not asymmetrical." Many African masks display asymmetrical facial designs, but these works Picasso likely saw in illustrated books, not in Paris museums or private homes (see chapter 4).

58. Stein 1984, 19.

59. Barr 1946, 59.

60. Hal Foster (1985, 57) cleverly argues that the real "magic" that took place in the exhibition was that of adding commodity value to the African and other works; Picasso and friends had done this long ago.

61. Foster 2004, 12, 45.

62. Foster 1985, 16.

63. Daix 1993, 62.

64. Chave 1994, 607.

65. Rubin 1984b, 250.

66. Malraux 1974, 170.

67. Steinberg 1988, 73.

68. Rubin, Seckel, and Cousins, 1994, 21.

69. Quoted in Rubin 1984a, 23.

70. Quoted in Seckel 1994a, 223.

71. Gedo 1994, 134.

72. Richardson 1996, 11.

73. Gedo 1994, 134.

74. Burgess 1910, 408–9.

75. In Baldassari 1997a, 72n167.

76. Bois 1994, 61.

77. Florman 2012c, n.p.

78. On the importance of autobiography in my own research, see Blier 2001.

79. Anderson 2002, 90.

ONE Setting, Titles, Sources, and Time

1. Pablo Picasso Archives, 87 rue Vieille-du-Temple, 75003, Paris, Box B1, 1906.

2. Pablo Picasso Archives, 87 rue Vieille-du-Temple, 75003, Paris, Box E10, Ateliers (Autres ateliers parisiens) 1906–50.

3. Stovall 1990, 25.

4. US Bureau of Foreign Commerce 1909, 130–31.

5. Bignon and Miscio 2010, 16n15; US Bureau of Foreign Commerce 1909, 130. The latter wage is reported for the following occupations in Paris: blacksmithing, painting, woodworking, plumbing, leatherworking, and landscape gardening.

6. Fitzgerald 1996, 30; McCully 2011b, 236.

7. Flam 2004, 24.

8. Flam 2004, 24.

9. Flam 2004, 24 and 27.