

PABLO PICASSO (1881-1973)

Head of a Woman

Bronze, unnumbered
Sand cast, 1933, probably by Florentin Godard
Light brown patina
Signed (on the base at the back): PICASSO
Inscribed in relief (on the interior): 1933
H: 115, W: 8, D: 9 cm

Provenance

- Collection of André Pusey (1894-1968), given to his wife, Lucienne Pusey (1899-1976)
- By inheritance since 1976

Bibliography

- 1942 ZERVOS : Zervos, Christian, *Pablo Picasso*, vol. II, *Œuvres de 1912 à 1917*, Paris, 1942, no. 574 (une autre épreuve illustrée pl. 266).
- 1971 SPIES : Spies, Werner, *Les sculptures de Picasso*, La guilde du livre Lausanne, 1971, repr. n°12, p.40.
- 2007 EXPOSITION : *De Cézanne à Picasso : Chefs-d'œuvre de la galerie Vollard*, Paris, musée d'Orsay, Réunion des musées nationaux, 2007.
- 2016 EXPOSITION : *Picasso. Sculptures*, catalogue d'exposition, Paris, musée Picasso, 8 mars – 28 août 2016 ; Bruxelles, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 26 octobre 2016 – 5 mars 2017, repr. p.52 (épreuve en bronze du musée Picasso MP235).

- 2016 COLLOQUE : Diana Widmaier Picasso, « Picasso et les fondeurs : un état des lieux », *Colloque Picasso Sculptures*, 25 mars 2016, Paris, Musée Picasso.
- 2021 BERGER LEBON : Ursel Berger, Élisabeth Lebon, *Maillol redécouvert*, 2021, Galerie Malaquais, éditions Gourcuff Gradenigo, Paris, « Florentin Godard (1877 – 1957), fondeur d'art.

"Sculpture is the best commentary that a painter can make on painting." Pablo Picasso

A Stylistic Turning Point
In his sculptures, Pablo Picasso used a variety of techniques and materials. His sculptures were his playing field and artistic laboratory; they took his innovative force and artistic audacity in a sometimes personal, even intimate direction. His development was not linear; he began in contact with sculptors, ceramicists, and metalworkers, and he was, above all, influenced by the incontestable master of the field at the time, Auguste Rodin. Picasso undoubtedly went to the large retrospective exhibition of Rodin's work at the Alma Pavilion during the Universal Exhibition of 1900.

Though he began sculpting relatively late, sculpture is indissociably linked to his work as a whole. He turned to it when he lacked inspiration or was faced with an aesthetic problem that he couldn't resolve. His first sculpture was *Femme assise* (*Seated Woman*) (1902). The Spanish art historian Cirici-Pellicer saw in it a link with Catalonian art of the Middle Ages, particularly the Romanesque frescos from Santa Maria de Tahull held in a museum in Barcelona, which Picasso had seen.[1] In 1903, continuing in the same vein, he created the *Tête de picador au nez cassé* (*Head of a Picador with a Broken Nose*), which features a distinctive face marked by deformity. Picasso created it with two points of view, frontal and profile, each with its own particular expression. The piece allowed Picasso to establish new relationships among forms.

The work presented here is one of Picasso's earliest sculptures and was created at a crucial moment in his artistic development. In 1905, Picasso was working on the portrait of Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) (portrait de Gertrude Stein), and yet, after almost a hundred sittings, he still hadn't found quite the right way to express her facial features. During the summer of 1906, he stopped work on the canvas and completely revolutionized his aesthetic vision. He was then able to return to the canvas and finish the portrait of the celebrated American writer. During the same period, he created *Head of a Woman*; its geometric and archaic features are comparable to those of the Stein portrait.

Head of a Woman is the result of experimentation that he did during the summer in Gosól, a village in the Spanish Pyrenees. There, he abandoned the psychological representation of his blue and rose periods and turned toward purely aesthetic representation. There, also, he became aware of the importance of sculpture, which triggered a renovation in his practice and led to some of his career's most important works, such as *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907, MoMA, New York) and *Tête de Femme (Fernande)* (*Head of a Woman (Fernande)*) (1909 Musée Picasso, Paris).

Head of a Woman reveals his attachment to Gauguin as well as the taste for non-western art—African, Oceanic, and even Iberian—that was brewing in the Parisian avant-garde art world at the time. With its pointed mouth, *Head of a Woman*shows a non-European influence also found in Gauguin's wood carvings, [2] which Picasso would have seen in October or November of 1906 at the large retrospective held at the fourth Salon d'Automne. In this work, Picasso employed a simplification of means and a limitation of volumes, traits that would later characterize the figures that he carved directly from wood.[3]

Head of a Woman is distinguished by its almond eyes with slightly convex pupils, a feature that also appears in many of the studies for the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* and in sketches from what is known as his "Black period." It was during the years of 1905 and 1906 that the Parisian avant-garde, following Matisse (1869-1954) discovered African and non-western art. Picasso was very interested and also, in 1906, discovered ancient Iberian art through the collection of Iberian sculpture[4] recently acquired by the Louvre. In this work, Picasso adopts a mask-like approach that marks his shift from mimetic representation to an expressive stylization. Furthermore, in 1907, he executed a work titled *Mask*[5] that uses the same schematized stylistic elements for the features of the face.

According to Werner Spies, *Head of a Woman* is a "pure object"[6] that rises up before the viewer. He also sees in it a reaction against the canons of Rodin, Bourdelle, and Medardo Rosso.

From 1906 and 1907 on, inspired by this *Head of a Woman*, Picasso radically transformed his art. He turned toward solid, volumetric forms, taking a sculptural approach to the construction and modeling of his bodies, and creating feminine heads that were dramatically asymmetric. Cubism was being born.

The Edition and the Context of the Casting
Approximately ten proofs of this model are known, and three of them are in public collections:

—Washington, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, inv.66.4048[7]
—Paris, Picasso Museum, inv. MP235[8]
—Cologne, Ludwig Museum, inv. ML 01559[9]

Our proof of *Head of a Woman* was passed down by inheritance from the private collection of André and Lucienne Pusey.

The sculpture is a sand cast most likely done by Florentin Godard (1877-1956). Maillol's founder from 1907 on, Godard also worked with the dealer Ambroise Vollard (1866-1939). Vollard began representing Picasso's work in 1901 and became interested in his sculptures in 1910.[10] Based on the verified provenance of other proofs of *Head of a woman*, we know that Vollard supervised the edition, at least during a certain period.

From recent work on Florentin Godard by Elisabeth Lebon, a specialist in bronze founders, cross-referenced with information from Diana Widmaier's work on Picasso's castings, we have learned more about the triangulated relationship among Vollard, F. Godard, and Picasso. There was no contract signed between Vollard and Picasso, and it seems that the artist gave up his rights, which was also the case in the arrangement between Vollard and Maillol. Each bronze is signed but not numbered, and there is no founder's stamp. Vollard editioned the sculptures for potential clients on an individual basis.[11]

This bronze has the numbers "1933" inscribed in relief on the inside, which most likely indicates the year that the proof was cast. This original feature, as no other bronze by Picasso cast by Godard is known to have a date, can be explained as follows: oral tradition says that the date was added at the request of the work's commissioner, André Pusey (1894-1968), who gave it to his wife Lucienne Grias (1899-1977) as a wedding gift on 18 November of that year. Florentin Godard also used this type of relief inscription on bronzes by Manolo and Laurens editioned by Kahnweiler.[12]
At this period, Vollard was not Picasso's principal dealer,[13] but the model belonged to Vollard by tacit agreement, as mentioned above. We know that Vollard continued to order casts of Picasso's works from Florentin Godard until the end of the 1920s, that he continued to sell them through the 1930s, and that he kept all of Picasso's original models until he died in 1939.[14]

Our *Head of a Woman* is most likely a casting by Florentin Godard from 1933, supervised by Ambroise Vollard.

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[1] The Spanish art historian Cirici-Pellicer cites an exclamation that Picasso made standing before these frescoes: "Look! I made those!" (Spies, *Les sculptures de Picasso*, La guilde du livre Lausanne, 1971, p. 11).

[2] See Paul Gauguin, *Tii à la coquille*, 1892, Musée d'Orsay, OA9540.
[3] See Pablo Picasso, *Figure*, 1907, sculpted wood with traces of pencil and paint, Musée Picasso.
[4] See *Sculpture ibérique* (*Iberian Scultpure*), limestone, circa 400-300 B.C.E., Louvre-Lens Museum, AM 15577.
[5] Reproduced in 1971 SPIES, #13, p. 41.
[6] W. Spies, *Les Sculptures de Picasso*, Guilde de Livre de Lausanne, 1971, p. 23.
[7] Provenance: Ambroise Vollard, 1939, then acquired by Joseph H. Hirshhorn in 1958.
[8] Provenance: Studio of Pablo Picasso.
[9] Provenance: Peter and Irene Ludwig, Aachen.
[10] Vollard bought five original models: *Fou* (*Madman*) (1905); *Tête de femme (Fernande)* (*Head of a Woman (Fernande)*) (1906); *Femme agenouillée se coiffant* (*Kneeling Woman Doing Her Hair*) (1906); and *Tête de femme (Fernande)* (*Head of a Woman (Fernande)*) (1909). Cf. 2007 EXPOSITION, p. 195.
[11] There are three account books from the Godard Foundry available for consultation. They cover the periods from 1910-1914, 1924-1928, and 1929-1931, and don't allow for a precise identification of the sculptures. Cf. 2007 EXPOSITION, p. 196 and 200.
[12] In those cases, they were not dates but the initials of the dealer with numbering, for example "KHII."
[13] He was his principal dealer from 1906 to 1911, even if he was not the only one.
[14] 2007 EXPOSITION, p. 198-199.