

CERAMICS by PICASSO

**(Mrs. Charlotte Bergman's Collection,
U.S.A.)**

APRIL 1970



**Ceramics Museum
Museum Haaretz**

Tel Aviv

The 54 ceramic works in this exhibition were made by Picasso in the small potters' village of Vallauris, in southern France, where he has lived intermittently since the end of the second World War. Since August 1947, when Picasso first started making pottery in the workshop (Madoura) of his friend Remié, he has produced thousands of ceramic vessels which he decorated in every conceivable technique of colouring and glazing.

The selection of vessels from Mrs Bergmann's collection on display in this exhibition represents only a small percentage of the total ceramic work of Picasso. We should here like to thank Mrs Bergmann for her kindness in making her fine collection available and so enabling us to show for the first time some of Picasso's ceramics in this museum.

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Much as the works of Giotto and Michelangelo have come to symbolize the highest cultural and spiritual achievements of their ages, so we see in Picasso the most typical representative of 20th century painting. His art signifies a fertile quest giving birth to a wealth of new ideas and inventions of daring originality which left the public amazed and enraged the conservative and hidebound. Picasso has become a myth in his own lifetime.

Today we realize, as we survey the span of his seventy years of artistic production, that Picasso was genuinely involved in only one of the modern avant-garde art movements, namely Cubism of which he is the key-figure. His contribution to modern art is essentially personal; and in spite of the fact that his style in all its phases and manifestations drew a horde of imitators, his work after 1914 refuses to be classified with any definite movement or tendency. Picasso remains supremely himself. It is worth recalling that in all his long and varied artistic career Picasso never at any time severed the link with the external object, though in many cases he would distort it, or break it down into its elements which he would then reassemble, for the object to gain a new meaning in his work. Significantly through all the protean changes of his style the human figure has remained his most common subject.

Two other art forms in which Picasso has successfully tried his hand are sculpture and, after the second World War, ceramic design and decoration. Yet it must be confessed that his work in these fields is in no way comparable to his best painting, neither in inventiveness nor in aesthetic quality.

As a matter of fact, Picasso introduced elaborately shaped vases of his own design in many of his still lifes; and several of these vases, in his canvases from the forties, are very reminiscent of his early ceramic efforts. Naturally an imagined design in a painting is an altogether different proposition from the design of an actual vase, which cannot ignore the functional aspects of a vessel even where this is not intended for use in the ordinary sense.

Instead of allowing himself to get involved with the formal problems of ceramic design, Picasso often prefers to employ a free variant of an existing shape (not infrequently he entrusts the main work of shaping the vessels to the potters of Vallauris, while he limits his task to deciding on colour-tones, glazing, and applying the scratched decoration or summary painted design). Very characteristic of his ceramic decoration are the surprising ways in which Picasso manages to bring the shape of the vessel into intimate relationship with the pictorial subject of its decoration. Here the method is the opposite of his paintings. Whereas in his paintings the point of departure is an object or a figure which in the act of painting is given a new meaning, in his ceramic works he always starts out from the shape of the vessel itself: e.g. the disc of the plate, or the egg belly of the jug; and to this feature of the shape he applies the painted image (sometimes with additional ceramic modelling) which then appears as organically one with the vessel, so that the jug has now turned into a woman and the plate into a human face. Herein also lies the difference between the ceramic work of Picasso and the zoomorphic vessels of the ancient civilizations. On several of his ceramic pieces the influence of Picasso, the draftsman and sculptor, is evident. Here shapes are supple, asymmetrical, mobile and organically alive, whereas in the other vessels Picasso contents himself, as stated, with traditional shapes which he decorates with swift brush-stroke drawings of his favorite subjects: bull-fights, masks, and mythological scenes. These subjects are in no way fortuitous; for in these summary drawings endowed with an almost savage vitality, Picasso expressed his passionate attachment and deep identification with the ancient Mediterranean cultures. Picasso has been able to absorb the spirit emanating from the remnants of ancient art and culture still preserved in southern France, Spain and Sardinia not in the way of an archaeologist but as an artist whose pristine instinct leads him back to his ancient origins.

A. R.

Ceramics by Picasso

Catalogue of Exhibits

1. Glazed plate - goat's head
2. Partly glazed plate - bullfight
3. Plate - bullfight
4. Glazed jug - two horned heads
5. Two-handled jar - woman's face
6. Glazed jug - bullfight
7. Plate (glaze over decoration only) - human face
8. Glazed bowl - satyr's face
9. Glazed bowl - raven
10. Glazed bowl - mounted knight and figure
11. Glazed bowl - mounted horseman
12. Glazed bowl - bird
13. Plate - shepherd with pan-pipe and goat
14. Plate - scene at water-pool
15. Plate - dancers
16. Glazed jar (basket handle) - four human faces
17. Plate - woman's face (in relief)
18. Glazed plate - bullfight
19. Elliptical plate - still-life
20. Elliptical plate - fish
21. Elliptical plate - bird
22. Bird-shaped jug - human face
23. Hole-mouth jar - bull-ring with bullfight
24. Owl-shaped jug
25. Jug - bird drawings
26. Glazed bottle - three human faces
27. Elliptical plate - goat's head
28. Jug with two spouts and handle
29. Bird-shaped jug
30. Glazed bowl - female figures
31. Plate - bullfight
32. Glazed plate - bullfight
33. Jug - birds and fishes
34. Glazed jug - human face
35. Glazed jug - owl's head
36. Bird-shaped vessel - mounted knight
37. Jug - bird drawings
38. Glazed jug - owl's face
39. Bird-shaped vessel
40. Jug - two human faces
41. Plate - dancers
42. Plate - dancers
43. Glazed plate - flower-pot with flowers
44. Plate - figure in profile
45. Partly glazed plate - scene at swimming-pool
46. Glazed bowl - human face and flowers
47. Glazed plate - two flowers
48. Plate - bull in front of tree
49. Plate - bull in front of tree
50. Plate - mounted knight
51. Bird-shaped vessel (glazed)
52. Jug (glaze on inside) - woman's face
53. Fish-shaped vessel
54. Glazed jug - two horned heads.