

# Picasso. The Dance

[from *Le tricorne* to the Suites 347 and 156]

From October 1<sup>st</sup> 2009, to January 10<sup>th</sup> 2010

Bancaja Cultural Centre

C/Rambla Méndez Núñez, 4.

Alicante

Organised by:

**Bancaja** 

el compromiso social

Curator: Juan Carrete Parrondo

## Bancaja presents “Picasso. The Dance” in Alicante

The exhibition includes a selection of etchings belonging to the Bank's collection

Bancaja presents the *Picasso. The Dance* exhibition in Alicante, an exhibition through which the Bank takes its collection of art by the painter from Malaga closer to the Alicante society. The exhibition, that will be on display in Bancaja's Cultural Centre in Alicante from October 1<sup>st</sup> through to January 10<sup>th</sup> 2010, shows a collection of etchings belonging to **Suite 347** and **Suite 156**, as well as some illustrations made by the artist to decorate the play **Le Tricorne** (The three-pointed hat, by Pedro Antonio de Alarcon), which had its premiere in London in 1919. the exhibition shows Picasso's vision of set design and costumes in the world of theatre and dance from 1917 to 1962.

The exhibition comprises a total of 55 pieces of work belonging to Bancaja's collection, of which 12 are from **Suite 347**, another 10 from **Suite 156**, and 33 from **Le Tricorne**. In *Picasso. The Dance*, curated by Juan Carrete, shows Picasso's immersion in the world of scenic arts, which he got involved in under the guidance of Serge Diaghilev, the great businessman of the *Ballets Russes* who was interested in bringing together the best artists in order to stage a ballet of “total art”.

*Picasso. The Dance* can be divided up into two large blocks: the set designs by the painter between 1919 and 1924, where a bourgeois Picasso is more evident, when he had already become successful and joined that notion of total art; and a second stage related to dance, which can be dated between 1968 and 1972. From this period, there are different scenes belonging to **Suite 347** and **Suite 156**. We are able to see an ancient Picasso who reflects on the world of dance. These etchings show the

sadness of a man who loved the feminine body. At this stage Picasso had become a contemplator remembering that era and times gone by.

The exhibition includes the drawing *Picador*, made for the medal of the first backdrop project for the ballet set design **Le Tricorne**. The exhibition is complemented with an audiovisual documentary that shows an historical reconstruction of *Le Tricorne* ballet by the Paris Opera of 1919, made 75 years later.

### **Picasso. The Dance**

Picasso (1881 – 1973) was deeply committed to the scenic arts up until 1924. Between 1899 and 1902 his interest in live music cafes and cabarets was evident. The drawings of *Bailaoras* (Flamenco Dancers) date back to Barcelona in 1899, and from 1901 there are some charcoal drawings of dancers. The watercolours painted in Rome in 1917 can be considered to be authentic annotations of dance steps. His dedication to stage backdrops, decorations and costumes for the *Ballets Russes* became especially important when he joined up with Serge Diaghilev. On these lines, Picasso collaborated directly in the composition of the set designs for different plays and shows:

Picasso took part with the decoration and costumes for **Parade** (1917) by Jean Cocteau and Léonide Massine, with music by Erik Satie, produced for the *Ballets Russes* by Diaghilev. It was premiered on May 18<sup>th</sup> 1917 at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris.

In **Le Tricorne** (1919) he also elaborated different parts of the backdrop, the decorations and the costumes for the ballet by Léonide Massine (from the play by Pedro Antonio de Alarcon), with music by Manuel de Falla, created for the *Ballets Russes* by Diaghilev. One year later, in **Pulcinella** he made the decorations and the costume for the ballet by Léonide Massine (according to *La Commedia dell'Arte*), with music by Igor

Stravinsky (according to Pergolèse), created for the *Ballets Russes* by Diaghilev.

In ***Cuadro Flamenco*** (1921) he was in charge of the decoration and costumes for a series of traditional Andalusian dances, in a show produced by Diaghilev, but in which the *Ballets Russes* did not take part. A year later in ***L'après-midi d'un faune*** (1922) he made the backdrop for the ballet by Vaslav Nijinsky with music by Claude Debussy. In the same year he made the decoration for the tragedy by Jean Cocteau (according to Sofocles) ***Antígone***, produced by Charles Dullin for the Théâtre de l'Atelier, Paris.

In ***Mercure*** (1924), Picasso made the decoration and the costumes for the ballet by Léonide Massine, with music by Erik Satie. That year he was also in charge of the set design for the ballet by Jean Cocteau and Bronislava Nijinska, ***Train Bleu***, with music by Darius Milhaud, produced for the *Ballets Russes* by Diaghilev.

In 1925, attracted by the revolutionary surrealist movement founded by André Breton, he produced one of his two decisive pictorials, ***Les trois danseuses*** by the Tate Modern in London, which can be interpreted as a shout between supplication and ecstasy, perhaps the death dance. It must be pointed out that this performance coincided with the death of his friend Ramon Pichot and perhaps the memory of another friend is also present in this work, Carlos Casagemas who had committed suicide.

After this time, his works involving the scenic arts are very sporadic and scarce.

***Le 14 juillet*** (1936): Backdrop for the play by Romain Rolland. Presented at the *Maison de la Culture* at the Théâtre de l'Alhambra, Paris.

***Andromaque*** (1944): Pyrography on the sceptre for the tragedy by Racine, presented at the Théâtre Edouard VII, París. One year later, he made the backdrop for ***Le rendez-vous***, a ballet by Jaques Prévert and Roland Petit, with music by Pierre Kosma, produced by the Ballets des Champs-Élysées in the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, Paris.

**Œdipe roi** (1947): Decoration for the tragedy by Sófocles. Presented by Pierre Blanchar at Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris.

**Chant funèbre** (1954): Decoration for the poem by Federico Garcia Lorca. Théâtre 347, Paris. Nearly ten years later he went back to set design for **L'après-midi d'un faune** (1962). He made the backdrop for the ballet by Nijinsky (version of Lifar), created for the *Opera de Paris* and presented in 1965 at the Théâtre Capitole de Toulouse. In the same year he was also in charge of making the backdrop and decoration for **Icare** the ballet by Serge Lifar, produced for the *Opera de Paris*.

On the other hand, the scarcity of drawings and illustrations dealing with the subject of set design is notable: in 1954 two lithographs (February 13<sup>th</sup> and March), in 1959 a linoleum and a lithograph (November 17<sup>th</sup>), in 1964 a linoleum (January 4<sup>th</sup>), and in 1967 a drawing (December 30<sup>th</sup>). Only in the years 1968 and 1970 (**Suite 347** and **Suite 156**) did the number of illustrations increase with dance as the subject, but they did not deal with dance itself, but rather as a memory of his youth to overcome his *punishment* of old age, and it is apparent that he feels he is only an active spectator.

### **The Ballets Russes by Diaghilev as total art**

Serge Diaghilev (1872 – 1929) had an extraordinary uniting ability. It was he who got in touch with the most outstanding artists, musicians, dancers and painters. As a result of this artistic union, ballet took on a whole new concept and dimension that allowed it to play a leading role in the configuration of *avant-garde* arts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Diaghilev eclectically brought together the best painters of the time: Picasso, Derain, afterwards Braque, Matisse, Utrillo, Chirico, Rouault, and also the naïfs, the constructivists, the Russian *avant-garde*, and the surrealists (Ernst and Miro). In this way he attained his idea: making “total art”. This objective was attained by mixing tradition and *avant-garde*, rigour and audacity. In the ballets he produced, he brought together the best of each discipline:

choreographers, composers, painters and dancers, which resulted in some exceptional performances.

### **Le tricorne: the backdrop, the decoration and the costumes**

**Le Tricorne** is the second ballet of the four produced by Diaghilev for the *Ballets Russes* with decorations and costumes by Picasso (the first was *Parade* in 1917). The ballet **Le Tricorne** was premiered in London on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1919 at the Alhambra Theatre, with music by Manuel de Falla, choreography by Léonide Massine and libretto by Maria and Gregorio Martinez Sierra. The dancers were Léonide Massine (the miller), Tamara Karsavina (the miller's wife), Leon Woizikowsky (the judge) and Stanislas Idzikovsky (the Dandy). The plot was inspired on the satirical play by Pedro Antonio de Alarcon *El sombrero de tres picos* (the three-pointed hat), that staged the amorous intrigue of a miller, his wife and a judge.

In 1916 Diaghilev and Massine met Falla during their visit to Madrid for a performance by the *Ballets Russes* at the *Teatro Real*. Falla was preparing the play *El corregidor y la molinera* (The Judge and the Miller's Wife) for the company belonging to Gregorio and Maria Martinez Sierra. Owing to the enthusiasm instilled in them, the three took a trip around Andalusia, Seville, Granada and Cordoba, where Diaghilev and Massine, got to know about the Andalusian culture and folklore.

In February 1917 Picasso was in Rome to work alongside Diaghilev and Massine, and Cocteau in the ballet **Parade** where he met the dancer Olga Koklova, whom he married a few months later. It was on his return to Spain when he joined the project for the production of **Le Tricorne**. Diaghilev, Massine and Picasso worked on the choreographic adaptation of

Alarcon's text, which they gave a more socio-political context, the triumph of the people over the decadent monarchy, but only as a pretext to represent the wealth and singularity of Spanish folklore. The cooperation agreement was recorded in the letter from Diaghilev to Picasso on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1919: *"Dear Picasso: I beg you to take charge of the set design for the ballet El Sombrero de Tres Picos with music by M. de Falla for my performances with the Ballets Russes. You will be in charge of the backdrop sketches, the decorations and the costumes and the attrezzo necessary for the ballet. You will have to direct the production work of the decoration and costumes in London and paint any fragments of the backdrop you consider necessary. For the aforementioned work I will pay you the amount of ten thousand francs. You will have to be in London as of May 20<sup>th</sup> 1919 until the premiere of the ballet in London. The sketches will naturally remain your property, the backdrop, decorations and costumes will be mine. Yours sincerely. Sergio de Diaghilev"*.

Picasso arrived in London at the beginning of May 1919 to supervise the work on the backdrop and the decorations. The first project for the backdrop was the dramatic moment of luck while picadors stuck the barbs in the bull. This first project was later replaced by another the depicted a bullfight, with a strong Goyaesque influence: a lady and some picadors who, from a box, watch the mules dragging the dead bull out of the ring after the fight. Picasso suggested to Falla that he composed an overture for the moment the backdrop appeared. He also advises him to include some human voices in the overture, the "Oles" that would remind people of the "Cante jondo" (traditional Andalusian style of singing that gave way to Flamenco singing).

The decorations represented a bridge, the miller's house and in the distance a village under the blue sky. "A combination of geometric shapes presided by the search for the perspective and dominated by the use of a soft earthy colour tones that evoke the Spanish countryside", achieved based on large geometric planes. Pale, almost neutral, the decoration made

the bright colours of the costume stand out even more. Picasso imposed his cubist concept on the apprehension of space and perspective.

The costumes, also with Goyaesque inspiration, paid homage to the different Spanish regions. Very conventional were those of the leading roles, juxtaposed on the body of the dance, conceived as powerful three-dimensional structures in movement, that gave rise to a significant visual shock, identifying them with the geometrical and complex steps invented by Massine.

### **Picasso in the Bancaja collection**

Starting in 1994 with the **Suite Vollard**, Bancaja has acquired significant series of Picasso's graphical work, with this being one of the pillars of our acquisition policy for pieces of art.

The Bancaja collection comprises the following Suites by Picasso:

1.- **Suite Vollard**: comprising 100 etchings, artist's sample made between 1930 and 1937.

2.- **Suite 156**: comprising 156 etchings, which he made 1970 and 1972

3.- **Suite 347**: artist's sample comprising 347 etchings, made in 1973 between March and October.

4.- **Caja de Remordimientos (Box of Remorse)**: comprising 45 etchings. These are the etchings that the artist rejected over the years and which eventually he decided to ink in; dating from 1920 to 1955.

5.- **Retratos de familia (Family Portraits)**: comprising 5 pieces of work made in 1962.

6.- **Fumadores (Smokers)**: 13 etchings made in 1964.

7.- **Suite 60**: 60 etchings made in 1966.

9.- **Maison Close: Le Chocolat** etching in three sole states of iron, made in 1955.

The Bancaja Collection also comprises 6 lino-etchings by Picasso, where he portrayed his last wife: Jacqueline, made in 1963. Another part of the artistic heritage by Bancaja include 90 illustrated books (all of them have attached illustrations by Picasso, an approximate total of 735), which widens and completes the Bancaja Collection.

To this heritage, other significant graphic work by Picasso is to be added, acquired by Bancaja in 2009: eight lino-etchings, three lithographs, two aquatint etchings and three illustrated books, of significant interest is the one titles "Temperatures", the smallest book illustrated by Picasso, with the following dimensions: 2.1 x 4 centimetres. As can be seen, this is a minute book with four illustrations of the same size, etched using the dry point technique on celluloid, and are originals by Picasso.

In this way, the Bancaja Collection of graphic art by Picasso is consolidated as the most significant private collection in the world. The objective of this collection is to disseminate culture and the heritage alternates between temporary exhibitions with the rest periods required to conserve the etchings. Over the last 10 years Bancaja's Picasso collection has been displayed, apart from in the major Spanish cities, in Holland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, South Korea, USA, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Brazil. Bancaja's heritage by the painter from Malaga has been visited by more than a million and a half people.

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