



PICASSO IN CONVERSATION

Pablo Picasso wrote no book of essays or any treatise on painting. His thoughts, concerns, criticism and values are sufficiently clear in his work – most of which was in creative arts and occasionally in written pieces (poetry, plays, letters and dedications). For a summary of his thoughts we need therefore to consult the written records of those who knew him best, of the researchers who personally met him, of the friends who loved him.

Here is a selection of Picasso's sayings expressed in conversations, meetings, interviews and collections in different bibliographic material.

All of them may be looked up at the Barcelona Picasso Museum library (by prior appointment only).

BARCELONA

“There is where it all began... There is where I understood how far I could reach”

(In Pierre Daix, *Picasso Créateur*, Paris, Seuil, 1987, p. 103)

UNDERSTANDING ART

Everyone wants to understand painting. Why not try to understand the songs of a bird? Why does one love the night, flowers, everything around one, without trying to understand them? But in the case of painting people have to understand.

(In Christian Zervos, “Conversation avec Picasso” in *Cahiers d'art*, 7/10, Paris, 1935, p. 178)

Why do you paint in such a way that your expression is so difficult for the public to understand?

[Question from Jérôme Slecker].

I paint this way because here is the result of my thoughts. I have worked for years to get there, and if I take a step backwards, it would be an insult to the public as it is the result of my reflections. I can not make use of a common method simply in order to have the satisfaction of being understood.

(In Jérôme Slecker, “Picasso explains” in *New Masses*, 13 March 1945) ^(*)

The public does not always understand modern art. It's a fact, but this is because they haven't been taught anything about painting. They are taught to read and write, draw and sing, but how to look at a painting has never been considered. That there could be a poetry of colour, a life of shape or rhythm – the plastic rhymes – has been completely overlooked.

(In Anatole Jakovski, “Midis avec Picasso” in *Arts de France*, Paris, 6, 1946) ^(*)

People need to be woken up. Their way of identifying things, shattered. Unacceptable images should be created.

(In André Malraux. *La tête d'obsidienne*. Gallimard, Paris, 1974) ^(*)

CREATION

All interest in art is at the outset. After the outset, it's already the end.

(Collected by Efstratios Tériade, ‘En causant avec Picasso’, in *L'Intransigeant*, 15 June 1932) ^(*)



The painting is not thought and pre-set in advance. While you create it, it follows your thought processes. Once finished, it changes even more, according to the observer's state-of-mind. A painting lives its life like a living being, experiencing changes everyday life imposes. This is totally natural as a painting only lives when a person looks at it. (Christian Zervos, in "Conversation avec Picasso" in *Cahiers d'art*, 7/10, Paris, 1935, p. 173-174)

Before [...] a painting was the sum of additions. For me, a painting is the sum of destructions. I do a painting and then I destroy it. But in the end, it is not lost – the red I wiped from one part appears in another part in another place. (Christian Zervos, in "Conversation avec Picasso" in *Cahiers d'art*, 7/10, Paris, 1935, p. 173)

One never knows what will come out. A painting begins and becomes something completely different. It's strange how little the artist's wishes actually matter. (In Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler "Entretiens avec Picasso au sujet des *Femmes d'Alger*", in *Aujourd'hui*, 4, Sept. 1955) (*)

Success is dangerous. One starts to copy oneself and copying oneself is more dangerous than copying others. This leads to sterility. (In Alexander Liberman, extract from "Picasso" in *Vogue*, New York, Nov. 1956) (*)

For me, every painting is a study. I say to myself, one day I'll finish it; I'll make a finite thing. But as I start to finish, it becomes another painting and I think I'll redo it. In the end, it's always something different. If I retouch it, I do a new painting. (In Alexander Liberman, extract from "Picasso" in *Vogue*, New York, Nov. 1956) (*)

I never do a painting like a work of art. It is always a search, I'm always seeking and there is a logical connection throughout that search. This is why I number them [the works]. I number and date them. Maybe one day someone will thank me for it. (In Alexander Liberman, extract from "Picasso" in *Vogue*, New York, Nov. 1956) (*)

The surrealists were right in this sense. Reality is more than the thing itself. I always search out the surreal. Reality is the way things are seen... A painter who copies a tree is forbidden from seeing reality. I see things differently. A palm tree could become a horse. (In Roland Penrose. *Picasso. His life and Work* (1958). University of California Press, 1981)

Perfection must always be sought out [...] For me, it means always going further and further from one canvas to the next. (In Brassai, *Conversations avec Picasso*. (1964). Gallimard, Paris, 1997, p. 132)

It's not enough to know an artist's works. One must also know when he did them, why, how, in what circumstances [...] I attempt to leave as complete a documentation as possible for posterity. This is why I date everything I do. (In Brassai, *Conversations avec Picasso*. (1964). Gallimard, Paris, 1997, p. 150)

But one constantly changes [...] One can't truly follow the creative act other than via a series of all its variations. (In Brassai, *Conversations avec Picasso*. (1964). Gallimard, Paris, 1997, p. 285)

I see for the others. That is to say I put down on the canvas the sudden visions which force themselves on me. I don't know beforehand what I shall put on the canvas, even less can I decide what colours to use. Whilst I'm working I'm not aware of what I'm painting on the canvas. Each time I begin a picture, I have the feeling of throwing myself into space. I never know whether I'll land on my feet. It's only later that I begin to assess the effect of what I've done. (in John Berger, *The success and failure of Picasso*. (1965). Pantheon Books, New York, 1980, p. 136)

Displace. Put the eyes on the legs. Contradict. Make one eye face-on and the other in profile. The two eyes are always done the same, have you noticed? Nature does many things like me – she conceals them! (In André Malraux. *La tête d'obsidienne*. Gallimard, Paris, 1974) (*)



I look for inspiration in reality. Only reality powers my imagination and gives me new life. (**)

In art, there is not only the aim of representing as per conventional perspective laws. There is the size of the work, the light where the artistic concept itself is located, the position given to it, many other things.
I prefer light above all else.

(In Guillaume Apollinaire, "Propos de Pablo Picasso" in Picasso/Apollinaire, *Correspondence*, Gallimard, Paris, 1992, p. 201)

Painting is stronger than me. It makes me do what it wants. (**)

Each painting, each rhythm, each colour is a battle. A battle against oneself, against painting. (**)

CUBISM

Cubism has stayed on the limits and limitations of painting, without ever trying to go further. Cubism comprehends and uses drawing, composition and colour with the same spirit and in the same way as all the other schools. Our topics may be different, as we have introduced objects and forms into painting that were overlooked before; we have maintained our eyes – and our minds – open to our environment.

(From the interview with Marius de Zayas "Picasso speaks" in *The Arts*, Nova York, 1923) (*)

I merely try to place the greatest humanity possible in my paintings. It is just as valid if it offends some idolaters of conventional human effigies – they just need to look at themselves a little closer in a mirror. What is a face, in truth? [...] What we have in front of us? Inside? Behind? And the rest?

Doesn't everyone see it in their own way?

(In Anatole Jakovski, "Midis avec Picasso" in *Arts de France*, Paris, 6, 1946) (*)

I saw that everything had been done. A break was needed to create a revolution and start again from scratch. I have put myself at the head of the new movement. The problem is how to go beyond, avoid the object and give artistic expression to the result [...] All this is my fight to shatter two-dimensional perspective.

(Alexander Liberman, extract from "Picasso" in *Vogue*, New York, Nov. 1956) (*)

Any artist worthy of the name must give the objects he wants to show the maximum artistic expression possible. For example, if he needs to show an apple and traces a circle, the first level of artistry is shown of the model. It is possible, though, that the artist wants to take his work to a higher artistic level and there, the object to be shown ends in the form of a square or a cube which in no way signifies the negation of the model.

(In Guillaume Apollinaire, "Propos de Pablo Picasso" in Picasso/Apollinaire, *Correspondence*, Gallimard, Paris, 1992, p. 201)

EXPRESSION

Whenever I have had something to say, I have said it in the manner I felt it ought to be said. Different motives inevitably require different methods of expression.

(From the interview "Picasso speaks" in *The Arts*, New York, 1923) (*)

When I paint, my object is to show what I have found and not what I am looking for.

(From the interview with Marius de Zayas "Picasso speaks" in *The Arts*, New York, 1923) (*)



All I want is for my painting to release the emotion
(Christian Zervos, in "Conversation avec Picasso" in *Cahiers d'art*, 7/10, Paris, 1935, p. 174)

I only paint what I see. I've seen it, felt it perhaps differently in other times throughout my life, but I have never painted anything other than what I have seen and felt.
(In Anatole Jakovski, "Midis avec Picasso" in *Arts de France*, Paris, 6, 1946) (*)

I paint how others write their autobiography. My canvases, finished or not, are the pages of my diary.
(In Françoise Gilot- Calmann-Lévy. *Vivre avec Picasso*. Paris, 1965) (*)

VISION OF THE WORLD, ATTITUDE TO LIFE

There is no painting or drawing of mine that does not follow exactly a vision of the world. (**)

Anything without an goal to achieve, a result to conquer, a puzzle to solve, a mystery to penetrate fails to interest me.
(**)

I am proud to say it, I have never considered painting as a simple pleasurable art of distraction – through my weapons of drawing and colour I have always wanted to further investigate knowledge of the world and of man, so that this knowledge frees us more every day.
(In *New Masses*, 24 Oct. 1944, quoted by Pierre Daix, *Picasso créateur*. Seuil, Paris, 1987)

He who worries about judgement by posterity can not be free. Posterity is a hypothesis and the artist does not work on hypotheses. He works on the Here and Now. (**)

My old paintings do not interest me... I am much more curious about those I still haven't painted yet.
[Picasso at 80]
(In Brassai, *Conversations avec Picasso*. (1964). Gallimard, Paris, 1997, p. 352)

The essential thing is to do what you want to do.
(in Olivier Widmaier Picasso. *Picasso Portraits de famille*. Éditions Ramsay, Paris, 2002, p. 292)

(a Olivier Widmaier Picasso. *Picasso Portraits de famille*. Éditions Ramsay, Paris, 2002, p. 292)

* extract from *Picasso. Propos sur l'art*. Edition by Marie-Laure Bernadac and Androula Michael. Gallimard, Paris, 1998

** extract from Thibault, Claude. *Picasso Gauguin. Citations et maximes sur l'art, l'oeuvre, l'artiste*. Éditions Résidence, Paris, 1999.