

## LESSONS

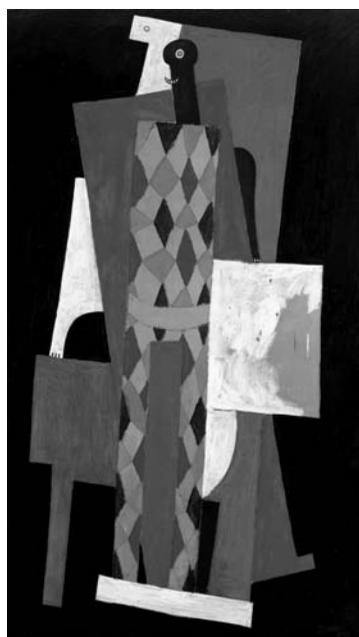
### LESSON ONE: Self-Portrait of the Artist



**IMAGE ONE:** Pablo Picasso. Spanish, 1881–1973. *The Artist's Eyes*. 1917. Pencil on wove paper, 1<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (5 x 9 cm). Museo Picasso Málaga, Spain. © 2006 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Rafael Lobato



**IMAGE TWO:** Pablo Picasso. Spanish, 1881–1973. *Meditation (Contemplation)*. Late 1904. Watercolor and pen and ink on paper, 14<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" (36.9 x 26.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Louise Reinhardt Smith Bequest. © 2006 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



**IMAGE THREE:** Pablo Picasso. Spanish, 1881–1973. *Harlequin*. Late 1915. Oil on canvas, 6' 1/4" x 41 3/8" (183.5 x 105.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest. © 2006 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

## INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, artists have created **portraits** of themselves over the course of their careers. Not only a means of representing one's physical attributes, self-portraiture can also serve to announce one's vocation as an artist, one's place in society, or one's style. While Picasso's work is intimately tied to his personal experience, he created very few direct likenesses. However, he did symbolically portray himself in numerous guises, including **harlequins** and **Minotaurs**, that indicate how he perceived his role as an artist and its relationship to society. This lesson explores some of Picasso's direct self-portraits and symbolic, or disguised, self-portraits.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will be introduced to the genre and elements of **self-portraiture**.
- Students will consider Picasso's use of this genre to convey particular ideas about his role as an artist and the role of an artist in society.

## INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Begin the discussion by asking your students to define "portrait" and "self-portrait." Have they ever had a portrait taken? Have they ever created a self-portrait? Ask your students to think about the choices they can make in how they are represented in a portrait and how they are represented in a self-portrait. Ask them which genre they think might reveal most about them.
- Show your students *The Artist's Eyes*. Ask them to consider how Picasso made this drawing. What can they discern about his working method? Point out that he used many lines to depict his eyes, his eyebrows, and the bridge of his nose. In some areas it appears that he erased his work and shifted lines while attempting to represent his eyes as reflected in a mirror. Picasso chose to focus on his eyes in this image. Ask your students what they can discern about him as a person from his eyes.
- Direct your students to make a self-portrait in a similar manner. Tell them that they may choose to focus on a part of their face that is expressive. Give each student a small mirror and a pencil and paper to create their self-portrait. Ask them to create their likeness based on what they see in the mirror.
- When they are finished with their drawings, ask your students to share their experience with the class.

## IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

- Give your students a few minutes to look at *Meditation (Contemplation)*. Ask them what they think is going on in this drawing. Ask them to describe the characters, **setting**, and **mood**. Ask them to imagine a story that includes these characters.

*Meditation (Contemplation)* was created in late 1904, when Picasso was twenty-three years old and had recently settled in Paris after a period of moving back and forth between France and Spain. He had also recently embarked on a love affair with Fernande Olivier. At this time, Picasso painted almost exclusively at night, while Olivier slept. His own upright conscious meditation on his lover contrasts with her slumbering dream state.

Artists' self-portraits are often set in their studio, and include items of their profession—brushes, palette, easel—that help to communicate what the artist does, the seriousness of the artist's trade, and what the artist's work looks like. Here Picasso chose not to highlight his profession but rather a skill that is essential to it: that of prolonged and intense observation.

- **Ask your students to compare *Meditation (Contemplation)* to *The Artist's Eyes*, two self-portraits by Picasso. Ask them to reflect upon how Picasso represented himself in each image. Ask them what choices they think he made.**

While the drawing reveals the artist's interest in draftsmanship (in looking at and recording his appearance), the fluid watercolor was most likely created while Picasso watched Olivier sleep or from his memory of the moment. In the drawing, Picasso is seated at a table, legs crossed, elbow on his knee, his chin resting on his hand. His head is in profile as he contemplates Olivier. Olivier lies in bed, with one arm raised above her head. Her head, which rests on a pillow, is turned toward Picasso.

- **Give your students a few minutes to look at *Harlequin* without mentioning the title of the work. Ask them to describe what they see. Ask them what they think the painting represents.**

While not a likeness of Picasso, *Harlequin* is a symbolic representation of the artist. Picasso may be said to inhabit this painting without reference to his actual physical appearance.<sup>3</sup> The harlequin is a character from Roman mythology as well as from Italian Renaissance theater, known as *commedia dell'arte*. Traditionally presented in a mask and multicolored, diamond-patterned costume, the harlequin had the capacity to become invisible, to travel to any part of the world, and to take on other forms—gifts bestowed upon him by the god Mercury. As a theatrical character, the harlequin is usually a clown, making jokes and parodying the more serious characters.

- **Ask your students to identify the human form in this image. A black paddlelike shape with a single eye and grinning mouth makes up the head that peers out of the harlequin's trademark diamond-patterned costume, which delineates his legs and torso.**
- **Ask your students to consider why Picasso might have chosen to represent himself as a clown. Ask them why they think he chose the harlequin, and what it might mean for an artist to portray himself as a clown.**
- **Ask them to describe how they think Picasso went about making this painting. Students should consider the shapes, colors and brushwork that he used. It might look at first as if multicolored paper cutouts have been dropped onto a black surface. The rectangular zone to the right, only partially covered with white brushstrokes, is suggestive of a palette, uniting clown and artist.**

This work was painted in Paris in 1915, when many of Picasso's friends were fighting in World War I. As a Spanish citizen, Picasso was not required to serve. His girlfriend at the time, Eva Gouel, was dying of tuberculosis. In a letter to friend, patron, and writer Gertrude Stein, Picasso wrote:

My life is hell. Eva becomes more and more ill each day. I go to the hospital and spend most of the time in the Métro [subway]. . . . However, I have made a picture of a Harlequin that, to my way of thinking and to that of many others, is the best thing I have ever done.<sup>4</sup>

3. See Kirk Varnedoe, "Picasso's Self-Portraits," in *Picasso and Portraiture: Representation and Transformation*. William S. Rubin, ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996), 111.

4. Pablo Picasso, quoted in *Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective*. William S. Rubin, ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980), 179.

- Ask your students to respond to Picasso’s statement in relation to *Harlequin*, considering not only the subject of the painting but also the manner in which it was executed. Ask your students to consider the mood of this painting. How did Picasso use color to create a specific mood for this work?

#### ACTIVITY

Picasso selected the character of Harlequin as a way of communicating another side of himself, a second self—one that is not physically a likeness but rather embodies how he felt or imagined himself. Ask your students to come up with their own *alter ego*. Direct them to paint a portrait or write a short autobiography about themselves as their alter ego.