Spanish artist, chiefly active in France. Picasso was one of the most inventive and prolific talents in 20th-century art. His Blue Period 1901–04 and Rose Period 1904–06 preceded the revolutionary Les Demoiselles d’Avignon (1907; Museum of Modern Art, New York), which paved the way for cubism. In the early 1920s he was considered a leader of the surrealist movement. From the 1930s his work included sculpture, ceramics, and graphic works in a wide variety of media; in his life he created over 20,000 works of art. Among his best-known paintings is Guernica (1937; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid), a comment on the bombing of civilians in the Spanish Civil War.

Born in Málaga, Picasso was the son of a painter José Ruiz Blasco, but used the birth name of his mother, Maria Picasso. His father gave him early tuition, and he attended Barcelona School of Fine Arts, before visiting Paris in 1900, where he settled permanently in 1904. To begin with his work was concerned with the social scene, after the fashion of Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec, but between 1901 and 1904 he turned to austere figure studies, blue being the dominant colour (Blue Period). Circus pictures followed, delicate and more varied in colour (Rose Period, 1904–06).

An epoch-making change in his art followed when between 1907 and 1909, together with Georges Braque, he developed cubism, from the study of Cézanne combined with that of Negro sculpture and primitive art. Les Demoiselles d’Avignon (1907) marks the birth of the cubist movement, to which Picasso adhered until 1914. Like Braque, he practised successively its ‘analytic’ form (construction in depth) and its ‘synthetic’ form (more decorative and two-dimensional in effect). A feature of his cubist still life of 1912–14 – usually depicting musical instruments, friends, and portraiture – was the use of collage. He also created cubist sculptures, using bronze, construction, and other sculpting materials.

He met the Russian ballet impresario Sergei Diaghilev in Rome in 1914, with whom he designed the décor of a number of ballets 1917–1927. He reverted to a neoclassical style 1920–24, in painting and in outline etchings of classical themes. A new and imaginative phase of his art began in about 1925, and coincided with the development of surrealism. Although claiming he was not a surrealist, Picasso's images were often akin to those of the surrealist group. This quasi-surrealist period called the ‘period of metamorphosis’ lasted for about 10 years. The bull, a traditional Spanish emblem of conflict and tragedy, began to appear in paintings and etchings, and in 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, he made use of this symbolism in Guernica (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid), a fierce pictorial comment on a deplorable bombing incident. In later works he moved freely from one style and one medium to another, using all with astonishing freedom and virtuosity.

He practised sculpture, devised metal constructions, designed pottery (from 1946 at Villauris near Antibes) and produced a great number of prints, etchings, aquatints and lithographs. His graphic art is one of his most distinctive achievements, including his illustrations to Ovid and Balzac, his Minotaur etchings, and his aquatints for Buffon’s Natural History (published 1942). His prodigious facility was shown in the 180 drawings of artist and model produced 1953–54.

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A number of female companions, muses, and patrons influenced Picasso's work throughout his career. They include Fernande Olivier, whom he met in 1904, heralding in his Rose Period; the writer Gertrude Stein, who after 1905 would become one of his biggest patrons; the Russian ballet dancer Olga Koklova, who he met in 1917 – they later married and, in 1921, had a son, Paolo; Marie-Thérèse Walter, with whom he had an affair from 1927, and a daughter, Maya, in 1935; the Yugoslavian photographer Dora Maar, who became his constant companion during World War II; the painter Françoise Gilot, who met Picasso in 1943 and became his mistress in 1946, giving birth to their children Claude in 1947 and Paloma in 1949; and Jacqueline Roque, with whom he lived from 1954— they married in 1961. All inspired a profusion of art, frequently as the subject of his work; in 1962 alone he produced over 70 portraits of Jacqueline Roque.

Picasso's restless energy has been impressively conveyed by a film showing him at work. Picasso has affected the whole course of modern art and no later artist of the School of Paris has rivalled him as an international influence, though the non-figurative art of today has found other sources of inspiration. His paintings are widely distributed in the world's principal public galleries and in many private collections. In 1989 Picasso's Pierrette's Wedding was sold for $51.6 million.

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