



A PAINTERLY TRUTH: PEDRO PARICIO AND PABLO PICASSO

BY GIOVANNI CASINI

‘Picasso is the issue, Picasso is the one to beat, Picasso is the fastest gun in the West, the one every budding gunfighter has to beat to the draw in order to prove himself.’¹ This quote by David Sylvester triggered – almost in a literal way – Pedro Paricio’s reaction to the multifaceted oeuvre of Pablo Picasso. While not new to references to the history of art in his work, Paricio now feels ready to confront this inescapable artistic father. ‘In my home island of Tenerife’, the artist explains, ‘we have a saying about our big volcanic peak, Mount Teide: no matter how hard you try to get away from it, Teide is always still there. And it’s the same, I’ve ultimately come to realise, for me as an artist with Picasso.’² And he is not alone in this feeling, considering the number of contemporary artists who have looked at Picasso’s work and used it in fresh and unexpected ways.³ However, Paricio is not trying to rival Picasso; he is not playing the same ‘game of chess’ Matisse was playing with Picasso.⁴ While engaging with Picasso’s work, Paricio is meditating on the act of painting itself, continuing his personal artistic research in this medium.

In a now notorious essay Rosalind Krauss unfolded the interpretation of Picasso’s playing with styles and historical precedents as *pastiche*.⁵ While Picasso could be considered a *pasticheur* in his references to the history of art, we could not draw a similar conclusion for Paricio’s most recent body of works. The paintings of the Andalusian master to which Paricio responds in each of his works are easy to identify because they mostly keep the iconographic element intact, whilst filtering it through a sort of kaleidoscopic lens. With the exception of *Guernica*, Paricio did not select any of the most iconic pictures by Picasso. His exclusion of *Les Femmes d’Alger*, a key work in established narratives of Modernism, reveals the need of the artist to feel a personal connection and an instinctive attraction to the subjects represented

[opposite] Pedro Paricio
Bather, 2018
Acrylic on linen
114 × 110 cm

[left] Pablo Picasso
The Bathers, 1918
Oil on canvas
27 × 22 cm
Musée National Picasso, Paris

[right] Pablo Picasso
Bather with Beach Ball, 1932
Oil on canvas
146.2 × 114.6 cm
Museum of Modern Art, New York





by Picasso. Paricio shows equal interest in all periods of Picasso's career. In spite of Picasso's stylistic exuberance, Paricio's response seems to be of the utmost coherence.

To better understand Paricio's visual language we might start by looking at the canvas *Three Musicians* (2017), based on Picasso's homonymous piece now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In this work, Picasso's cubist vocabulary of flat planes of colour, interlocking and overlapping to create the figures of the three music players, is translated almost literally in Paricio's painting – the only such case in the series. The harlequinesque dress of the central character is made more flamboyant through the use of brighter colours. This clear stylistic proximity reveals a distinguishing feature of Paricio's painting, which is characterised, in Greenbergian terms familiar to the artist, by a search for the flatness of the canvas, while using a fundamentally geometric language. This is particularly clear if we look at the landscape painting *Bather* (2018), the only work in the series whose subject is the result of the combination of two different Picassos (*The Bathers*, 1918, Musée National Picasso, Paris, and *Bather with Beach Ball*, 1932, MoMA, New York), and *Glens* (2018), where an early, 'post-impressionist' Picasso (*Mediterranean*, 1901, Private Collection) looks as if it were put in a vacuum. Even though they refer to very different facets of Picasso's style, Paricio translates them both in his personal visual idiom which never makes use of shaded planes, just flat colour. Even when Paricio employs his distinctive *mélange* of colours, the forms or figures he fills with it never allow the viewer to imagine depth.

Paricio realises drawings as a preliminary investigation into his sources, which he has access to in reproduction. These are not subsequently enlarged on the canvas, as painting has its own realm and it is the painting process itself that guides him, 'like a couple dancing or a boxing match (depending on the painting)'.⁶ Even if working from images in books, Paricio is well aware of the physicality of the actual paintings and of Picasso's technique. How could his approach be different, if we consider Paricio's strong reaffirmation of painting as a still-valid artistic medium? In his life he has had innumerable opportunities of experiencing Picasso's work in person and, in fact, the three pictures *Reclining Woman Reading*, *Woman with Red Hair* and *Woman Leaning* (all 2017) were all inspired by portraits of Picasso's young lover Marie-Thérèse Walter from the 1930s, seen in a recent major exhibition at Tate Modern in London.⁷ Paricio was struck by their eroticism, conveyed also through a sensual layering of pictorial matter.

Picasso's lesson is ultimately a sense of freedom: freedom in experimenting with painterly technique, freedom of changing style without the need of a theory to justify it, freedom in relation to the history of art, which should never become a burden and should be made use of instead. An emblem of freedom is Paricio's response to Picasso's 1901 *Child with a Dove* (Private Collection): while in Picasso's picture the child is



depicted holding the bird, Paricio modifies this gesture into the act of freeing the dove. It is not surprising that the artist has titled this work simply – and ambitiously – *Truth*, because, in his own words, ‘the only way to avoid a derivative art when you confront Picasso is to be true, to be honest and to put yourself out there on the art field. Every painting has to speak about Picasso but also about me, about my life, about my vision of art. It must be 100% honest.’⁸

Giovanni Casini is a Leonard A. Lauder Fellow in Modern Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. He holds an MA and a PhD from the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London. In 2016 he was a Fellow at the Center for Italian Modern Art in New York and in 2017-18 the Guggenheim Museum’s Hilla Rebay International Curatorial Fellow. An expert on the interwar years, Casini has also conducted research and published on art from the 1950s in England, Italy and France. Recent publications include an article on Richard Hamilton in the Burlington magazine (2015) and a chronology in the Museu Picasso’s exhibition catalogue The Crystal in the Flame. Cubism and War (2016).

[left] Pablo Picasso
Child with a Dove, 1901
Oil on canvas
73 × 54 cm
Private Collection

[right] Pedro Paricio
Truth, 2018
Acrylic on linen
81 × 65 cm