



PEDRO PARICIO

BY ALASTAIR SMART

Born in Tenerife on the Canary Islands in 1982, Pedro Paricio moved as a young man to the Spanish mainland, where he completed a degree in Fine Arts at the University of Barcelona. On graduation, after initially toying with the idea of being an art critic or curator, he chose to become a professional artist – specifically, a painter.

Paricio had his first solo exhibition in 2006 at Espacio Joven in the historic city of Salamanca. His early work strove to achieve a synthesis between Pop Art and abstraction – or, in the artist’s own words, ‘to combine the ideas of Clement Greenberg with the style of Keith Haring’.

In 2010, spotting Paricio’s originality, talent and immense potential, representatives from Halcyon Gallery in London signed him up. By the time of his first exhibition there a year later, *Master Painters*, his style and subject matter had noticeably evolved. He had begun a dialogue with art’s Old and Modern Masters – the likes of Velázquez, Caravaggio and Klimt – whose famous works he adapted and made his own (often ironically, but always respectfully). He introduced personal touches such as Stetson hats, blanked-out faces and abstract passages in harlequin colours.

Juan Manuel Bonet, erstwhile director of the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid, described Paricio’s work as ‘the freshest thing I’ve seen in the emerging contemporary art world in 30 years’. Likewise, Paricio was included in Francesca Gavin’s 2011 book *100 New Artists* as one of the figures who had most shaped international art in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

For several years, Paricio divided his time between London, Barcelona and Tenerife. The ancient traditions of his home island provided the inspiration for his 2014 show at Halcyon Gallery, *Shaman*. Further exhibitions came thick and fast, many in his homeland at such prestigious venues as the Institute of Culture and Arts in Seville. A Paricio retrospective was held in 2014–15 at Tenerife Espacio de las Artes.

The artist has never been one to rest on his laurels; ‘To change is to stay alive’, he says. For *Dreams*, a 2016 show at Halcyon Gallery, Paricio presented what is his most political series to date. Subjects included gun crime and the international refugee crisis. Changes have come in his personal life too: he has returned to live full-time in Tenerife and set up a studio in the north of the island; and since the birth of his son Theo and daughter Gracia, the children have started to pop up in some of his paintings.

Of late, the artist has been hard at work on *Paricio • Picasso*, a new Halcyon Gallery show inspired by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and featuring mostly paintings, but also his first forays into printmaking and sculpture. Throughout his career he has adapted works by

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major artists, the *Master Painters* exhibition being but the most concentrated example. Only now, however, after more than a decade, does Paricio say he feels ready to take on Picasso: the man art critic David Sylvester dubbed 'the fastest gun in the West', who Paricio himself calls the 'monster' of modern art.

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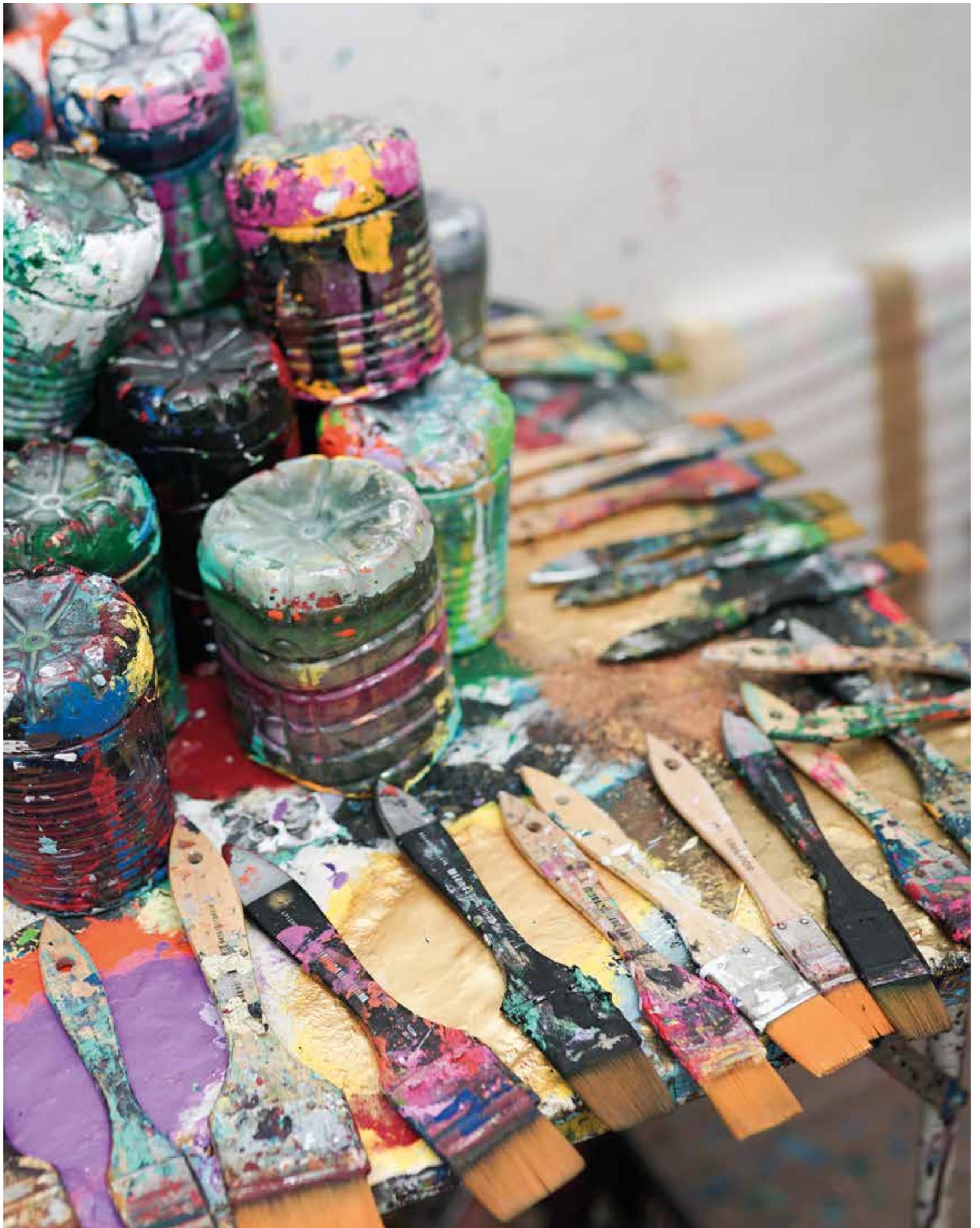
Alastair Smart: Your new Halcyon Gallery show features a large number of paintings in direct response to famous ones of Picasso's. Throughout your career, you've made works in homage to Old or Modern Masters – such as *Self-Portrait after Velázquez (Golden Rider)* (2011), inspired by Velázquez's *Philip IV on Horseback*; *I am Painting* (2011), inspired by Caravaggio's *Narcissus*; and 'After Francis Bacon', a whole series inspired by the eponymous Anglo-Irishman's art. Only really now, though, are you tackling Picasso. Why the wait and why is this the right time?

Pedro Paricio: For many years, I tried to distance myself from him – to do my own thing, create my own path. I think contemporary art is pretty much unimaginable without Picasso; not just for the work he made but for his notion of what an artist is and can be, for his whole outlook. When Banksy infamously had his painting *Girl with a Balloon* shred itself at auction [Sotheby's, October 2018], he used a quote from Picasso to explain his actions: 'The urge to destroy is also a creative urge'.

In my home island of Tenerife, 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. He's always there, even if I try to avoid him, and even where you might not obviously expect him to be: for instance, when I did my series on Francis Bacon. Which twentieth-century artist did Bacon revere? Picasso. He is my Teide. But only very recently have I had the courage and experience to face up to him.

AS: In a Freudian way?

PP: In part, yes. He's the father figure I wish to confront. But I wouldn't go so far as to say I want to 'kill' him in any sense! In art, it's not a question of defeating anyone. Perhaps the best way of putting it is that competition is always 'with' rather than 'against' another artist. I like to think there's a torch that's passed on from one artist or generation to another. We inherit the fire from our predecessors and duly bequeath that fire to our successors. Picasso himself was conscious of this idea: he reworked paintings by several of the greats before him, from Velázquez to Manet.



AS: Do you think the fact you're Spanish increases the size of Picasso's spectre for you?

PP: This goes beyond even nationality. Picasso was from the same *region* of Spain as my mother – Andalusia – and I used to spend summers there as a child. So you could say we both shared in that region's sun, sea, culture and folklore. How that manifests itself in art isn't easy to prove, but I think it does mean he's closer to me than to artists from elsewhere, yes.

AS: The Halcyon Gallery show also features engravings you've made in response to Picasso's prints series, the *Vollard Suite*, as well as posters for imagined exhibitions, many years from now, where works by you and him are shown side by side. Should we take the latter at face value?

PP: I suppose you might say the posters are slightly more conceptual than my art is usually, but the sentiment is genuine. In 100, 200 or 300 years' time, I won't be around myself, but I'd love my paintings to represent me. If they're showing alongside Picasso's, I'll know my work has been successful and meaningful in society. It's an aspiration no different from Picasso's own: he wanted his paintings to hang, one day, in the Prado Museum alongside those by El Greco and Velázquez.

AS: In an interview with the poet Alejandro Krawietz in 2014, you made a number of statements about your dedication to your medium: 'I didn't consciously choose painting, painting chose me', for example, and 'You paint because it's what you are, and without painting I'm nothing'. How, then, to explain your unprecedented move into sculpture with new series, 'Quantum'?

PP: It's not quite unprecedented. As an art student, I experimented with a lot of different media, sculpture being one of them – but, yes, I take the point that these are the first sculptures of my professional career. From the beginning, painting was kind of a dogma for me. I took a positive decision to focus on it, because I felt it was a medium that still has very much to offer, even though the fashion in the late twentieth century was for video, performance, installation and the like. I took it upon myself to show the world, 'Guys, it's still possible to paint'.

After many years, now I feel ready to try something different – sculpture – but I've absolutely no plans to leave painting behind.

AS: But was there a particular trigger for the change? I'm wondering why now, suddenly, you felt ready to make sculptures.

PP: I'd say one big factor was my recent 'encounter' with Picasso, which forms the core of my new exhibition at Halcyon Gallery. By getting close to so many of Picasso's works, I felt his inspiration. He made me feel free again. His art was so brilliantly wide-ranging and liberated, it instilled in me the sense that I could do whatever I wanted as an artist. 'Explanations aren't necessary; do what you like', was the message. And with that, I felt the freedom to turn to sculpture.

AS: Is it fair to say the sculptures have also been inspired by your interest in quantum physics? The name of the series suggests so.

PP: I appreciate the argument that learning isn't necessary for the painting of a good picture. But I believe just as firmly that an artist doesn't begin from zero. Art exists in the world, and quantum physics presents a rich understanding of that world. Whereas in traditional physics a problem has a solution, in quantum physics a problem can have a variety of solutions at the same time. Things can be in multiple states at the same time too.

AS: Like Schrödinger's Cat, in the famous riddle of the feline put in a bunker filled with poisonous gas?

PP: Exactly, the cat that is simultaneously dead and alive. I take a similar approach to understanding art. Too many critics and curators are too linear in their analysis, saying definitively that a work is x or a work is y. As far as I'm concerned, an artwork never has a single meaning. In the vein of quantum physics, a piece has multiple meanings at the same time: as many meanings as there are people viewing it, because everyone's reaction is equally valid.

AS: With their intricate combinations of geometric shapes in bright, Pop Art colours, can the sculptures be considered extensions of your paintings? Such combinations have become a signature motif of yours over the years.

PP: Yes, I think those familiar with my career will see the sculptures as a continuation from my paintings rather than a departure.

AS: To be specific, in your early paintings you often used the geometric shapes as passages of abstraction in works that otherwise were figurative – the face and hands of the subject in *The Big Painter* (2011), for example, or the mountain in *Shipwreck in Front of the Teide* (2011). Then, with the 2016 series 'Particles', you isolated the geometric combinations to create paintings of pure abstraction. Now it seems you've gone a step further – with *Let Me Get Lost Mama* (2017) and the other 'Quantum' works – by creating sculptures of pure abstraction.

PP: I see some similarities with the rise of Cubism a century ago. That was a movement that revolutionised ways of seeing just as much as the Renaissance artists had done with the discovery of perspective. Picasso, Braque and their peers created a rupture from art of the past: they de-composed reality, breaking down colour and form, developing a visual language of fragmented, geometric planes. I think one could see my progression towards the 'Quantum' sculptures (in the timeline you just gave) in a similar vein of de-composition. I've come to the point where I've broken down colour and form now too.

AS: Given the rapid advance of the digital sector, do you think sculpture and painting will still be around in another century's time?

PP: I'm confident, yes. Paintings and sculptures have an energy and a vibrancy that just can't be replicated digitally. I believe that human fulfilment comes from *real* things not technological ones – and the more technological our world becomes, the more we'll crave what's real.

It was interesting to hear how Steve Jobs strictly limited his children's use of iPads and iPhones, aware that technology has a place in modern society but certainly not an exclusive one. Painting has been around for 40,000 years already; I remain hopeful there will be Paricios to see alongside Picassos in museums of the future!

Alastair Smart is Associate Editor of christies.com, the online news, features and video channel for Christie's auction house. He also works as a freelance art critic for a variety of publications, such as the Spectator, The New European and Mail on Sunday. Previously he was Arts Editor of both the Daily Telegraph and Sunday Telegraph newspapers.