

THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Fact Sheet

Dora Maar by Pablo Picasso

Title:	Dora Maar
Maker:	Pablo Picasso (1881 - 1973)
Medium:	Oil on canvas
Date:	1940
Museum No:	On loan
Gallery:	I

The Artist

Picasso can fairly be called a giant of 20th century art, and one who took centre stage amongst the artistic avant-garde up until the Second World War. His art is diverse, both in style and media. It ranges from his early Blue and Rose periods, through works influenced by the native art of Africa and Polynesia, which in part led to his cubist style, developed in collaboration with Georges Braque. His personal life was equally varied, dominated by a series of, often passionate, relationships with women who provided great inspiration for his work. At the time this portrait was painted he was involved with two women: Marie Thérèse Walters who was the inspiration behind paintings like the sensuous *Bather with Beach Ball* of 1932, and Dora Maar, the Surrealist painter-photographer he met in 1936 who is portrayed here.

The Sitter

The poet Paul Eluard introduced Picasso to Dora Maar. During their seven year relationship, his portraits of her range from the intimate, through a series of classical and somewhat melancholic canvasses to the latter portraits where the sitter's dark features are violently contorted and depicted in bright acidic colours. She was the muse for Picasso's 'Weeping Woman', which may describe their turbulent relationship, but is also thought to reflect the political turbulence and suffering caused by the Spanish Civil War and the outbreak of the Second World War. In early 1937 Dora Maar photographed the painting of *Guernica*. This painting was Picasso's response to the destruction of the small Basque town of that name, which was bombed for three hours, killing or wounding 2000 civilians- an atrocity carried out by the German Condor Legion. Maar's features can be seen in the face of the lamp-bearing woman in *Guernica*. After their relationship was over Dora Maar said that after Picasso's post-cubist period there were five factors that determined his way of life and likewise his style: the woman with whom he was in love; the poet, or poets, who served as a catalyst; the place where he lived; the circle of friends who provided the admiration and understanding of which he never had enough; and the dog who was his inseparable companion and sometimes figured in the iconography of his work.

The Portrait

From early in his career, and particularly with cubism, Picasso abandoned traditional methods of representation.

'Why should I try to imitate nature? I might just as well try to trace the perfect circle.'

In his portraits, the head and all of the features are invariably present, but they may be reshaped and displaced. In these works Picasso strove to represent the complexity of the inner and outer reality of the individual.

'Portraits should possess not physical, not spiritual, but psychological likeness.'

Picasso's portraits not only reveal the intense and turbulent emotions of the sitter, but also reflect the feelings of the artist. Dora was not the only partner of Picasso's to see herself distorted as love soured.

Whatever the source of the emotion that drives me to create, I want to give it a form which has some connection with the visible world, even if it is only to wage war on that world.'

This portrait dates from 1940 and appears to be an affectionate, if somewhat tense, portrayal of Dora.