

PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION

Press Release

PICASSO. On the Beach

Curated by Luca Massimo Barbero

August 26, 2017 – January 7, 2018

Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Project Rooms

From August 26, 2017 through January 7, 2018 the Peggy Guggenheim Collection presents the exhibition *PICASSO. On the Beach* curated by Luca Massimo Barbero. The exhibition will be installed in the museum's Project Rooms.

The exhibition is a collaboration with the Musée national Picasso-Paris, and focuses on one of Peggy Guggenheim's favorite works of art, Picasso's *On the Beach (La Baignade)*, now part of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice. The show gathers a selection of ten drawings, three paintings and a sculpture, made by Picasso between February and December 1937, and is a part of the initiative of the Musée national Picasso-Paris *Picasso-Méditerranée*, an international cultural event, from Spring 2017 through Spring 2019. Over sixty cultural institutions have come together to develop a programme around the work "obstinément méditerranéenne" of Pablo Picasso. Initiated by the Musée national Picasso-Paris, this journey into the creation of the artist and across the places which inspired him, aims at strengthening ties between all the shores that touched his career.

In early 1937, Picasso responded forcefully to the Spanish Civil War. This is clear in the aquatints *The Dream and Lie of Franco*, examples of which are in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection and that will be on view in the exhibition. This is also evident in the preparatory sketches for *Guernica*, the mural-scale painting dedicated to the Basque capital that was destroyed on April 26 of the same year by Nazi-Fascist aerial bombing acting in support of General Francisco Franco with the goal of overturning the government of the Spanish Republic. *Guernica* was completed in June 1937 for the Spanish Pavilion at the International Exposition of Paris. Even so, during the same period, Picasso executed works that do not reveal, at least not in an obvious manner, his preoccupation with the political events that were consuming Spain. *On the Beach*, signed and dated February 12, 1937, recalls specifically the style of his paintings from the 1920s, one of which belongs to the Guggenheim New York, *Three Bathers*, 1920. Painted at Le Tremblay-sur-Mauldre, a town not far from Versailles, *On the Beach* depicts swollen anthropomorphic figures of preposterous shape, almost sculptural in consistency, typical of beach scenes completed in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This series of works was inspired still by Marie-Thérèse Walter, Picasso's muse and omnipresent life partner in the thirties, even though he had begun secretly to live with Dora Maar. The two bathers, whose attention is focused primarily on playing with a toy boat, are simultaneously graceful and monstrous. In a similar manner, the composition is calm and relaxed, suspended in its tender lyricism, but also menacing, given the presence on the right of a figure on the horizon. A sense of impotent voyeurism emanates from the

PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION

man observing the girls, with their florid forms and exaggerated sexuality, bring-ing to mind classical myths such as the Bath of Diana or the Old Testament story of Susanna/Shoshana in the Book of Daniel. The preparatory sketch that belongs today to the Musée national Picasso-Paris, executed on the same day as the painting, will be displayed next to the painting for the first time together with another preparatory sketch, from a private collection, that Picasso gave to Dora Maar, and which is on view for the first time.

With a subtle play of connections, the reconstruction of the creative process that brought Picasso to paint *On the Beach* is applicable to *Femme assise sur la plage* a masterpiece in the Musée des Beaux Arts de Lyon, dated February 10, 1937. This remarkable oil on canvas, executed only two days before the Venice painting, is a demonstration of the unceasing investigations and experiments that would be successfully resolved in *On the Beach*. The canvas shows a nude bather on a beach in a surprisingly banal position. Combined with the still lyricism of the atmosphere, she anticipates the right-side bather-figure of the Guggenheim painting.

The narrative of the exhibition concludes with a third superb work by Picasso. *The Grande Baigneuse au livre* now in the Musée national Picasso-Paris, was painted almost a week after the Venice *On the Beach* on February 18, 1937, at Le-Tremblay sur Mauldre, where Picasso had bought an old farmhouse. *The Grande Baigneuse* is transformed into a large, white-gray sculptural form. The legs are crossed and the head is stooped over a book, supported by elbows. Once again, the figure is imperturbable, immersed in a silent environment; her barely delineated face is enigmatic. Something however seems to change, driven by Picasso's restless curiosity. With the third *Grande Baigneuse*, he abandons, at least in part, the formal delicacy – still emphatic and distorted – of the previous bathers. Instead, he favored construction of the form in more static surfaces in a style that is stubbornly angular, almost cubist.

With his numerous depictions of beaches and bathers – a subject matter that tends to cling to each new formal and iconographic departure - Picasso certainly did not discover a new subject, but rather identified and revealed the only real outdoor theme of his entire work. Like the majority of his motifs, the concept of the beach is approached in both a traditional and modern manner. Giorgione, Titian, Ingres, Puvis de Chavannes, Manet, Cézanne, Matisse, Renoir are all artists to whom Picasso turned for inspiration for his figures and structural compositions. The nude in motion is recurrent and of primary importance for all figurative artists. Picasso's novelty here, however, is not a function of his subject matter but rather, as was characteristic of the Spanish genius, by uniting individual experience with tradition, he created something not only new but absolutely revolutionary.

PICASSO. *On the Beach* is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue, in English and Italian, with an essay by the curator Luca Massimo Barbero.

PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION

The exhibition program of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection is supported by the museum's Institutional Patrons - EFG, Lavazza, and the Regione del Veneto, by Guggenheim Intrapresæ and by the Peggy Guggenheim Collection Advisory Board. Education programs surrounding the exhibition are funded by the Fondazione Araldi Guinetti, Vaduz.

Institutional Patrons:

EFG
Lavazza
Regione del Veneto

guggenheim
intrapresæ

Acqua di Parma + Aermec + Allegrini
Apice + Arclinea + Arper + Corriere della Sera
Distilleria Nardini + Florim + Foodies Bros
Gruppo Campari + Hangar Design Group
Istituto Europeo di Design + Mapei + MST-
Gruppo Maccaferri + Orsoni + Reggiani
Illuminazione + René Caovilla + Rubelli
Safilo Group + Swatch

Picasso-Méditerranée:
an initiative of the Musée national Picasso-Paris

