

PABLO PICASSO was born in 1881 and is arguably one of the most significant figures in the 20th century – his impact is still being felt today. He was a Spanish painter, sculptor, printmaker, ceramicist, stage designer, poet, and playwright who spent most of his life in France. As one of the greatest and most influential artists of the 20th century, he is known for as a leader in the Cubist, constructed sculpture, and collage movements. Among his most famous works are the proto-Cubist *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1911), and *Guernica* (1937).

ANDRÉ VILLERS is a French photographer and artist, born in 1930 in Beaucourt in northeastern France. In 1947, following a bone tuberculosis, he was hospitalized in Vallauris where he was introduced to photography. He met Pablo Picasso in Vallauris in March 1953. Villers produced many portraits of the painter, and their relationship evolved into hundreds of images based on photographic experiments that were developed into *Diurnes*. Since then, his personal photographic work is based upon experimentation with shadows and transparencies. André Villers has been a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres since 2006.

JACQUES PRÉVERT, born in 1900, was a celebrated French poet and screenwriter that participated actively in the Surrealist movement. His works remain popular in the French-speaking world, particularly in schools. His poems are often about life in Paris and life after the Second World War. They are widely taught in schools in France and frequently appear in French language textbooks published worldwide. His most regarded films formed part of the poetic realist movement, and include *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945).



LOCATION: The Marion and Wayland H. Cato Jr. Center for the Arts
161 Calhoun Street, 1st Floor (on the corner of St. Philip & Calhoun Streets)
College of Charleston, School of the Arts, Charleston, SC 29401
HALSEY.COFC.EDU

PARKING: Available in the St. Philip and George Street Garages

GALLERY HOURS: Mon - Sat, 11 am - 4pm, or by appointment
OPEN UNTIL 7PM ON THURSDAYS! Free and open to the public.

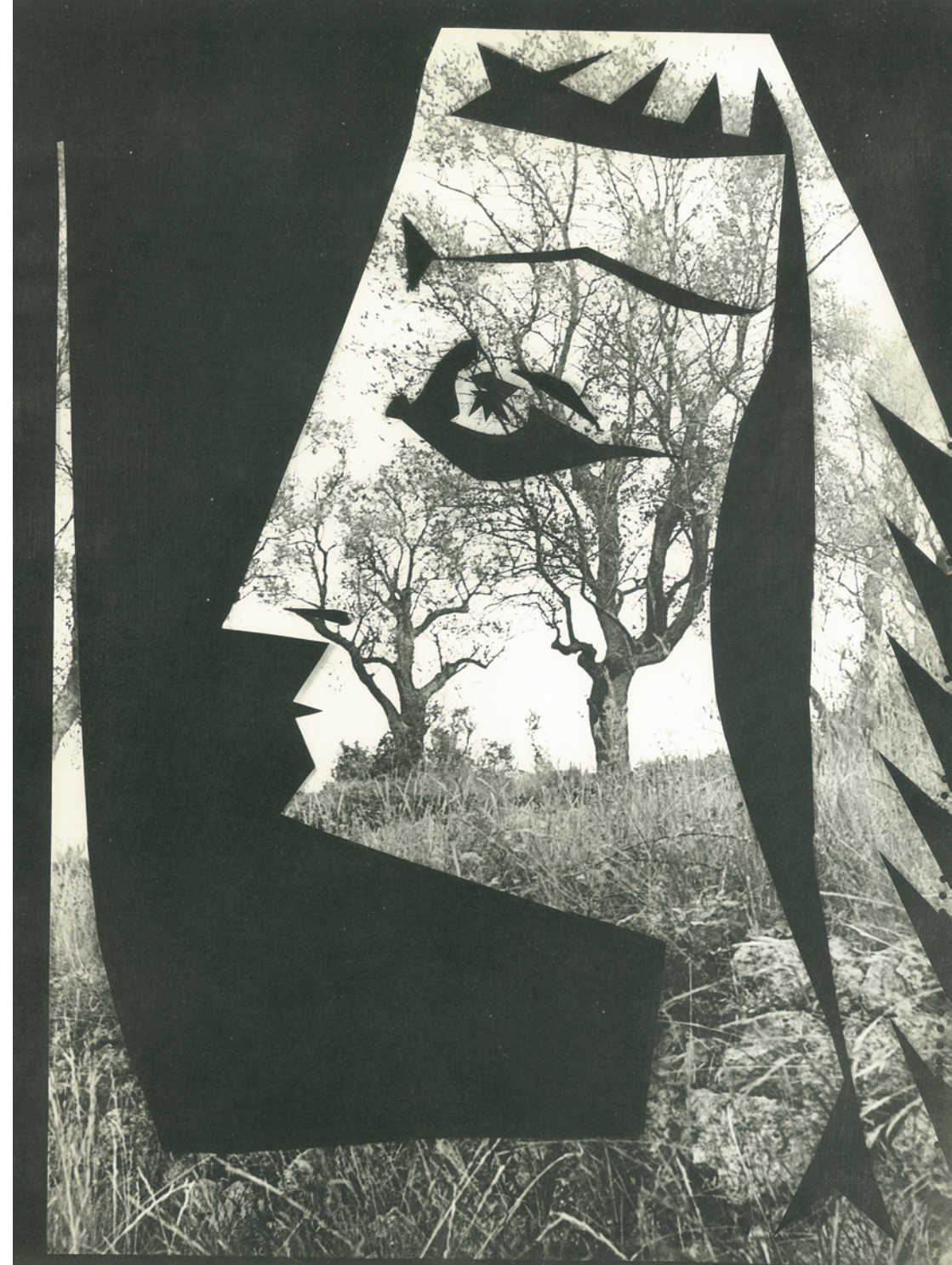
CONTACT: (843) 953-4422 or halsey@cofc.edu

BLOG: Join the conversation! halsey.cofc.edu/EDU/blog

BOOK A GUIDED TOUR: Free tours are led by knowledgeable and experienced guides and can be adapted to different time lengths, group sizes, and ages. Contact our curator of education and public programs, Lizz Biswell at BiswellL@cofc.edu or (843) 953-5957.

OUR MISSION: The Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston School of the Arts provides a multidisciplinary laboratory for the production, presentation, interpretation, and dissemination of ideas by innovative visual artists from around the world. As a non-collecting museum, we create meaningful interactions between adventurous artists and diverse communities within a context that emphasizes the historical, social, and cultural importance of the art of our time.

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Unknown Picassos: Diurnes

October 17 – December 6, 2014



The “Unknown” Picassos

Diurnes, the opposite of *nocturnes*, was published in Paris in 1962 as a 12” x 16” decorated box, containing thirty equally large photogravure images by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), working with a then young unknown photographer, André Villers (b. 1930), and accompanied by a poetic screenplay text by Picasso’s close friend, the Surrealist French poet, screenwriter, composer, and collage artist, Jacques Prévert (1900-1977).

The Surrealistically complex and delightfully satirical dramatic text by Prévert has been translated by Charleston-based artist Jean-Marie Mauclet, and presented with the thirty stunning black and white “decoupages et photographies.” The images in the gallery represent a cast of characters, The Bride, just as beautiful as she needs to be, the dazed and nuclear-bomb-happy General, a frightening Werewolf, a favorite and wise-speaking She-goat, and Picasso’s second wife, Jacqueline Roque among others. They each step forward and “read” their parts in what Prévert called an “outragedy.”

Within the exhibition at the Halsey Institute, viewers experience the entirety of this completely contemporary installation, see the constant interplay of backgrounds and figures within each work and their reflections across and around the gallery, let their minds work as well as their eyes in puzzling out the deep double/triple/contradictory meanings imbedded in Prévert’s apparently playful words and Picasso’s equally playful images.

Pablo Picasso and Jacques Prévert shared a life-long friendship. Both men were strong activists, in art and life: against all forms of war, the military, nuclear weapons, police brutality in city streets, established religion, intellectuals, and art critics; and in support of all aspects of the beauty they saw in natural life from the “smallest louse on the head of a bald man,” to the entire Earth itself, all its cycles, its plants and animals, from delicate maidenhair ferns to entire landscapes, from bulls and horses, dogs, cats and goats, to the common man, woman, and child, trying to live each day with honest emotional responses to what life they had.

This “play,” *Diurnes*, highlights in particular Picasso’s life, with Villers and Prévert, from 1954 to 1961, living on the Côte d’Azur, in a beautiful old villa in the Californie area of Cannes. Along with numerous paparazzi constantly following him, photographing the “crazy old man of Vallauris,” where Picasso was working in the ceramics facility, was a very young man, with a round face and curly black hair, who had joined the crowds. André Villers was recovering from tuberculosis of the bone in a nearby asylum and had been given some lessons in photography for occupational therapy.

Villers showed Picasso a curious image in which he had bent the paper while printing a portrait of a fellow patient, creating a distorted image, intriguing the artist, who had worked with many of the great photographers of his day in a similar way. Eventually handing Villers some of his paper cutouts, made for the delight of his young grandchildren, Picasso requested he “Play with these.” The resulting superimpositions of Villers’ textural landscape views – the beach, old stone walls, trees, and distant

landscapes – with layers of cutouts and extraneous items, like feathers, plaster, and rice, exploited the ultimate transparency of the young man’s photogram method. As art historian and Picasso authority Anne Baldassari writes in her book *Picasso and Photography: The Dark Mirror*, “The image thus reunites in a simultaneously coherent and contradictory fashion, the flat shape of the cutout, (and) the perspective specific to photography.” She notes that Villers emphasized in his notes to her that Picasso seemed to maintain an almost uncanny advanced control over his still virtual images, perfectly mastering effects of cutouts, collage, and transparency even in their roles as negatives.

Jacques Prévert, the Narrator, living nearby, had already written poems about Picasso and his work, and published them with photos of Picasso by Villers. After Picasso celebrated his 80th birthday, Prévert was brought into the Picasso-Villers “game.” He begins the final play by announcing to the audience, “If there were only Seven Wonders of the World on the earth, they would not be worth going to see. Not to speak of the sea, women or the sun, every stone has its history.”

Breaking the written play into sections with the repeated word “Daytime . . .” Prévert introduces Villers as the photographer, and then Picasso, as choreographer and composer, adding, “whether he disfigures, figures or transfigures, nature does not mind a bit.”

The double portrait of The Bride and The Man in Lace, “he who did not make the Bride too beautiful nor not beautiful enough, but simply just as beautiful as she is,” can easily be seen as Jacqueline and Picasso, who had secretly married in Vallauris in 1961.

The Narrator then introduces four “little fauns” or “baby leprechauns.” These imaginary natural beings begin the puzzles of words and meanings endemic to Prévert’s personal poetry: using Latin terms Hic and Nunc, Here and Now, and Urbi and Torbi, an ancient Roman and present-day Papal phrase used for opening special speeches, City and World. The viewer must now begin to read carefully, to “play” with these two great artists. Think about the apparently simple statements made by Urbi and Torbi: one declares, “Without a doubt, I am the one who may be.” Then the other says, “Maybe I am the one without a doubt.”

Examined closely, these are simple phrases, which, when read for actual meaning, allow the “may be/maybe and Without a doubt” to cancel each other, then are reversed once more to add to the ridiculousness which suddenly hits the careful reader. Prévert is poking fun at all great philosophical proclamations, echoing, “I think, therefore I am” for instance, by making a contradictory set of sentences which sound profound upon first reading.

Perhaps the most damning, and much too relevant for comfort to our world today, is the section of the play beginning when a rooster’s shrieks wake a dozing General, sleeping by a graveyard. The General dreams of the “Ultimate atom, the prestige of the war” which turns the “landscape to chaos.”



Instead of “Daytime . . .” separating the next three sections, Prévert uses a pun on street corner newsboys calling out “Special Edition!” Now the Narrator’s segments are headed with “Spatial Edition!”

“Hear the Howling of the paperboys”: selling news about recent police brutality in the streets of Paris, about the commercial capitalists selling “the latest winter fashion in Nuclear Shelters,” and especially comparing the puny atom bombs of Hiroshima with the horrific test explosions of the new H-bomb with “MORE RADIANCE THAN 10,000 SUNS!” In the original text, this phrase is greatly enlarged, resembling a torn piece of newspaper, with huge white print against black. The obliteration of the Earth as a possibility sold many newspapers.

But time keeps going, whether forward or backwards. Now Vacarme, a skull-like image, enters with his sons, Tohu and Bohu, ancient Biblical references to the huge emptiness of explosive noise and constant commotion before the Creation. In this most confusing of verbal diatribes, Tohu Bohu, as one voice, attack established religion, referring to the “age of despair catechism” and the “hell of Durand (Dante) Alighieri.” They recall for all French literary scholars, the words of Mallarme with “It is not by chance. Chance never takes a chance.” The complexity of references in this section finally gives way to the



simple goodness of everyday human life: The Man with the Bird comes on stage, with the “bird of right now.” Although his own daily life, he knows, will sometime end, the Man loves it and will never say “goodbye,” only “see you.” Other images of the beauty of daily, earthly reality come and go before our eyes.

In one final satirical stab, Prévert takes aim at “the Spirit,” an art critic whose image is superimposed on top of Picasso’s bald head. He is trying to put down Picasso in declaring all of present painting “obsolete.” In describing the art of the future, the critic exclaims there will be “detonated painting and nuclear sculpture.” The seemingly prophetic critic appears to be looking into today’s art world of Damien Hirst’s spin paintings and Cao Guo-Qiang’s *Explosion Project for Central Park*.

The Magician angrily cuts the Critic off in mid-sentence, and presents the final player, the She-Goat. Referring to one of Picasso’s most famous and favorite sculptures, made from found trash and plaster, then cast in bronze, the She-Goat takes over the stage, much as its real counterpart, Esmeralda, a pet goat given to Picasso by Jacqueline, took over their back garden at Villa Californie. We are brought to the end of the play with stories of love, sexuality, a description of how Picasso creates, an enigmatic puzzle-poem for Oedipus and the Sphinx, and then walk off in the day lit forest with the Goat and Jacqueline with Jacqueline of the Fruits, Jacqueline with a Veil, Jacqueline of the Trees, and Jacqueline with the Look of a Bird.

Guest Curator, Dr. Diane Chalmers Johnson, Professor of Modern Art at the College of Charleston, began studying these curious works after traveling in Southern France and seeing an isolated one or two hung in galleries and simply labeled as “Photographs by Picasso.”