

Exhibition: *Picasso and Rivera: Conversations Across Time*

On View: December 4, 2016–May 7, 2017

Location: BCAM, Level 2



Image credits on page 4

(Los Angeles—November 16, 2016) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), with Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City (MPBA), presents *Picasso and Rivera: Conversations Across Time* (December 4, 2016–May 7, 2017), an exhibition that examines moments of intersection in the formation of modernism both in Europe and Latin America, and asks how Pablo Picasso and Diego Rivera—towering figures of the 20th century—both exchanged ideas in Paris about avant-garde paintings and later engaged with their respective ancient Mediterranean and Pre-Columbian worlds. Co-curated and conceived by Diana Magaloni, deputy director and director of the Program for the Art of the Ancient Americas at LACMA, and Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director, and developed with Juan Coronel Rivera, curator from the MPBA, with guest curators James Oles and Jennifer Stager, the exhibition compares the artists' trajectories beginning with their similar academic training to their shared investment in Cubism and their return to an engagement with antiquity from the 1920s through the 1950s.

More than 100 paintings and prints by both artists are in dialogue with one other and with dozens of ancient Greco-Roman, Iberian, and Aztec objects, *Picasso and Rivera* aims to advance the understanding of the artists' practices, particularly in how their contributions were influenced by the forms, myths, and structures of the arts of antiquity. Picasso and Rivera's radical approach to understanding ancient art was in many ways subversive: by doing that they also rewrote art history—greatly enlarging the recognition of artistic contributions of ancient civilizations. Ancient art became essential for their sense of the future, both personally and politically.

“By placing masterworks by Picasso and Rivera alongside Greco-Roman, Etruscan, and Iberian works as well as Mesoamerican sculptures and ceramic figurines, the exhibition weaves together distant geographies and worlds to blur the frontiers of time and space,” said Diana Magaloni. “*Picasso and Rivera* views both artists as inventors of a new visual reality in the first decades of the 20th century. Diego Rivera brought the Pre-Columbian world to the forefront by showing that the art produced by these cultures was for the Americas what traditional Greek and Roman art was for Europe.”

“LACMA thinks about art history along a continuum,” said Michael Govan. “Rather than perpetuating historical or cultural hierarchies, we seek to create dialogue, particularly given our location in a city that stands at an international crossroads with both Latin America and the Pacific Rim. This exhibition is a product of an Americas viewpoint, where our ancient indigenous heritage proposes a novel worldview that can interface with classical Western traditions, bringing both a diversity of viewpoints and a profound convergence of human and artistic values.”

Picasso and Rivera will travel to Mexico City, where it will be on view from June 14 to September 17, 2017 at the Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes.

Exhibition Organization

This exhibition is presented in five thematic sections, highlighting the moments of interaction and divergence between the two artists.

The Academy looks at Picasso and Rivera’s training in their respective national academies—Picasso in Spain and Rivera in Mexico—which they both entered as child prodigies. They studied within the rigorous curriculum of neoclassicism, where copying of the antique and a ruthless adherence to the principles it had come to represent were the chief means to a successful career.

Cubism and Paris (1908–16) examines the period between 1908 and 1916 when both artists moved to Paris and became active participants of the avant-garde movement. The two met in early 1914 when Picasso invited Rivera to his studio before camaraderie yielded to rivalry in 1915. Both artists prolifically created Cubist works, including Picasso’s *The Poet (Le poète)* (1912) and Rivera’s *Sailor at Lunch (Marinero almorzando)* (1914). This period of experimentation became critical for both artists, foreshadowing a unique approach to composition and to ancient art in their future practices. This section also provides a rare opportunity to view Picasso’s Cubism through Rivera’s eyes.

Picasso and Rivera both traveled to Italy (in 1917 and 1920, respectively) and, following the war, embraced a revalorization of the classical tradition. **Return to Order and Indigenismo** addresses the post-WWI desire for order and stability that permeated the Parisian avant-garde. Picasso and Rivera's monumental paintings of the 1920s capture their reinterpretations of antiquity, be it Greco-Roman for Picasso, or ancient Mesoamerican for Rivera. Picasso's first monumental neoclassical painting, *Three Women at the Spring* (1921)—an exceptional loan from the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA)—recasts the classical group of three women, usually appearing as Graces and Fates, into sculptural forms and on a monumental scale. Meanwhile, in *Flower Day (Día de Flores)* (1925), Rivera transforms figures of Mexico's indigenous peoples into icons inspired by Chalchiuhtlicue, the Aztec water goddess. This gallery also includes portions of Rivera's personal holdings of ancient Pre-Columbian ceramic and stone sculptures, a collection that has never previously traveled outside of Mexico. This will be the first time that *Flower Day* will be shown alongside the ancient Chalchiuhtlicue sculptures that Rivera often used for his compositions.

The subsequent two galleries focus on the artists individually rather than in direct dialogue. **Rivera and Pre-Columbian Art** demonstrates how Rivera vigorously engaged with European modernism only to abandon abstraction for didactic figuration—enriched by references to Mexico's ancient civilizations—and focusing his attention on public murals that emphasized the national and ideological above the personal. By the 1930s Rivera had already formed his own style where the ancient Mesoamerican sculptures were transformed into everyday living people, creating in this manner a representation of the idealized mestizo race in Mexico. In *The Flowered Canoe (La Canoa en Florada)* (1931), Rivera creates two worlds: the mestizos, influenced by Western culture, enjoy a day at Lake Xochimilco, while an oarsman, clearly an indigenous man, represents the force of tradition.

The gallery dedicated to **Picasso and Mythology** explores how the artist shaped the foundations of 20th century art through formal experimentation with the art of the past, creating images that were at once deeply personal and universal. In *Studio with Plaster Head (Atelier avec tête et bras de plâtre)* (1925), for example, Picasso summarizes his views on the dialectic relationship between ancient Greek and Roman tradition with Western painting and the beginning of modernism. Modernism was often conceived as a total break with the past; however, Picasso perceived it as part of a continuum. By showing classical figuration in the artist's studio, Picasso implies that it is the responsibility of the artist to create something new out of tradition. In this way, he presents an artistic lineage that goes from ancient Greece to Cubism.

Situated between the final two galleries, the film *Ideologías y Muralismo*, commissioned by LACMA and directed by Rodrigo García and Chris Hall, explores Rivera's mural *Pan American Unity* (San Francisco City College, 1940) and Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), as well as the artists' shared engagement with monumentality and political activism.

Exhibition Catalogue

Picasso and Rivera: Conversations Across Time is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue published by Del Monico Books/Prestel. The 304-page volume is edited by Michael Govan and Diana Magaloni with contributions by Émilie Bouvard, Lilly Casillas, Juan Rafael Coronel Rivera, Michael Govan, Michele Greet, Patricia Leighten, Diana Magaloni, Camille Mathieu, Itzel A. Rodríguez Mortellaro, James Oles, and Jennifer Stager. The hardcover catalogue is \$60.00 and is available at the LACMA Store and Art Catalogues.

Credit:

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City.

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Image captions:

(Left) Pablo Picasso, *Three Women at the Spring (Trois femmes à la fontaine)*, Summer 1921, oil on canvas, 80 1/4 × 68 1/2 in., The Museum of Modern Art, NY, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Allan D. Emil, © 2016 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY

(Center Left) *The Lansdowne Artemis*, Roman, 1st century B.C. or 1st century A.D., marble, 70 × 26 × 17 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, William Randolph Hearst Collection, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

(Center Right) *Water Deity (Chalchiuhtlicue)*, Mexico, Aztec, 1200–1521, basalt, 7 7/8 × 4 3/8 in., Museo Diego Rivera-Anahuacalli, photo by Javier Hinojosa

(Right) Diego Rivera, *Flower Day (Día de Flores)*, 1925, oil on canvas, 58 × 47 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Fund, © 2016 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes over 130,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles, which also contains the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum and the forthcoming Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles.

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