Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) is regarded as the most influential artist of the 20th century. One key feature of his oeuvre is that he effortlessly crossed techniques, styles, and disciplines of art (1, 2). Another is that he appropriated styles and templates of both past and contemporary artists, creating works that “conversation” with them (3).

Picasso created paintings and sculptures, used a wide range of printing techniques, made posters, and in the 1940s revived the production of pottery in the village of Vallauris in Provence. His earliest paintings were conventionally academic, albeit perfectly executed. For a short time he studied in Madrid, where he became acquainted with the works of Velázquez and El Greco in the Prado museum. Later, in Barcelona, he was exposed to modernism. In Paris, where he settled in 1904, he admired not only Delacroix and Ingres but also contemporary artists, including Cézanne, Toulouse-Lautrec, Bonnard, and Degas. The Fauves exhibition in 1905, and the work of Matisse, made a particular impression on him. At the time, he produced several Expressionist paintings, such as The Absinthe Drinker (Melville Hall Collection, New York) (4).

The Blue Period paintings, created in 1901–1904, were figurative and monochromatic. The Pink Period (1904–1906) coincided with an interest in classicism and Greek sculpture. The interest in archaic sculpture and African art, as well as the influence of Cézanne, were evident in Analytic Cubism, which he developed in collaboration with Georges Braque (5). In the 1920s, after he saw the Parthenon Marbles in the British Museum in London, the elements of classicism appeared again, in such pictures as Large Bather (1921) (6). In the 1930s, there was the influence of Surrealism. Later, he combined Cubist elements, realist figurative painting, and Surrealist abstract forms, such as in Bathers with a Toy Boat, which is in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice (7).

Picasso’s appropriations are variations on the original painter’s works. They maintain the theme or composition but demonstrate a totally different style and approach. Early in his career he copied Velázquez’s Portrait of Philip IV, introducing elements of El Greco’s (1541–1614) style, the characteristic elongation of features. In 1901, The Burial of the Count of Orgaz, painted by El Greco in 1586, and the paintings of Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664) inspired the piece dedicated to the memory of his friend Carlos Casagemas, Evocation (The Burial of Casagemas).

Later in his life, Picasso created a series of paintings based on works of a particular master. There is one painting based on Delacroix’s The Women of Algiers (Les Femmes d’Alger) and one on Velázquez’s The Maids of Honor (Las Meninas). The third painting relates to Édouard Manet’s work The Luncheon on the Grass (Le déjeuner sur l’herbe), painted in 1863 and now in the Musée d’Orsay, in Paris (8).

Picasso painted his Le déjeuner series between 1959 and 1962. It includes 27 paintings and 140 drawings, as well as linocuts and cardboard models for sculptures. Within the common theme, the different paintings vary in style: there is a version (1961) in the Musée Picasso, in Paris, that contains figures that remind one of Cézanne’s The Bathers, and a Cubist version painted in 1960 (9).

In the painting shown (Fig. 1), the palette is green and white with a hint of pink, a combination also seen in some of the Cézanne paintings. Manet’s composition is loosely maintained, but the figures are simplified with Cubist and Surrealist distortions, clearly evident in the nude figure on the left.

The painting is darker than Manet’s original. Picasso compartmentalizes the light by making the figures nearly white and placing streaks of white in the left upper corner. The painting provides enough clues to anchor it in the original theme; however, it expresses it in an entirely different language.

This is what Picasso had to say about art of the past (10):

*To me there is no past or future in art. If a work of art cannot live always in the present it must not be considered at all. The art of the Greeks, of the Egyptians, of the great painters who lived in other times, is not an art of the past; perhaps it is more alive today than it ever was. Art does not evolve by itself, the ideas of people change and with them their mode of expression.*

As a result of his responses to various styles, and his engagement with the works of others, Picasso inhabits the entirety of art.

There is an analogy to science: a scientist, by publishing an article and providing a list of references, places himself on the map of science past and present. One could, if one wished, trace the works through the decades that influenced...
a particular publication by uncovering the successive layers of citations that concern the factual part. The formality of scientific presentations, however, precludes routinely linking scientific results to personal influences, life’s events, and charismatic individuals who may have influenced the investigator’s ideas; yet, all these factors have their effects on discoveries. The stories that excite the public about scientists often focus on credit for discoveries and associated feuds: from Newton and Leibniz, through the controversies surrounding the discovery of insulin, to Rosalind Franklin’s role in the discovery of the DNA structure. Is science putting too little emphasis on the people who make it?

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