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THE MOTHER BY PABLO PICASSO (1881-)

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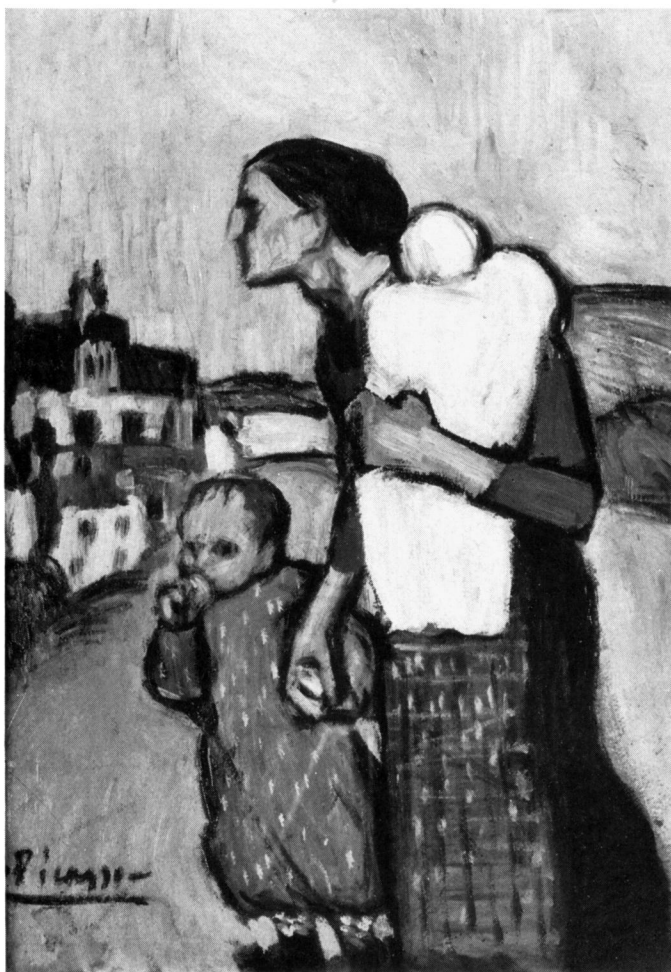
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THE MOTHER
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THE MOTHER BY PABLO PICASSO (1881-)

This canvas¹ was painted by Picasso in 1901 at the very beginning of his career two years before he settled permanently in Paris. It seems extraordinary that a work of such mature power could have been produced by the artist when hardly more than a boy for in it he not only sums up the contributions of the movements represented by Van Gogh and Gauguin but already demonstrates the mastery of pictorial structure which was necessary to his later experiments in analysis and abstraction.

Pablo Picasso was born in Málaga, Spain, in 1881. At a very early age he began the study of painting under his father, a drawing teacher. He later attended an art school in Barcelona and for a few months edited an art magazine in Madrid. On arrival in Paris his talent and precocious attainment were recognized by some of the more advanced critics but he achieved no popular success since the movement of which he was then a part was still largely unrecognized. Toulouse-Lautrec with his biting commentaries on the follies of Paris and his pessimistic outlook on contemporary life made the strongest impression on the young Spaniard whose temperament individually and racially responded readily to Lautrec's artistic approach. Moreover at the time the tragic and somewhat morbid writings of the Mallarmé group which had chiefly influenced Lautrec were in the ascendant among the younger artists of Paris.

Picasso's individuality, owing to his extraordinary powers of assimilation,

was by no means overwhelmed by these forces. An active intelligence and curiosity kept his eyes open to other possibilities. "The Mother" shows unmistakably that Daumier and Cezanne as well as Van Gogh and Gauguin were playing their parts in the young artist's experience but the result is by no means an imitation or rehash. Picasso's artistic capacity is marked by the success with which he has been able to assimilate the particular aspects of the work of those masters most germane to his purpose and fuse them into a unity which is individually distinctive and valid in its own right. Proof of this lies in the difficulty, even impossibility, of singling out one characteristic or feature of the work which was adopted directly from any of the artists whose contribution is immediately felt as being part of its background.

Picasso's work at this early period stands on its own feet as a masterly summary of the Post-Impressionist movement.

Without regard to the painter's youth or his future career "The Mother" is a remarkable achievement and a masterpiece in itself. The force of the composition is felt immediately—a force derived from the extreme simplicity and directness with which the subject is treated. All non-essentials to both the human and pictorial themes have been excluded. The skill with which the broad drawing of the figure has been used to carry the feeling of both solidity and motion is worthy of Daumier. The pathos of the drama is, however, both supplemented and relieved by the color which rescues it from the drabness of spirit which too often weakens contemporary social comment. The richness and clarity of the color give the painting a serenity and even a certain splendor which trans-

¹On carton panel. H. 29½ inches; W. 20 inches. Signed: Picasso, lower left.
Ex coll.: de la Peau de l'Ours; Van de Velde, the Hague; Chester Dale, New York.
Exhibited: Chester Dale Collection, Wildenstein & Co., New York, Oct., 1928, No. 33; French Paintings of the 19th and 20th centuries, Fogg Art Museum, March, 1929, No. 70; Picasso, Braque, Leger, Museum of French Art, February, 1931, No. 1; Modern French Paintings, Detroit Institute of Art, June, 1931, No. 90.

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forms its subject into a symbol of more timeless value.

The extraordinarily expressive drawing which is seen in the face and arm of the main figure indicates Picasso's unusual powers as a draftsman. The exercise of this talent and the development of a more linear method of expression became his main occupation up to 1907 and much of the richness of pigment so notable in his earlier painting was in later works sacrificed to this end. In 1907, under an impulse furnished largely by a study of primitive sculpture, Picasso started a series of experiments in formal analysis which led to the development of Cubism. This in its turn was followed by further experiments, each adventure testing out a new appeal and a new path but never returning to what had been left behind.

Picasso's curiosity, his intellectual

restlessness which have caused these kaleidoscopic changes have brought out recurrent charges of insincerity. This mobility is, however, not only part and parcel of his temperament and individuality but is indicative of the quality of the times. In a sense he epitomizes the discontent and constant search for a way out which marks the twentieth century. His artistic sincerity cannot reasonably be questioned. Although now his earlier work has attained general acceptance, his later work is still a center of controversy. It would be easy in such case for an insincere artist to return to an earlier manner and its consequent popular reward, but to all intents and purposes the Picasso of 1900 to 1906 is already a phenomenon of the past as far as the painter himself is concerned.

M. R. R.

SIVA,* LORD OF THE DANCE

To the casual art museum visitor Hindu sculpture such as the figure of Sri Nataraja,¹ recently acquired by the City Art Museum, may present a strange and outlandish appearance. The half-human monstrosities with their plurality of heads or arms or with their animal heads on human bodies, seem far removed from anything in our accustomed secular or religious imagery. But let the visitor forget these familiar iconographies and accept another, as rigid as the Christian or the Classical, yet entirely different from them. Let him come, prepared with leisure to sit quietly in front of the statue and to look at it not with a hasty passing glance but with a serious attempt to understand

why an artistically trained Oriental would consider work such as this as representing a high point in the development of Hindu art.

The statue is of bronze cast around iron reinforcements. The entire composition—base, figure, and halo—is in one piece, a *tour de force* of the bronze caster's art. It represents Siva, the third member of the great Hindu Trinity of which the others are Brahma and Vishnu, in his character as "Lord of the Dance" and shows him poised in perfect balance with flying hair² and streaming girdle. His right foot rests upon the back of a crouching dwarf; his left is held high. He has four arms of which the two rear ones are extended;

¹Accession No. 4:38; height: 34"; width: 28½"; height of base: 8". Purchased from income of the William K. Bixby Oriental Art Fund, 1938.

²Siva's hair was originally represented in braids spreading fanwise on both sides of his head. The ends of these braids have been broken off.

*The accents customarily used in transliteration of Indian names are omitted from this article because not available to the printer.