PICASSO
PRIMITIF
What were Picasso’s links with non-Western arts? This question, although frequently addressed, was avoided by the artist himself for a long time. This exhibition proposes, through two complementary approaches, to present his relationship with the arts of Africa, Oceania, the Americas and Asia.

The first approach presents the main points of contact between Picasso and the so-called “primitive” arts with a chronological look at the formation of his private collection and at what interested him and aroused his curiosity.

The second approach creates a dialogue between the works of Picasso and those of non-Western artists, a dialogue that Picasso maintained with the works in his own collection throughout his life.

Presented in three parts (Archetypes, Metamorphoses and the I), this interconnection highlights the artists’ research into shared preoccupations relating to the representation of reality, and in particular, of the human body. Simplification, metamorphosis, mise en abyme, transformation, destruction, etc. – there are many variations of the figure, used arbitrarily by Picasso and by non-Western artists in their artworks, which find a resonance with one another that reveals the impulses and fears behind their creation.

The Exhibition is organised by the musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, in collaboration with the Musée national Picasso-Paris.
PICASSO AND THE “PRIMITIVE” ARTS.  
1900-1974

This exhibition opens with a chronological discovery of Picasso’s relationship with non-Western art, from 1900, when he moved to Paris, until 1974, one year after his death.

When did Picasso first encounter the so-called “primitive” arts? Which exhibitions might he have seen? Which objects did he collect? What relation did they entertain with his own creative works?

To answer these questions, this investigation draws on catalogues, letters, photographs and witness accounts, as well as artworks that belonged to him, or that he had noticed when visiting museums, exhibitions and galleries.

This chronology will thus enable the visitor to follow Picasso’s interests and curiosity, which were not limited to African art, but extended to many other forms of creation.

The works the artist collected throughout his life accompanied him rather than inspired him. They followed him everywhere, wherever he lived. Will you be able to pick them out?
FACE TO FACE

This second part of the exhibition adopts a thematic approach to show the links between the works of non-Western artists and those of Picasso. The permanent presence in his studios of non-Westerns works shows that he maintained a continuous dialogue with them, an exchange born of admiration, respect and even fear.

Archetypes

Picasso’s interest in archetypal and early forms led him to explore elementary forms and their stylisation.

In Picasso’s works, as in those of non-Western artists, the human body becomes the subject around which artistic archetypes emerge: nudity, verticality, simplification and stylisation.

Stripped of its social attributes, simplified to the verticality of its presence, constructed as a series of volumes, the body, the object of all these transformations, is drastically changed in order to find an essential presence, expressed by the artists by borrowing, in turns, from the figurative or the abstract, monochrome or polychrome, with no concern for primacy.
Metamorphoses

The dialogue between Picasso and non-Western artists continues with a virtuoso interplay of metamorphoses.

Picasso uses many artistic techniques on one single form in order to increase the angles and points of view: transformation, reversal, mutation, mise en abyme, etc. - many systems for creating visual magic, and which are also used in many non-Western artworks.

The metamorphosis can be seen clearly where human features are combined with those of animals, but it is also found at the heart itself of the creative act. The assemblages, both in Picasso’s work and in the work of his non-Western “interlocutors”, transform the “found” objects, giving them a meaning and an existence different from those attributed to them until then.

The Id

Although Picasso is generally discussed in terms of form, recalling, for example, his relationship with Cubism, this section, on the contrary, underlines the importance of the formless in his creative works and his influences.

The numerous variations of the figure include disfigurement, destruction, many mask-like forms, and hybrid and ambivalent figures. By dislocating the figure, the inner character itself of the person is reached, enhancing the dramatic plasticity of the figure; a plasticity that is taken to the extreme in some of the figures in non-Western arts.

Picasso twists and kneads faces and bodies as if they were magic entities permeated with forces and impulses with which he forms a profound connection.

These impulses of life and death are at the origin of the id, taken in the Freudian sense of the psychic energy that circulates unconsciously, and which the artistic process brings to the surface by means of rituals and exorcism.

1. Sculpture of Nevimbumbaau in La Californie, Picasso’s studio, Cannes Villers André (1930-2016) © ADAGP, Paris 
Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée national Picasso-Paris) © Succession Picasso 2017
2. Anthropomorphic sculpture © musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Claude Germain
3. Turned nude with raised arms (study for “Les Demoiselles d’Avignon”, Pablo Picasso) 
Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée national Picasso-Paris) 
Franck Raux © Succession Picasso 2017
4. Sculpture dedicated to Gou © musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Hughes Dubois
Béatrice Hatala © Succession Picasso 2017
WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE EXHIBITION?

- Take a guided tour (age 12+), duration 1 h 30.
- Take a tour with a storyteller (children 6+ accompanied by a family member), duration 1 h.
- Have a hands-on experience by following a workshop (children 6+ accompanied by a family member), duration 1 h 30.
- Go deeper into the subject with the audioguide (€5 or download it for €2.99).
- Find out more with the exhibition catalogue (400 illustrations, 352 pages, €49.90, co-edition of musée du quai Branly - Jaques Chirac/ Flammarion).

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

- Discover the museum with your family during the first “Dimanche en Famille”, Sunday April 9th 2017.
- Come and join the BEFORE, Friday April 21st 2017! 7 pm to midnight. Enjoy a free evening at the museum with tours, performances, workshops, a DJ set…
- Enjoy our Picasso Primitif week-end, during the 17th and 18th of June 2017. Two days full of workshops, performances, meetings and much more to get acquainted with Picasso’s work, as well as his special connection to non-Western art.
- Enjoy an exciting programming at the Salon de lecture Jacques Kerchache: readings, debates, panels…

Share your visitor experience on Twitter with #PicassoPrimitif

You can also follow the latest news about the exhibition on Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and at www.quaibranly.fr

Opening times
Tuesday, Wednesday, Sunday, 11am to 7pm
Thursday, Friday, Saturday, 11am to 9pm
Closed on Mondays, except on April 3rd, 10th, 17th and 24th.
Free admission first Sunday of the month
Members admitted from 9.30am (except on Sundays)

Pedestrian access
218 rue de l’Université
or 37 quai Branly
75007 Paris

For disabled visitors
222, rue de l’Université
75007 Paris

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Bookings
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