

The months leading up to Picasso's move to Fontainebleau in early July 1921 were personally and professionally eventful. In February, he and Olga Picasso welcomed baby Paul. In May and June, the French government sold at auction the confiscated gallery stock of his Paris-based German art dealers, flooding the market with his pre-World War I cubist work.

That same spring, the Ballets Russes staged *Cuadro Flamenco* and *Le Tricorne* in Paris with sets and costumes designed by Picasso. Gallerist Paul Rosenberg commissioned prints inspired by the artist's projects for the 1920 ballet *Pulcinella*. A retrospective exhibition at Rosenberg's gallery reinforced Picasso's growing reputation as an artist simultaneously working in cubist and classicizing styles.

Rendered in different mediums and sizes, the works on this wall represent multiple facets of Picasso's career immediately prior to his Fontainebleau residency. The *commedia dell'arte* musicians and classically garbed figures depicted in the paintings, drawings, and prints Picasso created that summer engaged wide-ranging art historical models, including his own early cubism, as well as referenced his Ballets Russes contributions.

The Picassos rented their villa at 33, boulevard Gambetta in Fontainebleau from July 1 to October 1, 1921. The artist's early summer production is rooted in place and demonstrates his keen observation of this new environment, which he, Olga Picasso, and their guests also documented with a camera. Many of his precisely dated line drawings describe the home and its garden and tenderly portray Olga and Paul Picasso. Others reinterpret *The Nymph of Fontainebleau*, a well-known wall painting in the nearby Château de Fontainebleau that was based on a sixteenth-century design by Rosso Fiorentino.

“There is no abstract art,” Picasso later insisted. “One must always begin with something. Then one may remove all appearance of reality; there is no longer a risk, as the idea of the object has left an indelible mark.” Works in this section of the exhibition distill the features of real-life and mythological figures to various degrees of abstraction, but they all retain the “indelible mark” that the Fontainebleau surroundings left on Picasso that summer.

Reimagining the Fontainebleau Studio

Historical photographs document Picasso's garage studio in Fontainebleau at various moments throughout the summer. The known dimensions of the works captured in these images make it possible to estimate the no-longer-extant studio's size, which was roughly twenty by ten feet. This gallery's footprint approximately matches that of the studio.

In Fontainebleau, south-facing doors opened to welcome sunlight, and high walls provided support for drawings and paintings, which Picasso tacked directly to the plaster surfaces. On the west wall, he affixed the oil painting *Three Women at the Spring* and the narrower version of *Three Musicians*. On the east wall, he hung the latter's wider counterpart, now in The Museum of Modern Art's collection.

Here to-scale reproductions of these three paintings reestablish the compressed environment within which Picasso worked, illuminating the visual dialogues he orchestrated between images that appear stylistically divergent yet are compositionally alike: each features three figures in a condensed and flattened picture space. We invite you to look closely at and compare the original paintings, which are installed in the next gallery.

The rectangular proportions of this gallery loosely echo those of the Fontainebleau garage studio, and three of the four monumental canvases that Picasso created therein are installed to correspond with their placement in historical photographs. While these images do not document the red chalk version of *Three Women at the Spring*, here the work occupies its most likely spot. Positioned across from its oil-on-canvas counterpart and to the right of The Museum of Modern Art's *Three Musicians*, it completes a double set of pairs. Five pastel women's heads, which Picasso photographed on the north wall of his studio, hang at the far end of this gallery.

Many of the other works the artist made in Fontainebleau escaped the lens of the camera. Here they are reunited for the first time since leaving the artist's studio more than a hundred years ago. Together the works on display show that Picasso experimented as widely with formats, mediums, and processes as he did with eclectic styles and visual sources, often subverting academic conventions in his use of materials.