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PICASSO PROJECT – SURREALISM 1930-1936 - MARCH 1998
PICASSO'S PAINTINGS, WATERCOLORS, DRAWINGS AND SCULPTURE:
SURREALISM 1930-1936.

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Nine volumes of the comprehensive Picasso Project catalogue are now in print, covering between them the years 1917 to 1949. They are not beautiful but they are useful and, since their subject is the prodigious Picasso, rarely less than astounding. The present volume surveys seven years of his work from the age of forty-eight and is subtitled *Surrealism 1930-1936* (an earlier volume is *Toward Surrealism 1925-1929*). A one-page preface is followed by fourteen pages of useful chronology, a bibliography and the captions provide the only other text. The book ends with concordances relating its catalogue numbers to those used by Zervos and by the Picasso Museum in Paris. The only colour illustration is the eye-catcher on the wrapper- one of his less amorous representations of Marie-Thérèse. The plates in the book vary in quality. They are modest in size, two, three or four to a page, and some of them are rather grey, diminishing the works, vividness, especially in the case of sculpture. The captions accompanying them are functional. Dimensions are given in centimeters only, which may indicate a change of mind and practice in the USA. The dates are often specific, thanks to Picasso's dating of most of his works; it helps to know that they are given US-fashion: month, day, year. Only public collections are named.

About one thousand works are shown in chronological sequence. Only prints and unilluminated texts are excluded, so that browsing steadily through this volume is instructive and much more than that. Perhaps 'electrifying' is the word. In the first days of January 1930, Picasso painted two major nudes, the half-figure in Chicago and the seated bather at MOMA; they introduce a particularly monstrous anatomical reconstruction of the head that, after further rehearsals, becomes Mary Magdalen's in the distressing Crucifixion of February 7. On December 29, 1936, Picasso drew a nasty *Women at the Piano* but also painted two relatively relaxed still lifes. In between comes a swarm of radically new images, images developed through several variations, new techniques (such as the objects stuck at the back of a canvas and coated with sand, and the constructions and loose assemblages with which he led sculpture off in a new direction), representations that are strident, loving, mocking, straight (as in a drawing of a bearded man accompanied by the newspaper cutting from which he copied it), distantly and often cruelly abstracted, or somewhere in between, where indeed most art lives.

The subtitle's pointing to surrealism has to be taken as a broad and vague indication. There are items, in the *Toward Surrealism* volume that would warrant an unqualified use of the term, and it does more or less fit a greater proportion of the things in this book- But then surrealism's limits are not easily defined, and Picasso's relationship to surrealism as movement or programme was never very clear. In the 1950's he admitted to having been influenced by surrealism in 1933, attributing the connection to his matrimonial difficulties'. One cannot imagine him giving much thought to what

the Surrealist artists might think of what he was doing. It was the Surrealist poets who were his friends, and if the admiring Breton was instrumental in giving Picasso a central role in the movement he could also be tiresomely censorious. There cannot have been much to make Picasso feel like joining that or any other movement. They needed him, but not he them. His *An Anatomy* drawings, printed in the first *Minotaure*, demonstrated one aspect of his metamorphic wizardry and could thus be useful to anyone thinking of making surrealist objects, but then a series of drawings of February 1934, of more or less nightmare-ish nudes, increasingly dismembered and turned into *natures mortes*, could have been meant as sketches for some signed-up surrealist to turn into paintings. His own paintings and drawings stand at some distance from surrealism in both its veristic and freely inventive veins, though there are signs, as John Golding pointed out in 1973, that Picasso had been looking at Miro and at one of Miro's sources, Eskimo art.

As we turn the pages we encounter some of Picasso's most lyrical and most romantic images, his most harmlessly classical as well as his fiercest, most hateful. Marie-Thérèse, with and without baby Maya, occasions affectionately possessive representations, and then, in September 1936, a new face emerges. In between working on a *Reclining Nude* that presages what we now call 'Late Picasso', he sketched it '*par coeur*', as he wrote against one of them (which I take to mean not 'by heart' but with the heart), and also drew it more formally, handsomely. By November he was reconstructing smallish canvases and that December drew and painted it as though it were a mute mask loosely attached to the woman's head. She was Dora Maar. Images of Dora as the *Weeping Woman* come after *Guernica* the following summer. Since, presumably for logistical reasons, Picasso's prints are not included in this series, we have to remind ourselves of his thoroughly poetic etching *Minotauromachy*, in important aspects *Guernica*'s forerunner, and carefully worked through five known stages in the spring of 1935.

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