

Visit to Picasso: the Legacy of Youth

The Art Appreciation Group enjoyed a visit on 5th April to Picasso: the Legacy of Youth at the impressive Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in the Norwich campus of the University of East Anglia.



The exhibition, which lasts until July 22nd, is focused on his artistic formation from his teenage years to his thirties (1896 – 1914). It traces the artist's progress from his childhood in Malaga to his rise in Paris as acknowledged leader of the international avant-garde.

Picasso was a child prodigy – some say the greatest artist ever – and was painting and drawing astonishingly accomplished traditional art from a very early age. He went to Paris when he was 19 and for the first few years was influenced by established artistic styles and ideas.

It wasn't until he was about 26 that he launched his own style that became known as Cubism. This phase only lasted until the beginning of World War 1 when he was 33 and after that he moved onto modern sculptures and the more familiar distortions of geometry, faces and colours. He always retained his exquisite drawing skills, however, as demonstrated by several examples in the show. The Norwich exhibition thus covers his precocious childhood, his time in Paris copying other styles and the beginning of his own artistic style.



Those hoping to see his famous paintings will be disappointed but what this small exhibition does achieve very well is tracing his development as an artist. It achieves this by comparing his work with those from the artists he admired and made use of including Monet, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Bonnard, Gauguin and Modigliani. It also includes a very interesting section on the African and Asian face masks that influenced Picasso from the early 1900's and also some very revealing quotes from the artist. This very well designed and presented exhibition therefore appeals to those interested in the development of art as well as art lovers.



The entrance fee for the Picasso exhibition also includes an exhibition of Constructivism art which developed in Russia just before the revolution with the aim to explore artistic uses of newly available materials such as plastics and extruded metals. Constructivism was frowned upon by Stalin and its main protagonists, notably Gabo and Pevsner, moved to Western Europe to continue their work.

These special exhibitions form only a small part of the works of art on display in the Sainsbury Centre. The free permanent exhibition on the ground floor is a large display of items collected by the Sainsbury family over many years from all over the world. It comprises artefacts from all civilisations as well as modern western paintings, drawings and sculptures. There are also sculptures in the grounds around the Centre. The Centre also has an excellent restaurant with a good menu, lovely view and reasonable prices! Altogether the Sainsbury Centre in its beautiful setting on the campus is well-worth a visit even if you don't pay for the Picasso and Constructivism exhibits.