

# THE TRACE OF A CORUÑA. FROM THE DRAWN SCULPTURE TO THE SCULPTED DRAWING

Elena Pardo & Rubén Ventureira • Colloque Picasso Sculptures • 24 mars 2016

This paper aims to vindicate the importance of the academic stage of Picasso in A Coruña (from 1892 to 1895) and its long echo in the artist's later work. These contributions were reflected last year in the exhibition *El primer Picasso* held in A Coruña and curated by Malén Gual, curator of the collection of Museu Picasso Barcelona, whose work and support for our research we really appreciate.

We will specifically analyze the influence cast on Picasso's work by certain models that the artist met during his time at the School of Fine Arts in A Coruña. In this school, where he studied from the age of twelve to thirteen, he began his academic training, which then continued in Barcelona and Madrid. In A Coruña, Picasso mastered the academic drawing technique of copying plaster models, which were reproductions of Classical marble sculptures. As we will see, among these first Academic models we can find some of the recurring themes of his subsequent production. Finally, we will situate his first contact with African sculpture in A Coruña.

Picasso arrived in A Coruña in 1891. It was a city with 39,000 inhabitants, located beyond the end of the Camino de Santiago. He and the rest of his family followed his father, who was appointed as a professor at the local School of Fine Arts, which was housed in a majestic building that was inaugurated a year before the Ruiz Picasso's arrival in the city. In the same building, Picasso would attend his secondary-school classes

## COURSE 1892–1893

Even if, despite his young age, he could have done it before, it was not until his second year in A Coruña,

in 1892, when Picasso joined the School of Fine Arts. He was just eleven years old. His father, Jose Ruiz Blasco, is the head teacher of the only subject in which Pablo is inscribed: *Dibujo de figura y adorno* (*Figure drawing and ornament*).

The atmosphere inside the solemn building is very sculptural: from the staircase in Carrara marble chaired by two great figures of Egyptian demeanor to the corridors of the school, which, like its walls, constitute a unique museum of replicas of Classical sculptures. Today, many of the casts which young Picasso saw are kept in the School of Art and Design Pablo Picasso, heir of the former School of Fine Arts where he studied. The exemplary care of such legacy by this institution has allowed us to trace back to this formative stage.

Picasso faces a very strict education system, extremely regulated, and governed from Madrid by the Academia de San Fernando. Thus, during his first year at the school he would only make copies of plates, mainly from the drawing course of the French artist, Charles Bargue. His studies, according to the curriculum, basically consisted of:

Accurately copying the originals that they have present, always on the basis of principles, and applying the aid that Geometry provides to drawing in order to achieve success. ... These same parts that they have drawn in single contours, will then be shaded, and then the pupils will be warned and instructed about the effects caused by the shadow, and how by its effect it appears as a body, when it is really only a surface.<sup>1</sup>

As a paradigm of this learning process we will begin by highlighting the drawing *Double studio portrait of a bearded man in profile* (Z.VI, 10).

Palau i Fabre saw in this work “glimpses of the future creator of Cubism.”<sup>2</sup> He did not know, as it was not until 1993 that Lavin made the discovery,<sup>3</sup> that the model is taken from Bargue’s drawing course,<sup>4</sup> whose plates taught appreciation of the outline prior to the drawing, the structure where the elements of the composition lie, with lines that mark the outline of the figure’s profile.

Later in this first course, the boy will also copy Bargue’s plate *Torso of the Belvedere* (MPB 110.894),<sup>5</sup> which reproduces the sculpture of Apollonius of Athens, made in the first or second century and that is kept in the Vatican Museums.

This torso is one of the references that have shaped Western art and Picasso saw it for the first time in A Coruña through this copy and through a plaster cast. Picasso’s charcoal is superb. It is a considerable size, and corresponds to the latter part of the learning process for drawing, copying plates, a process that culminated with full figures, as is the case.

Works like *Torso of the Belvedere* would bring Picasso a distinction with honorable mention (literally a “sobresaliente con accésit”) in the subject, which is the second highest recognition. There were 141 students in the class and the son of Ruiz Blasco is one of the best eight pupils, and by far the youngest of the group. Let’s remember he was only eleven years old. Anyone who sees this torso today would conclude that

the boy already knew how to draw. However, what he mastered then is just the technique of the copyist, which surely bores him, because, as he will tell Parmelin: ... if you know exactly what you’re going to do, what’s the point on doing it? Since you know, there’s no interest in it. It is better to do anything else.<sup>6</sup>

Picasso, for now, knew how to copy, but he had not yet been instructed in life drawing, whose difficulty lies precisely in the exercise of translating three-dimensional reality to the two-dimensional surface of the paper. In fact, when he later faces the plaster cast of the same work, *Torso of the Belvedere* (MPB 110.592), the result is far from being spectacular.

## COURSE 1893–1894

And this is because the academic learning process is slower. It goes through very measured steps. Picasso took the following in the course from 1893 to 1894, now twelve years old and again with his father as the head teacher of Figure Drawing. This is the moment when he had to work on the interpretation of the volume, rendering it just with its illusion through the shading. That is to say, to translate the sculpture into drawing.

The models for this course were now real plaster casts, but only (as mandated by San Fernando’s curriculum), heads and extremities (feet and legs, hands and arms). Students had to learn to see, to measure and render the light and shadows of the model. To work the *chiaroscuro*, classes were held in the afternoon, with no natural light, with gas lamps that produce heat, creating an unbearable atmosphere. As an example of this

work with plaster limbs as models and the technique of chiaroscuro, we want to highlight *Academic study of the right leg I* (Z.VI, 8) and *II* (Z.VI, 6), two drawings made from the same plaster cast in different lighting.

In this same course, Picasso faced his first complex piece: a head of a faun (MPB 110.875, *fig. 1*). This head was part of a complete statue (*fig. 2*) but, in those days, it was separated from the rest of the body. It is a cast of the original kept in the Uffizi, titled *Dancing Faun*, a Roman copy—which was believed to be restored by Michelangelo—from a Greek original of the third century BCE that was attributed to Praxiteles. It holds two cymbals: it is, therefore, a musician faun, like many Picasso would paint later. It is remarkable how Picasso renders all the detail and imperfections of the cast, reproducing the lines left by the mold's burr. This faun from the A Coruña years is the first of the long series of these characters that live in Picasso's iconography. The faun is a mythological, lewd and sympathetic being, half man and half god, with which the artist always identified.

The proof that Picasso would never forget the classrooms from A Coruña is a painting that he made more than fifty years later, on September 2, 1946, in Antibes: *Tête de faune vert* (MPA 1946.2.2). It seems to represent that same broken plaster head of a faun lying on a shelf at the school.

It may not be coincidence that this remembrance comes to Picasso in Antibes, because just a few months before he had seen an exhibition of children drawings, organized by the British Council, in the castle of the town. John Richardson wrote that Pablo boasted of his childhood academic works after visiting the exhibition:

I could not, as a child, participate in an exhibition of this kind: at twelve I drew like Raphael.<sup>7</sup>

Picasso was exactly twelve when he drew this head of a faun in the School of Fine Arts of A Coruña, a head that will evoke in other pieces made in Antibes. It is part of a series of fauns (MPA 1946.2.1, MPA 1946.2.3, MPA 1946.2.4, MPA 1946.2.5, MPA 1946.2.6, etc.), developed between May 28 and September 8, 1946, when Picasso lived a very happy period with Françoise Gilot, which culminated a few months later with the birth of his son Claude. In all cases, the head is executed from geometric shapes.

In our opinion, these fauns have clear echoes of the academic drawing, with geometric lines that refer to the layout's outline, and that may even be a memory of those mold burrs that divided the face of the A Coruña faun.

We would like to highlight another piece that is still held in the School of Arts Pablo Picasso in A Coruña: a statue depicting Hypnos (*fig. 3*), the god of sleep. The wings that arise from the temples call our attention. It is a plaster cast of a Roman marble—also a replica of a Greek original—that is preserved in the Museo del Prado (inv. E00089).

It is very likely that the artist also knew this mythological figure through a drawing by Françoise Grellet,<sup>8</sup> as in the archives of the school there is the registry of a donation of plates by this artist during the course of 1890–1891. Both the cast and the plate are very interesting because it is possible that Picasso's prodigious visual memory rescued these two images when in

1950 he drew his famous series of *Le visage de la paix* (particularly *Le visage de la paix (XXIII): colombe aux ailes et visage. Vallauris. 5-December/1950*).

Picasso finished the course 1893 to 1894 with another “sobresaliente” (the highest qualification). He was, once again, one of the school’s best students. And by the way, the best pupils showed their work at the end of the course in an exhibition at the school, but this was not, of course, a children’s drawing exhibition.

## COURSE 1894–1895

After the summer, the new course, beginning in October 1894, would be the last that the Picasso family would spend in A Coruña. Following the rigid curriculum of San Fernando, during this course the students would have to draw complex, complete figures. One of the statues that was in the school for that course, and that is still there today, was this plaster cast of the sculpture titled *Faun with a Kid* (*suppr. de la fig. XX suite à suppression de l’image par le MPP*), a Roman marble replica of a Hellenistic model which is part of the collection of the Museo del Prado (inv. E00029). Picasso faced the challenge of drawing this figure (MPB 110.598) as an exercise for Figure Drawing, again with his father as head teacher and the course that would ultimately give him another “sobresaliente.” In this drawing, the boy, who is now thirteen years old, shows an advanced technique, particularly in the mastery of chiaroscuro.

Now let’s travel to 1943. Picasso is working on a sculpture in plaster depicting a man with a lamb (Museo

Reina Sofía, Madrid, inv. DE01360 / WS 280 I).

Brassaï, intrigued by the piece that he was photographing, asked Jaime Sabartés if the master had used any model. The secretary replied:

A model? You’ve got to be kidding! He said he saw a lamb at Le Catalan. But can he control his memories? More likely, that the lamb he saw at Le Catalan simply revived the memory of other lambs he’d seen in his childhood. His memory of forms is phenomenal. When he was very young, he captured them so well in every detail, he recalled them so exactly, that later he didn’t need to work from life any longer.<sup>9</sup>

Sabartés said it is likely that Picasso “simply revived the memory of other lambs he’d seen in his childhood.” He is right. In his childhood in A Coruña, he made a drawing of a faun with a kid. Goats and lambs are quite similar creatures when babies, so we think that what Picasso was reviving is the memory of his charcoal study made in A Coruña.

*L’homme au mouton* will be one of Picasso’s most important sculptures. He will make this magnificent statue in plaster in 1943 (WS 280 I), as it was in plaster his first contact with this subject. Later, the model will be cast in bronze (MPP 331 / WS 280 II; WS 280 III).

The man holding the animal for its sacrifice is a Classical theme whose iconography will be adopted by Christianity as the Good Shepherd, with a radically different meaning, as the shepherd saves the lamb instead of leading it to sacrifice, and it will also become another recurrent theme in Picasso’s work.

In 1961, Picasso brings it back to sculpture, but using

metal sheets (iron and steel) that he cuts and folds (WS 602; WS 603).

These are two examples of a technique that will be widely used in sculptural production and in whose beginnings we must remember his friend, the sculptor Julio González.

González was fascinated by what he called “drawing in space,” as he wrote in his manuscript “Picasso et les cathédrales,”<sup>10</sup> in which he referred to this particular technique of Picasso as

“a new art.”

This way of approaching the sculpture resembles the drawings with scissors with which the young Picasso delighted his cousins and sisters in Málaga (MPB 110.239, MPB 110.239R).

Paradoxically, we could understand this “drawing in space” as the reverse process of academic statue drawing he learned at the school in A Coruña. If the point of it was to bring the three-dimensional model to the two dimensions of the paper, in the case of these two works from 1961, it is the two-dimensional surface itself—the iron and the steel—which serves to generate volume. Somehow, if the academic studies “put” the sculpture in the surface of the sheet of paper, here the volume is a “token” of the sheet itself.

In A Coruña, Picasso also discovered the Classical figure of Theseus. He did so through a plate in Bargue’s course<sup>11</sup> that he had to copy (Z. VI, 4), depicting the sculpture of Phidias, from the Parthenon, which is exhibited in the British Museum.

When, in the summer in 1962, Picasso produced some cardboard sculptures reinterpreting one of the figures from Édouard Manet’s *Déjeuner sur l’herbe* (MPP 1845, MPP 1847, etc.), he was obviously taking that painting as a reference. But we can’t help thinking that the leaning posture and the placement of the arms, especially the right one, visually resembles to Theseus.

Again, Picasso extracts the three-dimensionality from folding a sheet of cardboard, looking for a drawing that, beyond rendering a volume, as he had learned to do in A Coruña with chiaroscuro, produces it in its corporeality. Picasso approaches sculpture from the perspective of a draftsman, with pieces often designed for a frontal view.

In A Coruña, Picasso also found models outside the school that would appear in his later sculptural work. He lived very close to the bullring and made several sketches at bullfights he attended. The poster announcing the bullfights held in August 1894<sup>12</sup> could possibly have drawn his attention, as it had a quite advanced design for the time, with a die-cut shape of a guitar. We can link it with the cardboard guitars from 1912–13 (MoMA, New York. - inv. 640.1973; WS 29; WS 30, etc.).

## MATIABO

Finally, we want to mention the Museo Romero Ortiz.<sup>13</sup> In the nineteenth century, it was the only museum in the city and, along with the Tower of Hercules, its main attraction.

Picasso’s first contact with African art is usually situated during his visit to the Ethnographic Museum at

the Palais du Trocadero in Paris in 1907. This is the origin of what is known as the African Period, between 1907 and 1909. The artist's work was inspired by indigenous art, African masks.

Dated to 1907 are, in fact, the first "African" Picasso sculptures (WS 16, WS 21.I, etc.). But we think the ones at the Trocadero are not the first ones he saw. In A Coruña, just three hundred meters away from his home, was the Museo Romero Ortiz.

The star piece of its collection was *Matiabo* (fig. 5), an idol taken from an Afro-Cuban tribe during a war. The piece even made it to the front cover of the most important Spanish illustrated magazine of the time, *La Ilustración Española y Americana*.<sup>14</sup> In a guide to the city of A Coruña from 1890, the piece is described as follows:

**"It is made from dark wood, crudely carved. Embedded in the head are two fillets of gold and three ordinary tacks with golden heads. The eyes are imitated with two squares of glass, and in the chest there an opening to place a kind of horn covered with a piece of mirror, in which, according to the negroes, *Matiabo* could see the Spaniards coming."**<sup>15</sup>

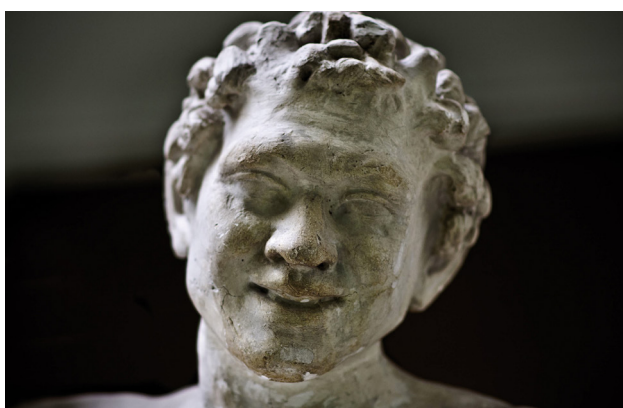
This sculpture, now in the Museo del Ejército at Toledo's Alcázar, bears a huge resemblance to those first "African" works by Picasso, and also to some pieces in his collection of African and Oceanic art.<sup>16</sup>

It is likely that here we are again stumbling across Picasso's photographic memory, or in the words of Sabartés, with his "phenomenal memory of forms." And it is possible that the visit to the Trocadero museum stirred a childhood memory, because there are sculptural forms that Picasso saw for the first time in A Coruña, which hibernate for a few years and reappear episodically in his later work, maybe as a theme, maybe as a starting point for a sculpture: the faun, the man with the lamb, the winged head, Theseus, a guitar-shaped poster, or this primitive and disturbing *Matiabo* that surely impressed a ten-year-old boy who took his first bath in sculptural art in A Coruña.



**PABLO PICASSO**

*Academic drawing. Head of a faun. A Coruña, 1894*  
Charcoal and Conté pencil on paper, 50,5 x 48,3 cm  
Museu Picasso, Barcelone, Pablo Picasso donation, 1970  
© Museo Picasso Barcelona, Gasull  
© Succession Picasso, 2016



**ANONYMOUS**

*Dancing Faun, 19th century*  
Plaster cast, 145 x 105 x 60 cm  
A Coruña, Escola de Arte e Superior de Deseño Pablo Picasso  
© Cecilia Orueta



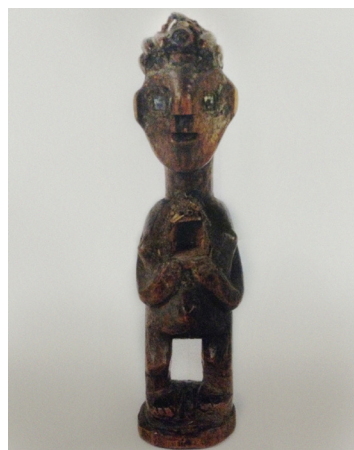
**ANONYMOUS**

*Hypnos, 19th century*  
Plaster cast  
A Coruña, Escola de Arte e Superior de Deseño Pablo Picasso  
© J. L. Neira



**ANONYMOUS**

*Hombre con cordero, 19th century*  
Plaster cast, 150 x 75 x 60 cm  
A Coruña, Escola de Arte e Superior de Deseño Pablo Picasso  
© Rubén Ventureira



**ANONYMOUS**

*Matiabo, Cuba, 1800-1889*  
Museo del Ejército de Toledo (Colección Romero Ortiz)  
© Rubén Ventureira

## NOTES

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2. Palau i Fabre, Josep. *Picasso vivo. 1881-1907. Infancia y primera juventud de un demiurgo* (Barcelona :Polígrafa, 1980), p. 42.
3. Irving Lavin, "Picasso's Litograph(s): 'The Bull(s)' and the History of Art in Reverse," *Past-Present :Essays on Historicism in Art from Donatello to Picasso* (Berkeley, CA :Universiy of California Press, 1993), pp. 203–260.
4. Charles Bargue, *Cours de dessin*, Planche I, 3, Musée Goupil, Bordeaux.
5. Charles Bargue, *Cours de dessin*, Planche I, 63. Musée Goupil, Bordeaux.
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7. Antonina Vallentin, *Picasso* (Garden City, NY :Doubleday, 1963), p. 5.
8. Françoise Grellet, *Tête Ailée, d'après un bronze du Musée de Naples. Études d'Après les Maitres Lithographiées*, plate 11 (Paris: F. Delarue.
9. Brassai. *Conversaciones con Picasso* (Madrid: Turner - Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002), pp. 141–142. Originally published as *Conversation avec Picasso* (Paris :Gallimard, 1964).
10. Julio González, "Picasso et les cathédrales, Picasso sculpteur (1931-1932)," IVAM archives, Valencia.
11. Charles Bargue, *Cours de dessin*, Planche I, 61. Musée Goupil, Bordeaux.
12. Rubén Ventureira and Elena Pardo, *Picasso Azul y Blanco. A Coruña :el nacimiento de un pintor* (A Coruña: Fundación Rodríguez Iglesias / Fundación Emalcsa, 2014), pp. 118–119 (fig.144).
13. Rubén Ventureira and Elena Pardo, *Picasso Azul y Blanco. A Coruña: el nacimiento de un pintor* (A Coruña :Fundación Rodríguez Iglesias / Fundación Emalcsa, 2014), p. 39 (fig.29).
14. *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, August 15, 1875. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.

15. R. Faginas Arcuaz, *Guía-Indicador de La Coruña y de Galicia para 1890-91* (Sada: Brigantium Gestión, 2008), p. 245. Originally published as *Guía-Indicador de La Coruña y de Galicia para 1890-91* (A Coruña: Imprenta y Estereotipia de Vicente Abad, 1890).

16. Rubén Ventureira and Elena Pardo, *Picasso Azul y Blanco. A Coruña: el nacimiento de un pintor* (A Coruña: Fundación Rodríguez Iglesias / Fundación Emalcsa, 2014), p. 39 (fig.28).

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– VENTUREIRA, RUBÉN ET PARDO, ELENA, «Conchita, la hermana de Picasso: luz sobre un misterio», VV. AA. *El cementerio de San Amaro: memoria de dos siglos*, La Corogne, COAG, Fundación Emalcsa/Ayuntamiento de A Coruña, 2012.

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– VENTUREIRA, RUBÉN, «El cronista Picasso», VV. AA. *El primer Picasso. A Coruña 2015*, La Corogne, Xunta/Ayuntamiento de A Coruña, 2015.

### Expositions

– Membres du comité scientifique de l'exposition «El primer Picasso. A Coruña 2015 »(Le premier Picasso. La Corogne 2015), ayant eu lieu au Musée des beaux-arts de La Corogne, de février à mai 2015.

### Conférences :

– VENTUREIRA, RUBÉN ET PARDO, ELENA (le 17 octobre 2013), *Nuevos apuntes sobre el Picasso coruñés*, exposé présenté dans le cadre de la rencontre «Picasso en A Coruña 1891-1895 (I)», de l'université internationale Menéndez Pelayo (UIMP).

– VENTUREIRA, RUBÉN ET PARDO, ELENA (le 9 juillet 2014), *La muchacha de los pies descalzos :historia de una obra maestra*, exposé présenté dans le cadre de la rencontre «Picasso en A Coruña 1891-1895 (II)», de l'université internationale Menéndez Pelayo (UIMP).

– PARDO, ELENA (le 11 mars 2015), *Picasso Blanco y Azul*. Exposé présenté dans le cadre de la rencontre «Encuentros en torno a Picasso», organisée à La Corogne par la maison-musée Emilia Pardo Bazán.

– VENTUREIRA, RUBÉN (le 11 mars 2015), *Picasso en la Academia de Bellas Artes*, exposé présenté dans le cadre de la rencontre «Encuentros en torno a Picasso», organisée à La Corogne par la maison-musée Emilia Pardo Bazán.

– VENTUREIRA, RUBÉN (le 23 septembre 2015), *El primer Picasso*, conférence inaugurale de la 41e réunion annuelle de la Société nucléaire espagnole, à La Corogne.

### Distinctions

– Mention spéciale en 2012 du prix de journalisme Albarelo, octroyé par l'ordre des pharmaciens de La Corogne, pour son article «El farmacéutico que inspiró a Picasso», publié le 10 décembre 2011 dans le supplément *Culturas* du journal *La Voz* de Galicia.