

Picasso and the Mood of a Painting

The mood of a painting can be strongly influenced by its colors. Interestingly, there are several cases where a painting's colors are quite abnormal, but the luminance is correct. Our Where system sees the paintings clearly, but our What system is confused by the coloring.

In Picasso's "Blue Period" (1901-1904), his blue paintings portray destitute human beings. Blue was chosen deliberately — deep and cold, signifying misery and despair — to intensify the hopelessness of the figures depicted, such as beggars, prostitutes, the blind, out-of-work actors and circus folk, as well as Picasso himself and his penniless friends. At the time, Picasso even wore blue clothes.



La Celestina, Pablo Picasso, 1904. Celestina, a notorious procuress from a 15th century Spanish play is the subject of one of the last great works of Picasso's Blue Period.

The "Blue Period" dramatizes the artist as an outcast from society. Indeed, in Paris at that time, far from family and home, Picasso is unrecognized, unappreciated and in extreme poverty. Moreover, as Jaime Sabartes, his closest friend at the time, wrote:

"Picasso believed Art to be the son of Sadness and Suffering... that sadness lent itself to meditation and that suffering was fundamental to life... If we demand sincerity of an artist, we must remember that sincerity is not to be found outside the realm of grief."

Picasso's "Blue Period" is further triggered by the fate of his closest friend, Carles Casagemas, whose infatuation with a girl and her rejection led to his subsequent

attempt to kill her and to his own suicide. Picasso explained later, "It was thinking about Casagemas that got me started painting in blue."

Gradually, Picasso's colors brighten, in what has somewhat misleadingly been termed the "Rose Period" (1904-1906). Not only soft pinks, but blues, reds and greens complement these images. The emaciated figures became fuller. The new color expresses warmth and life. Picasso's paintings are beginning to sell, and he now has a studio, a lover and a life. The two periods — the "Blue" and the "Rose" — form a transition between the conventional art of his youth and the iconoclastic art of his maturity. In 1907, Picasso and Georges Braque introduce Cubism, where form no longer appears to follow the traditional rules of three-dimensional representation. The "Blue" and "Rose" periods remain popular because the human figure is less undistorted and more recognizable than in Picasso's Cubist works.



Self-Portrait, Pablo Picasso, 1901. Here, Picasso presents himself as a romantic, bohemian figure — a moody young artist who fixes the viewer with a hypnotic stare.



Family of Saltimbanques, Pablo Picasso, 1905. These wandering acrobats camped on the outskirts of Paris and appeared in its small circuses.