

Exhibition curated by Marilyn McCully and Michael Raeburn, and organised in collaboration with the Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso.



Fig. 4
Dora Maar (1907–1997)
Studies of Picasso with a Hat.
From Sketchbook 234 'MSM'
Royan, 1939–41
Graphite, ink and green grease pencil on paper, 31.9 × 24.3 cm
Galerie Boquet and M. Ambroise Audoin-Rouzeau. DM234



Fig. 5
Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
Café at Royan
Royan, 15 August 1940
Oil on canvas, 97 × 130 cm
Musée National Picasso-Paris. Dation Pablo Picasso, 1979. MP187

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#PicassoRoyanMPM

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Picasso: The Royan Sketchbooks

31.01.2025 - 30.04.2025



Fig. 1
Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
Three Sheep's Heads
 Royan, 17 October 1939
 Oil on canvas, 65 × 89 cm
 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. AD01716

Picasso: The Royan Sketchbooks brings together for the first time the eight books of sketches made by Picasso during his stay in this French town on the Atlantic coast. It contextualises them along with other drawings, gouaches, paintings, a palette and poems he produced during this period, as well as a group of works produced by his partner, the artist and photographer Dora Maar. Together, the pieces on show shed light on an especially prolific period in Picasso's life and artistic career.

Picasso moved to the coast when World War II broke out. Although he made occasional trips to Paris, he remained in Royan from September 1939 to August 1940, accompanied by Dora Maar and his friend and secretary Jaime Sabartés. A privileged witness, Sabartés would record this period in a chapter of his memoirs, *Picasso, portraits & souvenirs*. Picasso's dog Kazbek, a Saluki, also travelled with them; the lambs' heads the painter fed him also served as a source of inspiration during this period [fig. 1].

On arriving in Royan, Picasso and Dora Maar stayed at the Hôtel du Tigre. The following day Picasso set up a studio in the dining room on the ground floor of the Villa Gerbier de Jonc, where his lover Marie-Thérèse Walter and their daughter Maya had taken lodging. In January 1940 the artist rented a new studio near the harbour in an apartment



Fig. 2
Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
Study for Bust of a Woman with Arms Crossed behind her Head
 From *Sketchbook 202*, f.16v
 Royan, 3–9 November 1939
 Pencil, black ink and wash on wove paper, 11 × 17 cm
 Museo Picasso Málaga. Gift of Christine Ruiz-Picasso. MPM1.35-16/R

building known as Les Voiliers, attracted by its light and the panoramic view it commanded.

The eight sketchbooks not only show ideas for larger works but also illustrate Picasso's evolving approach to form, revealing his working methods as well as how World War II affected him personally and artistically. Besides offering an insight into the artist's creative process, they attest to his extraordinary versatility, as can be seen in *Sketchbook 202* [fig. 2], from the Museo Picasso Málaga's collection. Its contents range from classical drawings, such as *Portrait of a Young Princess* after the Master of Moulins, to radical depictions of Dora Maar and sketches of bullfights, a theme that was ever-present in Picasso's oeuvre. Some of these drawings are related to outstanding works in the exhibition, such as a study for *Bust of a Woman with Arms Crossed behind her Head*. The evolution of his bold approach, seen in the handling of the head and body and in the overall simplification of the palette, can be traced in this sketchbook. It also contains the preparatory drawings for *Head of a Woman ('For the Greek People')*. The final painting was executed in his workshop at Gerbier de Jonc and moved to the new studio at Les Voiliers, where it was displayed in a prominent place on an easel. In May 1946 Picasso gave it to the city of Athens as part of the donation made by French artists to pay tribute to the Greek resistance in the aftermath of World War II.



Fig. 3
Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
Woman Dressing her Hair
 Royan, June 1940
 Oil on canvas, 130.1 × 97.1 cm
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Louise Reinhardt Smith Bequest, 1995. 788.1995

At Les Voiliers the artist worked for a time on a large-scale composition, *Woman Dressing her Hair* [fig. 3], which he completed in June 1940. Lent by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, it is one of the most important pieces in this show. It reflects many of the groundbreaking ideas and experiments with the form and composition of figures that concerned Picasso at the time and marks the culmination of the numerous drawings of a seated female nude that filled his sketchbooks during the year. In most of these sketches the woman is a brunette, like Dora Maar, though several others recall the seated figures in the harem in Eugène Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1834; Musée du Louvre, Paris), which the artist greatly admired.

The exhibition also includes pieces produced by Dora Maar during those months. Besides painting, Maar worked on several sketchbooks, one of which contains a page with sketches of Picasso's head in a hat [fig. 4]. Maar, who had already documented the gestation of *Guernica* in 1937, produced important photographic records of the studio at Les Voiliers, a notable selection of which is on view here.

After painting a large picture on canvas showing the view from the window of his studio, *Café at Royan* [fig. 5], on 24 August 1940 Picasso left the city for good, together with his friends, to return to war-torn Paris.