





PABLO PICASSO

Le petit pierrot aux fleurs

Painted in Paris,
Winter 1923 - Spring 1924

Oil on canvas
92.1 x 73.6 cm.



The family is a subject that is marked through the entirety of Pablo Picasso's oeuvre and if, at first sight, it appears to represent one of the artist's most personal themes, it is actually used more than any other in the artist's perpetual questioning of the nature of painting. Each important period in the artist's oeuvre reveals a major composition on this theme and was unquestionably dear to Picasso, as an artistic subject and as an intrinsic part of his personal life, that of the man who had always regarded himself as the chief of his tribe, a veritable *pater familias*.

Both charming and playful, *Le petit pierrot aux fleurs* conveys Picasso's son Paulo dressed as Pierrot. Painted around 1923, it was subsequently selected for Picasso's first retrospective, the 1932 exhibition at the Galerie Georges Petit which pre-empted the later show at the Kunsthaus Zürich. Paulo was born in 1921, and within a short space of time the artist had begun to include him in his own pictures, often revealing his paternal pride and the profound emotional bond that existed between father and young son. Nowhere is this more the case than in his portraits of Paulo dressed as a Harlequin, a Pierrot or a *torero*.

In 1920, Picasso had begun work on the design for Serge Diaghilev's ballet, *Pulcinella*, a reinvention of the seventeenth-century Italian *Commedia dell'arte*. Suddenly, the Harlequins that had peopled so many of Picasso's earlier works and with which he had become so closely identified sprung back into his work with a vengeance, joined by the clownish Pierrot. As a male character of French pantomime, the Pierrot is typically depicted with a white face, a loose-fitting costume, as well as a floppy hat, as displayed in this personable work. In French pantomime, the Pierrot often plays the role of the fool whose naiveté causes him usually to fall victim to pranks. Revisiting these themes in his depictions of his son Paulo, Picasso managed to create incredibly emotive, tender pictures which appeal to the viewer's pathos. In *Le petit pierrot aux fleurs*, Picasso has eschewed slapstick and comedy in favour of something more enduring, a bittersweet beauty.



Pablo Picasso, *Arlequin au miroir*, 1923
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid



Pablo Picasso, *Arlequin assis (Le peintre Jacint Salvadó en arlequin)*, 1923
Musée National d'Art Moderne,
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris



Pablo Picasso, *Arlequin, les mains corisées (Le peintre Jacint Salvadó)*, 1923
Museum Ludwig, Cologne

The French literary critic and dramatist Jule Lemaître deliberated on the cardinal traits of the theatrical character Pierrot. He recounted in 1888: “(Pierrot) represents human vice with an air of insouciance and innocence which makes it extremely attractive. Pierrot is outside the law and, thus, outside of sin. He makes us dream of a life which is usually purely sensual and freed from the yoke of conscience, which is perhaps the definition of perfect felicity. Pierrot is the son of Lilith, the ingenious Adam who has not eaten the apple and continues to wander, amidst our complicated modern societies, with the ignorant soul of the inhabitant of some early paradise” (R. de Najac, *Souvenirs d'un mime*, Paris, 1909, 28-29).

In this sense, Lemaître conveys the Pierrot as a nonchalant, innocent figure who enjoys the sensual freedoms of life, thus the character found resonance with many of the Bohemian artists and literary personnel of the fin de siècle period. The visual salience of the Pierrot placed him in a dialogue with some of the major ideological concerns of age. As an inherently impressionable and malleable character, he was often used to project, or in many ways reflect, the concerns of the individual artist, poet, or actor who assumed the Pierrot mask as a type of alter-ego.

In this cultural milieu of performativity and spectacle the Pierrot came to occupy much of the visual art and literary discourse of some of Paris’s most notable poets and artists from the turn of the twentieth century—Alongside Picasso, such well-known figures include George Seurat, Henri Rousseau and Edouard Manet, amongst others.

Whilst the present *Le petit pierrot aux fleurs* employs the motif of the Pierrot in an innocent, rather than adulterous, manner, Picasso’s fascination with the subject of the Pierrot could stem from a disillusionment and anxiety felt by the industrialisation and capitalisation of Paris. He was particularly captivated by the characters of the Harlequin and the Pierrot and found comfort in the theatre, in many ways using it as an escape during the turmoil and political upheaval triggered by the great war.



Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Pierrot*, c. 1718-19
Musée du Louvre, Paris

Inconsistent to traditional historical interpretation, Picasso's depiction of his son Paulo as a Pierrot with flowers symbolically endows the piece with a sense of endearment. When encountering the piece, one can readily gather the sense that this work is Picasso's intimate tribute to Paulo's innocence and naiveté rather than a pantomimic representation. The subjects shy and pensive aura only contributes to the impressions of youth and innocence provided by this piece.

Le petit pierrot aux fleurs hung in the young Paulo's nursery at 23 rue de la Boétie and was considered part of the family's collection and never to be sold, a testament to the artist's tenderness and the import placed upon his young family. Consequently, the work was at first neither signed nor dated. In July 1929, when Paulo was eight and a half years old, he severely injured his left hand when he caught it in a slammed door. Dr. Antoine Gosset, one of Paris's most eminent surgeons, attended to the boy and saved his finger from lasting damage. As his fee, the doctor requested *Le petit pierrot aux fleurs*. Upon presenting the doctor with the it, Picasso signed and dated it 1929, the year of the gift. So important had this painting been, and unhappy that it was now gone, Picasso promptly painted a similar canvas of Paulo in a white pierrot's costume holding a similar bouquet as replacement, which now hangs in the Pola Museum of Art in Hakone, Japan.

Picasso had first begun a series of canvases depicting Paulo in various guises when he was just two years old. He varyingly posed alongside a wooden horse, a desk, as a harlequin and wearing a little white round hat. Paulo would remain Picasso's most malleable muse for years to come

**“We are all born children -
the trick is remaining one”**

Pablo Picasso



Pablo Picasso, *Paulo en Pierrot (le fils d'artiste)*, 1925
Musée Picasso, Paris



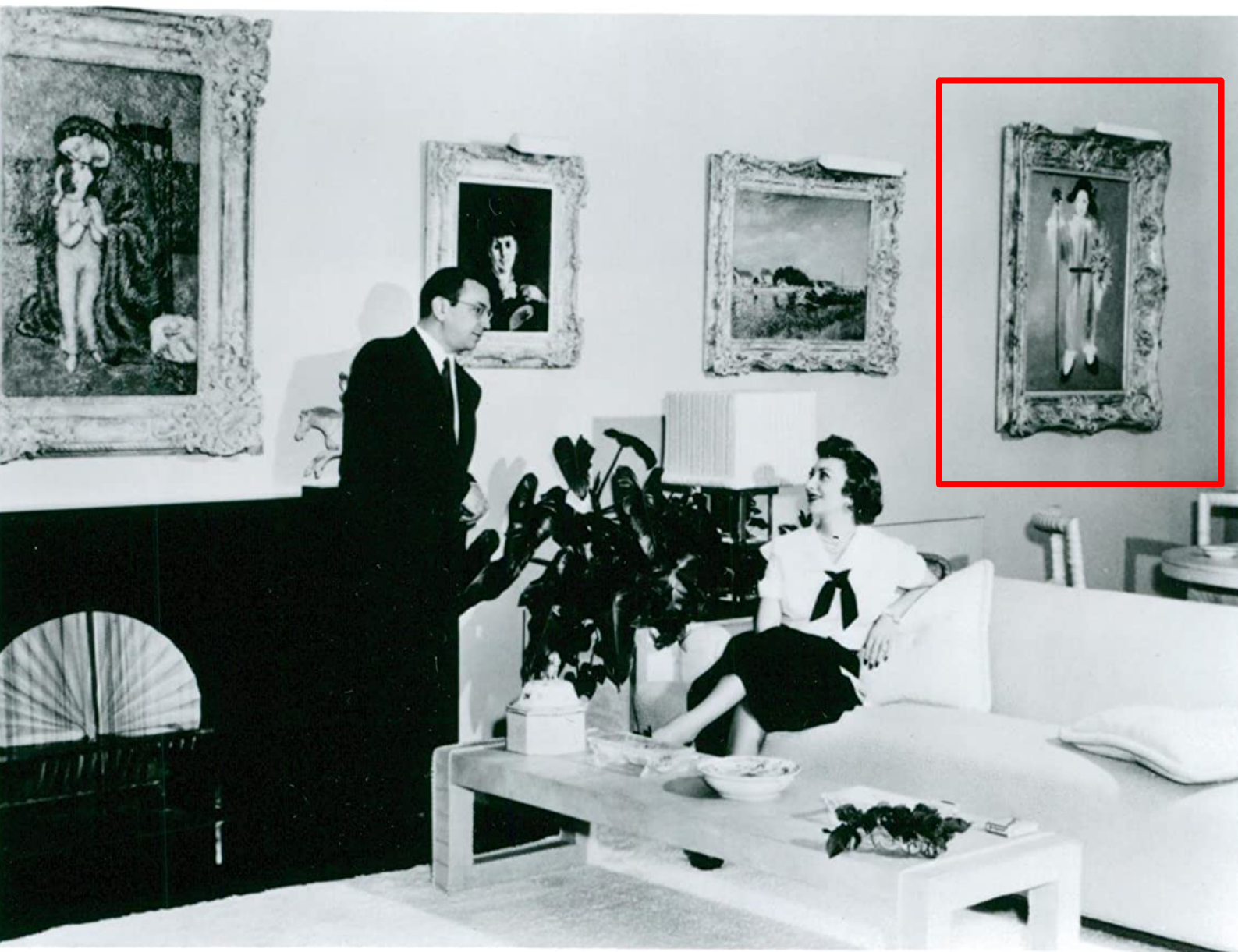
Pablo Picasso, *Portrait de Paulo en Pierrot*, 1929
Pola Museum of Art, Hakone, Japan

**“Everything you can
imagine is real”**

Pablo Picasso

Paulo dressed as a torero, 1926





Picasso's *Le petit pierrot aux fleurs* in the living room of William and Edith Mayer Goetz, Beverly Hills, California, late 1940s



PABLO PICASSO (1881-1973)

Le petit pierrot aux fleurs

Signed and dated lower left *Picasso, 29* (the date he parted with the work)

Oil on canvas

36 1/4 x 29 in. (92.1 x 73.6 cm.)

Painted in Paris, Winter 1923 - Spring 1924

PROVENANCE

Dr. A. Gosset (acquired from the artist)

Mme. Gosset, Paris (1948)

Collection of William & Edith Mayer Goetz

EXHIBITED

Paris, Galeries Georges Petit, *Exposition Picasso*, June – July 1932, no. 186, p. 61

San Francisco, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, *The Collection of Mr. and*

Mrs. William Goetz, April - May 1959, no. 46

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October - November 1961, no. 23 (illustrated)

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Mrs. William Goetz, January 1967, no. 20 (illustrated)

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Rotterdam, Kunsthal, *Picasso - Artist of the Century*,

13 March - 4 April 1999, p. 93, no. 54 (illustrated in colour)

Zurich, Kunsthaus, *Nahmad Collection*, 21 October 2011 - 15 January 2012, p. 35

Monaco, Grimaldi Forum, *Picasso in the Nahmad Collection*,

12 July - 15 September 2013, p. 192 (illustrated in colour)

Aix-en-Provence, Hotel de Caumont, *Botero dialogue avec Picasso*,

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Pablo and Paulo Picasso, 1923
Photograph by Man Ray

