

Associated Press Article, May 6, 2004

Album of 26 works on paper from 1970 on display for first time

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NEW YORK (AP) - From simple pen and ink drawings of nude women to a colourful and elaborate felt pen and ink drawing of two men ogling a nude woman, a sketchbook that was filled in a week reveals the obsessive nature of a mature Pablo Picasso at work.

The 26 works from a 1970 album of drawings and watercolours are on public display for the first time ever, offering an intimate look into the art and thoughts of Picasso, less than three years before his death at age 91.

Picasso: The Berggruen Album opened Monday at Mitchell-Innes & Nash gallery, in cooperation with John Berggruen Gallery in San Francisco, and runs through June 26. The full book from the collection of art dealer Heinz Berggruen was carefully unbound for framing, and will be reassembled for sale at \$3.5 million US. Such sketchbooks are very rare, as most belong to the Picasso family, gallery owner David Nash said.

Picasso created sketchbooks throughout his life. But these drawings are works "of a very personal nature," said Olivier Berggruen, an independent scholar and the youngest son of Heinz Berggruen. "It also gives a very good idea of his day-to-day thinking. You have this kind of intimacy."

Reclining Nude, a pen and ink on paper is the simplest of the works, with delicate yet clearly defined lines. It is reminiscent of Picasso's 1906 gauche and watercolour of the same name.

On the same day, Nov. 5, 1970, Picasso used a light touch with pen and ink for the outline of Two Men and a Woman. On Nov. 12, he revisited the work with felt pen to create the busiest and only multicoloured page in the album.

An elaborately adorned nude with her arms crossed at her chest, and concealing one breast, is in the middle of two men. The more prominent image of the old man on the left makes eye contact with the woman, while the man on the right is relegated to the background and appears distant and distraught.

Nude women are a common thread in the drawings, most of them highly sexual and offering themselves to men, which is typical of Picasso's late work, Olivier Berggruen said.

"The themes are a rehearsal of his early themes," he said. "This is, I think, an indication that his work is narrowing down. Not only is his work no longer part of the outside world, but he is obsessing on his old self."

In Seated Woman and Gentleman, a wash and pen and ink on paper, a bountiful woman bares her large breasts to a man clad in a wide-brimmed black hat and cloak. The work recalls Picasso's 347 etching series from 1968.

Picasso created the 26-page album over the course of seven days while at his home in Mougins, France. He produced about four works per day, varying his medium from pen and ink to pencil, ink wash and watercolour. Picasso biographer John Richardson has suggested that the album makes references to the work of Ingres and Goya, and that some of the female figures depict the artist's wife, Jacqueline.

"I think the interesting thing is the sequence," Nash said. "Picasso very carefully annotated and dated each work."

While mediums vary, strong lines are prominent throughout the album.

"It tells us that he had an extraordinary confidence in the lines, a sureness of how he handles the lines better than in his handwriting," said Nash, adding that the album could be seen as an "essay of bravado."

Berggruen said his father, who closed his Paris gallery in 1980 to devote more time to his personal collection, was interested in "all aspects and all facets of Picasso's work."

"In order to know what Picasso is like, you don't just look at his big paintings," Berggruen said. "Picasso is someone who could create something in every medium."

An international dealer for 25 years, Heinz Berggruen collected works by Picasso, Klee, Braque, Cezanne, Giacometti, Matisse, Seurat and van Gogh. In 1996, a significant part of his collection was set aside to form one of Berlin's most important museums of modern art, the Sammlung Berggruen. A year later, he donated 90 paintings by Klee to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Picasso: The Berggruen Album will not travel.