

Picasso: Painting the Blue Period

Described audio transcript

1. *The Coiffure*, 1899–1900, pastel and watercolour on paper, and the size is 46.7 by 29.5 cm.

This loosely drawn scene shows a woman standing at a vanity, styling her hair in her bedroom. Behind her a picture hangs in the upper right corner of the painting on a deep blue wall; its subject matter is indistinct. In front of the wall, there is a bed with brown sheets and a white cushion. A chamber pot sits under the bed. Filling the foreground, the woman is dressed in a white petticoat that reaches to her ankles. She wears a tight brown corset over the petticoat, creating her hourglass figure. She reaches to fix her dark hair up into a bun on top of her head. Her elbows point out sharply as she gazes into a vanity mirror. Various containers sit on top of the vanity table. The reflective surface of the mirror faces the woman, not the viewer. Picasso does not finish the bottom of the scene; he leaves the paper exposed through loose brushstrokes and light pastel marks, adding to the overall sketchy feeling of the artwork. This is an intimate domestic scene capturing a woman attending to her appearance.

2. *Woman with Bangs*, 1902, oil on canvas, and the size is 61.4 by 51.8 cm.

In this portrait, Picasso portrays an image of a sad woman in shades of blue. He has subtly painted the background in varying tones of blue, drawing our attention to the subject, who is positioned to the right of the painting. This neutral background places her in three-dimensional space that contains no anecdotal information. The woman's upper torso, cut off under her chest, fills the foreground, casting a shadow over her left shoulder. Wearing a large, shapeless jacket modelled with blue and brown tones, the woman slumps forwards towards the viewer. She stares out of the canvas with an unfocused gaze and solemn facial expression. Her short, dark hair with bangs frames her face. Picasso emphasizes her sombre mood by painting her pouting reddish-brown lips, leaving us to ponder her thoughts. In the *Blue Period* paintings of poor women, Picasso employs the poses and clothing of Christian religious images of the Madonna to evoke the empathy of viewers.

3. *Family at Supper*, 1903, pen and ink with watercolour on paper, and the size is 32.1 by 44.5 cm.

In this delicate watercolour and ink image, a Spanish family sits down to supper at a table in the centre of a modest room. In the foreground, a father, on the left, and a young child, on the right, sit on a plain wooden bench at the table with their backs to us. The father, with a plate and spoon in front of him, holds a bottle of wine and looks down towards the child. The child looks back at the father with a neutral expression and their arms on top of their plate. The mother, to the right of the child, bends to set a covered blue bowl of food on the table. She appears in profile, wearing a white headscarf tied to hold her hair back. The father and child sit facing a red framed window in the centre of the background. Blue wooden panels line the lower half of the walls. A green and blue painting hangs to the left of the window and a wooden chair with vertical slats on the back sits below it. To the right of the window, behind the mother, there is a cast iron cauldron hanging over a hearth, with two terracotta pots sitting under it.

4. *Still Life with Flowers*, 1906, gouache on cardboard, and the size is 72.1 by 55.9 cm.

A floral bouquet and dishes are set against a warm orange background. This still life centres around a white ceramic vase with a flared neck that narrows to meet a rounded body, curving into a pedestal that sits on the table. Elaborate handles flare out from the neck, curling into the body of the vase. An assorted bouquet of flowers overflows to fill the top half of the painting. There is a mixture of soft pink, blue, and white wildflowers to the left of the bouquet, while classic pink and red roses are on the right. A branch with green leaves and yellow flowers bursts out of the top of the flower arrangement. To the left of the vase, on the table, there is a white plate with a shiny green earthenware bowl. To the right of the vase is an elegant, white ceramic chocolate pot with a curved spout, lid, and faceted body. This is an autobiographical artwork; the bowl, handmade in Spain, refers to Picasso. The chocolate pot, factory-made in France, symbolizes his lover, the artist Fernande Olivier. The local wildflowers represent Picasso, as well, while the cultivated roses symbolize the sophisticated Fernande.