

sion that characterized much of Picasso's work after 1925. In a few works, including *Two Figures on the Beach*, Picasso adapted the iconographic types and illusionist devices of Surrealists such as Ernst and Dali. This drawing is from a group Picasso executed in Cannes in 1933. Although one writer has reported that these drawings are the only works the artist considers "directly surrealist in conception,"¹ they nonetheless exhibit that conscious control characteristic of Picasso the master draftsman.

In this composition, two strange entities present themselves to each other in front of a conventional seascape. Each is composed of elements representative of several levels of reality: the practical (chair, door, shutter), the symbolic (sculpture, fork, glove), the fantastic (padded growths). The images of self they offer one to the other are guileful facades in view of their complex—sometimes disintegrating, even monstrous—reality. (Elaine L. Johnson)

Vollard Suite

MODEL AND SURREALIST FIGURE. May 4, 1933. Etching, 10¹/₁₆ x 7⁷/₈ inches. (C&N, p. 228)

Picasso's interest in classical life and mythology was heightened by his commission in 1930 to illustrate Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and paralleled his burgeoning preoccupation with his own sculpture. Before completing the plates for Ovid in 1931, Picasso bought a château at Boisgeloup. There, finally, he had the space and seclusion that allowed him to devote some of his energies to sculpture. His next spurt of printmaking activity, in 1933,

closely followed this unleashing of creative activity, and the simultaneous inspiration resulting from his alliance with the young Marie-Thérèse Walter.

Although Louis Fort, his printer, had installed an etching press at Boisgeloup, Picasso made few prints there. In March 1933 in Paris he embarked on a series of etchings, one hundred of which were later to fulfill an obligation to the publisher and art dealer Ambroise Vollard. Not surprisingly, classic motifs and studio life were the prevailing inspirations for the first prints. Later, after his contributions to the Surrealist-oriented publication *Minotaure*, Picasso recreated this mythological being as his surrogate in compositions both of revelry and utmost seriousness.

The earliest forty prints, devoted to the sculptor in his studio, are serene, filled with light, sweet desire, and generally reflect the artist's own relaxed mood. The sculptured pieces in the first prints are those of Boisgeloup: large moon-heads of Marie-Thérèse. As variations were made on the theme, colossal Roman heads, classical groups and abstracted torsos appear. By far the most extravagant variation is the Surrealist construction shown in the etching reproduced. Here the classically simple nude model, garlands around her neck and waist, wonderingly touches an assembly of manufactured and human forms, a concoction of nineteenth-century furniture, embroidered fleurs-de-lis and objects that allude to diverse sexual possibilities.

The Vollard Suite, as it came to be called, was Picasso's first prolonged experience with printmaking in which he had complete freedom of choice of subject and execution. The dozens of plates became a refined sketchbook in which the artist gave rein to his fertile imagination and consummate draftsmanship, yet generally restricting himself to classical images and limiting the representations of his current stylistic tendencies to works of art observed by persons within the compositions. The juxtaposition of somewhat abstract sculptural forms and recognizably human spectators emphasizes a type of reality Picasso continually explores. While the sculpture could well have been part of his own space and time (either in his own transformations or in relics from the past) the artist and model who gaze upon these works are metaphors in a timeless vacuum. The drawings and prints done by Picasso during the periods of his greatest personal content are usually sensual, often witty, and almost consistently dwell on this double view of reality. (Riva Castleman)