

PICASSO'S CASTING IN BRONZE DURING WORLD WAR II

Clare Finn • Colloque Picasso Sculptures • 25 mars 2016

During the Second World War there were rumours concerning Picasso's whereabouts.¹ But stories of his casting during the war emerged only after the Liberation. Photographs by people such as Robert Capa, Lee Miller and Henri Cartier-Bresson that show sculptures in his studio were also taken after the Liberation.

The first to publish an account of his casting activity were the art dealers Harriet and Sidney Janis in *Picasso: The Recent Years 1939 – 1946*, in which they include a grainy photograph showing *Tête de taureau*, *La femme en robe longue*, *Tête de mort* and *Le Chat*,² taken in Picasso's studio captioning it: "Bronzes Made During the War. These and more than a dozen of Picasso's pre-war sculptures were cast during the occupation."³ Brassai's account of Picasso's war-time casting was published only in 1964 in his *Conversations avec Picasso*.⁴ Despite being written from notes Brassai made at the time of the conversations he also refers to public events that do not correlate with the dates he is speaking of, thus it reads more like a memoir.

Yet both accounts originate from Picasso. Brassai's was his reaction to seeing bronzes in Picasso's studio in September 1943. He was there to discuss photographing sculpture for a book, which would eventually be published in 1948 as *Les Sculptures de Picasso*, the first serious publication on Picasso's sculpture.⁵ The Janis's appear to have got their story from conversations with Picasso in February and March 1946. Both accounts give the activity an air of mystery, referring to 'forbidden' metals and clandestine deliveries.

BUT WHAT ACTUALLY WENT ON ?

In the Musée Picasso's *Picasso Sculptures* exhibition catalogue, which should be read in tandem with this essay, I briefly charted Picasso's bronze casting before the war. Then, with the Valsuani Foundry's closure in 1940, I follow Picasso's change of foundries to continue a programme of casting begun before war was declared, first to an obscure caster called Guastini, then in 1941 to the foundry of Émile Robecchi. We can document Picasso continuing to bronze cast into June 1942, and perhaps a little beyond. When he stopped coincided with an ordinance coming into force enabling the German military authorities to close any enterprise they felt non-essential to the war economy.⁶ Art-bronze casting cannot have appeared essential. But Picasso's decision to stop may have been influenced more by the wider war economy described here, rather than by specific legislation.

GERMAN REPARATIONS

Eighty per cent of Europe's copper consumption was supplied from outside Europe.⁷ The German occupation of France meant that from 31 July 1940 all importation of metal from overseas stopped. From then on all France's needs and Germany's demands on France had to be met from existing stocks.⁸ Problems with supply were inevitable.

In 1940 Germany took over 800,000 tons of copper from France. But this was from the French Military⁹ and the public at large would have been relatively unaware of it. It was an ignorance that would not last.

In July 1941 Vichy launched a widespread voluntary programme to collect everyday items made of non-fer-

rous metals: cooking pots, ashtrays, coat racks, protective metal on furniture, doors and stairways, and the famous brasserie counters. Hotels and restaurants were sent surveys asking for objects not vital to their businesses. These surveys were followed by inspectors who removed overlooked items making it questionable how voluntary the programme was.¹⁰ The programme was not a success and to recuperate, more bronze public sculpture, deemed unartistic, was removed. Between November 1941 and February 1942, over sixty public sculptures were removed. More was scheduled for removal, but was eventually saved by transport and labour shortages. The number of sculptures destroyed throughout France is believed to be around 1,700.¹¹ How much Picasso understood of the reparations we don't know but he would certainly have seen the stripped counters and the empty pedestals. It may also have made him reflect on his own stock of non-ferrous metals' security, his cast bronzes. Aware that he had been designated a 'degenerate' artist, he would not have wanted his work requisitioned for the war effort. Documents dated to the period when Picasso was in Royan indicate that arrangements were made for casts to be delivered to his store at 25 Rue des Grands-Augustins, a minute's walk from his studio at number 7. Later Brassai remarked on how many bronzes were in the studio and later still referred to plasters being at number 25, "because of the lack of bronze, they are all still in plaster".¹² So it seems Picasso reorganized things to keep a firm eye on his bronzes.

SUPPLY SYSTEMS AND ITS EFFECT ON AVAILABLE WORK

Germany took reparations from France not just as non-ferrous metals but also in the form of manufactured goods and overall the French metallurgy sector benefited from the war economy.

Citroën, Renault and Peugeot together supplied the Wehrmacht with 93,000 vehicles.¹³ After the war, the International Military Tribunal of Major War Criminals would hear that in undertaking contracts for finished goods the French rendered the Reich and its Armed Forces valuable service.¹⁴

The benefits to the metallurgy sector filtered down even to small businesses and in June 1941 eighty per cent of Paris' metallurgical industries were small. Despite problems with materials and manpower, few of the firms in the "Petite et Moyenne" section of the Parisian Metallurgy Association were forcibly closed. Much of the work depended on contracts with the state for Germany.¹⁵ To deal with these contracts Vichy introduced economic controls from autumn 1940; rationing, complex supply systems for raw materials and mandatory declaration of stocks. But with livelihoods depending on having the raw materials with which to work, not everyone complied.¹⁶ This led to hoarding.¹⁷ Despite being allotted bronze to cast Arno Breker's work, Eugène Rudier would tell Breker he had enough undeclared materials to fulfil the sculptor's needs.¹⁸ Given the size versus the weight of metal ingots, hiding quantities of them may not have been difficult. They could be buried in quite large quantities, especially if a foundry floor was earthen. Richard Vinen tells us that the German presence tended to be

more in Paris's smart western quarters and was slight in the industrial suburbs surrounding the city where foundries tended to be located.¹⁹ This would not have helped the Germans root out undeclared stocks or other activities.

So work was available in the metallurgical sector; yet for art-bronze foundries there was a greater compromise than just working on contracts for Germany. State contracts were for industrial casting — machine parts or munitions, which for art-bronze casters involved a loss of skills that were no longer necessary; the skill of individual mould making, chasing and patinating. It is like asking the couture ateliers of Christian Dior to supply Marks and Spencer. Still earning a living was important. Guastini, who had work in his metier from Picasso, remained in Paris throughout the *exode* of 1940, which reduced the city's population, normally around 3,000,000, to between 700,000 and 1,000,000. Guastini panicked only as German troops neared the city. He returned the deposit to Kahnweiler that Picasso had already paid him. A month later, reassured Armageddon has not occurred, he began trying to cast again.

WHAT ART-BRONZE CASTING WAS POSSIBLE IN 1941 ?

We have little information of what art-bronze casters were actually doing under the occupation. Some may have diversified. Rudier continued casting art bronzes, but for the Germans. However, Elisabeth Lebon records that the Fonderie Cooperative des Artistes cast art bronzes in 1941, and would have cast more had it been able to obtain the bronze. Notori-

ously, the foundry had not held stocks of metal as was the norm, a factor that led to its liquidation.²⁰ Significantly, there is no suggestion this work was clandestine or resistance motivated and every indication, if they had obtained the metal, that they could have continued casting during Vichy's programme for collecting such metals. Thus Picasso's activity now looks less out of step.

DID PICASSO SPEED UP THE NUMBER OF PIECES HE CAST ?

Currently we know little of how much Picasso cast in the 1930s, certainly several pieces but perhaps not every year. When Valsuani's closed in 1940 there were seven bronzes at his foundry. Picasso had already collected two and Guastini would cast three more for him. That brings the number of bronzes cast in the period just before the war and into 1940 to at least twelve. But in 1941 Picasso cast three times as many plus fifteen pieces by the Catalan sculptor Apel-les Fenosa.²¹ But it is not an escalating pattern, as in 1942 he cast only eleven of his own and a further fourteen of Fenosa's works.²² Counter intuitively, Picasso cast larger pieces in 1942 than in 1941. With diminishing metal stocks one might expect the contrary, but Picasso may equally have wanted to cast larger pieces while he still could. The 1942 work includes two "statue manequin" [sic], *La Femme en robe longue* at 161cm high, and a "sujet grandeur nature" that may be either *L'Orateur* at 183.5 cm high or *La Femme à l'orange*, at 180.5 cm high.²³ There seems also to be a correlation between size, complexity of casting and cost, a cost that esca-

lates over time. As the purchasing power of the franc went down, hoarding led to a speculative market in goods,²⁴ reflected in the prices Picasso was charged. Hence Dora Maar remarked to Jean Cocteau: “The metal is like gold.”²⁵ Ironically, Picasso would be charged even more after the war!

Finally, in April 1943 Robecchi gave Picasso an invoice charging him a sum that was 80 per cent of the total the caster had previously charged for all the casting he had conducted in 1941. The work was not, however, for bronze casting but for “moulding on site in the artist’s atelier... in plaster from clay”.²⁶ Among these plaster moulds Robecchi listed “statue homme grandeurs nature avec mouton” (*L’Homme au mouton*), cast in bronze by Valsuani after the war, and “Grande piece sujet – Guerrier” (probably *Tête casquée*).²⁷ Picasso disputed the cost on the invoice and paid Robecchi less than half.²⁸

BLACK OR GREY ECONOMY ?

Clandestine activities are generally difficult to trace. Yet both Robecchi and Picasso left a conspicuous paper trail. Robecchi put his foundry mark on pieces. Picasso throughout paid not with used franc notes as one might imagine, but by cheque. This would have been in accord with laws enacted in 1940 and 1941 stating payments in excess of 3,000 francs, which these were, be made only by cheque. Presumably Robecchi banked those cheques. So if the relevant authorities have looked into the activity there was plenty to look at. On each invoice Picasso also recorded the bank and cheque numbers in his own hand, indicating he dealt

with these matters himself and did not delegate them to Sabartés, weakening the argument for Sabartés’s role in the wartime casting.²⁹

CLANDESTINE TRANSPORT

The April 1943 moulding is the last traceable work that Robecchi did for Picasso. It indicates that at least this caster and some of his workforce were still available to work for Picasso. They had not closed, nor complied with Prime Minister Pierre Laval’s request, in June 1942, to volunteer to work in Germany.

Robecchi probably cast for Picasso for as long as his metal stocks lasted, doing other work once these were gone. What that other work was, we do not know. The price rise in Robecchi’s invoices may be a measure of his desperation. He must have indeed risked a fair bit delivering pieces. Vichy’s requirements to declare, donate or register non-ferrous metals would make openly transporting a ‘degenerate’ artist’s bronze sculpture troublesome at best.

Christian Zervos carried pieces left at Valsuani’s in 1940 by métro, though *Le Coq* was left with Meric Gallery as it was too large to be transported that way. Brassai remarks on the lack of petrol and that Picasso would walk between the Rue la Boétie and the Rue des Grands-Augustins.³⁰ Werner Zachmann — the person in charge of the métro and omnibuses in Gross-Paris, and of the Eiffel Tower, because of its elevators, from July 1941 to 1944 — said that under the Occupation petrol was no longer freely available. Cars could only be driven with a permit and they were issued “only if there was some overriding reason and the owner could not use the métro — the fire brigade... and the like.”³¹ But it is

known Picasso drove back from Royan in August 1940 and thus may also have collected *Le Coq* himself by car. Two years later obtaining petrol for private transport was probably not possible. Moving two casts of the 161-cm-high *La femme en longue robe*, from the foundry to Picasso's studio must have been challenging at best.

A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE

As the war drew to a close in 1944 it was industry that demonstrated the change in attitude to acts done to cling to livelihoods in troubled times. The Groupement des Industries Métallurgiques Mécaniques et Connexes de la Région Parisienne encouraged its members to compile dossiers on their resistance activities, suggesting maintenance of illicit stocks was a 'resistance' act.³² Hiding stocks of metal did deny Germany access to economic resources. But I doubt Picasso or Robecchi were motivated by that reasoning while they were doing it. Picasso's commissioning of Robecchi did, however, allow him to do work in his metier, which was not for Germany.



HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON

Atelier de Picasso, rue des Grands-Augustins, Paris, 1944

musée national Picasso-Paris. MPPH2557

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NOTES

1. Henri Matisse assured his son Pierre that rumours Picasso was in Switzerland, or in a lunatic asylum were untrue. John Russell, *Matisse Father & Son* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), pp.193, 231.
2. Werner Spies, *Picasso, The Sculptures* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2000), n^{os} 240, 238A, 238, 219 and 195.
3. Harriet and Sidney Janis, *Picasso: The Recent Years 1939 – 1946* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1946), 5 and text for plate 130.
4. Brassai, *Conversations avec Picasso* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).
5. Daniel Henri Kahnweiler, *Les Sculptures de Picasso* (Paris: Les Éditions du Chêne, 1948).
6. The German military authorities brought in an ordinance to close enterprises they thought non-essential to the war effort on 26 February 1942. Vichy delayed its enforcement until 4 July 1942. François Lehideux, ‘Industrial production, Document 304, Paris, 20 January 1956’, in *France during the German Occupation 1940 – 1944: A Collection of 292 Statements on the Government of Maréchal Pétain and Pierre Laval*, Vol. 1 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957), pp.25–9.
7. Alan S. Milward, *The New Order and the French Economy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 27 and 35; Pierre Cathala, ‘Industrial production, the protection of French factories and output’, *France during the German Occupation*, pp.30–34.
8. E. C. Karlsgodt, ‘Recycling French Heroes: The Destruction of Bronze Statues under the Vichy Regime’, *French Historical Studies* 29 (2006): pp.143–181.
9. Germany took so much non-ferrous metals and their ores from all their occupied western territories that General Thomas, head of the *Wirtschafts- und Rüstungsamt*, believed this accounted for Germany’s lack of serious shortages of these materials throughout 1941. Milward, *The New Order and the French Economy*, 79, 80 and 93; Kiriilly Freeman, *Bronzes to Bullets: Vichy and the Destruction of French Statuary, 1941 – 1944* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p.17 and p.195.
10. Karlsgodt, ‘Recycling French Heroes’, 143–181; Freeman, *Bronzes to Bullets*, p.26.
11. Municipal governments and private associations owning statues were to be paid for the bronze at a rate similar to that used for the voluntary campaign of 30 francs a kilo. June Hargrove, *The Statues of Paris: An Open Air Pantheon: The History of Statues to Great Men* (New York: Vendome Press, 1989), 303 – 306. See also Yvon Bizadel, ‘Les Statues parisiennes fondues sous l’occupation 1940-1944’ and ‘Catalogue des statues enlevées par les Nazis a Paris, 1940-1944, et quelques images en conservant le souvenir’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 83 (March 1974): pp.130–134; Pierre Jahan and Jean Cocteau, *La Mort et les Statues* (Paris: Éditions du Compas, 1946); Pierre Jahan, ‘La Mort et les Statues, Décembre 1941’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 83 (March 1974): pp.153 – 156.
12. Brassai, *Picasso & Co* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967). Entry for 5 May 1944, p. 135.
13. Antony Beevor and Artemis Cooper, *Paris After the Liberation 1944 – 1949* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp.104–105.
14. Milward, p.108 and 281.
15. But small businesses were often exploited by larger firms, tight margins and late payments were difficult for smaller firms and larger firms who got the contacts and the ‘Zast Bonds’ by which metal was acquired, did not always pass those bonds on when subcontracting, forcing small businesses to use precious stocks. Thus, while Vichy spoke illustriously of the skilled labourer and small businessman, artisans’ needs for raw materials were neglected in favour of large businesses. Richard Vinen, *The Politics of French Business 1936 – 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.168–171.
16. *Ibid.*, pp.141–142.
17. Paul Sanders, ‘Economic Draining – German Black Market Operations in France, 1940 – 1944’, *Global Crime*, Special Issue: Organised Crime in History, vol. 9, n^o. 1 – 2 (2008), pp.136 – 168.
18. ‘Mon prévoyant et rusé ami m’avoua pourtant posséder dans ses stocks suffisamment de matière première non déclarée lors de la requisition.’ Arno Breker, *Paris, Hitler et Moi* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1970), 134 – 136.
19. Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French: Life Under the Occupation* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), pp.111–112.
20. Elisabeth Lebon, *Dictionnaire des fondateurs de bronze d’art, France 1890-1950 = Dictionary of art bronze founders, France 1890 – 1950* (London: Sladmore Editions, 2014), pp.156 – 158.
21. E. Robecchi to Picasso, 17 February, 14 May, 3 July, 14 August and 14 October 1941, private archive, Paris.
22. E. Robecchi to Picasso, 12 January, 20 February, 2 April and 20 September 1942, private archive, Paris.
23. Spies, *Picasso, The Sculptures*, nos. 238II, 236II and 181II.
24. Sanders, ‘Economic Draining’, pp.136–168.
25. Jean Cocteau, ‘Le métal est comme de l’or’, *Journal 1942 – 1945* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1989), entry for Monday, 29 June 1942, p.171.
26. ‘Moulage à l’atelier de l’artiste... plâtre de après terre’, E. Robecchi to Picasso, 5 April 1943, private archive, Paris.
27. Spies nos. 280 & 136.
28. E. Robecchi to Picasso, invoice and receipt, 5 April 1943, private archive, Paris.
29. Brassai credited Jaime Sabartés with encouraging Picasso to cast the plaster sculptures of the early 1930s in more durable bronze. Sabartés began working for Picasso in 1935 on his return from South America. He had gone to Buenos Aires in 1904, settled in Guatemala in

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1906, returned briefly to Barcelona and Paris in 1927, before going to Uruguay. Thus he was not involved in Picasso's early casting. In mid-January 1937 Sabartés and Picasso fell out and Sabartés stopped working for him. He returned to Picasso's employ after the end of September 1938, after the signing of the Munich Pact. Brassai, *Picasso & Co.*, 51; *Dictionary of Artists Models*, ed. Jill Berk Jiminez (Abingdon: Routledge, Oxon, 2001), pp.477–479; Pierre Daix, *Dictionnaire Picasso* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), pp.805– 806; Jaime Sabartés, *Picasso, An Intimate Portrait* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1948), pp.137–142.

30. Brassai, *Picasso & Co.*, 48.

31. David Pryce-Jones, *Paris in the Third Reich: A History of the German Occupation 1940 – 1944* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Wilson, 1981), p.259.

32. Vinen, *The Politics of French Business*, p.142.