

John Finlay • Colloque Picasso Sculptures • 24 mars 2016

In his programme note for *Parade* (1917), Guillaume Apollinaire made special mention of “the fantastic constructions representing the gigantic and surprising figures of the Managers” (*fig. 1*). The poet reflected, “Picasso’s Cubist costumes and scenery bear witness to the realism of his art. This realism—or Cubism, if you will—is the influence that has most stirred the arts over the past ten years.”¹ Apollinaire’s note acknowledges a number of important things regarding Picasso’s new theatrical venture. Most notable is his recognition that the Managers are not costumes in the traditional sense, but three-dimensional in conception, and linked with his earlier Cubist work. In describing the Managers as “construction”, Apollinaire was perhaps thinking of Picasso’s satirical *Guitar Player at a Café Table* (*fig. 2*). The assemblage ran the gamut from a Cubist painting on a flat surface, showing a harlequin with pasted paper arms, to a real guitar suspended from strings, to a still life on a table. *Guitar Player* was not a proper assemblage, nor a freestanding construction, but a comic elaboration on Picasso’s probing figure/ground relationships in his Synthetic Cubist collages and constructed works, such as the cardboard *Guitar* (1912).

As with *Guitar Player* (a harlequin emerging from the fictional into the literal world), Picasso’s Managers fulfilled the function of sculpture-cum-architecture moving in space. Picasso’s Manager assemblages were the incarnation of, literally and metaphorically, the towering city, the all-encompassing costumes perhaps parodying Cubist/Futurist theories of flux and simultaneity.² Towering over the other performers and gesturing “dans la langue de la ville”³, these 11-foot-

tall superstructures knowingly created a conflict between the vitality of dance and the immobility of more grounded sculptures. As a practical and symbolic feature, the Managers anticipate certain aspects of Picasso’s later sculpture.

The decors for the ballet (1924) were equally “surreal”, contemporary forms of sculpture. Picasso made allowance for mobility in his set designs by enabling the assembled stage props (even the stars) to move in time to the music, the dancers manipulating them like seateurs. For the *Three Graces*, Picasso created wickerwork constructions manipulated like puppets by wires. The “practicables” were similar to telephone extension cables that expanded and contracted as their heads bounced up and down. These tableaux vivants were intentionally part of the dance. To represent the ballet’s other tableau scenes, Picasso assembled movable sets designed from bent or twisted rattan, laid at angles on to cardboard, representing schematic figures and animals.

In formulating ideas for *Mercury*, Picasso looked back to the geometry of prewar graphic experiments where lines intersect, creating grid-like, transparent patterns or structural armatures that render line drawings in sculptural terms. In relation to studies for the Cubist *Head of a Woman (Fernande)* of 1909, Picasso claimed that he originally “had the intention of doing them in wire”. Although it is unlikely that Picasso was thinking in theatrical terms in 1912–14, he must have later perceived that the constructive “syntax” of his prewar Cubism could easily be adapted to stage design. This has led certain authors to underplay the

important material and constructional relationships between Picasso's early Cubist sculpture and his later theatrical costumes and set designs. Werner Spies's definition of how the *Mercure* sets relate to Picasso's earlier sculpture is inconclusive when he claims that the linear designs Picasso created for *Mercure* were not totally three-dimensional in aspect, and that these stage decors essentially remained "flat" and entirely bound up with the picture plane.⁴ Notwithstanding this observation, the *Mercure* practicables, like the 1912 *Guitar*, are constructed to form new "signs" that give meaning to "flat" shapes brought together in simple semantic relationships. What is more, Picasso's set designs operate in the same way as his prewar Cubism—somewhere between the status of a picture and an object—and were, according to his own interpretation, truly sculptural, as he understood the term. This conception is vital if we are to understand how Cubism and theatre shaped Picasso's later sculpture. *Parade* and the *Mercure* costumes and set designs demonstrate that Picasso continued to search for a moving/living form of sculpture. Picasso's mobile set pieces possibly take their cue from poetic imagination and can be likened to the "statues vivantes" in Apollinaire's earliest poetry from *Alcools* (1913). As Peter Read has shown, in *Alcools* enlivened sculpture is presented as both "surreal" and distinctly kinetic :

In "L'Emigrant de Landor Road", shop-window dummies awaken and move. Robotic automata go to work in "1909" and "Vendémiaire". Most striking of all, "La Maison des morts", a poem which was conceived as a

short story, begins with a line referring to shop-window dummies ... who rise up from behind the glass of their funeral display cabinets to spend a day of revelry and romance amongst the living.⁶

The vulgar, noisy and robotic *Managers* were precisely the kinds of sculpture that Apollinaire imagined and championed in his writings: "Quelle sculpture poursuivra à travers les rues son admirateur terrifié?" asked the poet.⁷ Apollinaire's anthropomorphic vision conjures other fictional sculptures in his literary compendium. In his novella, *Le Poète assassiné* (1916), we encounter "a dark metallic poet, who is smoking a cigarette by the bank of the Seine, while improvising witty rhymes [and who] turns out to be a living, breathing bronze statue of François Coppée, a poet who had died in 1908".⁸ The poet's descriptions renew and celebrate time-honoured images of inanimate sculpture infused with movement and brought to life.⁹ Furthermore, they have a direct connection with the sculptures Picasso designed for Apollinaire's tomb. Picasso's project for the Apollinaire monument led to the creation of a number of important metal constructions between 1928 and 1932, sculpture that might loosely be described as "vivantes et mouvementées", poised between life and death. The transparent weightlessness of the 1928 constructions (*fig. 3*) could only have been transposed with patterned or linear effects in two and three-dimensions, effects which recall Apollinaire's description in *Le Poète assassiné* (1916) of a memorial sculpture erected as "a statue of nothingness, of the void [and] filled with his ghost". Picasso's wire maquettes, often described as "drawings in space",¹⁰

undeniably evoke “une statue en rien, en vide”. Yet their welded frameworks and heavy base supports paradoxically reveal very solid structures. They lack mass, so the impression is one of a sculpture that rests solidly in three-dimensions, but remains see-through, a sculpture that “derives its force from the air”.¹¹

Picasso’s wire constructions largely depict human form with movement implicit. Alan Bowness sees “a woman pushing a swing”, whilst Peter Read describes the wire sculptures as “human figures surrounded by a geometrical frame, but sometimes reaching beyond the spatial limitations that such enclosure implies”.¹² Christa Lichtenstern argues that the “disk ‘head’, simultaneously defines the standing position of the figure and its progress forwards”, while Michael Fitzgerald views the constructions as sketching out

“a dramatic central figure whose forward thrust criss-crosses the delimited space of the sculpture. The dynamic rhythm of the rods energizes the surrounding void and draws the viewer’s attention to it.”¹³

The lattice-like effects infer grasping, moving towards or reaching out into the surrounding space, the rigorously welded scaffolding creating touching or caressing sensations. There is an inherent tension between the encompassing spatial framework and the figure’s active march into the open. Movement vs stasis, flesh and blood vs the inorganic, openness vs rigidity, ephemerality vs permanence inhabit Picasso’s wire sculptures; they are built on contradictions.

In the context of the Père Lachaise cemetery, Picasso’s living monument captures the very essence of Apollinaire’s ideas in *Alcools* and *Le Poète assassiné*.

The two-metre high *Woman in a Garden* (fig. 4) was Picasso’s most ambitious and definitive welded metal construction for the memorial to Apollinaire. Its great success derives from the sculpture’s Ovidian transformations of flora and anatomy. Half-flame and half-leaf, with a framework of mechanical-looking parts representing her backbone and swollen midriff, this dryad breathes fertility, and appears a slightly comical product of Vulcan’s forge. Uncharacteristically, Picasso’s solid metal montage exudes airiness, energy and animation. As André Salmon wrote in 1931 :

“From the base rises a figure, which is entirely devoted to the upward expression of movement. Some will find it full of grace, the delicate structure on which could have been built the elegant body of a woman; for others it will be no more than an incomprehensible diagram.”¹⁴

The three-dimensional effects of *Woman in a Garden* show its dependence on Cubist sculpture. As Peter Read explains :

“It is no coincidence that, without exception, all the published photographs of the work are taken from the front. Though free-standing, *Woman in a Garden* is in fact related to the original metal *Guitar*, and to the

larger, painted metal *Guitar* of 1924, both of which were made to hang on a wall, viewed only from the front and sides, challenging generic classification, straddling the frontier between painting and sculpture.”¹⁵

This raises questions concerning the three-dimensionality and intention of this highly contradictory sculpture. While the work imparts energy—windswept hair, sinuous arms, wavering philodendron branches, leaf or flame-like shapes—from behind, metal cross-pieces suggest the stillness/flatness of sets or signage. Paradoxically, curved and solid supporting sections at its base suggest dainty dance steps (*fig. 5*); on pointe, croisé, curtsies, whereas the hair and head (with its howling mouth) help express themes of the stage: “joy, despair, abandon.”¹⁶

Two other sculptures closely associated with the Apollinaire commission include *Tête d’homme* and *Tête de femme* (1930 and 1929–30, both Musée Picasso, Paris). The cut and welded sections of the lozenge-shaped mouth in *Tête d’homme* contrast with Picasso’s roughly welded joints. The pin eyes and megaphone and moustachioed mouth look back to the loud and kinetic French and American Managers for Parade. The structural principle for *Tête de femme* derives from Picasso’s 1924 dot-and-line sketchbooks, particularly, a drawing from March (Carnet 215, folio 18, Musée Picasso, Paris) showing two globes surrounded by oval rings resembling the planet Saturn and supported by a similar diamond/tripod-shaped base. Where *Tête d’homme* contrasts a heavy-looking base and structure with a light-comical countenance, the colanders and elliptical rods (painted white) in

Tête de femme, become “signs” linking planetary motion with anatomy. Solid metal frameworks rendered with riven iron and weighty metal springs, incongruously represent graceful features—hair, moustaches and pursed lips—so the tension between the animate/inanimate governs both sculptures.

Contradictory tensions are similarly a feature of the later *Bull* (1958, MoMA, New York), created from thin planes of plywood and other contrasting wooden elements. Once more, the emphasis falls on flat, simplified shapes and opaque forms, arranged on a two-dimensional surface. The work references in its near flatness the multiple perspectives of Cubism and possibly large advertising “bull boards” seen throughout Spain, first erected in 1956 (*fig. 6*). More straightforwardly, the pilfered stretcher used to outline the animal’s face becomes a witty “sign” for Cubist painting, allowing Bull paradoxically to play with the possibility of rhythm and kinesis through contour and curvature. So while *Metamorphosis I* (1928) and the “double metamorphosis”¹⁸ of the famous *Bull’s Head* (1942, both Musée Picasso, Paris) explore interchange via visual transmutation (animate to inanimate and back again), the assembled earthenware objects of *Tanagra Resting Hands on Knee* and *Condor* (c. 1947–48) (Musée Picasso, Antibes) infer subtle bodily movements. While the bird’s head swivels sharply to the left and the glazed wings signify fluttering feathers, *Tanagra* incorporates similarly turning and twisting actions.

Here there is not the space to explore many of the contradictory features in Picasso’s sculpture. It will suffice to say that the intellectual and sculptural logic

of theatre simulated a range of plastic expression from 1928 to 1932, and thereafter. As wellsprings for the fantastical costume-sculptures of *Parade* (1917), *Mercury* (1924) and the *Apollinaire memorial*, key stimuli were the poetic and literary works of Apollinaire. Analysis shows that three-dimensional projects for the proposed monument also relied heavily on earlier graphic discoveries. As a driving force behind the artist's sculptural oeuvre, Picasso's costumes and decors are forms of sculpture, as the artist understood the term. Making few distinctions between categories in art, Picasso sought to liberate sculpture from conventional definitions, aesthetic hierarchies and "the imbecile tyranny of genres".¹⁹ Ultimately, movement is vital to understanding much of Picasso's sculpture. Picasso's theatre, sculpture and monumental projects are active models, no longer objects, silent and motionless, but "statues vivantes".



AMERICAN MANAGER FOR PARADE, THÉÂTRE DU CHÂTELET, PARIS, IN 1917
Glass Negative.
Victoria & Albert Museum. S.5408-2009
Photograph by H. B Lachmann.
(Courtesy V&A, London)
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Picasso devant la version en fer peinte en blanc de La femme au jardin lors de l'exposition « Picasso » à la Galerie Georges Petit, Paris 1932
Archives privées de Pablo Picasso. MP 267
Photo © RMN-Grand Palais/Mathieu Rabeau
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GUITAR PLAYER AT A CAFÉ TABLE, 1913, NO LONGER EXTANT
Photograph probably taken by Pablo Picasso, Détail du négatif verre N°102
Private collection
© Succession Picasso, 2016



OLGA DANCING. VILLA BELLE ROSE, JUAN-LES-PINS (C. 1925)
FABA Courtesy Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso para el Arte
© Succession Picasso, 2016



PABLO PICASSO
Figure (Design for a Monument to Apollinaire), 1928/c.1962
Painted steel rods 198 x 159.4 x 72.3 cm
Museum of Modern Art New York, Gift of the artist, 1979.
72.1979



MARK RENTZ
Toro de Osborne ("Bull board"), Salamanca, Spain

NOTES

1. *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews*, ed. Leroy. C. Breunig, trans Susan Suleiman (New York: Viking Press, 1972), pp.452–453.
2. Theories of simultaneity in the writings of Henri Bergson, especially his ideas on the multiplicity of memories and perceptions in *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1910), may have influenced Apollinaire's experimental poetry. Apollinaire's library included Bergson's *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: Alcan, 1911). See Gilbert Boudar, with Michel Décaudin, *La Bibliothèque de Guillaume Apollinaire* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1983). Notably, in "Zone" (Autumn 1913), Apollinaire captured the simultaneity of experience by means of synthesizing pieces of fractured conversation and unintegrated details, creating his own form of street poetry.

À la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien ...
 Tu lis les prospectus les catalogues les affiches
 qui chantent tout haut
 Voilà la poésie ce matin et pour la prose il y a
 les journaux
3. The Managers, according to Jean Cocteau in Nord-Sud, were pieces of the set with human attributes. It was their job to stomp around on stage in the manner of uncivilized, vulgar and noisy automata. In his Roman *Carnet* he refers to the Managers as the "terribles divinités vulgaires de la réclame". Douglas Cooper, *Picasso Theatre* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p.25, n. 53.
4. "The linear configurations Picasso designed for *Mercure* were not yet three-dimensional in character. The props and stage flats based on them remained just that—flat. Although the dancers could manipulate the props, even open and close them like scissors, the illusion of movement produced remained strictly bound to the plane." Werner Spies, *Picasso on the Path to Sculpture: The Paris and Dinard Sketchbooks of 1928 from the Marina Picasso Collection* (Munich / New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1995), p.8.
5. Picasso's reaction to questions surrounding traditional definitions of painting and sculpture were recorded by André Salmon: "It's nothing, it's the guitar! And that's it. The watertight barriers have been breached. Now we are delivered from Painting and Sculpture, themselves already liberated from the imbecile tyranny of genres. It's neither one thing nor another. It's nothing. It's the guitar!" André Salmon, *La Jeune Sculpture française* (Paris: Société des Trente [1912] 1919), pp.103–104.
6. Peter Read: "Et moi aussi je suis sculpteur", Movement, Immobility and Time in the Fictional Sculptures of Apollinaire", in *From Rodin to Giacometti: Sculpture and Literature in France, 1880–1959* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp.75–83 (p. 77).
7. "What sculpture will pursue through the streets its terrified admirer?" *Guillaume Apollinaire: Oeuvres en prose complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 597, cited and translated in Read, *ibid.*, p.76.
8. 'In *Alcools* and "Merlin et la vieille femme", we find "Des monuments tremblants" (trembling monuments); and in "Le Larron", "les statues suant" (statues sweating), Read, "Et moi aussi je suis sculpteur", p.77.
9. The subject has numerous poetic and literary parallels. Daedalus exercised mercurial elements to give voice to his statues, whilst automata laboured in Hephaestus's workshop. There is the story of Talos, an imitation man made of bronze, and (according to Hesiod) Pandora, who was made from clay at the behest of Zeus. Best known is Ovid's tale of Pygmalion, who fell in love with his own sculpture, which subsequently came to life.
10. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *The Sculpture of Picasso*, (London: Rodney Phillips, 1948), n.p. [p. 5], calls these works "drawings in space".
11. Michael C. FitzGerald, *Making of Modernism: Picasso and the Creation of the Market for Twentieth-Century Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p.182.
12. Peter Read, "From Sketchbook to Sculpture in the Work of Picasso", in *Picasso: Sculptor/Painter*, eds. John Golding and Elizabeth Cowling (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1994), p.201.
13. FitzGerald, *Making of Modernism*, 178.
14. André Salmon, "Vingt-cinq ans d'art vivant", *La Revue de France*, 1 March, 1931, 123. Cited in Read, "From Sketchbook to Sculpture", p.206. Read was first to alert historians to this important article in *Picasso et Apollinaire: Les métamorphoses de la mémoire* (Paris: Jean Michel Place, 1995). Translated into English as *Picasso and Apollinaire: The Persistence of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
15. Read, "From Sketchbook to Sculpture", p.204.
16. Traditionally associated with Marie-Thérèse Walter, Picasso's lover after 1927, *Woman in a Garden* may, I suspect, be closely associated with the ballerina Olga Khokhlova. In photographs taken and possibly dictated by Picasso at the Villa Belle Rose (see fig. 5), "Olga assumes a pose, performs curtsies and arabesques on pointe and in a tutu, and expresses in a theatrical manner the essential themes of the stage: joy, despair, abandon". C. Godfrey: "Olga Khokhlova, Ballerina and Pablo Picasso", in *Picasso Looks at Degas*, eds. Elizabeth Cowling and Richard Kendall (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute / Museu Picasso, Barcelona, 2010), Appendix 1, pp.282–297 (p. 294).
17. The "Osborne bulls" were erected c. 1956 as a marketing strategy for its sherry company (est. 1772). The "bull board" signs were traditionally 23 feet (7 meters) tall and emblazoned with the company's red brand. A nationwide crackdown on advertising along the Spanish highways in the 1960s saw the hoardings forced back from the freeway. To compensate, the Osborne Company simply painted its signs black and doubled their height (fig. 6 is 46 feet, or 14 meters, tall). The silhouettes

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of *El Toro*, some five hundred populating Spain's highways, "dotted hilltops from the plains of La Mancha to the seacoast of Spain's Costa del Sol". See Carla Johnson and Alyson Leatherman, "El Toro de Osborne :Advertising, Community and Myth", *The Social Science Journal* 42, issue 1 (2005), 135–140. When the EU banned the signage in the 1990s the company finally removed its iconic bull boards, yet a public outcry restored the "Osborne bulls" and the "cultural and artistic heritage of the peoples of Spain". See Elizabeth Nash, "Spain's Biggest Bullfight :The Militant Catalans Waging War against the 'Osborne Bulls'", *Independent*, 5 August 2007.

18. Picasso's account of the origins of this sculpture is inconsistent. The sculptor often described how he found the bicycle parts by accident but instantly saw these objects as a bull's head, adding, that, if at all possible, a cyclist would later "see" it as a saddle and handlebars. On another occasion Picasso claimed that he found the bicycle parts in a skip after attending a funeral. See Roberto Otero, *Forever Picasso :An Intimate Look at his Last Years* (New York :Harry N. Abrams, 1974), pp.91–92.

19. Salmon, *La Jeune Sculpture française*. *op cit.*, note 5.