

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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TWO LOST AND UNKNOWN PICASSOS

DISCOVERED IN EXHIBITION PREPARATION

WASHINGTON, D. C. October 9, 1980. The National Gallery of Art has announced the discovery of a major painting by Picasso which was previously believed to have been lost or to have never existed. Entitled Circus Family, the composition has been found as a preliminary layer beneath the surface of Picasso's Family of Saltimbanques, a key painting from the artist's Rose Period. A second composition, Two Acrobats, unknown until now, was also discovered as an intermediate layer on the same canvas.

The paintings came to light during art-historical research and technical investigations by x-ray and other means in preparation for Picasso: The Saltimbanques, an exhibition opening in the Gallery's East Building on December 14 to mark the centenary year of Picasso's birth in 1881. The findings are documented in a catalogue study for the exhibition jointly prepared by E. A. Carmean, Jr., curator of twentieth-century art at the Gallery, and Ann Hoenigswald of the Gallery's conservation department.

Until now the Circus Family was thought to exist only in a gouache study and a print. The only written record of the larger work was a description of it by Fernande Olivier, Picasso's mistress during his early years in Paris. In her 1933 memoir she wrote, "The 'Blue Period' gave way to the saltimbanques. The first of these was a large canvas: a group of acrobats on

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a plain." She added, "If I remember correctly this canvas was repainted several times." Art historians have thought that Olivier was remembering the small gouache or print variation instead of the larger work.

The examination of the Family of Saltimbanques for the Circus Family state was encouraged by a previously overlooked comment by André Level, first owner of the work, who had stated in 1928 that the Family of Saltimbanques was "superimposed over two other compositions as important."

Mr. Carmean suggests that Circus Family was the first painting completed on the canvas now bearing the Family of Saltimbanques. It was a transitional work of late 1904 in which Picasso continued the Blue Period's theme of poverty-stricken outsiders but depicted his figures in circus costumes, practicing skills used in performance.

In early 1905, Carmean states, the Circus Family was painted over and replaced by a new work related to a gouache, now in a private collection, entitled Two Acrobats with a Dog. This new painting portrays figures less gaunt and more refined, but they seem more isolated and remote from one another in a landscape still more barren.

Through the summer and fall of 1905 Picasso again apparently reworked the canvas. He added many figures developed in other works and revised those already depicted. The painting, which evolved through at least five additional stages, became the third finished composition; it is now known as the Family of Saltimbanques. Its finished state continues the barren landscape, but the theme of wanderers in isolation is even more pervasive.

The figures, which were finally rendered as portraits of Picasso, his companions, and Olivier, allude to Olivier's first seeking to adopt a young

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girl and then insisting that the child be returned to the orphanage. This incident may have added the final interpretive level to Picasso's thematic development of the circus performer as artist-child who is lost and forever homeless.

THE EXHIBITION

Continuing through March 15, 1981, the exhibition will include a great variety of works related to the Family of Saltimbanques, the largest and most ambitious project of Picasso's early career. Its theme of vagabond performers and their isolated lives obsessed Picasso and became one of the most persistent in his oeuvre. It dominated his work during the fifteen months from late 1904 to early 1906, when he moved from expressing the deep melancholy of his Blue Period to developing lighter, less tragic themes.

In addition to paintings, drawings, prints, and sculpture by Picasso, as well as x-radiographs from the technical study, the exhibition will offer examples by Watteau, Daumier, Manet, and Seurat which illustrate the related depictions of the Harlequin, Jester, and Columbine from their origins in the commedia dell' arte of the seventeenth century to the circus figures in Picasso's day. Many of these works may have served as sources and inspiration for Picasso's further exploration of their common imagery and themes.

Public and private collections in the United States, Europe, and Japan have lent examples to the exhibition. Participating institutions include The Baltimore Museum of Art, The St. Louis Art Museum, the Bridgestone Gallery of Art (Tokyo, Japan), the Konstmuseet (Goteborg, Sweden), and the Kunsthaus (Zurich, Switzerland).

The exhibition, located on the Mezzanine level of the East Building, is part of a series of scholarly exhibitions devoted to various aspects of the Gallery's collection.

The Family of Saltimbanques came to the Gallery in 1962 as part of the Chester Dale bequest. It entered the Gallery's collection with the proviso that it never be lent.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer) or Mary Dyer, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565, area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 511.