

Extended Essay

ART: Visual Art

“To what Extent did Pablo Picasso’s ‘Blue Period’ affect his Artwork”



‘The Old Guitarist’ 1903-1904

Word Count: 4,000

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Introduction

In this EE I will be analyzing the certain aspects of Pablo Picasso's 'Blue Period' and exactly how that period of his life significantly affected and influenced the art pieces Picasso created during this period of his life, throughout the years of 1901-1904. I will be following my research question of; *“To what Extent did Pablo Picasso's 'Blue Period' affect his Artwork.”* with the supporting evidence of specific art pieces such as; 'La Mort de Casagemas' 'The Blue Room' and 'The Self-Portrait 1901' in contrast to some of his earlier art pieces before his 'Blue Period' such as his; 'Self-Portrait 1896' and his 'First Communion' Oil painting done in 1896 as well. Comparing Picasso's earlier works to his current works done during his 'Blue Period' will truly help us understand and even visualize exactly how that period of Picasso's life affected his work. Not only how it affected his works, but how accurately Picasso was able to convey his emotions and feelings during his 'Blue Period' throughout his art pieces. “Are we able to see those effects? Are they obvious or do they need more analysis? What's the message behind these paintings?” These are some questions that I will be asking myself and that I will also try to answer as well. When viewing Picasso's artworks, I want to continuously compare and contrast elements of each piece to get a better understanding and to also have a greater understanding of Picasso's inner turmoil he was experiencing while creating these art pieces, and how accurately he was able to convey these emotions throughout his pieces.

Pablo Picasso's 'Blue Period' How it Began

Pablo Picasso's Blue Period was a major depressive period of his life, it truly had a significant impact on not only his personality but the personality and quality he originally had on his paintings. Picasso only depicted sadness, sorrow, and agony throughout each and every one of his paintings. The reason why Picasso was depicting such dysphoric themes throughout his entire 'Blue Period' was primarily due to the fact he needed an 'escape' to release these negative emotions, Picasso did this through the years of 1901-1904.

¹Picasso's 'Blue Period' was solely based on not only his depression and his poverty, but those around him, who he could tell felt the same mutual emotions as he did. There was a very specific event in particular that really caused Picasso's 'Blue Period' to begin. The situation that really triggered the beginning of Picasso's 'Blue Period' was the suicide of his best friend and former roommate; Carlos Casagemas in 1901. This alone was a highly tragic moment for Picasso to face, causing him to have major setbacks in his life. Due to this, he was then engaged in dysphoric thoughts and had an intense, overwhelming look at not only the world but himself as well. Sending him into a deep state of depression and endless mourning.

While Picasso was suffering and mourning the death of his friend, towards the end of year of 1901, Picasso painted 'The Self-Portrait' which was the first painting he had done to convey the inner turmoil running through Picasso of his time. He painted 'The Self-Portrait' as a way to represent his mourning and loneliness without Carlos Casagemas. The painting conveys to us a very light and somewhat chaotic, lazily brushed background. This is presented in a dark hue of deep sea blue. Picasso is seen wearing a deep dark black coat along with a very high collar. In interpretation, Picasso's deep-colored coat can convey to many viewers that it's perhaps

¹ **Schneider, Daniel E. "The Painting of Pablo Picasso: A Psychoanalytic Study." *College Art Journal* 7, no. 2 (1947): 81–95. <https://doi.org/10.2307/772674>.**

the winter time, he's seen to be very warm. Although, his feelings weren't exactly all that warm. It is depicted that Picasso is feeling very negative and depressive emotions, which can be seen as a sort of 'shield' Picasso created for himself from the outside world after witnessing the tragic event of his dearest friend/roommate. When looking more at the physical features of Picasso's face with analysis, we can see that Picasso's eyes are painted in a very specific manner. Picasso's eyes are conveyed in a very 'blank' way. It's seen to show us that Picasso is detached from the world around him, hence why he has such blank and empty eyes. Due to this, we can understand how the representation of his depression is shown in a very serious manner. This self-portrait presents such dark monochrome blues associated with the black outlines to convey more of the 'shield' he's created for himself. The deep shades of turquoise, navy blue, and greys are all gathered into presenting Picasso's dysphoric emotions exactly. His palette color choices alone truly represent to us Picasso's internal negative feelings.

Figure 1: 'The Self-Portrait' 1901



We can notice that Picasso's background wasn't painted thoroughly enough, giving off the impression that this was lazily painted, Picasso had no motivation nor intention to complete this painting in a formal manner. Picasso perhaps was viewing himself as worthless, and unimportant, which is why he didn't paint his Self-Portrait with specific detail. Overall, the painting presents how Picasso was viewing this painting as having little importance to him, not because he didn't care, but because Picasso's negative inner turmoil was spewing out his motivation to create his self-portrait with care and attention to details and brush strokes. The dysphoria and sadness emitting from his Self-Portrait truly marked the beginning of his *'Blue Period'* that would proceed to carry on until 1904.

Before the 'Blue Period'

²Before Pablo Picasso lost his dearest friend and sank into a deep depression, his art pieces weren't always conveyed in a depressing manner. Early on, in his earlier works, Pablo Picasso's paintings were much more calm, realistic, and happy. Through his artworks, we can highly perceive that Picasso had many feelings of happiness and comfort. In Picasso's earlier years, he was attending the Barcelona Academy of Art, in 1889, Picasso did many academic paintings. His paintings primarily consisted of self-portraits of other people, they consisted of his rough sketches, his friends, his town, bullfights, and many more.



Figure 2: 'The First Communion' 1896

² Ferguson, John. "Picasso and the Classics." *Greece & Rome* 9, no. 2 (1962): 183–92.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/641819>.

Early in 1896, Pablo Picasso created a very famous painting known as; 'The First Communion' He painted this primarily for the Exhibition of Fine Arts in Barcelona. During this time, Pablo Picasso was attending La Lonja School of Art. This oil painting had become extremely popular amongst the public as well as the attraction of the local press. Although Picasso was actually an atheist, (despite the fact he was actually born into a Catholic family,) he later decided to become an Aetheist. This still didn't stop him from painting some religious themes of art, he still continued to paint a very religious theme in 'The First Communion' (We can see some more themes of religion presented throughout some of Picasso's later paintings now.) Nevertheless, his 1895-1896 student drawings contain quite a lot of scenes from the life of Jesus and images of saints.

‘La Mort de Casagemas’

Beginning in the year 1901 in Paris, Picasso continued with his painting and came to the conclusion he would paint another painting, instead, this painting would be in dedication to his former best friend/roommate, Carlos Casagemas. Picasso named this painting; “La Mort de Casagemas” In translation, this meant; “The Death of Casagemas.” Picasso completed this in the early year of 1901 after his friend’s suicide. Picasso began this painting with the intention to commemorate it to Carlos Casagemas. This painting contains a very deep message within it and a very emotional reasoning as to why Picasso decided to paint this, to begin with.

This painting is highly different from Picasso’s other paintings throughout his *‘Blue Period.’* Previously, Picasso’s “Self-Portrait” and Picasso’s “La Mort de Casagemas’ hold very different meanings and ultimately have different styles to it.

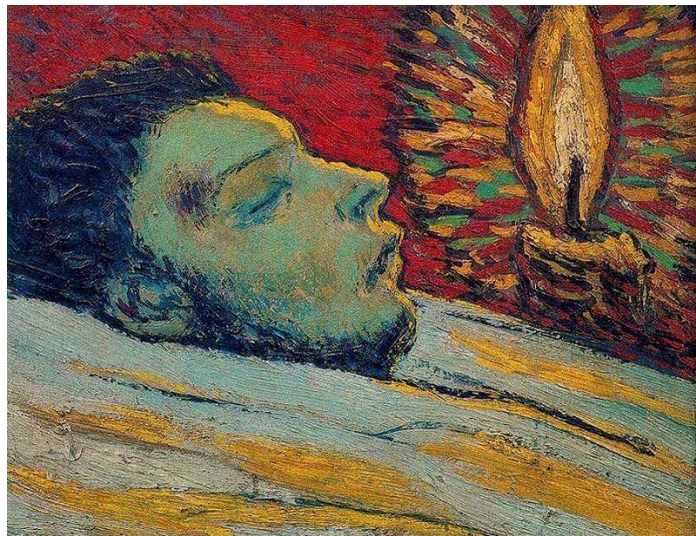


Figure 3: ‘La Mort De Casagemas’ 1901

At first glance we can automatically tell that ‘La Mort de Casagemas’ holds more intense colors, from interpretation, we can see that it also holds a more intense meaning behind it, it’s

more evident than his “Self-Portrait.” With a focus on his palette along with his choice of colors, more specifically in reference to the giant candle beside Casagemas corpse, Picasso decided to choose on using more intense colors with a very strong vibrance such as deep hues of reds with a strong vibrance, bright yellows that contrast positively with the reds. Picasso’s color choice was very positive in conveying the true colors a candle emits. In doing so, Picasso also had such focus and care with his shading from the light emitting from the candle. The strong hues of the light emitting from the candle have created a very unrealistic background behind Casagemas. We see that the background is painted with such intensity along with the color of a vibrant red. This is more so where we can truly understand the strong emotion associated with this painting and Picasso did a very positive job in conveying that emotion to us with his color choice.

Picasso never attended Carlos Casagama's funeral, he did this for two reasons; He couldn't bring himself to see his deceased friend. He also was in Paris, France during this time, he wouldn't have made it in time. Since Picasso didn't go, he still did a very astounding and surprising job at painting his deceased friend. He did a brilliant job at creating such a realistic and explicit depiction of his deceased friend at his own funeral. Picasso did this by firstly having such intense detail and focus on not only face texture,

The headshot wound on the head is highly visible. This is due to the fact that Picasso was unable to really remember what his friend had looked like without also remembering the horror of his death. This is in connection with the sickly, green, and blue skin tone of Casagemas' head. The most vibrant and interesting part of this painting is the candle and its flame. The flame of the candle is extraordinarily bright and vibrant. This is meant to convey how Carlos Casagemas highly influenced Picasso's life. His creativity and his ideas truly inspired Pablo Picasso throughout his life, which is why the flame of the candle is so vibrant and throws off

very unnatural colors. Overall, this painting is not only a tribute to Casagemas, but it also highly conveys the shock and trauma Picasso experienced over the death of his best friend. Although this marked the beginning of Picasso's Blue Period, it still doesn't present the atmosphere and the silent mourning that the rest of Picasso's paintings in the 'Blue Period' convey.

‘The Blue Room’

Promptly after the passing of Carlos Casagemas, Pablo Picasso had then created another oil painting named; ‘The Blue Room’ in 1901. Pablo Picasso painted a very intense yet sincere scene of a nude woman presenting in shades of different blues. This woman is depicted to be bending over a bathtub, washing herself. *“Recent infrared reflectography indicates that this work was painted on top of an earlier portrait of a man. Reusing canvases was a common practice for Picasso at the time since he was quite poor.”*

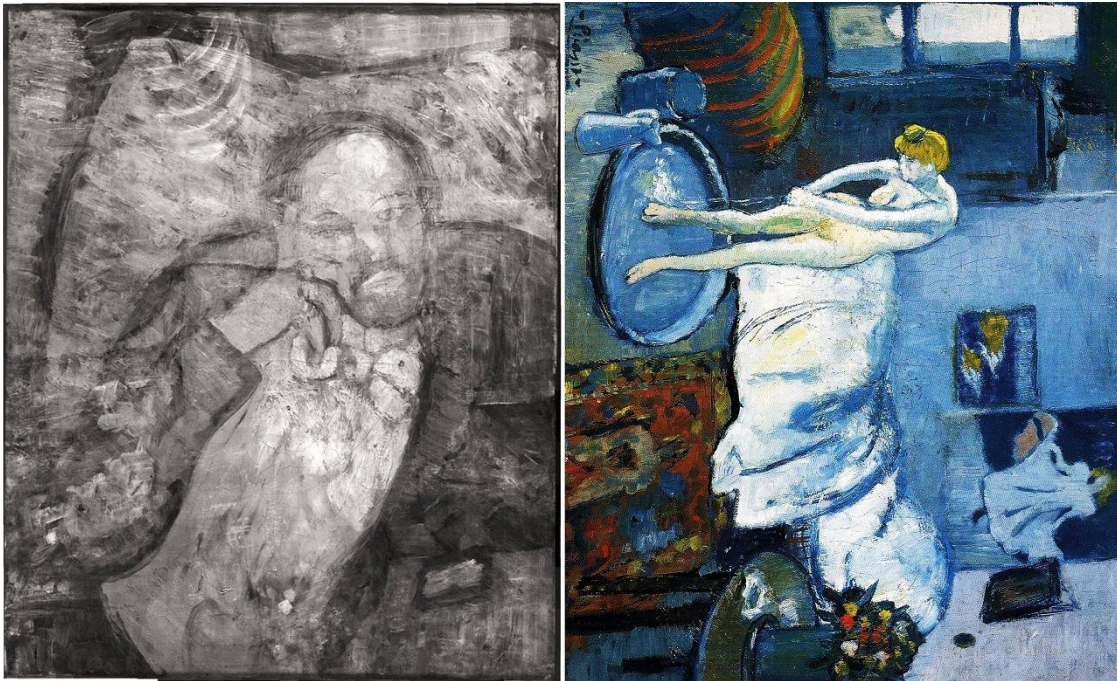


Figure 4: “The Blue Room” 1901 Pablo Picasso

Although Pablo Picasso has this painting predominantly based around the unknown woman we view in the painting, it actually depicts Picasso’s personal lifestyle to a certain extent. We are aware that Picasso was very poor, so depicting the woman bathing in a metal tub with a small pot cup of boiled warm water, depicts what Picasso actually had to do to bathe as well. We

can also examine the unknown woman's living conditions. She seems to have a very small home, with a small bed in the corner, a table with a flower vase, and some paintings hung on the wall. This could convey to us the same living conditions Picasso had in his home as well. Indeed, Picasso was painting primarily depressing images during his 'Blue Period' but Picasso's finances and living conditions also played a major role in his 'Blue Period' as well, these affected how he conveyed his artwork and what messages he was trying to convey to us.

'The Self-Portrait' 1896

Pablo Picasso's Self-Portrait of 1896 conveys to us a very relaxed time period for Picasso. He doesn't seem to be facing any internal struggles with his mental health and he seems as though he's extremely content with his life during his time at the Barcelona Art Academy. Picasso began his Self-Portrait during his youth. We can see in the painting that Pablo Picasso is still very young, very boy-ish, perhaps in his mid-teens.



Figure 5: 'The Self-Portrait' 1896

His Self-Portrait has such a calm, focused facial expression sort of giving off the impression that he's staring directly at the viewer. Picasso's Self-Portrait contains such intricate yet simple detail, it doesn't seem to convey any overall deep message behind the painting, just that Picasso was so calm and at peace in this Self-Portrait. We can see that Picasso painted a very deep brown background with many different hues of brown, and light brown. It seems to be painted in a very careful manner, his brushstrokes seem very strategic. Picasso seemed to paint this Self-Portrait as

realistic. He paints his hair with a deep black, creating motion to depict his wavy hair. He is seen wearing a suit, with a high collar with colors of whites, blacks, and greys, perhaps to convey his pride in his art and successes during this time in Art Academy. He uses such rich and vibrant colors of browns and such sharp visceral angles on his face, hair, and clothing. All the traits in Pablo Picasso's painting can truly convey how he was still a student, training and still learning how to master painting. This is conveyed in the almost unfinished quality of the painting. It looks almost sketch-like, it really shows how Pablo Picasso was still very much training. Picasso then did eventually leave the Art Academy due to the academy not holding his interest in studies of plaster models.

Contrasting Details in Self-Portraits 1896 & 1901

When viewing both of Picasso's Self-Portraits from 1896 and 1901, us viewers can immediately see contrasting details of both pieces. Beginning with Picasso's 1901 Self-Portrait, we will automatically view the major significant difference, palette choice of colors. Before Picasso's 'Blue Period' he wasn't using the hues of depressing blues, and deep blacks. He was more so using really earthy tones such as bright vibrant browns alongside with peaches, oranges, greens, including some hints of blue but not as major as his 'Blue Period.' On the other hand, his Self-Portrait of 1901 doesn't come near to the same art style presented in his earlier Self-Portrait of 1896.



Figure 5: 'The Self-Portrait' 1896



Figure 1: 'The Self-Portrait' 1901

Both paintings set side by side will truly help us understand the extreme contrast between the two paintings, most importantly the overall major effect of his 'Blue Period' on his artwork.

His 1901 Self-Portrait was created with such sadness and hopelessness, the overtone of his painting doesn't seem like that as he had done in his earlier years. We can truly see the drastic change in Picasso's art style and the major effect it made on his artwork. For instance, Pablo Picasso's earlier work; 'Self-Portrait' 1896, defines a very high contrast between his 'Self-Portrait' 1901. Picasso's 'Self-Portrait' 1896 conveys Picasso himself on the left side of the painting, rather than directly in the middle like in his 'Self-Portrait' in 1901. His Self-Portrait of 1896 uses very earthly tones of colors, it uses many shades of browns, greys, oranges, and deep blacks as well. The overall presentation of Pablo Picasso is much different than his 'Self-Portrait' in 1901. Pablo Picasso is seen to be in a very straight posture, with calm, relaxed eyes that don't seem sad nor blank. Pablo Picasso here seems to be conveyed as very serious-minded, he's presented as a student, an art student. He seems to be in a very upright posture, with a very neatly put suit and collar. Pablo Picasso seems overall, very proud of himself. He seems very proud of his appearance as well. Pablo Picasso's line work is done in a very sharp manner, these sharp lines truly emphasize his understanding of his training and his learning of art at his art academy.

On the other hand, when viewing his later work of his 'Self-Portrait' 1901, there's a very drastic contrast in the overall composition of the piece. Pablo Picasso is conveyed in a very depressed manner, his eyes look very blood-shot and cold. It seems as though Pablo Picasso isn't in touch with the world around him, he seems as though he may be losing his touch with reality due to his inner turmoil of depression and grieving. It overall presents how he's suffering in his own train of thoughts. Pablo Picasso was able to accurately convey the message of depression, sadness, loneliness and grieving in his 'Self-Portrait' of 1901. The effect of his 'Blue Period' beginning in

1901 was accurately portrayed in his Self-Portrait, Picasso accurately conveyed his effects from the 'Blue Period' into his work which is what Pablo Picasso's main goal was.

Poverty in his 'Blue Period'

As we knew, Pablo Picasso was very poor, he lived in poverty and had no money. During Pablo Picasso's Blue Period he was struggling financially, this was indirectly conveyed through some of his paintings during his Blue Period. He had done many paintings based primarily on poor people and people living in poverty. During this time, Pablo Picasso was living in poverty, he struggled extremely as a working artist. In Barcelona and Paris, Pablo Picasso saw many people just like him as well. The people he saw were all very sad and unhappy with their lives. They were poor people who were considered outcasts from society. These people and themes became the overall main subject and theme throughout Pablo Picasso's Blue Period. This is highly evident in Pablo Picasso's oil painting done in 1901 called; 'The Blue Room' Pablo Picasso paints a picture of a poor woman bathing in a rather small home. As stated earlier, these living conditions could be indirectly conveying the same conditions Pablo Picasso had to live through as well. It could also convey to us the same conditions that Pablo Picasso had to go through in order to bathe as well. There is a much deeper meaning behind this painting, that can ultimately give us the confirmation that Pablo Picasso was truly poor and to the extent that he was poor. Stated in an article discussing the 'Blue Room' in 1901 gave us a specific piece of evidence that helped the readers understand just how poor Pablo Picasso truly was.

³***“Recent infrared reflectography indicates that this work was painted on top of an earlier portrait of a man. Reusing canvases was a common practice for Picasso at the time since he was quite poor.”*** From this research we can now better understand exactly how Pablo Picasso's finances were conveyed throughout his Blue Period paintings. ⁴Pablo Picasso was

³ "The Blue Room." *The Phillips Collection*, www.phillipscollection.org/collection/blue-room. Accessed 2 Sept. 2023.

⁴ ***Chetham, Charles. "Woman in Blue by Pablo Picasso." Acquisitions (Fogg Art Museum), no. 1959/1962 (1959): 23–26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4300727>.***

extremely poor, although he never painted himself poor, he would use poor people he viewed around where he lived and used them as his main subject. This whole time Pablo Picasso was indirectly trying to tell us viewers how his living accommodation was and his feelings of sadness and hopelessness because of his poverty.

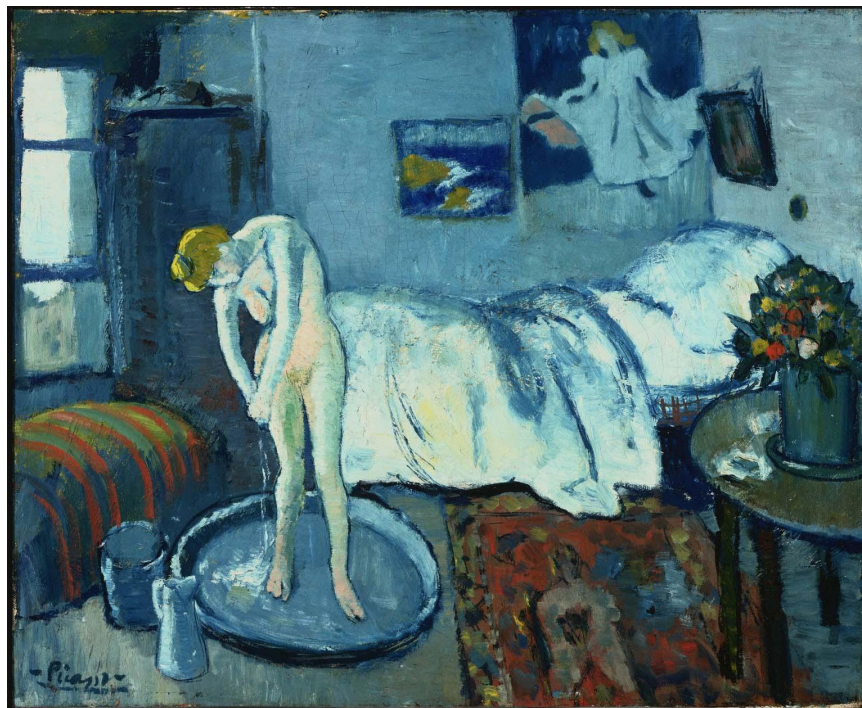


Figure 4: 'The Blue Room' 1901

Another main thing I would like to discuss is the woman overall. In regards to the woman, I want us to focus our attention on her, primarily the position she holds while bathing herself. We can see the woman has to bend herself down to pick up the water to bathe herself while she stands. We can understand her struggles and sadness, but how can we understand it even more on a deeper level? Of course that would be by going through what she's going through, or at least having a much personal understanding of how she might be feeling. What I did to have a better understanding of how the woman must feel was by focusing on her pose, analyzing her pose as

well. "How is this woman posed?" I posed myself in the same pose as the woman, whilst in this pose I was also asking myself more questions; "Where is the tension in my body? Any specific areas?" When doing the pose, I took note of feeling tight tension in my shoulders, between my shoulder blades. I felt much tension in my upper back, and I felt a strong, sharp stretch in the left side of my body, while the other side of my body was reaching downwards on my side.

"How might this tension contribute to this woman's sadness?" Feeling the tension for myself, I did feel some frustration. I felt frustration due to the physical pain I felt. Automatically, physical strain and pain contribute a lot to mental pain as well. When I sat back down and analyzed 'The Blue Room' again, I still felt the tension in my body, but not as strong as holding that position. It was very faint, only due to the fact I held the position for a few seconds. The woman in the painting must have to hold that position for numerous amounts of time. In time and doing this daily will indeed have a major effect on her mental health. Her physical pain will contribute to her sadness to an extreme extent. She is in this pain due to her poverty, which will make her feel hopeless and depressed. I was able to understand her sadness and frustration much more and even on a personal level. Pablo Picasso did an astounding job at being able to convey her physical and mental pain all in one scene. Us viewers are now able to truly understand how poverty has significantly impacted her mental health, as well as Pablo Picasso's depression. Picasso was able to accurately convey his poverty and depression all together throughout his 'Blue Period' majorly.

Conclusion

The major reason as to why I wrote this EE Essay is to answer my research question of; ***“To what Extent did Pablo Picasso’s ‘Blue Period’ affect his Artwork.”*** In basics, it was a very major extent that Pablo Picasso’s Blue Period played in affecting Picasso’s artwork. This is all evident in his paintings alone, such as his; ‘Blue Room 1901’ ‘The First Communion’ 1896 ‘The Self-Portrait’ 1901 and ‘La Mort De Casagemas’ 1901. All of these paintings together help us see the connection between his life and the effect his ‘Blue Period’ had on not only his life, but his artworks as well. Pablo Picasso, living in his unfortunate circumstances of poverty, depression, grief and loneliness, had a major toll on him and quickly consumed him into his ‘Blue Period.’ Due to this, he only produced paintings that had such monochromatic colors of blues and major hues of a variety shades of deep blues. All of this primarily emerged due to his intense sorrow after the suicided of his best friend, Carlos Casagemas. From the years of 1901 through 1904, Pablo Picasso’s artwork and product was only conveyed in the melancholic colors of blues and dark blacks. His ‘Blue Period’ primarily signaled that extreme shift in his creative art strategy which was highly contrasting from his usual techniques and strategy he had in his usual art pieces. Due to this, Pablo Picasso then decided to resort to using poor people who were depressed and hopeless, who were considered outcasts and used them as his major subjects in his art. Pablo Picasso was hoping to transform their pain and hardships into something beautiful.

Chicago Citations

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10. WESTON, SUSAN BROWN. "The Artist as Guitarist: Stevens and Picasso." *Criticism* 17, no. 2 (1975): 111–20. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23099597>.

List of Images

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<https://www.pablocicasso.org/blue-period.jsp>

Image 2: Picasso, Pablo. 'The Self-Portrait' 1901. Web. 07 September 2023

<https://www.pablocicasso.org/blue-period.jsp>

Image 3: Picasso, Pablo. 'The First Communion' 1896. Web. 07 September 2023

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Image 4: Picasso, Pablo. 'La Mort De Casagemas' 1901. Web. 07 September 2023

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Image 5: Picasso, Pablo. "The Blue Room" 1901. Web. 07 September 2023

<https://www.pablocicasso.org/blue-period.jsp>

Image 6: Picasso, Pablo. 'The Self-Portrait' 1896. Web. 07 September 2023

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