

Lost Paintings beneath Picasso's *La Coiffure*

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THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART is fortunate in its Picasso holdings. The collection includes examples from all periods of the artist's oeuvre and is particularly strong in works executed between the Rose Period and the Cubist era. The changes seen in Picasso's work during this transitional stage, dating from early 1906 to mid-1907, have been attributed to the influence of Greek and Iberian sculpture, both of which he had seen at the Louvre, as well as that of Catalan art and El Greco's paintings. They were, however, rooted to an amazing degree in a ten-week stay, starting in early June 1906, in the Spanish village of Gósol. Picasso had left Paris with his mistress to vacation there. Back in his beloved Spain, no longer distracted by his active Parisian social life, he found himself in a remote place of stark beauty and intense light, where even the austere dress of the villagers would inspire him. The isolation of Gósol produced a state of mind that allowed him to draw freely from these many sources. His palette changed to reflect the light and the ochre and gray colors of the landscape. He disrupted the unity and harmony that characterized his earlier style by introducing bold distortions and simplifications into otherwise realistic paintings. His figures gained weight and presence, and he did not hesitate to depict awkward or clumsy forms. The inner tension created by this new combination of realistic depiction with distortion and abstraction resulted in paintings that have been described by Pierre Daix as embodying the "dynamics of deformation."¹

Among the seven paintings and drawings from this period that can be said to exhibit the dynamics of deformation is *La Coiffure* (Figure 1, Colorplate 18). The date of execution of *La Coiffure* has been disputed: according to Picasso, it was painted in 1905, but Daix and Alfred H. Barr Jr. place it in 1906 on stylistic grounds.² Also in question is whether *La Coiffure*, like the *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Gertrude Stein,

1946 47.106), was carried out in two or more phases. In an attempt to shed light on this last point, *La Coiffure* was X-rayed in 1997. The results (Figure 2) were so informative that the initial question became just one of many issues. The X-radiograph shows that underneath *La Coiffure* there are at least three seemingly finished paintings, all very ambitious. Also revealed is the beginning of a fourth painting, as well as certain forms that remain unidentified. In addition, the X-radiograph tells us that after he finished working on these paintings, Picasso turned his canvas 180 degrees to paint *La Coiffure*.

Picasso often painted over his own compositions. Once he had achieved financial success, he did this to exploit pictorial ideas generated by the original composition. But during his earlier career, from 1902 to 1906, when he worked on this canvas, this practice was most likely dictated by a need for economy. The support of *La Coiffure*, measuring 174.9 by 99.7 centimeters, was an expensive piece of linen that Picasso surely would have reused if he believed his painting was unsatisfactory or if he simply wished to develop a new composition.

The earliest painting uncovered by the X-radiograph shows a Blue Period man and a female child, a composition whose power owes much to the use of a full-length portrait format and the close proximity of the figures. The clarity of the image of the man, dressed in a white long-sleeved shirt and a vest, hands extended in offering, suggests that the picture came close to completion. This man relates to a number of drawings executed in 1902, and in format and placement both figures correspond closely to a drawing made that year in Barcelona titled *Interior of the Artist's Studio* (Figures 3, 4). In fact, the correspondence is so close that this must be a preparatory sketch for the painting. The image of the child in the painting is not as legible as that of the man; however, one bare foot appears in the lower left corner of the X-radiograph, an oval can be seen where her head would be, and an irregular shape above her foot resembles a ruffle in *Interior of the Artist's Studio*. Another preparatory drawing, *The Folio* (Figure 5),

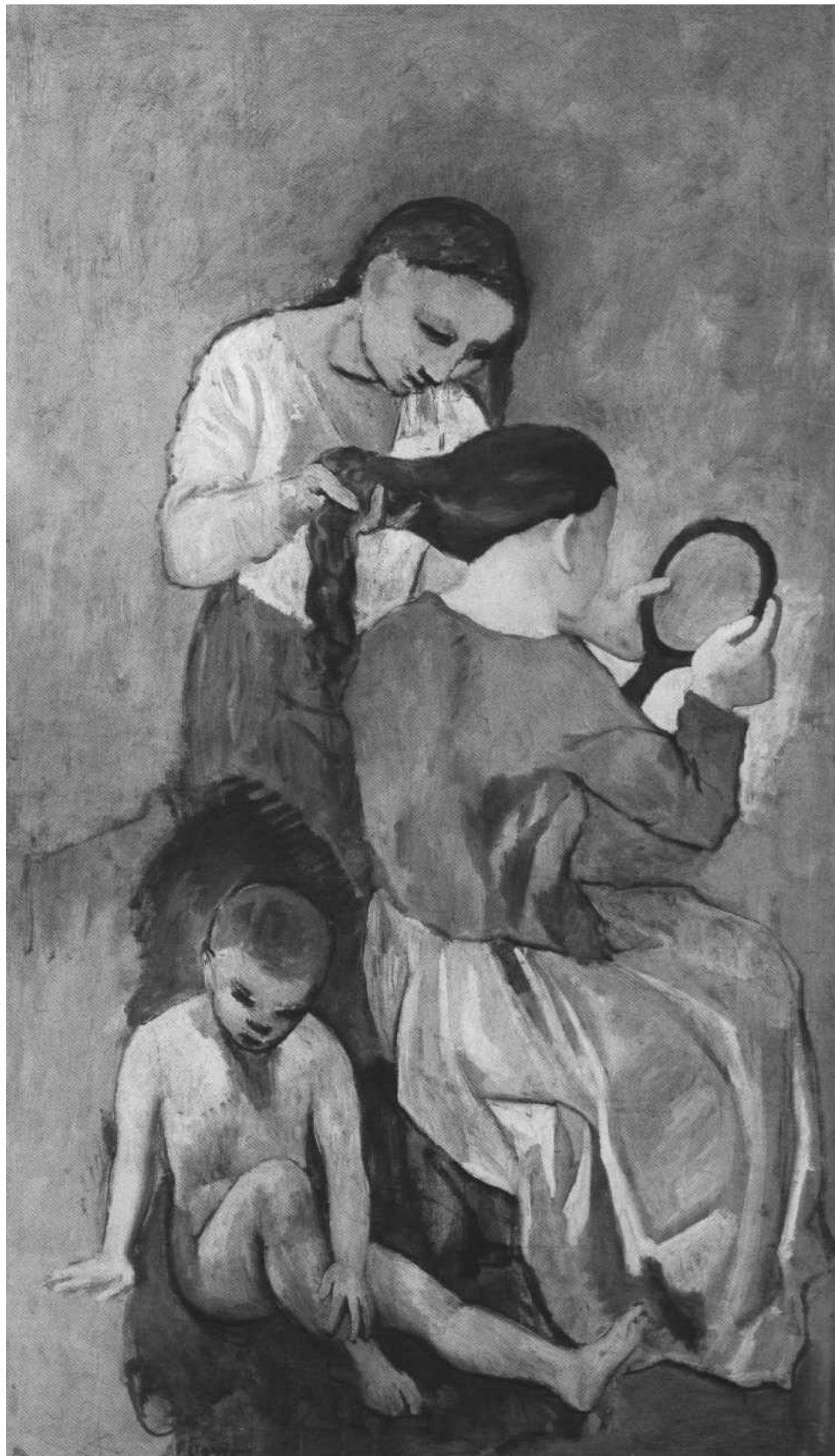


Figure 1. Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973). *La Coiffure*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 174.9 x 99.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1951; acquired from The Museum of Modern Art, New York, anonymous gift (53.140.3) (photo: © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York). See also Colorplate 18



Figure 2. X-radiograph of *La Coiffure* turned 180 degrees

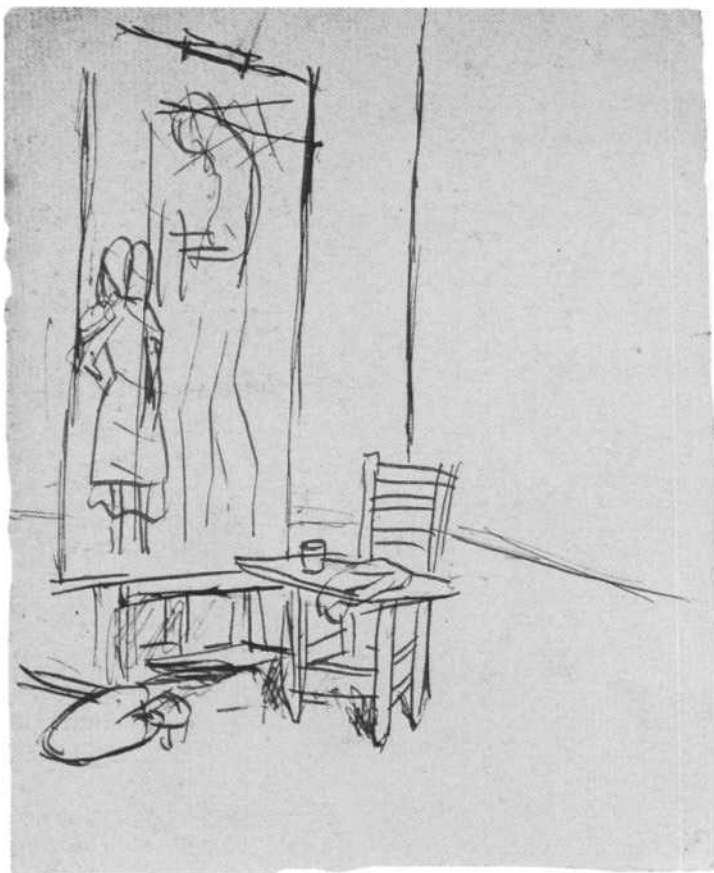


Figure 3. Pablo Picasso. *Interior of the Artist's Studio*, Barcelona, 1902. Pen and ink on paper, 15 x 12.2 cm. Museu Picasso, Barcelona (photo: AHC-ARXIU Fotografic, Barcelona. © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York)

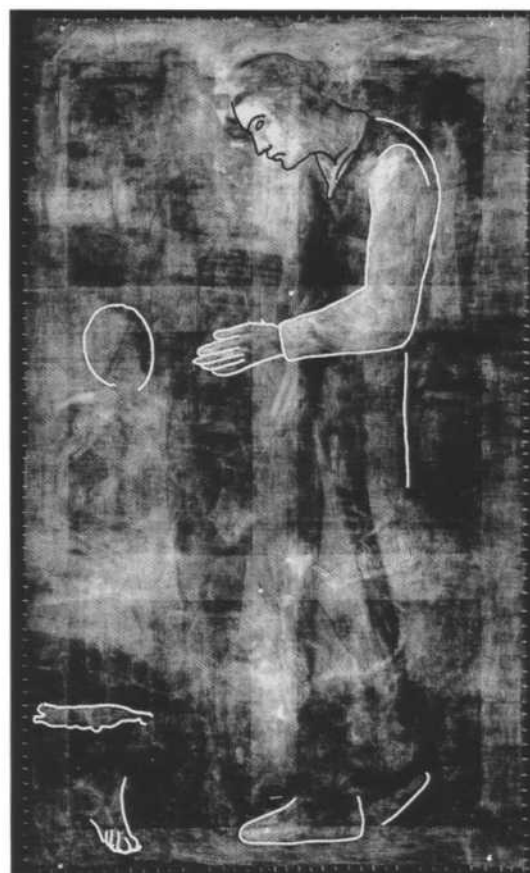


Figure 4. X-radiograph with outlines of *Interior of the Artist's Studio*

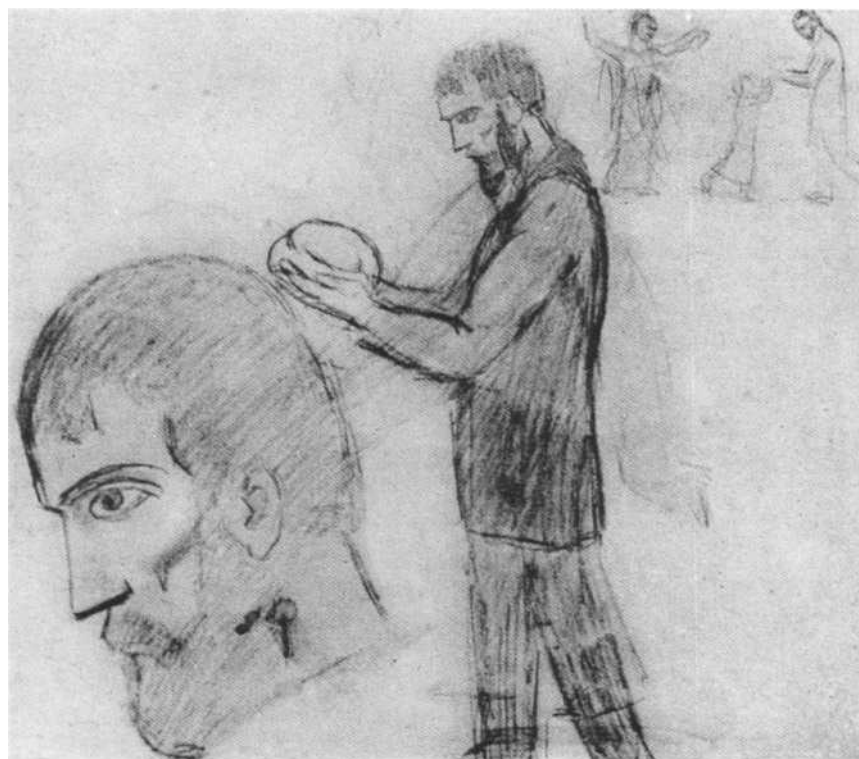


Figure 5. Pablo Picasso. *The Folio*, Paris, 1902. Drawing, 29.7 x 23.8 cm. Whereabouts unknown (photo: © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York)

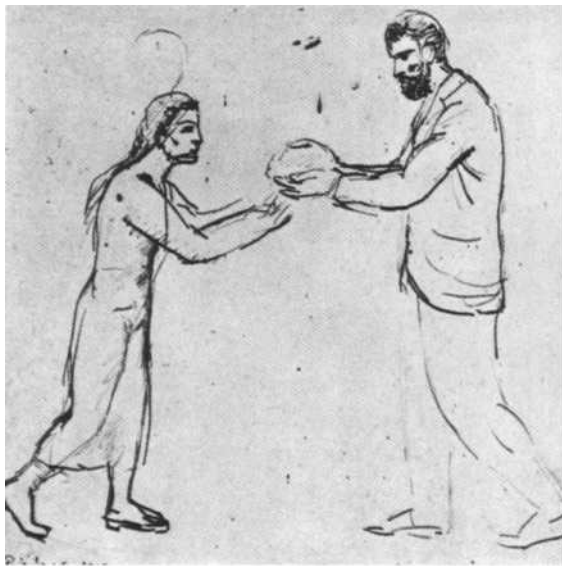


Figure 6. Pablo Picasso. *The Offering*, Paris, 1902. India ink on paper, 25 x 26 cm. Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Elliot Cohn Collection, New York (photo: © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York)



Figure 7. Pablo Picasso. *La Soupe*, Paris, 1902. Oil on canvas, 38.5 x 46 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Gift of Margaret Dunlap Crang, 1983 (photo: © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York)

depicts a single figure, a man whose face, clothing, and stance are similar to those of the man in the X-radiograph. Moreover, in the top right corner of *The Folio* there is a drawing in which Picasso tried out a composition with a man and a young girl. In a third drawing, *The Offering* (Figure 6), the compression and tension evident in the painting give way to a more open space with the figures placed farther apart. By adopting a horizontal format that allowed him to increase the space between the figures and by changing the male figure into a female, Picasso would finally resolve the theme treated in these works in the painting *La Soupe* (Figure 7).

Picasso was in Paris starting in May 1901 but had returned to Barcelona in January of 1902. It seems likely that he executed the earliest painting revealed in the X-radiograph in Barcelona between January and October of 1902. In October of 1902 Picasso again went to Paris, remaining there until January of 1903,³ a stay filled with uncertainty; he did not know where he would live and whether he could support himself. It is unlikely, therefore, that he would have taken this large painting with him.

Another painting discernible in the X-radiograph was described in the summer of 1904 by Fernande Olivier upon her first visit to Picasso's studio in the Bateau Lavoir, where he had taken up residence in April of that year: "One painting particularly struck me—I think Picasso has since painted over it—of a cripple leaning on his crutch and carrying a basket

of flowers on his back. The man, the background, everything in the picture, was blue, except the flowers which were painted in fresh, brilliant colors."⁴ This painting was preceded by two drawings. The one illustrated here, *Beggar with a Crutch* (Figure 8), is closest to the painting, although the basket contains no flowers. The figure is quite clear in the X-radiograph: his feet, legs, hips, staff, and left arm, as well as his basket are all easily legible, and even the ragged edge of his cut-off trouser is visible (Figure 9). The face, however, is obscured by the density of the lead-white pigment used in the face of the man in the first Blue Period picture, and only a hint of eyebrow and nose can be seen. When Picasso left Barcelona for Paris again in April of 1904, he had the promise of a studio in advance and would have been able to ship all the works he valued to that city.⁵ This large canvas was presumably among them. Whether *Beggar with a Crutch* was already painted on it when it arrived at the Bateau Lavoir, or whether Picasso executed the figure in Paris is not known.

Another figure visible in the X-radiograph is based on a drawing that bears the very specific date of December 24, 1905 (Figures 10, 11). This drawing, *Juggler, Sketches, and Caricatures of Apollinaire*, belongs to a group of works depicting acrobats and harlequins that Picasso executed in the second half of 1905. The figure in the X-radiograph corresponds closely to the figure in the drawing, except for the right leg, whose placement is unclear. The stance of the juggler in the

painting is similar to that of the man in *Beggar with a Crutch*, providing an example of Picasso's ingenious use of an earlier composition, a kind of economy seen throughout his oeuvre. In this context, it should be noted that a version of the juggler at the top right corner of the drawing shows the left arm in a position that echoes the position of the beggar's left arm. The juggler in the drawing does not wear a ruff, although there seems to be some lacelike material to the right of the neck. However, the X-radiograph of the painting shows a shape much like that of the ruffs used in paintings of the group to which the drawing belongs. A similarly shaped but less delicate collar appears, for example, in *Harlequin in Profile* (Figure 12).

Whereas Fernande Olivier provided information about the colors of the *Beggar with a Crutch*, we have no record of the painting of the juggler. However, related paintings tend toward the pinks and pale blues of the late Rose Period. Through microscopic examination

we can see two different tones of red: one deep and dark, the other a bronze color with a red tint. A pigment sample taken from what would be the background of the figure reveals a rich red painted wet into wet on a pale blue color. Areas in the figure itself are close to the bronze color visible under the microscope.

There is not much material indicating the existence of a fourth painting. Nevertheless, there is a fragment that is quite arresting and which, I believe, may represent the beginning of a composition that Picasso undertook in Gósol and completed there. The fragment shows part of a head that is very close to *Head of a Boy* (Figures 13, 14), a drawing dated 1905 by the artist. *Head of a Boy* initiated a subject that would occupy Picasso from late 1905 to the summer of 1906: the theme of two brothers, explored in numerous drawings and a gouache, which show an older boy carrying a younger one on his back. All of these works are vertical in format, emphasizing the height of the older



Figure 8. Pablo Picasso. *Beggar with a Crutch*, Barcelona or Paris, 1904. Pen and wash on paper, 36 x 24.8 cm. Private collection (photo: © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York)

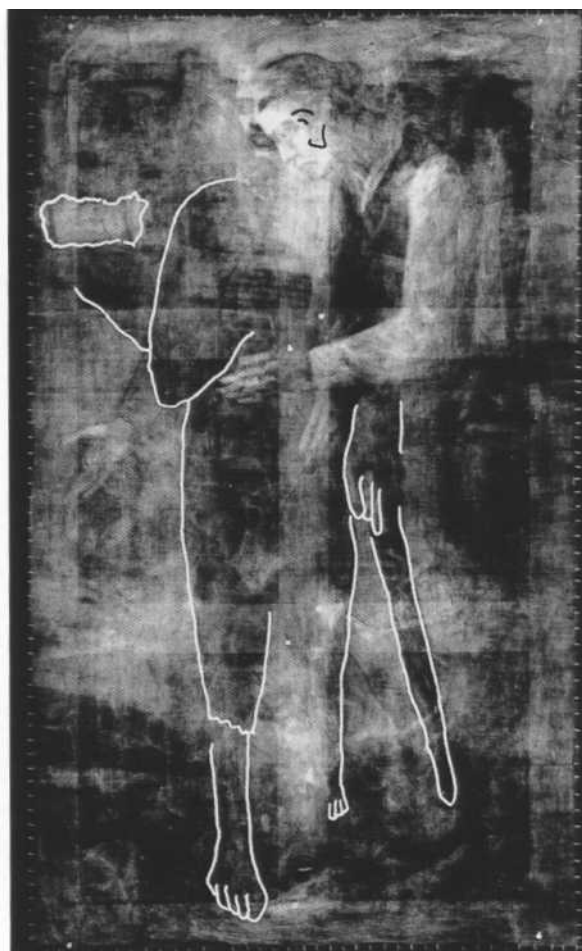


Figure 9. X-radiograph of *La Coiffure* with outlines of *Beggar with a Crutch*



Figure 10. Pablo Picasso. *Juggler, Sketches, and Caricatures of Apollinaire*, Paris, December 24, 1905. India ink on paper, 17.6 x 15.3 cm. Musée Picasso, Paris (photo: Daniel Arnaudet; Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, N.Y. © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York)

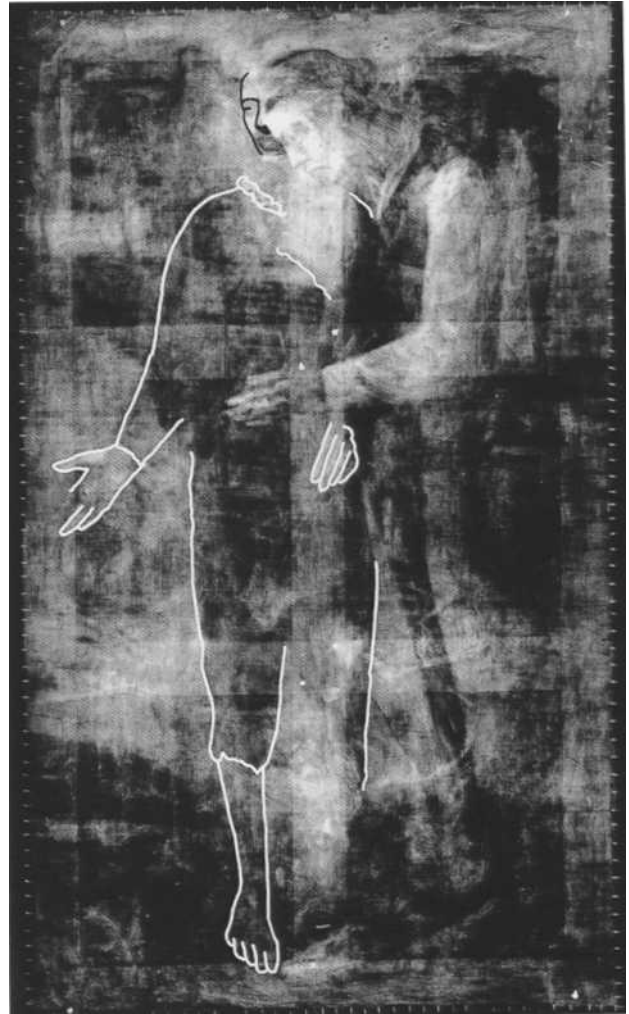


Figure 11. X-radiograph of *La Coiffure* with outlines of the juggler from *Juggler, Sketches, and Caricatures of Apollinaire*



Figure 12. Pablo Picasso. *Harlequin in Profile*, 1905. Gouache on cardboard, 79.1 x 59.4 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Scofield Thayer, 1982 (1984.433.269) (photo: © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York)



Figure 13. Pablo Picasso. *Head of a Boy*, 1905. Gouache on board, 31 x 23.5 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Bequest of Leonard C. Hanna Jr., 1958.43 (photo: © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York)

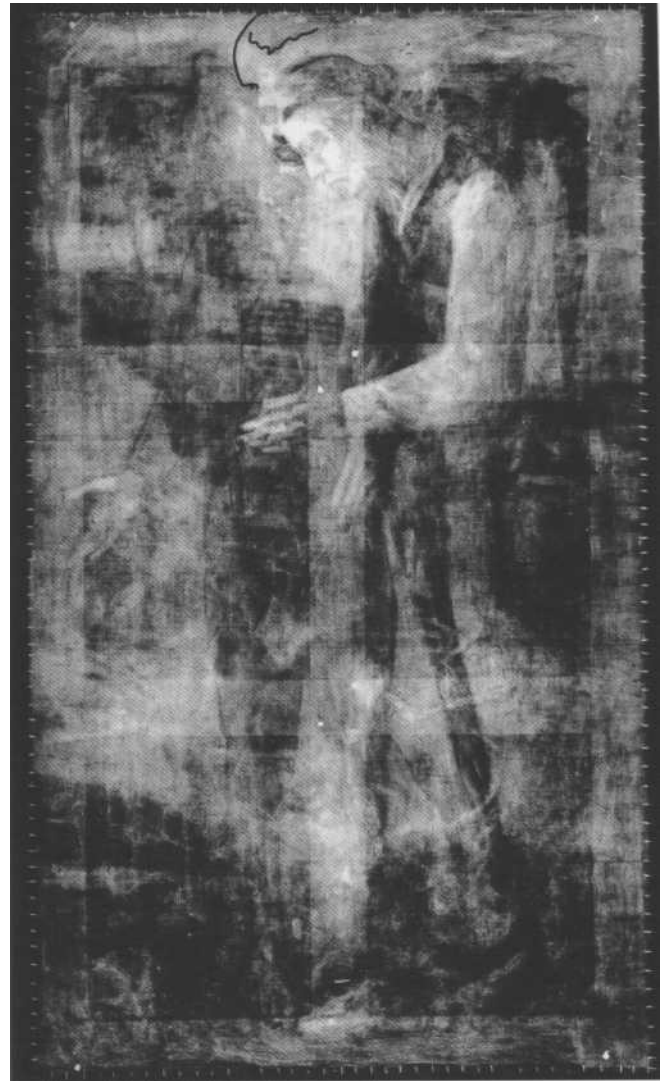


Figure 14. X-radiograph of *La Coiffure* with outlines of *Head of a Boy*

brother. The culminating example of this series is *Two Brothers* (Figure 15), painted in Gósol, in which the head of the older brother is virtually identical to the subject of the drawn *Head of a Boy*. The older boy in *Two Brothers* is painted very realistically and with great delicacy. The younger boy's face, by contrast, is rendered boldly and appears abstract and masklike, creating a dichotomy that epitomizes the dynamics of deformation. Although a number of the studies for *Two Brothers* depict the older brother in a pose similar to that of the beggar and the juggler, the X-radiograph offers no convincing visual proof that Picasso painted anything more than the head on this canvas.

I would like to speculate about what Picasso painted between January of 1906—when I believe he executed the *Juggler*—and the fall of the same year—when he produced *La Coiffure*. As he had finished the drawing of the *Juggler* at the end of 1905, he would probably have made the painted version of this image

in January or February of 1906. Then, I propose, he began a painting on the theme of two brothers. As we know, Picasso left Paris for Barcelona in May of 1906 and arrived in Gósol in early June. It is unlikely that the canvas on which *La Coiffure* would eventually be painted would have traveled to Gósol. With three or four layers of paintings, it would have been rather stiff and not easily rolled; certainly it would have been difficult to bring to the village by mule, the only means of transport for the last leg of the journey. In Gósol Picasso continued to pursue the two brothers theme: according to Josep Palau i Fabre, a variation on it, a gouache titled *Two Brothers*, was the first work Picasso produced in that village.⁶

When Picasso returned to Paris after his stay in Gósol, he was faced with this large canvas bearing the beginning of *Two Brothers*. As has been noted, it was not his custom to paint out his earlier compositions; rather, he preferred to keep them and use them for

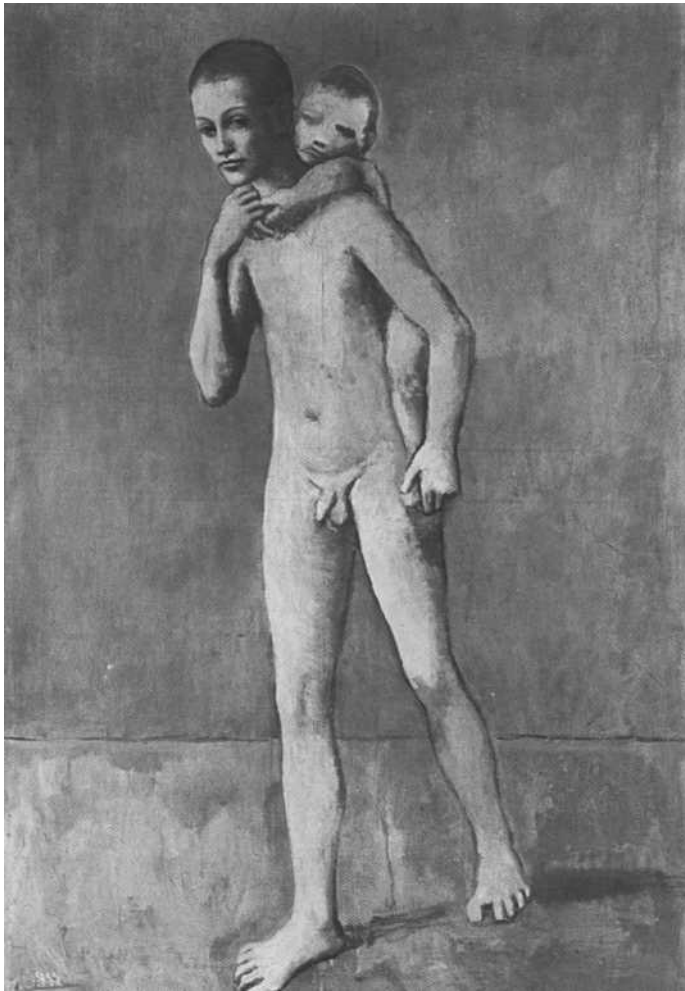


Figure 15. Pablo Picasso. *The Two Brothers*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 142 x 97 cm. Kunstmuseum Basel, permanent loan of the City of Basel, 1967 (photo: Kunstmuseum Basel, Martin Bühler. © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York)

Figure 16. Pablo Picasso. *La Coiffure*, 1906. Pen and ink on paper. Whereabouts unknown (photo: © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York)

Figure 17. Pablo Picasso. *The Coiffure*, 1906. Pen and ink on paper. Whereabouts unknown (photo: © 2004 Estate of Pablo Picasso/ARS, New York)



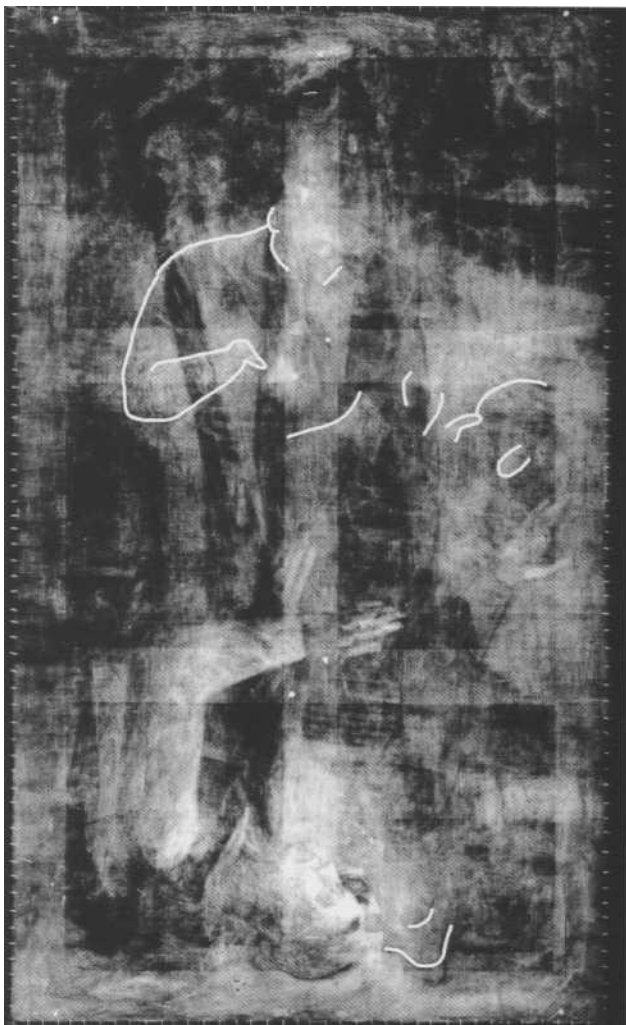


Figure 18. X-radiograph of *La Coiffure* turned right side up



Figure 19. Cross section of *La Coiffure*. See also Colorplate 19

his new work. But this canvas by now had a long history and had sustained many major changes. And so, in order to avoid the distraction of those earlier efforts, he turned it upside down. Then he began *La Coiffure*, with one woman combing another woman's hair. This subject had first engaged him in early 1905 as part of the circus theme that would occupy him for the entire year. His interest in the coiffure motif grew during a trip to Holland in mid-1905 and continued well into 1906, as demonstrated by numerous studies in ink, crayon, and watercolor. Those most closely related to *La Coiffure* (for example, Figures 16, 17) are all quite realistic and most likely were made before Picasso left for Gósol. *La Coiffure* was painted with speed and directness, as if all the previous studies and the new freedom achieved in Gósol had come together in an explosion. The women's poses remain similar to those worked out in the studies. But a boy makes his first appearance in a composition on this theme: he derives from the younger brother in the *Two Brothers*, although he is slightly larger than that figure.

Daix, acknowledging the Gósol influence on *La Coiffure*, seen in its simplified forms and abstract faces, speculates that it was perhaps carried out in two phases, one before the sojourn in Gósol and one after it, in much the same way *Gertrude Stein* was painted.⁷ However, the X-radiograph shows only one version of the painting (Figure 18). This finding was confirmed by microscopic examination that uncovered only one change, a repositioning of the neck of the standing figure, clearly effected during the initial laying in of the form. Microscopic examination further revealed that the paint film consists of multiple, relatively thin layers with colors from earlier compositions frequently showing through to the top. Characteristically, Picasso used colors from the painting directly beneath *La Coiffure*, incorporating the dark red of the *Juggler* in the standing woman's skirt and allowing the bronze tone to outline the hands and the mirror of the seated female figure. This same bronze lies under the black strokes that delineate the standing woman's eyes. In certain areas, particularly the skirt of the seated woman, the paint is applied with great rapidity, creating bubbles in the film. Indeed, everything about the execution points to speed and sureness. Because the handling is very similar to that of *Gertrude Stein*, which was finished soon after the artist returned from Gósol, in August of 1906, I propose that *La Coiffure* was painted in late August or September of the same year.

To provide additional proof that *Beggar with a Crutch* lies under *La Coiffure*, a cross section was taken where the flowers would be. We know from Fernande Olivier's description that *Beggar with a Crutch* was

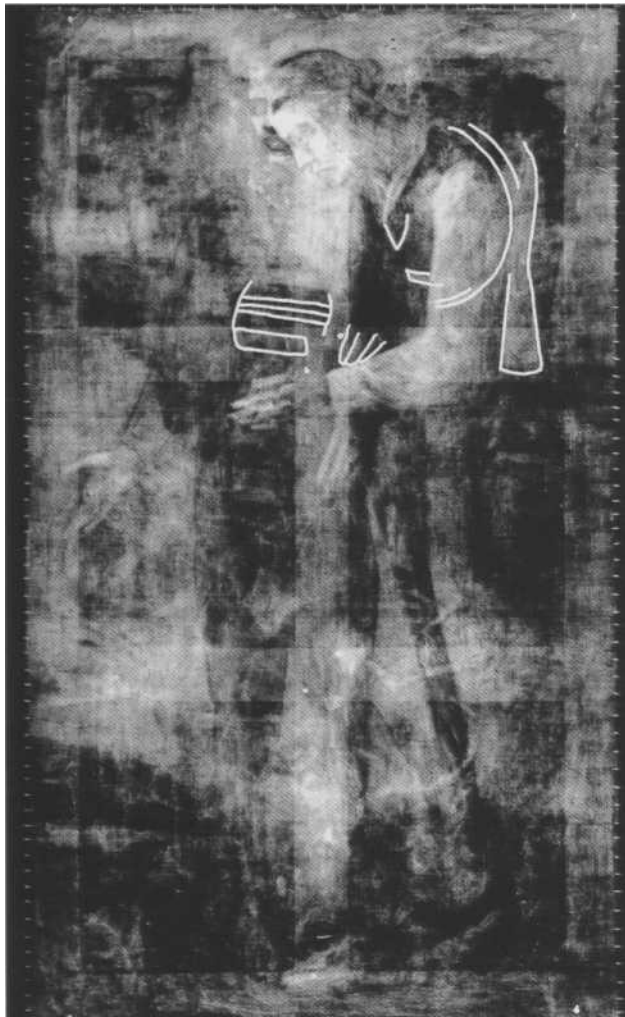


Figure 20. Unidentified elements in X-radiograph of *La Coiffure*

entirely blue except for the brilliantly colored flowers. Accordingly, in the interest of taking a single sample, a search for any color other than blue was undertaken. White was found, a likely element in a “brilliant” area, in a position that would correspond to the top layer of the second Blue Period painting. In addition, an impressive array of other colors appeared in the sample (Figure 19, Colorplate 19). In fact, the sample offers a chromatic summary of Picasso’s styles of the Blue Period, the Rose Period, and the Gósol and post-Gósol periods. Most surprising, however, is the fact that the cross section accounts not only for the two Blue Period paintings and shows the white on top of the second Blue Period picture, but also contains another Prussian blue section, by far the widest layer. This indicates the presence of a third Blue Period painting or one executed during the transition between the Blue Period and the Rose Period. The sequence of layers in

the cross section suggests that this painting was executed between the summer of 1904 and the summer of 1905; it must be one of the numerous blue pictures Picasso worked on until the middle of 1905. I have indicated on the X-radiograph (Figure 20) some of the more suggestive elements that do not relate to any of the paintings previously discussed in the hope that a reader will be able to relate them to a known work.

It is fortunate that Picasso rarely scraped or painted out discarded compositions, for the evidence left behind confirms that a number of important drawings were realized in painted form. In the case of *La Coiffure* his practice has also left us a remarkable record of his changing styles and interests. Through the shadow imagery of X-radiography we have been given a glimpse of the paintings hidden beneath *La Coiffure*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the following people for their help and advice: Silvia Centeno, Charlotte Hale, and Anne Hoenigswald. I am indebted to John Brealey, whose respect and admiration for the creative process was an inspiration in this study.

NOTES

1. Pierre Daix, “The Years of the Great Transformation,” in *Picasso, 1905–1906: From the Rose Period to the Ochres of Gósol*, exh. cat., Museu Picasso (Barcelona, 1992), p. 45.
2. Picasso is quoted in Alfred H. Barr Jr., *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art* (New York, 1974), p. 254; for Barr’s argument, see Pierre Daix and George Boudaille, *Picasso, the Blue and Rose Periods: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings, 1900–1906* (Greenwich, Conn., 1967), pp. 90–92.
3. John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, vol. 1 (New York, 1991), pp. 233–67.
4. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 299. Richardson makes the connection between Olivier’s description and this drawing.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 295.
6. Josep Palau i Fabre, “The Gold of Gósol,” in *Picasso, 1905–1906*, p. 84.
7. Daix and Boudaille, *Picasso*, pp. 90–92.

