

The Picasso Effect: Contemporary Reinterpretations

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Abstract: In this article, we examine the significance of the Picasso effect from a multidisciplinary perspective and its impact on contemporary art through the example of Christian Jankowski. The renowned artist Picasso, constantly focused on his entelechy in the Aristotelian sense, often captured in his emerging art the essence of a moment within the chaos of his era. These genuine masterpieces transformed visual styles and infused aesthetics with artistic innovations that became models for future artists, as well as benchmarks for experimentation and performance from new angles that challenge the laws of formal logic. This phenomenon, known as the Picasso effect, is evident across all areas of human activity. Through his cultural cubism, visual artist Christian Jankowski is a prominent and distinctive exponent of the Picasso effect. His exhibition “NEUE MALEREI: Cultural Cubism”, at the Suprainfinit Gallery in Bucharest, is part of the artist's third series of conceptual paintings and offers an inverted perspective on Picasso's conceptual approach. The curatorial team from Quote - Unquote and the Suprainfinit Gallery showcases the German artist's ability to create unique visual artworks that embody his collaborative Cultural Cubism style.

Keywords: Picasso, Christian Jankowski, Picasso effect, collaborative Cultural Cubism

Introduction: The Picasso effect

Drawing on Ian Leslie's (2013) articulation of the “Picasso effect,” the concept can be understood as encouraging individuals to adopt multiple perspectives and to recombine parts of an apparent whole into new, unexpected configurations, an approach that can generate innovation. At the same time, a core implication of the “Picasso effect” is the importance of persistence and tolerance for social rejection in the early stages of creative work. In this sense, innovation depends not only on producing novel configurations but also on sustaining creative

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commitment when audiences or critics are not yet prepared to recognize the value of departures from established norms.

Margaret Heffernan (2019) explains the phenomenon of intentional blindness as a protective mechanism. Education must be understood in the sense of raising awareness about this phenomenon of deliberate blindness. Through diplomacy, we can counteract the fear of social rejection by adopting a new perspective. Ethical intelligence is the factor that can give us the courage to affirm what may be viewed with reluctance by those around us if we are convinced of the positive ethical effect of our attitude. In this constructive sense, the ethos behind the “Picasso effect” can be summarized as the idea that progress often requires pursuing what others initially judge impossible, persisting ethically even when creative departures from established norms are not yet fully valued.

The Picasso effect refers to narratives that become intertwined with philosophical concepts of good, beauty, truth, and justice, and remain imprinted in the collective consciousness because Pablo Picasso continually reinvented his artistic style, absorbing new influences and exploring different accepted or reinvented modes of expression.

The life and work of the artist in a synthetic vision from a psychoanalytical perspective

The personal life of Pablo Picasso supported some of the accusations brought against him regarding his uncontrollable anxious behaviour: participating as an involuntary spectator in the suicide of his comrade Carles Casagemas, which marked the beginning of the Blue Period in the artist’s work; disowning his friend Guillaume Apollinaire when they were accused of involvement in the disappearance of the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre (Mailer 1995); machismo, “Picasso’s eight years of boredom” with Odette, his mistress and model (Richardson 1991); the so-called stylistic “schizophrenia” (Ansermet, apud Rosalind Kraus 2009) through the oscillation between naturalistic landscapes and drawings that included details similar to some found in the works of Ingres, Renoir, Cézanne as a way of continuing one of the inventions of Cubism, the collage, between the photographically distorted neoclassicism of 1920 towards which he was moving as a defence against the mechanomorphism in which he was involved through ready-mades (Ibid.); compulsive morning rituals-washing hands; superstitions, followed by recurrent expressions of doubt about one’s

own success; the manifest anxiety transmitted to his girl lover, the woman artist Gilot (Gilot & Lake 1990).

Picasso's artistic evolution followed an atypical route, as he was constantly confronted with his anxieties regarding the artistic value of his creations. The line: "Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working!" attributed to Pablo Picasso (Mailer 1995, 8) perfectly expresses the artist's conception of artistic creation.

In 1906, during the Roses Period, the era of the circus, with the clown artists, Picasso's line is precise, able to delineate the shape of the figure with a laconic narrative embossing.

Picasso's work named *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (Picasso 1907), represents the first cubist work, a radical innovation, absorbed in a few years into the mainstream, in an unconventional Paris (Leslie 2013). A fortunate coincidence arose between the emergence of the genius called Picasso, his daring stylistic experiments that completely broke with artistic tradition, and the new art market willing to assume risks related to the era's changing mentality, as well as cultural and economic circumstances (Stoyan 2013).

In the next stage, for example, in the drawings of 1915, one notices the abandonment of the adroitly constructed line, adopting clumsy, thick and insensitive, almost primitive contours, which led to the idea of mechanomorphism conceived by Francis Picabia, who, in 1917 published in the avant-garde magazine, named *391*, a satirical portrait of the critic Maximilien Gauthier entitled "Picasso Repentant", parodying Picasso, indirectly accusing him of running away from Cubism, taking refuge in a "Picasso contre les Maîtres", in which the drawing appears burlesque (Kraus 2009). This unconsciously hostile confrontation with the great masters associated Picasso with the Freudian concept of reaction formation, indicating a psychological attitude of opposition to desire, rather than repression. However, his critics, who are followers of "Picasso et les Maîtres", believe that the painter has total conscious control over his creations. Some critics, such as Alain Bois (2008), also do not adopt either of the two options, considering that Picasso is a conscious "parodist", which allows the artist to assume several styles and manners simultaneously.

Picasso had the motto: "Give me a museum and I will fill it!" (Penrose 1958, 372) Exceptionally prolific as an artist, he went through numerous representative phases of his artistic versatility, foreshadowing the continuous evolution that characterized his work throughout his life.

Critics have defined these phases as the Blue Period (1901–1904), The Roses Period (1904–1906), African Influenced Period (1907–1909), Analytical Cubism (1909–1912) and Synthetic or Crystal Cubism (1912–1919), Neoclassical Period from the early 1920s, Surrealism, middle 1920's. His later works often combine elements of his earlier styles.

Among his most famous works include the Proto-Cubist work entitled *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)* (Salmon 1912) and the anti-war painting *Guernica* (1937). This powerful depiction of the bombing of Guernica by the German and Italian air forces during the Spanish Civil War is a remarkable modern work, documented in real-time.

However, what unifies Picasso's art is the tendency to overcome limits and communicate through art. Pablo Picasso was not just an artist; he was a revolutionary who holistically perceived the world, sometimes fragmented, from a multitude of angles, presenting it from different perspectives (for example, the portrait in which both the front and the profile appear) an idea that profoundly changed the notion of a fixed, singular perspective, experimenting with new ways of space and shape representation (Sgourev 2013). This multidimensional approach has given rise to some masterpieces that are intriguing and evocative, visually captivating and emotionally charged (Cramer & Grant 2020).

Exploring Picasso (which challenged the status quo, deviated from realism, and broke from primary notions of space, time, and form) allowed artists to move away from strict mimesis, encouraging them to experiment with various abstract artistic approaches and conceptual ideas (O'Brien 2014).

Picasso reinterpreted by Christian Jankowski

The year 2023 marked the 50th anniversary of Picasso's passing in the realm of the immortals.

In partnership with France, Spain decided to celebrate the artist and his work through an impressive program, which involved eight countries and 42 museums around the world, Romania being the only country in Central and Eastern Europe included in the large project, through the exhibition at the MARE Gallery.

The exhibition NEUE MALEREI (New Painting): Cultural Cubism (September 23 - October 21, 2023), by the German artist Christian Jankowski, from the Suprainfinit Gallery in Bucharest, perfectly synchronized with the Picasso Effect exhibition from the Bucharest MARE Gallery (September 27, 2023 - January 8, 2024), as if to

constitute a typical example of the effect that the personality and work of the great Spanish artist have on modern art.

The exhibition “NEUE MALEREI: Cultural Cubism” is part of the third series of conceptual paintings by artist Christian Jankowski and offers an inverted perspective on the master's conceptual approach. Picasso created the works starting from reality towards collage and creation through individual inventive, intellectual, and emotional effort. In contrast, Jankowski proposes a reversal of the conceptual route, starting from the collage created by AI from images of the archive of famous paintings on the Internet, towards a collaborative creation often involving a performative act and a vocalized reflection, which is then videotaped.

Christian Jankowski

Jankowski is one of Germany's leading contemporary conceptual artists, working primarily with video, installation, and photography; his art is associated with the New Gothic Art movement (Gavin 2008).

His art uses different media formats (video art, photography, and performance, often including painting, sculpture, and drawing). It is conceived in a continuous exchange with the formats used by mass media and the mechanisms by which they are produced. Jankowski's innovation lies in initiating collaborations between contemporary visual artists and other hitherto less targeted professional worlds, such as religion, business, politics and the entertainment industry, as well as experimenting with a reflective practice on the concept of collective creation regarding the role, its functions, and influences on visual art. The collaborative nature of his art means that each participant implicitly contributes to the final form of the work (Smith 2006).

Jankowski's works have appeared in numerous group and solo exhibitions, such as Ticket to Future with Joseph Beuys, Katinka Bock, and Jon Rafman in 2022; Bangkok Art Biennale in 2020; After Leaving | Before Arriving, Kaunas Biennial, Kaunas, Lithuania in 2019; KNOCK KNOCK, South London Gallery, London. Solo exhibitions include: Traveling Artist, Tübingen, Germany, 2022; Sender and Receiver, Fluntum Berlin, 2020; Weather Flag, Jose Garcia, Mexico, 2020; Family Constellation, Romania, 2020; Floating World, KCUA, South Korea, 2018.

In 2016, Jankowski became the first artist to curate the eleventh edition of the Manifesta exhibition in Zürich. He participated in the

1992 Venice Biennale. His works are part of numerous public and private collections (Manifesta 2016).

In 2020, the exhibition *Family Constellation* was curated by Quote-Unquote¹ (2020). The exhibition consisted of an assemblage of four mobile homomorphic works from logs carved by Jankowski's brother with a chainsaw, which could be moved to realize precisely what intra-family connections and tensions were discovered during online therapy sessions in which the brothers participated live, these being mediated by a psychotherapist from a distance via a monitor. Exhibitors watched these sessions and rearranged their sculptures in wood to signify their family connections (Jankowski 2020).

Jankowski reverses the technique used by Picasso in making Cubist collages

Since 2015, the artist has been employing a *mélange* of generative artificial intelligence (focused on utilizing a digital archive built on the typical characteristics of photographs of famous paintings) and painting. He sends an AI-made collage-like composition based on selections from archived photos to painters from Dafen, China (who do reproductions), specifying the exact size he wants, and they send him back the imitations. The dimensions of the newly created canvas are kept to those of the true masterpieces, but the new painting almost always leaves a stripe on the bottom or right side of the canvas untouched, depending on the proportion of the latest painting (Marinescu 2023).

Thus, the technique used by Jankowski to create works of collaborative visual art, based on the collage of photographic images mixed by AI and painted by Chinese painters, becomes an inversion of Picasso's collage technique.

Jankowski's exhibition concept from *Suprainfinit* is realized in a complex perspective, featuring a *mélange* of photography, painting, performance, and the presentation of living paintings. According to Cristina Vasilescu, "Such an exhibition has the potential to expand the creativity of artistic production in Bucharest, where artistic and non-

¹ Quote - Unquote is an interdisciplinary platform founded in 2019 by Irina Radu, Cristina Vasilescu, and Dan Angelescu, which Irina Radu and Cristina Vasilescu currently manage. The platform investigates the mechanisms of the uses of communication and its effects on the public in contemporary society through artistic practice and the intersection with other fields of activity.

artistic disciplines (in particular: sociology, anthropology, cinema, philosophy, psychology) are still very separate.” (Dobre 2023)

Special curatorial effects used in the realization of Jankowski’s exhibition by the curators of Quote-Unquote in partnership with the Suprainfinit Gallery

The poster, which announces the opening of the exhibition of the painter who assumes Cultural Cubism, is a typical one, without emphasis or claims of sophistication, but only with a simple trick such as the inverted signature of the name of the gallery in the mirror, in the upper left part of the poster.

The central image is a painting by Jankowski that alludes to how Picasso created portraits of women, utilizing a double perspective: from the front and the profile.

The conceptual painting in the NEUE MALEREI series explores and expands the visual techniques applied by Picasso in the realization of his creations, using so-called photographs as a performative process, which continues innovation through the use of digital photography, film, and video, which uses sensors that convert light into electrical charges, which are digitally analysed and then transformed back into images (Shusterman 2012).

The female characters in Jankowski’s works invite viewers into an active, rather than passive, contemplation process. The subjectivities of the female characters are strong, engaging the viewer in a stimulating, reflective, and self-meditative experience.

In many of Picasso’s paintings, women are portrayed as objects of desire, evoking glances that are insinuating yet also convey a fear-inducing factor through depictions that feature desirable expressions but with slightly depressing attitudes, set against a chromatic, sometimes gloomy palette.

By contrast, the paintings from the NEUE MALEREI concept are alive, vibrant, bizarre, and beautiful, but also strange.

The framework “Woman with Bird” reveals that, in this exhibition subspace, the curator does not adopt the idea of the White Cube (O’Doherty 1976) but prefers to use the blue-coloured wall as a massive *passe-partout* for the painting on canvas (Jankowski 1970).



Christian Jankowski. 1970. *NEUE MALEREI – PICASSO VIII, 2023*, oil on canvas, 100 × 81 cm.
FEMME AVEC OISEAU (WOMAN WITH BIRD), oil on canvas, sold by Gallery Red (from Palma de Mallorca), no info on who bought it. Courtesy of the artist and Suprainfinit Gallery

It impresses the difference between the contrasting textures, such as the rough blue wall and the delicate, coloured canvas combined with black and white portions that stylistically indicate an elaborate, complex paper architecture, spatially highlighting a futuristic mask and costume of a female model, who seems to be walking on a specially arranged stage like in a fashion parade, who advocates for the ecological idea of paper recycling.

As Jankowski expands the medium and the pictorial techniques used, he also reaches unexpected, caricature, but also joking ways of expression, in this way, contributing both to the expansion of the number of collaboratively participating subjects in the creative act and to their complete involvement, including in the act of reception of the work aimed at meditation and self-reflection, as implicit symbiotic effects of the receiving a Cultural Cubism type of work.

By contrast, the next frame reveals an exhibition subspace where the White Cube concept was chosen; the white, neutral wall is specially designed to highlight the chromaticity of the painting and not interfere with it, highlighting, in this case, the perfect harmony of the two portraits that reflect, on the one hand, two different types of human in the same posture and, on the other hand, the image of Picasso's specific technique in a certain period, of rendering the portrait through sometimes crude lines (Sims 1996), here evident in the deformed hands, the caricature eyes, but also the drawn moustaches, like a toothbrush - à la Hitler (which, however, also reminds of Duchamp with the moustaches à la Dali in his drawing – Mona Lisa. Knight 1991).

Interestingly, in a retro integralist view, this approach to the exhibition space can be interpreted more as a current space intended for housing. The white walls, a coffee table, an armchair, the typical potted flower in the corner of the room, and the two paintings, which are consonant with the entire architectural ensemble of the interior from both chromatic and spatial points of view, are perfectly matched.

The exhibition also features a reinterpreted version of the *Guernica* painting, which remains faithful to the original's actual dimensions (349.3 cm × 776.6 cm) and the subject of Picasso's masterpiece.

On April 28th, the newspaper *L'Humanité* presented the horrors caused by the bombings initiated by Hitler and Mussolini, accompanied by tragic photographs of the victims of the attack. The article imposed on the Spanish collective mentality, and not only the tragedy's dimensions. On May 1st, Picasso made the first sketches for what would become his famous work, *Guernica*. The first sketch, probably drawn in less than a minute, juxtaposes a bull with a bird, a highly stylized "Image of a horse and a woman holding a lamp".

Picasso's *Guernica* represents one of the most realistic documentations in art history regarding the "work in progress" because Dora Maar photographed each stage of the work's realization in the artist's studio on the rue des Grands-Augustins. The final painting, which depicts the Nazi bombing of the homonymous Basque city, transcends the historical event that deeply inspired and sensitized the artist.

The work quickly becomes a representation of the general revolt against the atrocities of war and a universal anti-war symbol through the symbolic fusion that the artist achieves between epic and realism. The primary meaning of *Guernica* is easy to decipher: a white bull - the Spanish totem (Larrea & Barr 1947) - stands motionless, blocking with its body the only escape route, in front of a collective catastrophe produced in a closed space, from which four women try desperately to get out. The death of a warrior and a child, the agony of a wounded horse and the cry of a bird, the spear thrust into the horse's body, and the broken sword and spear beside the soldier's corpse are all symbols of war. The final meaning is anguish, generated by despair, destruction, and death, and it is emphasized by the choral howl that unites all the characters in a gloomy atmosphere, highlighted by the absence of colours.

In the case of Jakowsk's new "Guernica", the painting covers only 40% of the canvas's surface, allowing the viewer to reinterpret the rest

of the canvas. The black-and-white part of the painting captures the agony depicted in Joel-Peter Witkin's 1987 black-and-white photograph (Witkin 1987).

The cultural Cubist painting, placed in a conventional exhibition space, impresses with its monumental size and its approach that defies the elementary rule of classical painting, which requires that the image cover the entire surface of the painting.



Christian Jankowski. 2017. *NEUE MALEREI – PICASSO I*, oil on canvas, 349 × 777 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Suprainfinit Gallery

The painting is segregated into two parts, which here are cut callously, contrastingly, at the level of plastic representation: image/non-image; visual symbolism in non-colour, black-and-white/ neutral, earthy colour; movement/immobility; commotion; noise/ silence; expression/ vacuum; disturbance/calm; emotion/ impassiveness; war/peace.

Considering that the exhibition space at Suprainfinit was insufficient for the gigantic dimensions of this painting, which represented, in my opinion, the fundamental painting of the entire exhibition, the curators chose an unconventional variant of exhibiting the painting, totally atypical, in a position oblique which does not offer the original perspective on the painting, but allows its reception from different angles, brightnesses, even different spatial positions, including from outside the exhibition space, through the large windows of the gallery, which allows viewing the painting to be possible both during day, in natural light, as well as at night, in Bucharest's nocturnal lights from Mântuleasa street.

Conclusion

The Cubism Cultural event exhibition, curated by Quote-Unquote specialists in partnership with the Suprainfinit Gallery, was supported by an EEA Grants 2014 - 2021 grant in collaboration with RO-CULTURE and the Goethe Institute in Bucharest. It was conceived synchronously with the commemorative “The Picasso Effect” exhibition at the MARE Gallery in September 2023.

The NEUE MALEREI concept, initiated by Jankowski, surprises with the playful spontaneity it offers in a Cultural Cubist vision, where collaborative conceptual activity achieves the desired effects, presenting the viewer with a complex vision of outstanding visual masterpieces, known and appreciated in the universal artistic and cultural world. Jankowski approaches a coded decoding of the messages intentionally transmitted by the visual artists concerned, in the case of Picasso, applying an inverted technique to treat the homonymous subjects.

The vast curatorial experience of the organizers of the exhibition NEUE MALEREI: Cultural Cubism is fully leveraged; it is subjected to extreme tests, which it passes with imaginative effort and courage, giving the viewer a chance to experience Jankowskian Cultural Cubism.

Even a simple, fragmented virtual visit to this exhibition is intriguing, delightful, and invites introspection, active contemplation, interactive questioning, and collaborative communication; therefore, the exhibition has achieved its goal of engaging the competent public and making them addicted to this type of experience.

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