



# Myth and Metamorphosis: Picasso's Classical Prints of the 1930s

*Lisa Florman*

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Previous studies of Picasso's involvement with the classical have tended to concentrate on the period immediately following the First World War, and to attribute that involvement to both the rise of political conservatism in France and the domesticating influence of the artist's marriage to Olga Koklova. Focusing instead on the later, classicizing prints of the 1930s, this book offers a radically different view of Picasso and the "classical"—a view that aligns his work much more closely with Surrealist, and specifically Bataillean, revisions of antiquity.

The book's argument is built around detailed analyses of several separate print series: Picasso's illustrations for Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the etchings of the *Vollard Suite*, and *The Minotauromachy*. Common to all of them, the book shows, is a strong engagement not only with the classical, but with the viewer. In the latter, Picasso's prints are clearly at odds with the understanding of the relationship between classical art and its audience that prevailed throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—an understanding that held the work's purported autonomy to mirror the viewer's own. By exposing that autonomy as a fantasy, Picasso opens the "classical" work and its viewer alike to the entanglements of desire and the dissolution of boundaries it inevitably brings.

Much of the argument turns on close readings of key Surrealist texts by Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris, and Roger Caillois. Even more important, however, are the prints' numerous references, heretofore unnoticed, to specific works by, among others, Rubens, Rembrandt, and Goya. These references effectively create an alternative "classical" tradition out of which Picasso's etchings can be seen to have emerged.

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