

ceramics
of
Picasso



GEORGES RAMIÉ

CERAMICS
OF
PICASSO

GEORGES RAMIÉ

CERAMICS OF PICASSO

EDICIONES POLÍGRAFA, S. A.

© 1985 Ediciones Polígrafa, S. A.
Balma, 54 - 08007 Barcelona (Spain)

Reproduction rights S.G.A.E. - SPADEM
Translation by Kenneth Lyons

I.S.B.N.: 84-343-0424-4
Dep. Leg.: B. 17.144 - 1985 (Printed in Spain)

Printed in Spain by La Polígrafa, S. A.
Parets del Vallès (Barcelona)

CONTENTS

Ceramics: a New Adventure	7
The art of making people live and see	8
The challenge of new materials	10
The mastery of the technique	12
The moment of confrontation	13
The potter's wheel	15
Research and experiments	17
The possibilities of ceramics	20
A limitless creation	22
An over-punctilious fortune	23
Forms of Picasso's ceramics	24
<i>Rendezvous</i> at Vallauris	26
Chronology	29
Illustrations	31
List of illustrations	125



Ceramics: a New Adventure

Picasso 1946! A crucial epoch if ever there was one, when fate was slyly weaving its invisible yarns into a sequence of facts as yet uncertain, but which the future was to inscribe and illumine in the history of great deeds or small.

It was in that year, on 21 July to be exact, that Picasso, holidaying at Golfe Juan and probably having nothing very urgent to do, conceived the notion of visiting an exhibition he had heard well spoken of at the nearby village of Vallauris, where various local products were being shown, but above all and most particularly the works of about a score of the Vallauris potters.

The presence of these potters in Vallauris was originally due to the upheavals of population brought about by the still recent war, which had brought a whole phalanx of artists and craftsmen — from all over France and even from abroad — to seek a haven in this little Provençal town, where for thousands of years the livelihood of the inhabitants had depended on the local clay, baked over crackling logs from the neighbouring pine woods.

Peace to work in and means ready to hand — with the help of a certain degree of inventiveness — were to allow each one entire fullness of spirit to elicit the patient sap of his experience, his aspirations and his talent.

Working as they did with a constant passion, these artists liked to present some evidence of their activity and their merits at this traditional exhibition, held every year to show their work to the Riviera collectors.

It must be admitted that by 1946 their reputation was sufficiently established to justify Picasso's expectation of finding something worthy of an encouraging curiosity on this impromptu Sunday visit. And it is now even clearer that in this group manifestation aimed at a common ideal their collective presence, their faith and the wide range of their works had succeeded in establishing a centre for projects and a cynosure of encouragement towards the most favourable of destinies and the finest hopes. And so, though doubtless unintentionally, they had traced a noble path into the future for the man for whom this place had been predestined.

And now he had come! From curiosity certainly but, without a doubt, through interest. This ceramic material, if not for him a revelation, nevertheless offered

forms of plastic expression far from being definitive yet with a very wide range, infinitely variable in their processes and ever propitious to invention. Their generous solicitations held, for a spirit like that of Picasso, a powerful seduction.

So ready was our tourist to be won over by such an allure, that shortly afterwards he abandoned his care-free summer holiday and, accepting the mischievous whims of fortune, became the most absorbed and attentive workman imaginable. Carried away by his vital need to discover all, he suddenly succumbed, and with infinite delight, to the temptation — provoked, whether consciously or not, by himself — to penetrate the mysteries of earth and fire. With fitting reverence he approached this magical material, so sensitive to a mere stroke of the thumb yet so implacable in its reactions to the least variations of humidity, so stubborn in the hands of the uncomprehending yet so docile when treated with respect, a material so fragile while it is still in the shaping, totally dazzled from its recent metamorphosis for all that, in order to become from then on incombustible and imperishable, still to be purified by the terrifying ordeal of fire.

For here, indeed, this substance of so precious a humility becomes, by its permanence, the truest bearer of the message of mankind: however far back in time one goes, the evidence of humanity from the earliest epochs reaches us, not engraved in stone which crumbles to dust and erodes, not cast in metal which rusts and powders, but on little tablets of baked clay, with graphic signs as expressive today as when beneath the stylus of the scribe who traced them.

All this Picasso knew. And in order to know it still better he was to come face to face with all the exigencies, all the uncertainties, all the restlessness of this austere craft. But on the other hand he was to become enchanted by the sense of its magnificence, by the revelation of its surprises. He was to consent to meditate wisely certain propositions of occasionally deceptive nature, to be able, then, to accept the material for itself and pose to it, in his turn, some questions.

From the time of his arrival, on this spontaneous call as an interested bystander, Picasso was received with all the consideration due to his renown and to his authority. Surrounded, as he so often liked to be, by a whole retinue of friends, he at once took an interest in the total scene, in everything happening around him, in

everything he ascertained, in everything he assumed. He was provided swiftly with a corner of a bench and a lump of well-kneaded clay, which he seized with enthusiasm. That day three pieces emerged from his hands: three pieces which stayed there and remain still, for the witnesses of those exciting hours, the most powerful of talismans. Much rarer than any prototypes, they represent for all of us the most precious preface to an epoch fruitful in works and in friendship, of too rare worth: a little head of a faun and two bulls modelled by hand. A good many years later, celebrating the memory of those historic moments, these three little pieces for the joy of all were cast in bronze.

Once finished, they stayed on the bench to be completely dried before being baked in the kiln, but their author disappeared without sending any news.

The months elapsed, the pieces left behind could have been fired over and over again and we believed that this attempt, to Picasso's mind, constituted only a nice pastime that allowed him to occupy himself pleasantly, in a potter's studio, always cool, one midsummer afternoon.

But — exactly as in the *Romaunt de la Rose* — one year later to the day Picasso, again on holiday, took the route of Vallauris and of its Exhibition. He rediscovered with delight the studio of his first trial and, with an exultant surprise, the three pieces of the preceding year, which, in an excess of unreasoning pessimism, he had thought lost in one never knows what final mishap.

This time, however, he did not appear as an amateur; during the winter, this episode of summertime ceramics had held his imagination in a state of permanent disquiet: he had studied a multitude of projects, and this time he presented himself laden with the sketches all accumulated during the course of these promising meditations. When Picasso came up against a question, he immediately ignored common reality. He now brought with him a cardboard box full of designs: to be displayed, discussed, argued over, wondered at. This time, apparently, he was seriously interested: thus the great new adventure began.

That day Picasso took possession of a place of his own in our workshop, that venerable workshop hundreds of years old, in which so many generations of potters down through the centuries have fashioned thousands and thousands of everyday objects in the honest clay of Vallauris. Like these potters he sat down at his bench and — exacting, diligent, alert, almost feverish, taciturn — he too began his first piece, the forerunner of the multitude of pieces he was to shape throughout those long years of hard, ceaseless work. Forsaking Paris, his habits and his friends (even neglecting his brushes, his pencils and his graver), he deliberately broke through the visionary frontier of his new mission.

I need hardly add that he gave himself up to it heart and soul, with that tireless vehemence he brought to everything, the indomitable ardour of those vocations that are all the more fruitful for being slow to appear. And it was from that moment — and thanks to the prestige of the work Picasso was to do — that ceramics, which many had always considered a minor art, began to enjoy an eminence hitherto unsuspected and now universally admitted.

All this happened over forty years ago, forty years that have fled with the lightness of a breath, swift as the invisible flight of an arrow, and yet incomparably

rich in treasures, for in the relativity of one man's existence the most indefinable factors may play their part in the cycle of time: the overlong time of events that never quite come to pass, the fleeting time in which everything happens with the brutal intensity of lightning, the time of too-distant memories, the hours of burning fever in which all ideas are lost, the hours of grating impatience that crush, stretch and devour themselves in defiance of reason.

Throughout those years that we evoke today, as much with emotion as with respect, all these multiple factors, whose very essence is the salt of life, may well have mingled day after day in the spirit, the hands and even the tools of Picasso, that great workman, so meticulous, impatient and tenacious. How many alarms, indeed, must have startled those hours in which, diligent and secretive, he set formidable snares for the fire. How much ill-contained impatience must have possessed him when, in the closed and silent depths of their incandescent chamber, the mysteries of volatile exchanges and the evolution of impoderable substances were slowly working out. How much interest, too, when his pieces emerged from the kiln and he discovered the answers to his questions, sometimes propitious, sometimes surprising, but always, as he says himself, passionately absorbing.

And so, taking shape from the continuous pooling of intentions, projects and ideas, this immensely fertile period saw the completion of that marvellous expansion that conditions the attachment of beings and things in a process of serene ripening. In a sequence of circumstances in which nothing counts but the accomplishment of what has to be done, everything tends naturally to a harmonious concourse of effort towards the goal one is seeking.

In truth the value of time in its evanescent flow can be measured by the rhythm of our heart, that marvellous sand-glass of our most secret moments, which the weight of our sentiments empties, accelerates or slows down, making the sands of our life too light or too heavy.

But for those of us fortunate enough to experience them, the auspicious hours of those years of salutary interdependence were hours of fullness, hours that passed with incomparable lightness.

The art of making people live and see

Despite all those constant interchanges, despite all the shared intentions, despite the years spent working side by side, to pretend to define Picasso still seems to me a presumptuous enough undertaking. After this daily life in which, with the same words, the same tools and even the same feelings, we also shared the same sense of striving to make identical discoveries, there are still countless imponderables that make it impossible to analyse what it was, in this exceptional man, that went to make up the person, the personage, the personality.

It is true, indeed, that every human being is multiple in himself, uniformly variable at every moment, constantly transformed by the incessant impetus of individual evolution throughout the fateful course of life. Are we really the same this evening as we were this morning? Or the same today as yesterday? Can we say that ten years from now we shall be anything like what

we are at this moment? This diversity of individuals, as much from one to the other as within each one, very naturally comes from the proportion of constancy or variability evinced by each character in the existential rhythm of his perceptions and reactions.

And it is at this point that we are faced with the vexing problem of creative imagination, which intrudes upon and takes possession of the spirit, the judgment and sometimes even the hand of the man it visits.

If, in this way, Picasso evolved in his day-to-day activities, he became many-sided at the very moment when, in whatever work he was engaged on, he was visited by these attitudes. One can feel some mysterious current running through him, a sudden sequence of imperious influences that must be obeyed immediately, in accordance with an irresistible power that must be satisfied wholly and essentially.

This inner force that took possession of him hastened his inventive progress in an effort to assuage this unquenchable thirst to express the message of the moment. To express it but also to consume it, in a course of long duration in which an obsessive theme was taken up again and again in proliferating and continually renewed variations, reflecting the teeming intensity of the changing aspects of composition.

Thus one begins a cycle within which develop, in successive sequences, a multitude of modulations in chromatic evolution of a theme that will be treated with passion to the furthest conceivable limit.

A limit which, any day, can be extended to infinity or can give way to other, parallel meditations, under the ascendancy of an enormous and generous wealth of invention, unpredictable in its substance and constantly reborn in protean visions.

In this dramatic universe that Picasso created for us in such disconcerting profusion we can divine a temperament in perpetual tension, relentlessly pursuing its quest and subject to every contrast. A person who knows how to seek out the treasures hidden in the depths of his work may find Picasso, at one and the same time, quite strictly consequent in the most chaotic diversity, firmly disciplined and full of rectitude, yet with the air of a frenzied libertarian, zealous and respectful within apparently anarchic distortions, his flashing line the result of unhurried meditations, sometimes even harmonious amidst the most destructive stridencies, perfectly balanced in the shattering of fragments, sumptuous in the simplicity of his means, spiritedly seeking truth in the excess of his forms, capable of evoking tenderness just when the line is most particularly violent and of maintaining a seemingly restraint in the midst of the most tortuous intricacies.

But these are just superficial appearances, a vivid testimony of his constant quest for discipline in discovery, unceasingly vigilant in giving and taking, becoming abundant and also recollecting himself, cursing and repenting in the same breath, letting sparks fly in order to unbosom himself all the better immediately afterwards.

Discipline, certainly...! But then this is a word that very easily, among some people, suggests a thought of scandal...! This monumental *œuvre* does indeed have the unformulated aspect of absolute freedom in its indefatigable impetus, its unremitting effort to renew and reconstruct appearances, to re-create concepts and to revise plastic notations. All of which is true, provided we do not confuse the idea of freedom with that illu-

sory faculty that permits anybody at all to create anything at all, and in whatever way he likes. For such a faculty depends rather on the most sterile and incoherent licence than on the true freedom that is all-important here. An avid, engrossing, tyrannical freedom, one that is strictly limited to the requirements of the moment, confining each act to its intrinsic value, without encroaching on another's territory, inflexibly obedient to the individual's rules of thought. A severe spiritual discipline imposed by the unbending effort of character.

For anyone who travels in Picasso's company along the winding paths of his creations, this observation becomes self-evident. Despite the presence of certain of his variable traits, one will always find him to be permanent and consequent in the evolution of his art. Though there may sometimes be surprising episodes, the chain goes on in a series of links that are always forged in the strictest continuity.

In this we find an essential attitude — voluntary or unconscious, acquired or conceived — that is of real value inasmuch as it is the dominant force that creates the very personal system of ethics constituted by Picasso's progress through the universe of expression. A universe built wholly on this prophetic relativity of sensorial perception with respect to the reality of facts. The ascendancy of the sensibility, with its reflections eternally changing in space, over the pretext evoked almost immaterially. Multiplicity of principles, disparity of the symbols that demand, for him who wants to receive them, a creative participation of the formal imagination, in order to transpose and complete at will the given suggestion and to finish to his own taste the barely formulated vision.

What Picasso expresses, in its natural state, is a fundamentally living testimony, in a permanent process of conversion and demanding the co-operation of whoever is at one with him in seeking to penetrate into the very reason of things, the analysis of forms. And this very fluid mobility quite naturally leads to the restructuring of the Universe in a wholly personal attitude. An unexpected attitude, too, for on the one hand it calls into question once again our sensorial impressions as against reality, while on the other hand it has no immediate reference to the more usual appearances.

For the artist in our time is no longer a simple narrator of known or conventional circumstances, meekly employed in the purely manual business of copying commonplace, definitive elements of visions. Mechanical or photographic reproduction can take care of that only too well by now. His mission, now and in the future, is to continue his description beyond visible objects, making it traverse the emotional state in which he perceives them and transmitting them by the means of expression most right for him. And it is, precisely, the quality of these means which define his inner life in relation to his subject.

A living testimony, then...! For through the simple interpreter of an evocation or of a Mallarmé-like photograph that barely skims the surface, our quest, following the influences of the moment, is going to bring unlimited participation in this present proposition.

For we will find ourselves attracted, from the very beginning, by the effervescence of a continual tension. Henceforth each one of us, multiplied within himself in space and modified in himself at every moment, is sufficiently omnipotent to compose for himself alone the endless birth of a new vision.

Therefore, as explained, a particularly imponderable determinant has been introduced between the perceptible fact and its emotional resonance, thus giving rise to a permanent inner dialectic, comparing the essential fact with the specific content of the subject. One might go so far as to say that as from this moment the object, in a stupefying transmutation, is about to change its destination and become the subject. The true subject of our thoughts, of our aspirations, of our changes of heart and even of our illusions.

May one speak, then, of critical art, spontaneous art, art finally liberated, questions which concern so many restless spirits of our age? The art of Picasso neither abolishes nor scorns references already acquired, but makes use of them for translation into some metamorphoses, into some new, unexpected springs of genius. Here the first objective of the method is to learn how to do without the references, and virtuosity is pressed into the service of the spirit in order to free the imaginary. The subject just evoked becomes the inner wrapping in which our meditations are to be shrouded for a long time. The art of Picasso, then, is rather an art of making people live, of making them see. Though he is at once a chronicler of social events, a denouncer of the abuses of temporal history, a witness to everyday reality and a singer of the idylls of mythology, he nevertheless shuns anecdote.

At the very most he will try to make it difficult to identify in the transcription he gives us. With equal frequency, however, he subjects it to a disarticulation of form, a structural disintegration by which he declares the freedom of his power of expression.

It is then, of course, that some people begin to shout about outrage, indecency, imposture, scandal! With solemn indignation they bemoan the wounding of their smug complacency by so many disquieting manifestations. These are usually the sort of people who take the family to shelter their curiosity in public monuments on a rainy Sunday afternoon, for it sometimes happens that these monuments are used as museums or solemn pantheons, or even both things at once. These are the people who perpetuate their imaginary exploits in their belated reminiscences, or who seem to move through existence backwards and insist on finding their satisfaction in what they already know.

This was what led Baudelaire to say that in the presence of genius the vast majority of the public behave like a clock that claims to tell the right time but is actually about half a century slow. From time immemorial history has shown that the real men of each century are prophets. And have the prophets not clearly used ordinary, everyday words in their parables? And yet their language, for most people, is incomprehensible. When men's spirits are befogged or absent, prophecy is apt to sound like a mysterious discourse. Some protest at its incoherence, others — the wiser ones — examine their consciences. And later, much later, when the wheel of time has turned full circle and the light slowly rises, the sense of the forgotten messages appears in all its simplicity.

How many among us are in harmony with the rhythm of their age? How many are there among us, as the Athenian sage declared, whose applause for the discus thrower means that they themselves endeavour to hurl the discus equally far?

The challenge of new materials

Whenever Picasso decided to tackle new materials, in order to satisfy his insatiable desire to discover the particular features of each medium, he felt that he was liberated from any kind of gravity that might impede his flight. He seemed to develop a new acuteness in his pursuit of hazardous encounters with noxious interferences that teased him in the shadows. And this immediately filled him with an incredible ingenuity of a practical order. Hardly had the essential principles been established when he hastened to evade them. The notions acquired by custom or tradition might, if really necessary, be used as a starting-point for his venture, but always quite optionally, with a view to basing his judgment on them and estimating to what extent they could be accepted. This amounted to a preliminary way of learning how to do without them and then determining by what means they might help him to discover others. For he could hardly be expected to remain forever hemmed in by the same restrictions, to be eternally subjected to formalist precepts, unconditional definitions or undemonstrable functions. In the normal exercise of the faculties of this *métier*, it is true, a great number of possible avenues are regarded as taboo, simply by tradition, without any trial other than an assertion repeated and transmitted. But unfavourable circumstances at some distant date in the past may well have created in a sacrosanct law of stray impulses an element that might be held to be a perfect foundation for success.

Such procedures, though of great interest, may well have been discarded through lassitude as much as through ignorance or preference. And so we have a whole field of exciting experiments to be approached again, like a universe that is known too well or not well enough, too regularized, taking itself too seriously without any reason and fated to be put back, without delay, among the attempts at reform that favour the re-invention of the lost past. Is it not the destiny of created things, after all, to lie in incompleteness and perpetual re-creation?

It was with an appearance of anarchic empiricism, therefore, that this exuberant period of rediscovery and renewal, to say nothing of astonishing inventions, was to unfold. It should be confessed straight away that our love of the unexpected made us plunge headlong into this unorthodox adventure. The explorer's spirit is conditioned by the serious risks he takes and that is undoubtedly what enables him to recover from the mishaps he incurs of his own free will. He is a natural non-conformist. In a strictly ordered parkland his attitude would seem at best suspicious and perhaps even reprehensible. But out in the wilds, where everything is possible...!

And it was out in the wilds that Picasso developed; he made it his business to discover what nature intends to do in the normal course of her little personal habits, and then suggested that she envisage some other course. Something much more exciting, much more aggressive, than the usual product of her melancholy routine.

From the outset one might well think that the spirit of the established order of things would draw herself up in offended dignity and tell this intruder to be off about his business and insist no more. Nobody can tell whether that happened or not. Except that Picasso insisted. With that curious, mischievous little laugh that

one heard when he was preparing some trick, or when he persisted in forcing an obtuse and misleading fate, or went off to prepare some venture for which the most experienced authorities predicted inevitable failure, given the present state of carefully-garnered knowledge.

And then we see him setting a problem — a difficult, compromising problem, one that may even be tragic in its premeditated unseemliness — for the mysterious, capricious reactions of the kiln and its burning auguries.

And it is then that we see the expert calculations, the most reputable treatises and the most fundamental laws of experiment all at once called into question. And what should have been reduced, according to all the most expert opinions, to a miserable devastation bursting into barbaric fragments is seen to be an affirmation of new principles and evident possibilities. These possibilities had hitherto existed in the sterile shade and only now emerged from their inexplicable neglect. Just so can we find latent powers, fossilized in immobility or oblivion, waiting only for a liberator who will let them follow the course of their spontaneous stimulations once more.

And so the case is proven. The door is open to all kinds of obstinate attempts to produce very strange combinations, ready to dissolve into the totally unpredictable. It is all rather like the chess-player who moves his men on the squares with his eyes closed and then successfully mates in three moves.

For an analysis of the total number of contingencies that may arise from the interplay of the enamels and the metal oxides will readily confirm that we are faced with a complexity of possible developments almost as vast as in the game of Palamede. Each kind of matter influences and determines the others, either separately or together, under very specific conditions. The result of their interaction tends to be constantly altered by reactions of an elementary kind that may produce superimposed modifications, destroying each other, strengthening each other, exacerbating each other, dividing, repelling or multiplying each other, all these phenomena being determined by the temperature, the humidity and the duration, and sometimes even by the influence of very old residues. And thus, in a multiplicity of incidents, we find impinging on each other the peculiar characteristics of components that include, among others, fusibility, volatility, opacity, retractability, transparency, sensitivity to heat, rapidity, dullness, brilliance, etc.

As one can see, the field is enormous. Like every other sphere of human knowledge, it has an unlimited area for exploration. The more we learn of it, the more we realize the immensity still to be learnt. The smallest discovery is sometimes capable of producing a vertiginous attraction that holds as much promise as uncertainty. But is it permissible to seize all these possibilities at once? Nature compels us to remain within her own dimensions and from this range of attractive propositions to choose only one, which may be validly analysed and tested. And even this one will immediately open out, through an infinity of resultants, on a fabulous horizon of probabilities still to be explored.

Thus the circle widens unceasingly; it will never be closed again. And far from feeling crushed by this revelation of immensity, each one sets out once more to climb, indefatigably and sometimes even frenziedly, this infernal rock of Sisyphus!

And with this we have entered into the insidious domain of unusual investigations. Picasso, with that swift intuition he showed whenever he wanted to penetrate into the inmost essence of anything, would incline towards everything that custom had excommunicated, towards all that was traditionally considered an unapproachable myth or a respectable assumption which must not be upset.

This obstinate contrariness in Picasso was quite in keeping with his usual — and necessary — way of working. The difficulty or scale of the irruption he saw himself making in this new technique, far from frightening him, rather spurred him to even greater haste. And is it not true, after all, that this fashion of approaching principles by way of their contraries, inversions or even negations often gives rise to the most fruitful discoveries? Is not a well-founded reason in itself reversible?

In this exploration that he had chosen, partly by chance but also from preference, an exploration strewn with perfidious ambushes, countless complexities and stimulating perspectives, Picasso felt perfectly at ease and ready for the fiercest onslaughts. He penetrated, ever alert, to the heart of all the problems and used all available means to organize his plans of action for reducing the substance of the strange elements confronting him, elements that possessed subtle, sensitive possibilities.

One must readily admit that he very quickly acquired a total mastery of the potentialities that would let him put all his verve into the work and enforce his own concepts. The moment he felt capable of expressing quite freely the impression of the moment, he gave himself up, with the inexhaustible facility of which the sum of his work is the proof, to that frenzy of creation that was to lead him to the great accomplishments that are today only just beginning to be understood to their full extent.

But it is no easy task to explain the manner and reason of this facility to anybody who has not seen him expanding in the act itself.

His manner made you think of some irrepressible force which was always ready to imagine, to transform, to pursue the immediate perception beyond itself in order to create a new one, different and unexpected. A force that sprang as much from the constant diversity of invention as from the skill directed at catching in all the freshness of the instant the fleeting plosion of a thought.

As for the cause, can there be one for this faculty with countless different facets that permit it to multiply in the most improbable conditions; whether passing through the 'stages' of a work which, though alone in itself, can nevertheless be split up in such a way as to explode into a series of descriptive episodes, or in the enormous 'suites', throughout which the same theme appears and reappears, indefatigably modulated, affirmed, revised, rejected, reconstructed, without any necessity for a definitive conclusion?

We might find some sort of explanation in that fury of genuine, incessant activity which Picasso felt as a physiological necessity that was as essential to life as the breathing reflex. Untiring as he was, always in pursuit of the work before him or its successor, his tools never out of his hands, using up all possible plastic procedures and inventing new ones if the accepted ones

were not suitable enough, practising this exercise of self-liberation day after day, night after night (and for how many years?), it is only to be expected that in the course of this maturing process his spirit should have acquired a presence continually prepared to accept new rhythms, familiar with all immediately creative attractions. And it also follows logically, therefore, that his hands, those superb performers, should have come to possess the suppleness and dexterity of the most diligent of workmen.

It was thus, undoubtedly, that he had with such simple means built up that extraordinary accumulation of knowledge, judgment, experience and capacity that was ready at any given moment to adapt his circumstances to his imagination.

Picasso is supposed to have once said: 'I do not seek; I find'. Though he had a fundamental horror of analysing himself in order to regale the world with historic aphorisms, this phrase may well be considered genuine. But it should be understood as referring to somebody who first crams his money-box quite full and then smashes it to discover what it contains. It was in just such a state of mind, indeed, that Picasso, after so many years, without having to seek very far, smashed his money-box every morning to find what had been put there the night before.

The mastery of the technique

Picasso's work in ceramics, with its exuberant articulations, grew after the fashion of a marvellous universe. A universe of exceptionally vast dimensions, and yet reduced, as far as means are concerned, to the rudimentary elements of the world in an Empedoclean triad. Is there any reason to be astonished by the fact that, in this age of constant acceleration and frantic change, acceptance may still be given to a concept of activity that professes, within an apparently anachronic ethical system, such an Aristotelian humanism? The point is that for the potter it is precisely this rudimentary quality that constitutes at once his discipline, his strength and his challenge. Limiting himself, with timeless formulas, to expressing what he wants to say in a contemporary message, he must seek a multiplicity of effects within the very paucity of his means. Thus he endeavours to assert his sense of vocation, which led him to choose the most rustically simple materials in order to translate them into the most complex manifestations.

And it must be supposed that for him this asceticism is worth pursuing and that there will be other men, for many years to come, who will pursue and attain it; for premeditated love of the absolute, for the inner satisfaction of expanding in this precarious grandeur and also in order to find once more in the strictness of the natural laws their own supreme and only reason for existing. Many have already discovered this, and many more will discover it again, for it is good to linger late in the evening in the cool fullness of those places where the clay, with its silky touch, sacrifices its nature by delivering itself up to the mercies of a redoubtable alchemy, to be reborn in a completely different and unknown form.

But what is the mysterious origin of this immanent urge that comes from the remotest depths of mankind and, incessantly and everywhere, impels singular spirits

to respond to this belated but passionately insistent vocation?

In the beginning was the earth, and from that earth came man, that remote primate whose instinct to survive led him to dig a hole in the clay in which to keep the water from the sky. Much later came another man, one already travelling apace along the roads of progress, who conceived the idea of cutting out this hole followed by his ancestor in order to make it more easily transportable. This man's initiative bore within it all the postulates of the potter of the future, capable of fashioning objects of baked earth, familiar, rustic objects for everyday practical use. And to carry out this innovation — which today, after so many centuries, we may perhaps find banal, but which was nevertheless one of the most inspired discoveries of primitive humanity — all we need are the three eternal, sacred elements: earth, fire and water.

Nor had Picasso any need of others. One enters the field of pottery rather as one enters a religious order: one must have faith, a vocation, a great simplicity of nature and intention, a ready spirit and a persevering heart. And all of this, with the passing of the years, is apparently capable of leading the generous of spirit to an incomparable blessedness. And not an inert, senseless beatitude, but one that is active and thought-provoking to a high degree.

Picasso's ceramic work affirms this abundantly and constantly; he desired to follow the stony paths that lead, through joy, to the summit of man's accomplishment, and throughout this ceramic adventure he untiringly sang the delicious peace of the spirit, the serene sweetness of those halcyon days and the fruitful joy of creation in absolute freedom.

His universe came into being imperceptibly: the long days of feverish work followed each other over the years, unremittingly, without so much as an intermission or even a day off on Sundays! At the outset an inevitable preliminary training period entailed a suitably prudent rhythm of work; he had to have more than one long look at this new material before mastering it. But very quickly our sorcerer's apprentice succeeded in learning the magic words that unleash the surging floods of spells — and then the living forces were set free! Those who watched over the progress of affairs very soon had to make sure that all his needs were promptly supplied and that all processes could be carried out at a regular rhythm.

Very soon, too, the drying-rooms were filled with unfired pieces, finished at a lively pace and placed there to harden in the salutary warmth of the dry, moving air. There they awaited — certainly with a fair measure of confidence under such conditions — the fateful moment of truth now imminent. This ordeal by fire, consuming the offering only to restore it with a new nature and under a new appearance, was rather like the medieval "Judgment of God": jousting in the lists, with lowered vizors, where the victory is to the valiant. A triumph that sometimes requires several reprises, either in obligation to the normal estimates or because some unforeseen defect makes it necessary to perfect the conclusion.

There is nothing so moving as the moment when the pieces leave the kiln, even for the most hardened of these workers led by a possibly unusual vocation to entrust to the rigours of the flames the objects that hold all

their dreams, their thoughts and their faith. This is indeed the moment when feelings see-saw between absolute satisfaction and gloomy contrariety. But even in the depths of adversity the unfailing hope remains; once again one must re-assert one's abiding confidence by staking one's all on a fresh appeal, to a second hearing, for a carefully studied alteration. And quite often these failures of the first firing, neglected by fortune in so much confusion, emerge the second time triumphantly rehabilitated and in almost unhoped-for magnificence. These surprising reversals used to delight Jean Cocteau, who was an occasional and very alert witness of these strange polemics decided in a series of passionate rejoinders, leading him to conclude, in typically theatrical fashion, that "in the kilns of Vallauris even the flops are hits".

Once fired and taken from the kiln, unhurried attention had to be given to a careful, reasoned examination of each piece. It was at such moments that secrets were revealed and new questions insistently suggested meditations and suppositions. So many new horizons to be reached, so many immediate conquests to be imagined! In the face of such tremendous attractions a newly-acquired ardour made our good companion redouble his stubborn endeavours.

The shelves were quickly filled. Then one day it was decided that they could really hold no more, so we fitted out special rooms to take the copious results of each working day; but soon these rooms, too, were declared to be insufficient, so we had to resign ourselves to arranging certain pieces of like volume or form in piles. If one wished to examine them a little more closely, one could turn them over like the pages of a book. Sitting cross-legged, one took them from one's right and put them back on one's left. And so one advanced, from one pile to the next, through the strange labyrinth of this vertically arranged collection.

It is as well to make a distinction between two rather different periods as regards the technique of this work. From the beginning the firing took place in our old Roman kiln, of the free-chamber type traditional in Vallauris, heated by the acid flames of wood from the Aleppo pines that cover the chalky slopes of the nearby forests. In this type of kiln (the *four à balancier*) the flame is alternately sucked in and driven back by smothering, thus provoking a rocking movement between the treatment chamber and the exterior of the furnace and compressing the flame so that it will enwrap the pieces placed inside in staggered piles.

Depending on the kind of glazing required, the pieces are either left to the oxidation of the flame or protected in cases made of insulating or "muffle" bricks set up in the chamber itself. I, however, am hardly the right person to intone a hymn to that unforgettable human epic of the strict thermal control of such a firing, abandoned to the tender mercies of atmospheric humidity, the acid content of the wood, the regularity of the heating and the correct placing of the pieces in the kiln; to say nothing of the last two or three loads of wood, towards the end of the process, when the definitive temperature is very empirically calculated and the fate of the whole firing depends on one man's irrevocable decision. Great efforts, indeed, possibly great merits and risks; but what incomparable trophies are won in return!

This intense participation and feverish attention must be maintained by the potter for at least twenty-

four hours, during which, at an unfailing and strictly measured rhythm, he throws, together with several tons of wood, a part of himself into that fire with its dying red glow, his efforts consecrating his humble human offering and magnifying it in the nobility of the results his unstinting labours will accord to him.

This process of firing with oxidising flames was the one used until 21 January 1953 and all the pieces produced before that date were produced in this way. But then we installed one of the new electric potter's kilns developed after the war and, after a long period during which it was used alternately with the wood-fired kiln, eventually it replaced the latter entirely. A technique, assuredly, totally different as much in the thermal rhythm as in the chemical nature of the glazes effected; consequently, it greatly modified the processes and the genre of material produced. Another advantage gained was the smaller volume of the chamber, which allowed more frequent firings and at the same time reduced the long, impatient wait for results. Progress in research was thus facilitated by avoiding the loss of interest that inevitably comes from an overlong withdrawal of attention.

And so it was possible to array the ripe fruits of the latest creations in the kiln at an average rate of twice a week. Despite all this range of possibilities thus opened up to him, Picasso could not linger too long in the facility of effects already exploited by a host of lazier artists; he quickly passed on to the purest of all difficulties: that of seeking out the humblest and most austere of materials and transforming them into a dazzling wealth of composition, thus making the primacy of the spirit sing through the voice of the modesty of the materials.

To penetrate a man's secrets we need a lot of intuition and a considerable degree of friendship, as well as much reflection. Personal sentiment, after so many approaches and so many plans laid together, gains us the happy satisfaction of having here discovered one of the secrets of Picasso's complex nature. One evident trait in his character, in effect, was that basic need which, through all his works, in all circumstances and under all aspects, unceasingly led him from the particular to the general, from the individual to the universal. In the course of this long period dedicated to ceramic work the permanence of the personal option taken by the artist is to be found in his rapports with the import of a thing and the absolute choice he has made in it.

The strict law of contrast, when fervently obeyed by its greatest supporters, will always restore to the spirit the price of its sacrifice.

The moment of confrontation

There are artists who take pleasure in standing for some time, in silent satisfaction, before the works they have just finished. In this we can see a profoundly natural human reaction: his instinct impels the creator to seek himself even at the moment when he is about to cast off the extension of himself formed by the work he has just created. He cannot help retiring within himself to live that tragic moment of renunciation when his

own substance is about to be delivered up to the sacrilegious voracity of a fate as yet uncertain, possibly indifferent and perhaps even hostile.

In reliving the emotion he felt before, between the moment of conception and that of the act of translating it, it is understandable that the artist's thoughts should be dramatically invaded by a series of doubts, regrets, complications or reproaches.

As a general rule Picasso did not spend too long on this irresistible narcissism. Admittedly, he was always willing to make a close examination of whatever had just come from his hands. But at these moments he did not give the impression of a man holding a bitter debate with the work that was about to leave his immediate orbit. He seemed, rather, in this act of meditation that was typical of him, to be gathering reasons for pursuing, in fresh surges and along unknown lines, the idea he had imposed upon himself.

It was his hour of self-confrontation, of self-criticism, of deductions and lessons, the moment for balancing everything and making it bend!

Sometimes, too, this was the moment of censure, when perhaps one of the pieces arraigned before him, as if in the dock, would find no mercy. The result it proposed seemed stupefyingly incoherent. The surprise it caused was so acute that this attitude took on an air of scandal, in defiance of all relevant judgment. There seemed to be no way out... It was then that a special pile was started in a corner to house the solitary meditations, in the dust of penitence, of these sad, repudiated, rejected orphans, innocent victims of heaven knows what obscure machinations. Such decisions as these represent are rare. But we should remember that things are not always so ductile as not to become unseemly at times. They have to be given time to understand what is expected of them. Unless, of course, it is they who suddenly unveil their incomprehensible mystery and make us, in turn, understand what they expect of us!

This is a fact well-known to everybody. And yet an insidious curiosity frequently arises regarding the wretched indignities suffered by these unloved pieces. And sometimes, when the pressure of work slackens, one finds it tempting to go through the contents of the fatal pile.

This, of course, is an act of pure charity to oneself, but it also enables one to test once more an opinion which, for one reason or another, may have changed with the passing of time and this restorative retirement. And when one reaches the pile, one's heart never fails to miss a beat; are not these black sheep really one's most deserving children — and sometimes even the most gifted? And is there not an appreciably unexpected quality about this piece that one could not reasonably imagine before? Looking at it a little more closely, one might even admit that it is its very unusualness that gives it a value of singularity well worth keeping!

Did I not say just now that in many cases things know how to make themselves understood? Now we see how their qualities are no longer defects and their misdeeds are transformed into achievements!

As for those declared without argument to be inadmissible, no harm will come to them; they will be left intact, for nothing of what has been will be destroyed, nor will anything that cannot be remade be unmade.

And so they will share the fate of others, more perfect in some eyes. They will bear witness of humility towards man; man who, like all living beings, goes through hours of triumphant exaltation and moments of unutterable dejection.

In this manner it will be given to anyone who may want to concern himself at a later date to read the natural development of the *œuvre* as a manuscript in which the artist's changing states of mind will be recorded with absolute honesty. It is in this way that man's history is written from a point outside man himself, unsuited as he is to judge or destroy what he believes to be his own reality. And for him alone it is a most meritorious act of modesty not to attempt, by contributions later repented and withdrawn, to stir up its true content.

So now we see the work handed over in its entirety to public judgment, without any hypocritical cheating or false shame. And also, I need hardly say, inconclusively! For indeed, as I wrote these lines, this festival of invention in ceramics was still one of Picasso's most pressing concerns. And it is of small consequence, therefore, to attempt to determine its extent; what I can affirm is that it constitutes a very considerable *ensemble*, with the numbering of its pieces running into thousands. Such an immense amount of work, kept up at the incredible speed that Picasso untiringly demanded of himself, naturally had to expand one day in a vast exuberance of experiments, attempts and successes composed of innumerable episodes following one another without respite.

Without respite! And yet, knowing the beginnings of the work with some degree of precision, it would be rather tempting, if only for the satisfaction of the spirit, to measure its whole content and importance. But it was rare for any of Picasso's ventures to lead to a strictly-defined conclusion; everything about him seemed to be either limitless or involved in a permanent process of extension. When he had swept you away with him on a headlong gallop towards unknown horizons and the discoveries he hoped to make of them had fulfilled and calmed him, he was immediately anxious about other territories to explore. Then he would very probably bring his current quest to a sudden close and leave everything, to confront other, still more impenetrable mysteries.

If you wished, in this case, to continue alone, nothing in truth was preventing you. However, without waiting, it would be revealed that with him the charm of the shared interpretations had flown and that without him the impulse towards descriptive innovation was quickly attenuated. An overhasty conclusion, undoubtedly, and one that has led some, in their impotent despair, to claim that Picasso has opened all the doors of endeavour only to close them again immediately, after having stolen all that lay within. But maturer reflection will surely lead to the more judicious view that, on the contrary, after flinging open all these doors Picasso would have absented himself from the field, leaving his whole world exposed to an indescribable wind of change that might well prove fatal to many a spirit of feebler constitution. For these doors are still open, now and for ever, leading to a vast range of possibilities and available to the discretion of anyone who wishes to enter.

Is it possible that, depending on the weather, the shade may dazzle us more than the light itself? Thanks to heaven knows what sort of pitiable lassitude, nobody has yet ventured to enter this shade that is supposed to be deserted, in order to discover what lies in its depths. It is like a gift of surprising revelations, within one's reach and yet abandoned in the midst of a disintegrating uncertainty and relinquished because of preconceived ideas. Thus the too-deafening echoes are not always heard by those who listen with the liveliest attention. The only ones with any right to be pleased with themselves will be those who persevere in the assiduous pursuit of what this contemporary authority of the future intimates henceforth.

Here we might also speak of those countless people who have understood the spirit of renewal imperfectly, or who have not succeeded in recognizing either the meaning or the character of its evolution. Despite themselves, and by some strange kind of osmosis, they have absorbed superficial and conventional solutions, without assimilating the essential contribution of deeper influences.

Is it a phenomenon peculiar to our age that so many people who believe themselves to be generators of movement should lack the ability to discern the components of the forces that animate them? Confusing exactitude with truth, they take themselves in all good faith for the forerunners of future conceptions, while all the time they are standing perfectly still. If they were only granted a certain faculty of discernment, they would find in it their best means to enter effectively into the act of continuous conversion which is the natural course of evolution. And thus they would fulfil their human mission of participating in the edification of the present through a personal revision of their criteria and an effective stimulation of their pursuits.

In this venture, however, the effects were the opposite. Some temperaments emerged from it gravely impaired, their means of expression limited to some perilous and incomprehensible system of which these beautiful minds immediately found themselves prisoners. The earth-shaking liberation of which they thought themselves the heroes was evidently too violent for them; it offered them the incomparable power of re-transcribing and re-modelling the perceptible world to their own taste. And this moment of fecundity, before they could even conjecture about it, became remote from them. Convinced that they are creating original works, works that spring from their inmost being, they can only serve up again — undigested, spurious and distorted — the results of out-of-date or unanalysable conceptions. What Picasso tellingly described as his "beginner's gargoyles".

Renaissance artists moved among a faithful, studious crowd of scholar-pupils or art-students, always ready to follow their precepts, to seek their advice, to discuss new tendencies and formulas, to be learners or teachers — sometimes both at once.

And in their workshops, which remind one rather of the courts of love of medieval poetic joustings, the master painters watched over their pupils, spurring them on to work, entrusting them with the execution of works begun by themselves and handed over to these diligent young students to continue. The latter, whether apprentices or already qualified painters, were zealously taught, guided and controlled by the master himself, who did the retouching, the finishing and, of course,

the signing of the piece, thus justifying his presenting it as his own creation.

Through this unhurried schooling of new masters were transmitted the particular precepts, the metaphysical characteristics, the practical skill and the personal intentions of the presiding genius of the school. And later on his pupils, on their own, developed according to their several temperaments, their personal creations continuing to serve the ethical system to which they had been bound from the beginning.

Transposing the idea to our own time, and thinking particularly of Picasso, what could we expect from such a system? Can we really imagine him taking part in such an extravagant enterprise, dispensing judgments and pontificating? Such fancies would quickly lead to disaster, for the mere evocation of such a picture would immediately reveal itself as basically contrary to all that might — even with the greatest indulgence — be considered acceptable from one of his character, his nature, his way of creating and living. And further reflection would very soon invest the idea with an impossibly comic air. One cannot, in all honesty, imagine Picasso analysing himself, showering his listeners with examples, lavishing oracular maxims on a group of captivated disciples!

It is, no doubt, a great pity for all concerned. But for anyone who ever saw Picasso at work, absorbed to his very depths, crushing some furious inner dragon and racked by the torture inflicted on him by the idea he was pursuing, the reason is evident: Picasso communicated with the outer world only through the medium of his work. And this work speaks loud and clear enough to obviate any need for academic rhetoric, complementary information or systematic dissertation.

Imitators, followers and plagiarists Picasso was certainly to have, and already had. But pupils, never!

The potter's wheel

From the moment Picasso felt definitely absorbed by his new vocation and contemplated pursuing it to its furthest extremes of promise, he embraced the potter's life with the serene simplicity of nature. Wishing to live in hiding, he tried to stay as long as possible out of sight of all curious eyes, whether of professionals or of simple well-wishers, so as to work in peace and solitude. This circumstance enforced on us all an existence that soon became almost conspiratorial: dodging, lurking, parrying over-insistent bores, not answering any questions (which were, by definition, incomprehensible) and keeping everything absolutely secret.

But the secret, as may be imagined, did not take long to become a very open one indeed. The news travelled both fast and far. So far, indeed, that from all the corners of the globe came friends, known or unknown, painters, sculptors, engravers, poets, musicians, to pay their compliments and see for themselves in what curious fashion this illustrious Cubist painter could be dealing with the rotundities of the balls of potter's clay.

All at once it was as if we were back in the courts of love. And in reality it was one of them! But while the assembly did not sit in plenary session, making a perfect circle round the sounding lute, those who attended took part in turns, arriving day after day to inquire, to report and also to marvel. These occasions might be

cordial and prolonged or quickly terminated; frequently they could even be avoided altogether, though with a great deal of diplomatic precaution. And when the frequency of arrivals threatened to become too great an encroachment, the door would suddenly remain unyieldingly shut, without any consideration for the rank or mission of the visitor. The orders had to be strict; the workshop could not be turned into a permanent exhibition for curious strangers to gape at unique phenomena. The workshop, in fact, must uncompromisingly respect its role as a sanctuary of work. But then, a few days later, there might be an insidious temptation to exchange a few words with some congenial beggar. The result was that we lived, as was often the case with Picasso, in a sort of pendular swing, one day accepting all sorts of visits with alacrity, next turning away some over-insistent nuisance, then repenting such severity and receiving the next initiative more graciously.

The museum curators, naturally, were all on the alert and did everything they could to stay in the lists, hoping to be favoured with some significant donation from a collection of works that they could already guess to be of exceptional importance. The ones who succeeded hastened home in triumph with their considerable booty, justifiably pleased with themselves and losing no time in placing their new treasures in their most prominent show-cases.

As a result of these repeated and irregular departures, which escaped any kind of checking or analytical indexing of the work, it was decided to compile a catalogue, an authoritative record that would be as technically and historically accurate as possible, with a detailed description and a numbered index-card for each and every piece included. But the importance, the number and the diversity of the works to be listed made this an almost impossible task; to perform it properly we should have needed a secretarial and photographic service working full-time every day to study each piece from the moment it was quite finished. And Picasso would undoubtedly have had no difficulty in keeping them busy!

After several months of continuous work this cataloguing, though essential, was driven from our minds by other pressing matters; and when it came up again we had to agree that the scope intended was beyond the means then available. Anyway Picasso was almost hostile to such a cataloguing of his collections. Possibly he found it unseemly to treat them as if they were so many aprons or night-caps; or so, at least, one might have thought from the allusions he made to the subject then. But with Picasso one must remember that, though he would stand by what he said at a certain moment, it was his reflections on the matter, then or later, that really tormented him; and these two states of mind did not always coincide entirely. From which we may conclude that later on he was undoubtedly to regret that this important task had not been carried out in its entirety.

The fact remains that we are now faced with an ensemble of work that radiates in all directions, whose beginnings may be determined more or less exactly in time, but which remains indefinable as regards any precise knowledge of its elements. Though revealed to some extent by the frequent exhibitions held to present some fragments of the whole, this work has never been the subject of a definitive study. And to attempt one now, even if only a carefully selected anthology, would cer-

tainly be a wonderfully rewarding task, but one very difficult to carry out successfully.

Perhaps we might find somebody to make such a study among all those honourable visitors who in those days would find Picasso companionably busy in a workshop where each one went about his own tasks in a silence that more or less respected the diligent labours of the others. It was particularly noticeable that Picasso usually liked to reflect and to approach his work in modest solitude, to bring it forth in the strictest privacy and then to dream over it, retreating into the silence of this same workshop, where he was safe from any stranger's gaze. It is true, after all, that man, in each and every one of his creative acts, is liberating himself of his most secret essence, an essence that has grown in his most deeply hidden fibres. At the same time as he frees it, casting it on the fateful whirlwind of external contingencies, he plunges deep into his own isolation, for nothing must be allowed to disturb that tremendous moment when idea and action coalesce.

Yet here we had Picasso consenting to forsake the enchantments of inner concentration, screened from indiscreet eyes and working in the midst of this little audience of fellow-workers, spontaneously sharing the common demands of the workshop. Each of these workers attended quite freely to the needs of his task, though all kept a discreet watch on their impetuous companion, to make sure that he lacked none of the various commodities placed at his disposal. This relaxed, unpretentious freedom, the almost transparent presence of this circle of friends watching over his affairs, assiduously but without overpowering curiosity, provided a kind of independence that could neither intimidate nor annoy. And on days when his zest for work was on a level with his invention, the pieces flowed from his hands at a rate that was hard to keep up with. Then Picasso would be really delighted and would boast of his power with the pride of a champion who has beaten a stronger rival. Thus everything conspired to satisfy and foster the vigour of the most unexpected impulses. And, to our great joy and personal satisfaction, events certainly lavished such impulses on us.

In these essentially manual surroundings Picasso found himself neither out of place nor embarrassed; he had for many years been accustomed to handling tools for all sorts of difficult or intricate work. He was, indeed, proud to make use of this faculty of adaptation that enabled him — unhurriedly but with well-directed vigour, using the most suitable action and instrument in every sort of circumstance — to apply himself to the task before him, no matter what kind of work it entailed.

This everyday practice in the use of tools as dependable performers made it easy for him to assume the attitude of a real craftsman working with his fingers. And it was on that account that he had such a great respect for his hands, those nimble workers and faithful messengers, always prompt to undertake and succeed, always apt to seize both the idea and the best means of conveying it.

It would even seem that the thought often finds itself outstripped by the tool, which sanctions it, facilitates it and even precedes it in its solution. It is rather like a musician reading his score, who feels the next note already coming to life under his fingers.

These docile antennae are aware that they are directed by a will that knows to use them to the full-