Picasso Exhibition

On the 27th of October 2016 I visited the National Portrait Gallery in London to see the Pablo Picasso Exhibition. I have been to this type of exhibition once before at the National Portrait Gallery which was the Vogue 100. I found the Vogue 100 exhibition extremely different to the Picasso due to the type of art being displayed which was much more colourful and vibrant than the Picasso monotone pallets. The use of colour in the Vogue exhibition created an electric atmosphere but the Picasso one created a sombre atmosphere due to the bleak colours.

The lay out of the exhibition was well lit, working in a random order of the times of when the pieces were created but laying it out in modules such as cubism, self-portraiture and humorous compositions to name a few. Beside each piece was a description of the media used and some context about what each photo portrayed.

I really enjoyed the Picasso exhibition because it developed my knowledge of his work and styles and inspired my own work. The work in the exhibition included:

* Cubism, for example:
  + Daniel – Henry Kahnweiler: Abstract oil on canvas painting using geometric shapes and reduced colour. I found it extremely intriguing and moody with the sharp, dark corners of the shapes. I also found it similar to that of ancient tribal paintings found in caves.
* Photographic Portraits:
  + In these he places himself in the photograph – usually taken in his studio with his cubist work behind him which juxtaposes between the sharp shapes of his paintings with the soft features of his face. In each photograph however, he conceals that fact that he is the author of the image. He changes the mood of each photograph by changing the studio which he is in, the paintings in the photo, the clothing he wears and the pose he is in. These all portray different traits of his personality.
* Portraiture of his Male Friends, for example:
  + Portrait of Sebastian Junger I Vidal: This painting uses a melancholy, monochromatic blue pallet except for the red and yellow in the woman’s hair which stands out in contrast to the rest of the painting. The focus of the panting is on the man’s face whose large forehead and nose are strongly defined. Picasso focuses you on the man rather than the woman by using a looser, quicker brush technique on her.
* Self-Portraiture, for example:
  + Self Portrait with Palette: Picasso paints himself in a simplistic way, with mask like facial features and a rough technique. The painting has a reverential sombre mood, which links with the death of an artist he admired – Cézanne.
* Portraiture if his first wife Olga Picasso, for example:
  + Portrait of Olga with Fur Collar: This print of Olga starts with defined facial features but slips away into a loose style of crosshatching which represents her fading away from him.
* Home Videos:
  + In Picasso’s home videos you get an insight into his life and his relationship with his family. The videos show him petting and playing with his dog. He is shown as quite stern whilst his wife is playful and comical.
* Humorous Compositions, for example:
  + Jaume Sabartes and Sylvia Lopez: In this comical composition Picasso has placed a cartoon drawing of Jaume Sabartes next to a poster of Sylvia Lopez. The cartoon drawing is acting in an inappropriate yet comical manner.
* Sculptures, for example:
  + Head of a Woman (Fernande – Picasso’s lover): This was in the cubism part of the exhibition. It was an extremely abstract sculpture made with irregular shapes and sharp contours, creating pinched features. I found that the lustrous, thick metallic medium of the sculpture created a sad, symbolic atmosphere and the downturned angle of the head added to that too.
* Portraits of Comic – Mode, for example:
  + Maya in a Sailor Suit: This portrait uses an extremely vibrant pallet with bright blues and oranges and greens. The subject is drawn in an extremely simplistic and unrealistic, childlike way. Picasso spreads the paint on this portrait in an uneven manner, like a child did it. The childish style in which Picasso creates this portrait may effect that the portrait itself is of his daughter Maya.
* Portraiture during the Occupation, for example:
  + Woman in a Hat:
* Symbolism, for example:
  + Fernande Oliver with a Black Mantilla: This painting of Picasso’s lover used a melancholy pallet with a bleak colour scheme of whites and greys. The fluid painting of this captures the poetic atmosphere with soft curves and sweeping brush motions. I found this piece had an extremely emotional feel to it and the vaporous backdrop of dripping paint which I interpreted to mimic large raindrops created a sombre, heavy hearted atmosphere. The whole painting is extremely simplistic except for the face of Fernande which draws in focus on her soft features expressing mournfulness.

It was prohibited to take photographs in the exhibition so I used ones from the internet to show some of the paintings. I have selected to describe my favourite of each type.