

# PICASSO PAINTED ME

**AN INSIGHT INTO A FAMOUS ARTIST'S WORK BY  
HIS FRIEND AND MODEL FOR FORTY YEARS**

**Jaime Sabartés** has been a close friend of Picasso, most famous of contemporary painters, ever since the latter was a 19-year-old artist in Barcelona. In these extracts from his book, *Picasso: An Intimate Portrait* (to be published this month by Prentice-Hall Inc.), Sabartés comments on six of the portraits his friend did of him during their association.

**B**EFORE PICASSO, the artist used to take the object apart and try to imitate it. Picasso accepted it as a point of departure in order to devote himself thenceforth to an infinity of combinations and calculations—that is, when he did not use it as an element of comparison in order to emphasize that which might be true in his fantasies . . .

One day I was wondering what I might do to keep busy.

“Write, man, write. Write no matter what,” Picasso said. “Write for yourself, if you wish, even if

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**1946** *The author-model (left) and the artist sit in Picasso's Riviera studio before the latest portraits of Sabartés—as a pensive satyr. For the same model in other roles, see the following pages.*

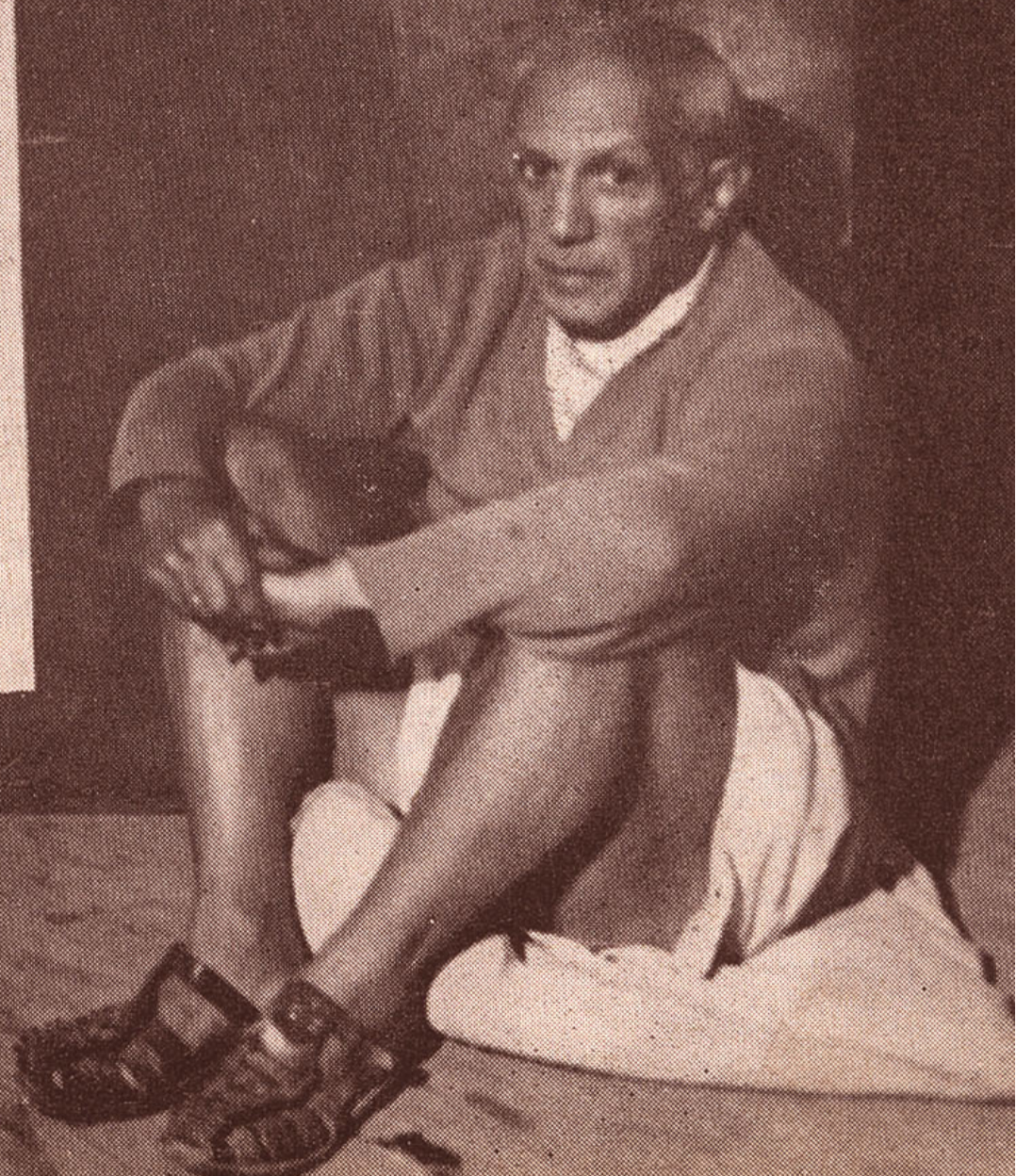
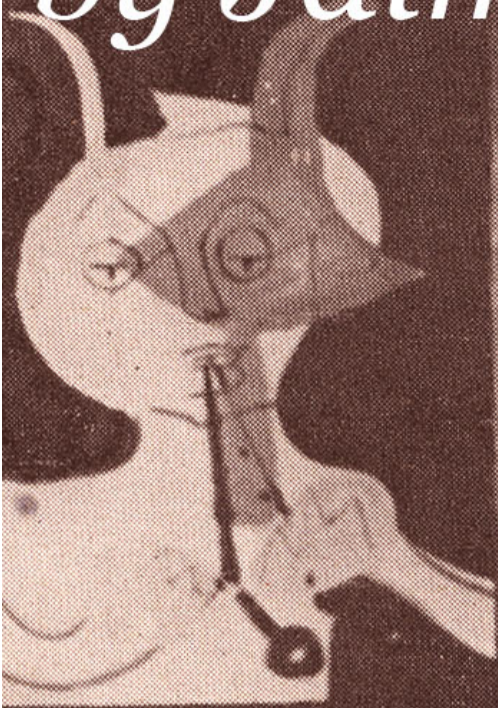
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*by Jaime Sabartes*



it be only for yourself; but write, and you will see that all your blues will disappear, and that you will feel better.”

I decided, therefore, to take these portraits as texts, to try to imbue with warmth Picasso's pictures of me, to make them live anew, to enrich them with fragments from the life of their creator and shreds of my own.

**1900** . . . In the literary world the rage was for what we had been told to call “decadent poetry.” The fashionable young women adopted languishing postures. Pallor was the order of the day . . . and designers decorated books with lilies and such. Poets to be poets had to



**1900** Sabartés as a young aesthete. A wash drawing, done in Barcelona.

have long hair, and painters wore their coats buttoned up to the neck, regardless of the weather.

On one of the two hundred-odd days which he spent in the studio on the Riera de San Juan [Barcelona], Picasso handed me a brush and asked me to serve as a model.

“Hold this with two fingers, as if it were a flower; lift it up a bit . . . hold it. That’s fine.”

In a very short time he told me: “That’s enough.”

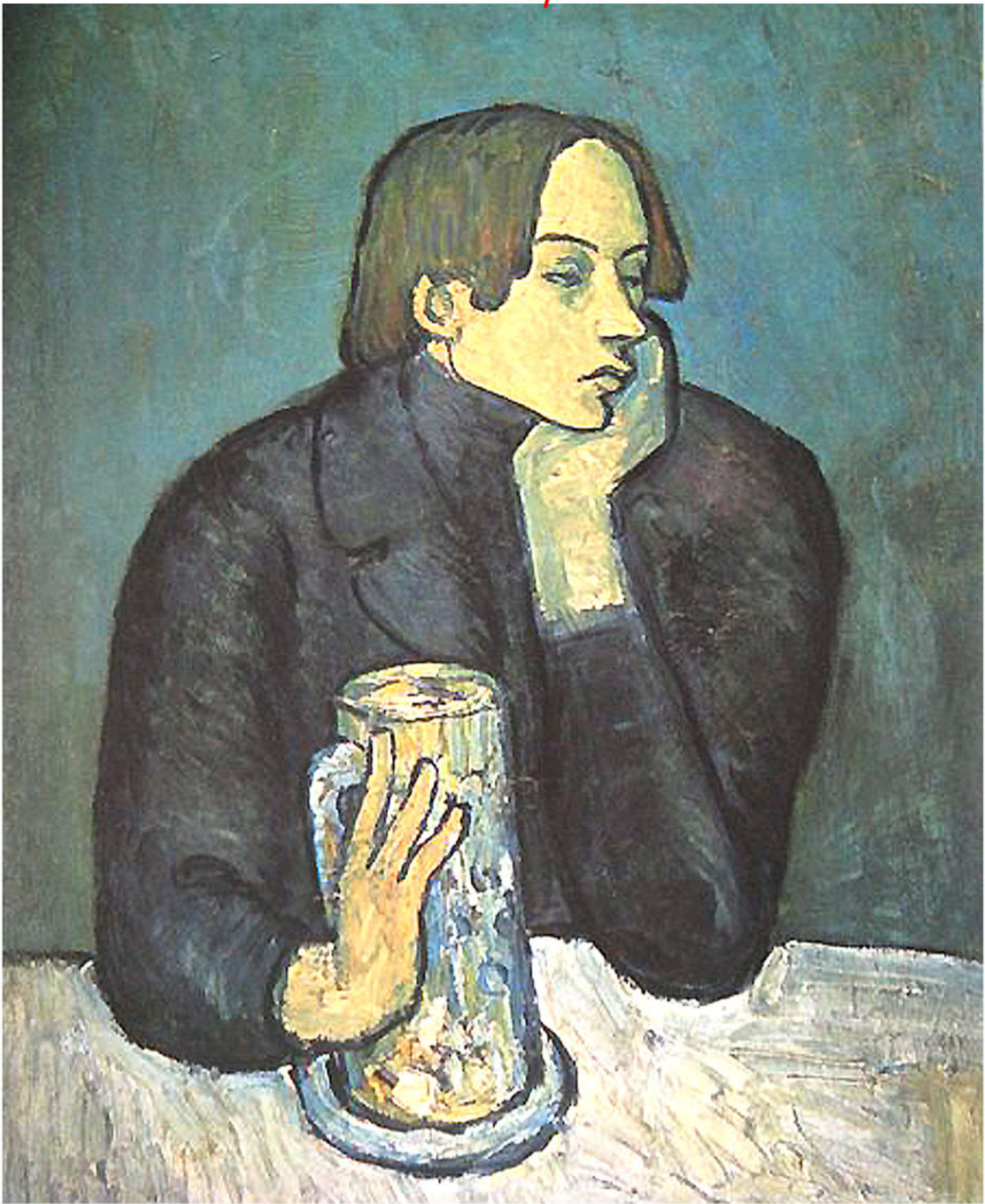
Then I looked over his shoulder and understood: it was his commentary on the mania for effeteness which was pervading the atmosphere.

**1901** . . . One night, I found myself alone in the Cafe La Lorraine. . . . alone and dreadfully bored. Before me, upon the table’s marble top, stood a glass of beer. With my near-sighted eyes I scrutinized the room, trying to penetrate the smoke-laden atmosphere.

Just as my sense of desolation was keenest, Picasso appeared—Picasso and the rest. But he came first, led on by the intensity of his gaze. . . . Unwittingly, I was serving as the model for a picture . . .

My hair was chestnut colored, neither light nor dark, long and smooth; falling over my shoulders, it curled slightly. My clothes were like those worn by the “rapins” [art students] of the period: a loose corduroy jacket, with a

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**1901** *The Glass of Beer is one of the earliest paintings in Picasso's "blue period." It was inspired by the sight of his myopic friend sitting alone in a Paris cafe.*

round collar buttoned at the neck, dispensed with the need of a vest and, in emergencies, could even disguise the lack of a shirt. The black wings of my lavalliere tie dropped upon my chest.

When Picasso put the painting up on the easel, I was astonished to see myself just as he had sur-

prised me in the cafe. Here is the spectre of my solitude, seen from without. The line which encloses the idea, eloquent in its simplicity, fixes a gesture suggestive of the artist's compassion upon surprising his friend in solitude. Such is the image returned to me by the clear light of Picasso's observa-



**1904** Realistic "blue period" portrait of Sabartés painted in Barcelona.

tion, a fugitive hallucination of his own restlessness, tormented by the discovery of his friend peering into the abyss of his loneliness.

**1904** . . . The blue in this portrait is very intense . . . The lines are finer, the hue of the skin, lips, and eyes brighter and at the same time softer. One now can discern greater skill in Picasso's manner of blending the colors of the flesh . . . Hitherto his style had been rigidly austere. In Paris he would not have cared whether my lips were more red or less. Then he needed crudeness and simplicity, but from his experiments he had learned what he could do with blue, and now he wanted to dis-

cover to what extent he could dispense with it.

**1935** . . . Picasso had shut himself up in the dining room and I surmised that he was writing. Presently I heard steps along the corridor and then Picasso appeared at the door, triumphantly waving a paper in his hand as if it were a flag. Handing it to me he said: "Take it. It is your portrait." It read:

*Live coal of friendship  
clock which always gives the hour  
joyfully waving banner  
stirred by the breath of a kiss on  
the hand*

*caress from the wings of the heart  
which flies from the topmost height  
of the tree of the fruit-laden bower  
when the gaze turns its velvet to-  
ward the window*

*armchair stuffed with the vest torn  
from the shrieking goose  
shaped with all the patience of the  
worm*

*and dyed by the ribbon of Medi-  
terranean hue*

*table so gracefully set  
upon the hand of the beggar  
dressed only in flowers*

*alms garnered from all those  
worlds he drags*

*trench of rose-colored bows  
so braided*

*as to spell the words which alone  
must sing their names*

When Picasso began to write, some years ago, he used to separate the phrases with dashes: some

long, some short. Later, however, Picasso gave up these conventions and in his present writings there are no periods, commas, paragraphing, or capital letters. Picasso declared that punctuation marks were the loincloths concealing the pudenda of literature. . . . "I would rather invent a grammar of my own than bind myself to rules which do not belong to me."

**1938** . . . One day we began to discuss the subject of portraiture. Once, to show that I was listening, I put in: "I should like to have my portrait done with ruffs, like those gentlemen of the sixteenth century—and with a plumed hat to cover my bald head."

"I'll do it for you by and by," he answered carelessly.

December 25, 1938 . . . I saw my portrait, done in accordance with my extravagant whim: as a gentleman of the time of Philip II. There was the plaited ruff and velvet hat enlivened by feathers.

Since the idea had not originated with him, Picasso had bound his imagination by the conventional frontiers set by me in the course of our conversation. That is why his pencil, accustomed to roaming freely, had stopped here and there and torn the paper, no doubt while checking his impulse.

"This is nothing," he said. "I'll finish it up some other day."

December 26, 1938 . . . On

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**1938** Picasso, ringing two variations on one theme, sees Sabartés as a medieval courtier (above) and, with slight changes, as a bald harlequin (below).



some pages torn from a notebook there were drawings new to me and one which was another portrait of myself: the third in two days. It bore the same date as the previous one. In this one my expression was not as stern as in the first of the series of three. The only detail he had left in accordance with my whim regarding the costume was the ruff. The bare cranium, the disorder apparent in the pleats of the ruff, might lead one to think that I had slept in this accoutrement and that he had surprised me jumping out of bed. I was ending my career as almost a harlequin.

**1939** . . . [This] portrait has really all the characteristics of my physiognomy, though only the most essential ones. If the way Picasso put them together does not coincide with the way the majority of people see them, this is because, thinking about me, he took them from his memory, with the intention of giving them form in a picture, organizing them in accordance with his sensibility and the need of constructing a harmonious whole. . . .

About this time Doctor Collaró frequented my house in his professional capacity. After two or three days, he discovered [this] portrait hanging on the wall.

Thereafter, he never left my house without first casting a glance

at that picture. Every day he made a new comment. . . .

“What astonished me is to see the nose going one way, and the lips and chin another, as if the face were in profile, and the head both in profile and full face at the same time but in a different direction from the eyes, except that one of the eyes is hanging in the air while the glasses are upside down.”

“This lends me an air of movement, or, rather, of life. Here you have me now before your eyes, and surely you do not mind seeing me from both one side and the other.”

“But, how about the glasses?”

“That’s something else. Do you know that Picasso didn’t even notice that he was painting them upside down? . . . I believe this is due to the need of not interrupting the rhythm of the lines of the orbital arcs. Had he swung the arc which supports the lenses in the same direction, the course of these curves would have been needlessly broken, hence the glasses do not rest on the nose but hang in the air. When they built that suspension bridge between Long Island and Manhattan, we all were astonished to find that it stood up in spite of the fact that instead of supporting itself upon an arch, it bore the arch on its back.”

The Doctor laughed and shook my hand excitedly: “That’s a good



**1939** *Two-faceted portraits are among Picasso's most famous, and perplexing, works. This is Sabartés as the painter remembers him, not as he sees him.*

one!" and then added, "Even if it isn't true, it's a good observation. But, as a matter of fact, it's true."

After seeing the portrait on several different days, comparing it

each time with his own recollection of me as retained during the period separating his visits, Doctor Collaró admitted that he saw it with different eyes.

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