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English 394

Francis Picabia (*Second Draft)

Francis Picabia [1879- 1953] was an eclectic Avant-Garde artist and writer, who mostly worked in the shadows of Marcel Duchamp. The French-born artist was most famous for his work in Cubism and Dadaism but his work was not restricted to those movements (Camfield 21). Some of his most famous paintings and sketches included *La Source*, *Udnie*, *Voilà Haviland (La poésie est comme lui)*, and *La Saint Vierge (The Blessed Virgin)*.

Picabia was born in Paris on January 22nd, 1879 to Cuban-born Spaniard Francisco Vicente Martinez Picabia and French Native Marie Cecile Davanne (Camfield 1). In his early adulthood, Picabia studied at the École des Arts Decoratifs, where other famous artists such as Vincent van Gogh and Henri Toulouse-Lautrec studied (“Francis Picabia Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works”). He married Gabrielle Buffet in 1909 (Camfield 3). Shortly after his marriage, starting during his honeymoon visit to Spain, Picabia faced an artistic identity crisis that steered him towards avant-garde art (Camfield 17).

Although impressionism and landscape paintings, in particular, were what originally earned him his fame, cubism and abstract art were both dominant parts of Picabia’s early art career. In 1911, he became affiliated with the Cubist group “Puteaux”, which is where some sources say he met lifelong friend Marcel Duchamp (Rosenthal 269). Picabia’s interest in geometry within cubism is what eventually led him to the Dadaist movement.

Picabia and Duchamp are seen as the two true founding fathers of Dadaism (Hopkins 15). In the fall of 1911 Picabia and Duchamp had established a strong relationship after both were involved with an organization known as the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne (Camfield

21).¹ The dynamic duo impacted each other's works for the rest of their lives and often worked in the same artistic circles. Picabia and Duchamp spread the Dada movement to America when they visited New York City in 1913, and were a part of the Armory Show, among other famous Avant-Garde social circles.

In 1915, in the wake of the American Industrial Revolution, Picabia became obsessed with mechanics and machinery. He loved to draw parallels between humankind and technology.

Picabia, despite not truly being a household name artist, was the "leading spokesperson for the avant-garde movement on American soil" (Umland). But beyond New York City, with Dada, in particular, Picabia really made a significant impact with not only spreading it to Zurich, Barcelona, and Paris but also by being one of the first artists to really test the limits and define what Dadaism was. Because the movement was so abstract and conceptually new, founding artists such as Picabia laid down precedents for the movement, breaking barriers of previous art canons of the time. *La Saint Vierge* is often seen as the groundbreaking piece of art that really started Dadaism or helped to bring the movement to the public eye (Hopkins 15).

During World War I Picabia sought refuge in Barcelona, Spain, causing yet another chapter in his art career. Outside of Dadaism, Picabia became inspired by "Spanish subjects, Romanesque and Renaissance sources" ("Francis Picabia Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works"), which eventually translated into his works in the 1920s referred to as *The Transparencies*. *The Transparencies* were a collection of works "in which outlines of figurative images from ancient Catalan and renaissance art are overlaid with animal, floral and

¹ There is a discrepancy issue of where exactly Picabia and Duchamp met, but there is agreement that it was sometime around the year 1911.

cosmological references” (Francis 243). Also, while working in Barcelona, Picabia worked on and published a magazine called 391, to further spread the Avant-Garde movement.

Picabia’s art career, which lasted around 50 years, was “marked by a consistent inconsistency” (Dupêcher). Because he often struggled with his own identity and beliefs, it showed in his art, which is why we see him dabble in so many different art forms through various passages of his life. Picabia died in 1953, in the same home he was born in Paris (“Francis Picabia: Biography”).

Template:

- **Name:** Francis Picabia (Camfield 1)
- **Date of Birth:** January 22nd 1879 (Camfield 1)
- **Place of Birth:** Paris, France (Camfield 1)
- **Date of Death:** 1953
- **Place of Death:** Paris, France
- **Country of origin, citizenship:** France (Camfield 1)
- **Gender:** Male
- **Race:** White (*His father was a Cuban born-Spaniard) (Camfield 1)
- **Kind of Artist/Cultural worker (writer, painter, photographer, gallery director, editor, etc.):** Writer (mostly poetry) and artist (most prominently painting)
- **Address in Florence or New York:**

From my extensive research, there appears to be no recorded address of his location in New York City, but there is an address of where he was born (in 1879) in Paris, France, the same place where he died (in 1953): 82 rue des Petits Champs (“Francis Picabia: Biography”).

- **Dates & Places of Overlap with Loy:**

1917 in New York, both were published in *the Blind Man*.

- **Avant-garde movements the figure was associated with [list]**

- Cubism (Camfield 17)
- Fauvism (Camfield 17)
- Futurism (Camfield 17)
- “Correspondance” (Camfield 21)
- Symbolism (Camfield 22)
- Pointillism
- Surrealism
- Dadaism

▪ **Brief summary of the figure’s Biographical/Historical significance:**

Alongside Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia is one of the founding names of Avant-Garde, in particular with Cubism and Dadaism. With Dada in particular Picabia really made a significant impact with not only spreading it through Zurich, Barcelona, Paris and New York City but also by being one of the first artists to really test the limits and define what Dadaism was. *La Saint Vierge (The Blessed Virgin)* is often seen as the groundbreaking piece of art that really started Dadaism or helped to bring the movement to the public eye (Hopkins 15).

▪ **Brief summary of the figure’s Relationship to Loy:**

Both Mina Loy and Francis Picabia were heavily involved in the same circles, largely because both were good friends with Marcel Duchamp. Where they crossed paths the most as artists were in the New York Dada movement. They also both were apart of and published in *the Blind Man* (a Dada journal published in New York in 1917).

▪ **What was the nature of their overlap or connection?**

Through my research and studies of both Mina Loy and Francis Picabia, the two individuals never seemed to have a distinct relationship, but instead were both involved in the same “intellectual groups” of the Avant-Garde. The place where they overlap the most appears to be through Dada- a movement within Avant-Garde where both Picabia and Loy were heavily involved.

- **Was it social, literary, artistic? Were they involved in collaborative ventures (publications, exhibitions, performances, readings)?**

Their relationship appeared to be mainly artistic, but it can potentially be inferred that they had a friendship beyond that through their mutual friend Marcel Duchamp. Both Picabia and Loy did contribute to *the Blind Man*, as mentioned previously.

- **What other artists/writers did your figure come in contact with?**

- Man Ray (Camfield 22)
- Alfred Stieglitz
- Guillaume Apollinaire (Camfield 17)
- Derain (Camfield 18)
- Georges Braque (Camfield 18)
- Pierre Dumont (Camfield 21)
- Manzana Pissaro (Camfield 21)
- Marcel Duchamp (Camfield 21)
- Albert Gleizes (Camfield 22)
- Jean Metzinger (Camfield 22)

- Fernand Léger (Camfield 22)
- Robert Delaunay (22)
- Henri Le Fauconnier (Camfield 22)
- Paul Éluard (15 of dada boys)
- Gertrude Stein (“Francis Picabia Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works”)
- Jacques Villon
- Roger de La Fresnaye
- André Breton

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