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Robert Fishko, *Director*

**PABLO PICASSO**

(1881-1973)

*Pianiste*, 1916 (Paris)

pencil on paper

11 1/8 inches x 8 7/8 inches

Signed in pen lower left "Picasso"



[Zervos, vol. II, no. 907]

**Provenance**

The Artist

Private Collection, Paris, France

Private Collection, New York, New York

**Selected Literature**

Palau i Fabre, Joseph. *Picasso Cubism (1907-1917)*, Ediciones Poligrafa, Barcelona, 1990, p. 469, no. 1444, Illustrated.

Zervos, Christian. *Pablo Picasso, Zervos Catalog Raisonne: Volume II, Cahiers d'Art*, Paris, 1942, pl. 379, no. 907, Illustrated.

**Note**

Despite the intense disruptions of the First World War, between 1915 and 1917 Picasso began a series of drawings and paintings depicting highly geometric and minimalist Cubist objects, often consisting of a pipe, a guitar, a glass, characters from his earlier interest in the *saltimbanques*, musicians and their instruments. The style became known as Synthetic Cubism or Crystal Cubism for the sharp-edged clarity and poised balance of the crystal structure of these compositions.

Picasso created *Pianiste* in 1916 in Paris where that summer he moved into a new studio at 22 rue Victor-Hugo in Montrouge, just south of Paris. Simultaneously, while in Issy-les-Moulineaux, Picasso's greatest artistic rival, Henri Matisse, painted *The Piano Lesson*, in the late summer of 1916.

The two compositions bare an uncanny structural resemblance to one another with the pianist and piano, flattened to form a plane upon which objects rest, anchoring the center-right, a window and the wall of the rooms consuming the left of each work. With its austere geometries and structured sense of balance, *The Piano Lesson* has been seen as Matisse's answer to Cubism. Matisse and Picasso, two of the most influential artists of the twentieth century, shared a lifelong dialogue. They were struck by each other's genius since meeting in 1906 and each recognized the other to be his only true rival and measure of his success.

If *The Piano Lesson* was Matisse's answer to Picasso's Cubism, Picasso's drawing, *Pianiste*, with its sense of joy evoked by the smiling pianist holding sheet music, and decorative elements embellishing the setting – candelabra, a potted plant, an elegant table and Parisian wainscoting on the walls – is perhaps indicative of Picasso's desire to win back the initiative from Matisse in the exploitation of the decorative potential of the synthetic Cubist style.

*Pianiste* stands alone as a charming work from a period in Picasso's artistic output that was to change the course of twentieth century art. Rendered in pencil and bearing the artist's signature, the composition evokes an intimacy, inviting us to look closely and hear its music.