



AP[®] Art History 2001 Sample Student Responses

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7. Identify the painting. How does the painting represent a radical break with many of the traditions of Western art?
(10 minutes)

This painting is by "Les Femmes d'Alger" by Pablo Picasso, an early representative of Analytic Cubism. Here, the idea of orderly, balanced pictorial space with carefully modeled figures has been shattered. The five females are broken apart and constructed in jagged planes, that compress both space and mass. Two figures on the ~~left~~^{right} show energetic, striated faces, perhaps influenced by African masks, contrasting with the calm features of the three on the left. The woman in the lower right is depicted in a new variation of the representation of the human figure, as multiple views are combined into a striking whole. This widely controversial form has 3/4 back views of the left and right, body, with a full face, showing a combination of front and back poses. This, this image of bright colors, jagged edges, interlocking planes, flat geometric forms stressing two-dimensionality, radically broke with western art.

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(10 minutes)

The painting was done by Picasso. The title is "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)." Picasso often took ideas and images from an African culture and created his own style of cubist, hard-edged looks.

The faces on each figure are not the "normal" faces generally seen in typical Western art. They are symbolic of African tribal masks. As mentioned before, the figures are not of the normal Western culture. These figures are more basic, probably to draw attention to more important aspects of this piece such as the African mask-like faces. This scene also may suggest some type of tribal meeting often shown in Non-Western cultures. Traditionally, such pieces would be more realistic including natural poses with more anatomically figures. It is obvious Picasso breaks from that tradition and is influenced by the African simplified art created by that culture. Also the background of this piece has no apparent form unlike the backgrounds of traditional Western art work.