

## Francis Picabia (French, 1879-1953) – Artist Resources



Picabia in atelier ca. 1910

[Digital archival copy](#) of the Guggenheim's seminal [1970 retrospective](#).

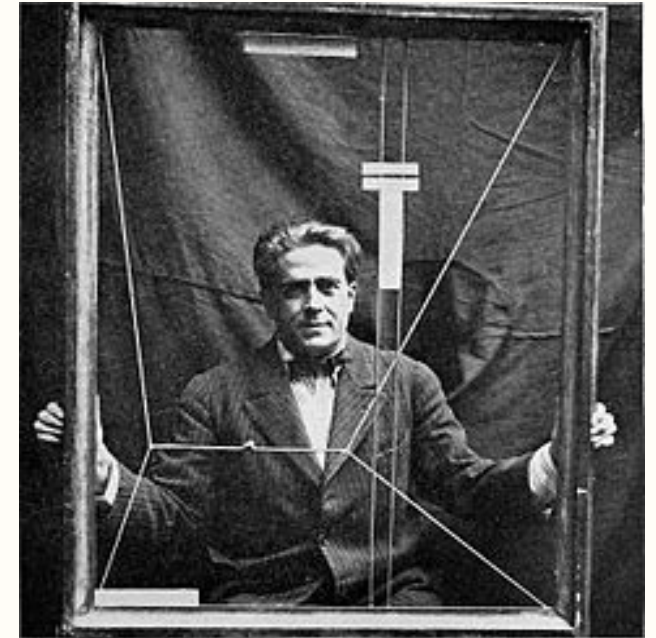
In the fall of 2016, [MoMA](#), in partnership with [Kunsthaus Zürich](#), opened the first major Picabia retrospective in the U.S. in 50 years, and the first ever survey to chart the entirety of his multi-media career: *Our Heads Are Round so Our Thoughts Can Change Direction*. As part of their program offerings, MoMA published the digital catalogue supplement detailing Picabia's [Materials and Techniques](#) ([scroll down to access the PDF link](#)).

In conjunction with the MoMA retrospective, exhibition curator Anne Umland [moderated a panel](#) with curator Peter Fischli and contemporary artists Rashid Johnson, Laura Owens, and Lisa Yuskavage about the influence of Picabia's innovations in painting and print.

Profiles abound in honor of MoMA's retrospective, including thoughtful and provocative pieces by [The New Yorker](#) in addition to [The New York Times](#), as well as [The Guardian](#).

### Recent Publications:

In 2007, MIT Press published the first comprehensive English translation of Picabia's innovative poetry and prose, [I Am a Beautiful Monster](#), complete with critical introduction and extensive notes to help decipher the artist's enigmatic play with language.



Picabia, 1919



Francis Picabia (French, 1879-1953)

**Intervention d'une femme au moyen d'une machine**, 1915

Pencil, watercolor, ink and gouache on paper mounted on cardboard

Private Collection; L2019:156.2

Francis Picabia's diverse and prolific oeuvre traces the stylistic moods of the twentieth-century avant garde in Europe and the United States. Without relinquishing his innovative sensibility, the artist moved nimby between movements such as Cubism, Dada, and Surrealism, and mediums such as painting, poetry, and performance. Picabia made **Intervention d'une femme au moyen d'une machine (Intervention of a woman by means of a machine)** during a sojourn in New York City where he became involved with the circle of American photographer Alfred Stieglitz. This new influence, and the recent work of friend and fellow modernist Marcel Duchamp, provided the catalyst for Picabia's pivotal transition from Cubism toward his mechanical period. This early *mechanomorph* drawing – a “portrait” of a machine, often with anthropomorphic, psychological, and even erotic undertones – was also influenced by the industrial landscape of New York. Picabia praised the city for inspiring “a complete revolution in my methods of work. Almost immediately upon coming to America it flashed on me that the genius of the modern world is in machinery, and that through machinery art ought to find a most vivid expression.”

*On view February 5 – May 10, 2020*

### Extra Resources

Read more about Picabia's time with Dada and his machine aesthetic in [Phaidon's brief profile](#).

Francis Picabia (French, 1879-1953)  
**Les Baigneuses (The Bathers)**, 1942  
Oil on board

Private Collection; L2020:30.1

Francis Picabia developed a prolific career as a painter, poet, publisher, and performer through energetic patterns of reinvention and experimentation. He moved fluidly between stylistic and conceptual movements, producing his own innovative canvases and publications while also maintaining a prominent role in avant-garde movements such as Dada and Surrealism. Picabia's figurative paintings in the 1940s diverge radically from the dynamic mechanical Dadaist compositions and Surrealist *Transparencies* that brought him critical success in the preceding decades. **Les Baigneuses (The Bathers)** stands out in its return to the gestural brushwork and attention to light that defined his earliest impressionist canvases. The artist's WWII works have long been a subject of tense debate among art historians due to the Social Realist aesthetic (the style of art approved by the Third Reich, then occupying France) many of the paintings appear to embrace. In the 1990s, however, research revealed that Picabia was copying his figures from photographs in popular Parisian erotic magazines. Historians now largely agree that Picabia's choice to appropriate these provocative images of the human figure was likely a subversive comment on the Nazi regime's mandate against "degenerate" art.

*On view March 18 – June 21, 2020*

### Extra Resources

[Sotheby's explores](#) Picabia's radical, provocative, and critically bewildering WWII output.

