

Art Story: *The Family of Saltimbanques* by Pablo Picasso

Read by Sara Mark Lesk

How does this painting connect to Picasso's life?

Pablo Picasso was one of the most inventive artists of the 20th century. He continually searched for fresh ways to represent the world, and he is admired for his experimentation with different styles, materials, and techniques. He said, "My work is like a diary. To understand it, you have to see how it mirrors my life." The *Family of Saltimbanques* does connect to Picasso's life at the time.

In 1904, at the age of 23, Picasso left his home and family in Spain and moved to Paris, then the center of the art world. He lived in Montmartre, a working class neighborhood on the outskirts of the city. Montmartre was known for its art galleries, bohemian cafés, night-clubs and dance halls. There he made friends with other avant-garde artists—writers, poets, and painters who were trying new things and pushing the boundaries of what art could be.

He also became fascinated with another group of people he met in the area: the clowns and acrobats who performed in the Cirque Médrano—a circus located nearby. He felt a special connection with these performers and thought of them as outsiders, who like him, were bursting with imagination and creative energy. For Picasso, these wandering saltimbanques were a stand-in for him and his fellow artists, a kind of extended family with whom he identified.

In fact, the jester character of Harlequin, a type who wanted to break with society's traditions, became a personal symbol for Picasso. In this painting, the diamond-suited jester is a self-portrait of the artist as a young man.