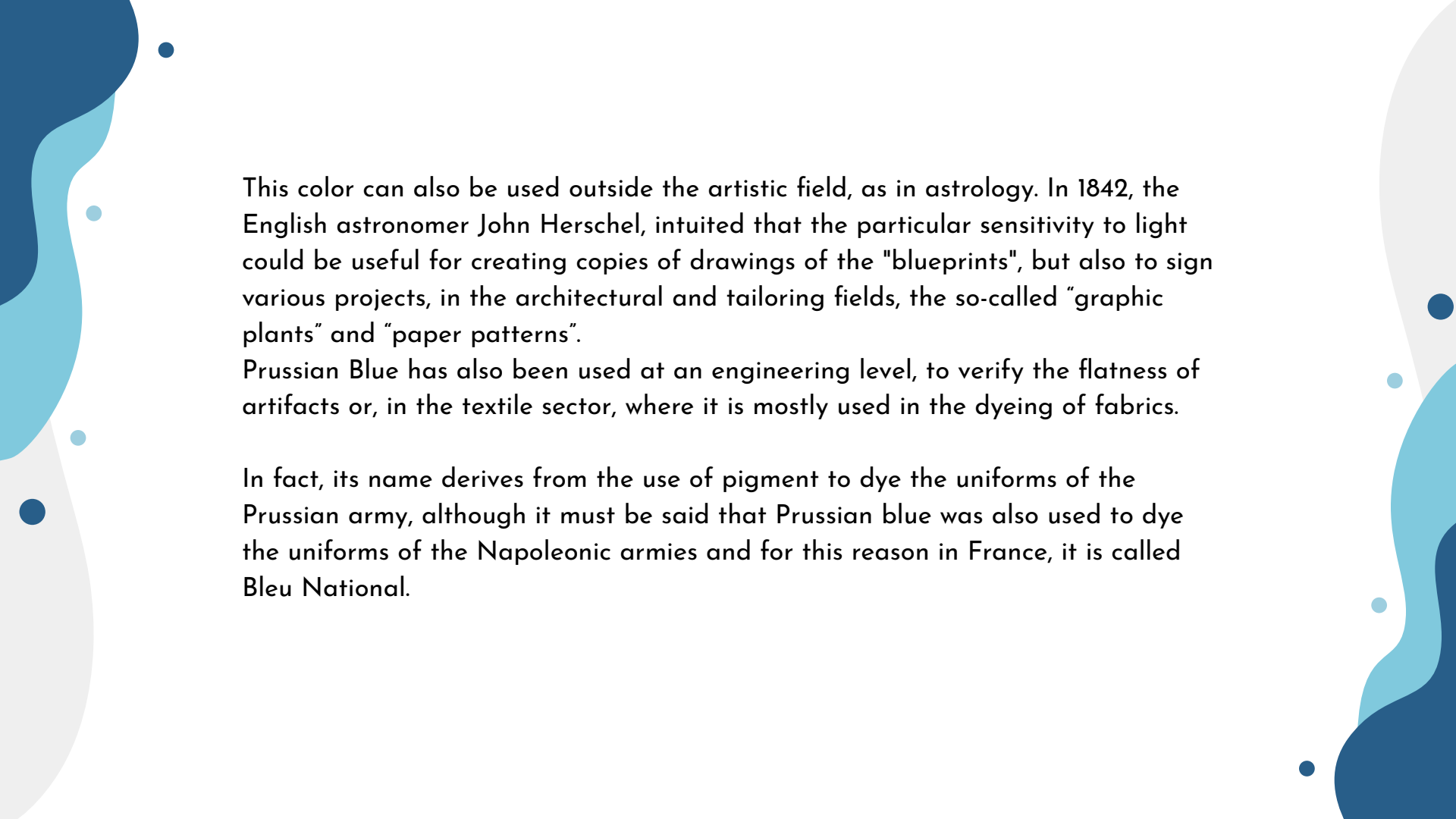


The background features abstract, organic shapes in shades of light blue, dark blue, and grey, scattered across a white field. Several small, solid blue dots are also present, adding to the minimalist aesthetic.

Prussian Blue

Introduction

Prussian blue was discovered by chance, thanks to an involuntary mistake of the German scientist - Johann Jacob Diesbach. In 1704, in his laboratory in Berlin, he was working on the creation of a new red, (the future cochineal lacquer) by mixing two elements: potassium chloride and animal blood. The resulting chemical reaction was not red in color, but a vibrant, deep blue.



This color can also be used outside the artistic field, as in astrology. In 1842, the English astronomer John Herschel, intuited that the particular sensitivity to light could be useful for creating copies of drawings of the "blueprints", but also to sign various projects, in the architectural and tailoring fields, the so-called "graphic plants" and "paper patterns".

Prussian Blue has also been used at an engineering level, to verify the flatness of artifacts or, in the textile sector, where it is mostly used in the dyeing of fabrics.

In fact, its name derives from the use of pigment to dye the uniforms of the Prussian army, although it must be said that Prussian blue was also used to dye the uniforms of the Napoleonic armies and for this reason in France, it is called Bleu National.

The Prussian blue is the first synthetic pigment in history, it has revolutionized the palette of painters, changed the course of art, opening new paths not only chromatic, but also compositional, up to Impressionism, which probably never would have existed without the innovations in the manufacture of pigments that occurred in the previous century.

This color tends to dominate over the others, it is highly opaque, however it cannot be considered opaque, since it still retains some shine and above all it is a particularly iridescent color.

Although initially so deep it is a color that adapts to various uses and can be made "softer" with the right combinations and with experience, for example, it plays very well with colors such as Sienna and with chrome yellow, to have a very bright green.

A few years after its discovery, this color became known throughout Europe, many artists used Prussian Blue making it internationally famous: Jean-Antoine Watteau was one of the first artists to use it frequently, followed by many painters including Pablo Picasso, who he exalted it during his Blue Period, between 1901 and 1904.

The Japanese painter Hokusai also used Prussian blue in his most iconic work The Wave off Kanagawa.

Art Works

Hokusai & others

- Portrait of Teresa
 - The Blue Boy
- The deposition of Christ
 - Fuji Red
- Wave off Kanagawa
- Keitai Eisen Momongawa
 - The Amida waterfalls
- Goldfinch and weeping cherry tree
 - Starry Night

Van Gogh & Picasso

- Starry night over the Rhone
 - The church of Auvers
 - The two sisters
- Mother with sick child
- Poor by the sea
- The old blind guitarist
 - The old Jew
 - The life
- The celestine



Pieter van der Werff

1665 - 1722

Dutch painter of the golden period who worked most of his life in Rotterdam, where he made paintings for rich and famous men. He also did portraits, genre scenes and historical painting. Today, many of his works are kept in the collections of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.



The deposition of Christ

Pieter van der Werff

Oil painting on canvas

1709

Alte Pinakothek, München

It is the first known great work in which Prussian blue was used. This pigment is significant as it was the first stable, lightfast blue pigment to be used following the loss of knowledge on the synthesis of Egyptian blue.



Thomas Gainsborough

1727 - 1788

Portrait and landscape painter of the 18th century. It deals with themes of peasant and rural life, humble, with a distinct art for naturalistic details. Thomas Gainsborough was one of the foremost landscape and portrait painters of his time. The portraits combined Rococo aesthetics and naturalism.



The Blue Boy

Thomas Gainsborough

178 x 112 cm

Oil painting on canvas

1770

Huntington Library Picture Gallery, California

This boy, placed in a victorious position, holds a hat in his right hand and his left hand in the pocket of his suit.

His face directed towards the viewer conveys superiority and confidence.

The Prussian Blue used in most of his clothes, from the neck to the ankles, with different shades of Prussian Blue in different points.

Louise Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun

1755 - 1842

French artist, recognized as the most famous female painter of the 18th century. Her style is considered Rococo and she also shows interest in the subject of neoclassical painting. In fact she creates portraits in neoclassical style clothes but, in her choice of color and style, she uses the Rococo.



Portrait of Teresa

Louise Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun

137 x 100 cm

Oil painting on canvas

1793

Norton Simon Art Museum, California

We can see how Teresa is placed in the center of the work and covers a large part of it, with the left hand the turban on her head is raised and the other hand is represented stretched over her body.

Her face is serene with a light smile and her gaze directed towards the viewer.

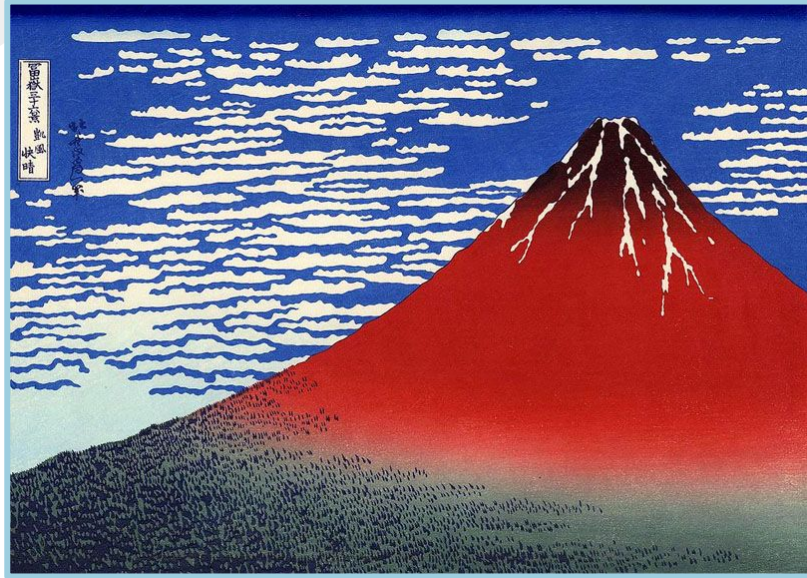
Blue (a darker blue than Prussian blue) is used in the dress.



Katsushika Hokusai

1760 - 1849

Hokusai was one of the first Japanese engravers to use color, a breakthrough that later had important implications in the art world. Also it must be taken into account that he managed to obtain the pigment, despite the strict Japanese ban on all imports and exports, the color had somehow found its way into the printing industry in Japan, where it was traded as "bero" ("Berlin blue").



Fuji Red

Katsushika Hokusai

About 25 x 38 cm

Print

1830

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Hokusai in his famous series of prints, in the "Thirty-six View of Mount Fuji" (1830) used extensively the shade of Prussian blue.

In this work "The Fuji in red" the mountain can be admired in all its splendor, the clear colors and the static image renders its solemnity and majesty, the celestial vault is rendered entirely through the vivid Prussian blue color.

Wave off Kanagawa



Katsushika Hokusai

About 25 x 38 cm

Print

1830

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Among the "Thirty-six views of Mount Fuji" by Hokusai there is the portrait of a great wave that hits the fishermen, causing the boats to stagger. This woodcut is the first of the collection. Although small in size, it depicts a scene of great visual impact, heightened by the use of colors dominated by Prussian blue, which lent itself particularly to rendering depth. Here the mountain seems to get lost in the waves of the stormy sea.



Keisai Eisen Momongawa

Katsushika Hokusai

About 25 x 38 cm

Polychrome woodcut

1830 - 44

Museum of Art, Chiba City

From 1830, following the introduction of Prussian blue, he directed his production towards the creation of prints with only blue ink, characterized by the excellence of tonal gradations.

Hokusai also devoted himself to some beautiful series of erotic prints and feminine beauties.

Of all keitai Eisen Momongawa deserves attention, a work in which the elegance of the stroke and the chromatic vivacity make it a beautiful and inspiring work. (even Van Gogh who copied the figure of a courtesan several times).



The Amida Waterfalls

Katsushika Hokusai

40 x 50 cm

Polychrome woodcut

1832

Honolulu Museum of Art

In the Amida Waterfall, the whole composition is played on an alternation of solids and voids in which Prussian blue abounds in the choice of color for the river. the linear shapes of the waterfall merge with the perfect circular shape drawn by the rocks at the top showing waves, formed by the river behind it before throwing itself.



Goldfinch and weeping cherry tree

Katsushika Hokusai

25 x 18 cm

Polychrome woodcut

1832

Honolulu Museum of Art

This woodcut is part of the “Small flowers” series and dates back to 1832.

The monochromatic background of an intense Prussian blue highlights the cherry tree branch where the flowers stand out, some completely open, others in bud, the protagonist is however the goldfinch that is preparing to take flight upside down.



Van Gogh

1853 - 1890

Vincent Van Gogh, a well-known Dutch painter, in addition to yellow, loved blue, a blue that ranged from Prussian to sugar paper. His paintings were not based on studies, but were the spontaneous photo of the reality in which he lived and what his eyes saw was brought back to canvas.

Starry night over the Rhone



Van Gogh

72,5 x 92 cm

Oil painting on canvas

1888

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

In the painting (1888) the bank of the Rhone stands out in the background, where the lights of the gas lamps stand out. These are reflected on the waters of the river, whose blue and yellow colors reflect those of the starry sky.

The true protagonist of the painting is the celestial vault, with the stars that lend themselves to look like precious stones. In his work, van Gogh uses only one color and develops it in all its possible shades, creating a symphony of Prussian blue, ultramarine blue and cobalt.



Starry Night

Van Gogh

74 x 92 cm

Oil painting on canvas

1889

Museum of Modern Art, New York

One of van Gogh's most famous paintings. The sky appears shocked by energetic waves and spirals, above the sleeping town, while the lights of the stars appear as if in motion in the vault of the sky, rendered by this characteristic blue.



The church of Auvers

Van Gogh

94 x 74 cm

Oil painting on canvas

1890

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

The church, depicted in the center of the painting, is Saint-Martin in Arles. Its unmistakable pointed bell tower is placed in a strategically central position against the prussian blue background of the painting.



Pablo Picasso

1881 - 1973

Spanish painter, sculptor and lithographer. He was an innovative and multifaceted artist, the founder of Cubism. Also described as being multimedia, he was able to work with different techniques such as oil painting, sculpture and collage. He wants to bare everything he sees with the help of a painting played on cold colors, such as Prussian Blue.

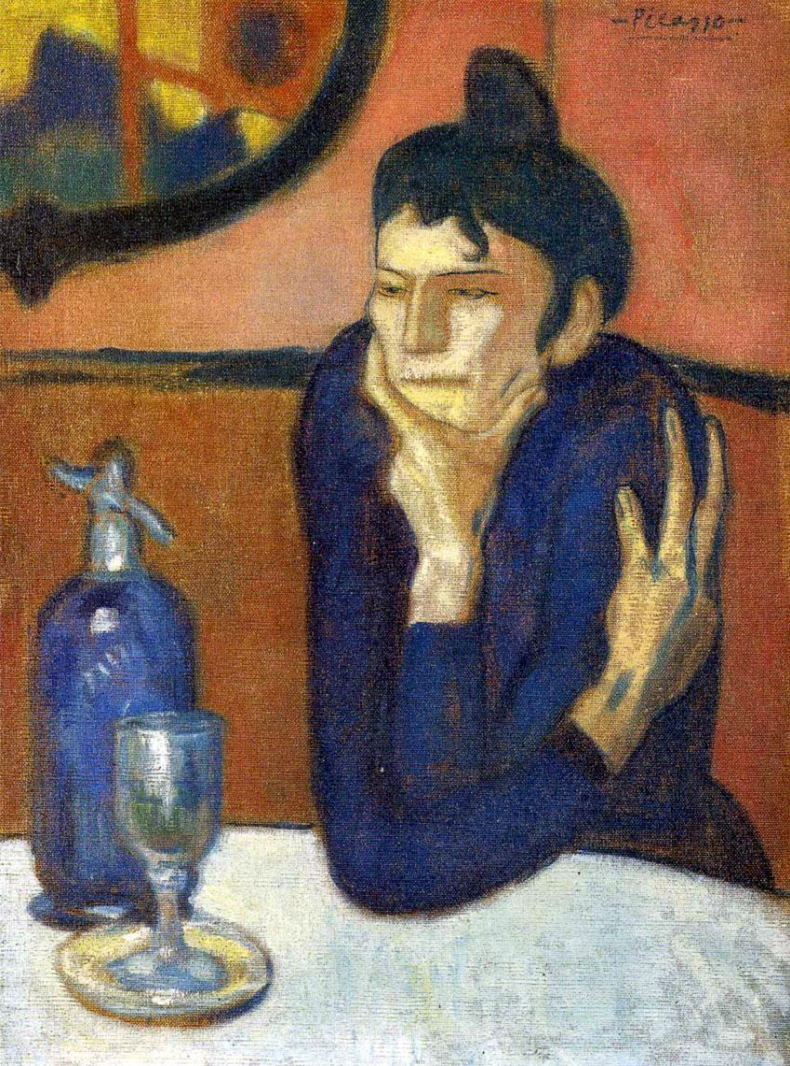


BLUE PERIOD 1901-1904

Picasso's Blue Period is not just a phase of his artistic production, but a real feeling. In the deep and gloomy shades of blue, the Spanish artist condensed the complex of experiences he lived between 1901 and 1904 in Paris. A particularly difficult period, in which the painter vent by creating a series of paintings imbued with a melancholy atmosphere calibrated in shades of Prussian blue and blue-green.

Sadness, melancholy, reflection, isolation. These are the emotions that torment the artist and the characters he portrays.

These are mostly poor and marginalized figures, whose desperation is both social and mental. We therefore find prisoners, the blind, the elderly, families in difficulty; but also beggars, wanderers, desperate people.



The absinthe drinker

Pablo Picasso

73 x 54 cm

Oil painting on canvas

1901

Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

The painting wants to show, in the figure of the woman, the loneliness in which the painter was struck in that period and falls within the artist's blue period.

In fact, we see the use of this pigment in the dress and in the bottle on the table.



The two sisters

Pablo Picasso

152 x 100 cm

Oil painting on canvas

1902

Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

The painting represents two women, a prostitute and her mother, according to the artist's intentions. The title derives from an error of his friend Sabartes, who transcribed soeur (sister) instead of mère (mother).

Some critics interpret the work as an allegory of sacred love and profane love.



Mother with sick child

Pablo Picasso

47 x 41 cm

Pastel on paper

1903

Picasso Museum, Barcelona

The painting is characterized by the predominance of blue, especially in the background. It also presents an atmosphere of anguish and sick subjects or those on the edge of society.



Poor by the sea

Pablo Picasso

105x69 cm

Oil painting on canvas

1903

National Gallery of Art, Washington

The three human figures are defined by a marked contour line and have a plastic appearance thanks to the black and blue shadows and outlines. They reflect a sense of closure in themselves, which leads to detachment and melancholy. Like the other works of this period, the main theme is incommunicability, in fact the characters are static, immobile, unable to relate to each other.



The old blind guitarist

Pablo Picasso

121 x 92 cm

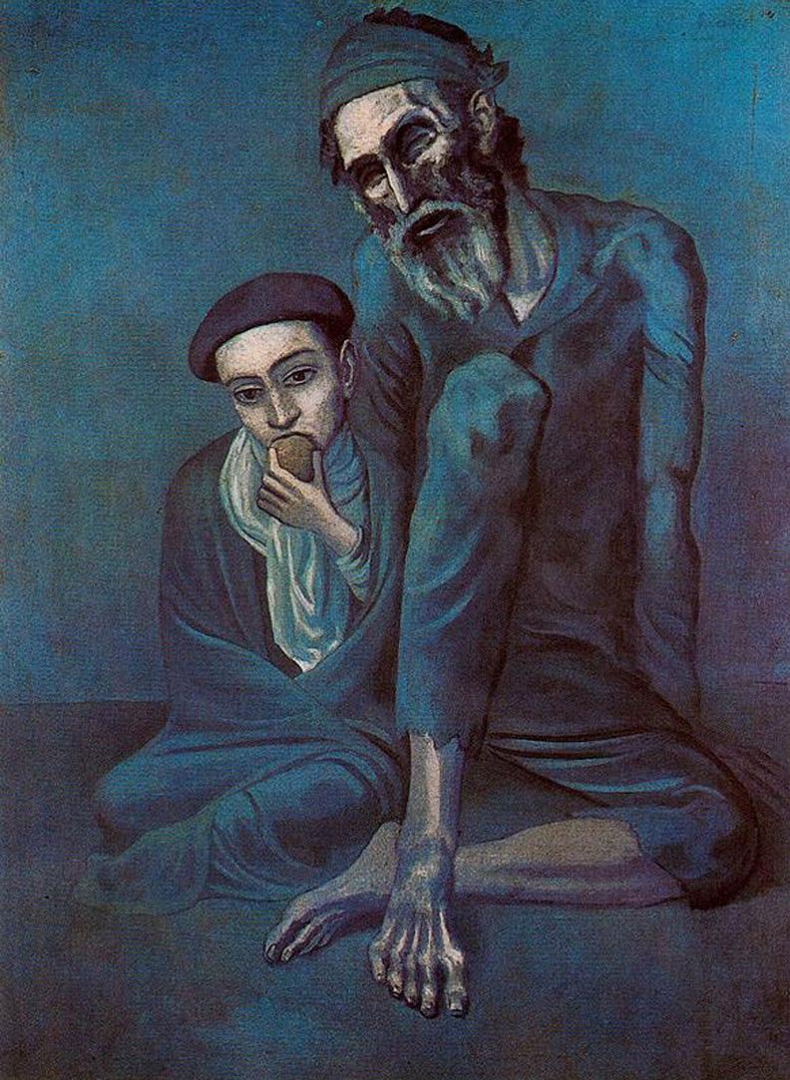
Oil painting on canvas

1903

Art Institute of Chicago

A blind old beggar on a sidewalk plays a big guitar, which in the painting takes up space and contrasts in its roundness with the thinness of the old man.

Blue is used on most of the surface.



The old Jew

Pablo Picasso

125 x 92 cm

Oil painting on canvas

1903

Pushkin Museum, Moscow

Picasso often used the marginalized as subjects of his canvases, to whom he felt very close, in particular circus artists are among the subjects of some of his most famous canvases.

Blue is present in all its shades.



The life

Pablo Picasso

197 x 127,5 cm

Oil painting on canvas

1903

Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland

The embraced couple occupying the left side of the picture symbolizes carnal love. In contrast to the right of the picture, the woman covered by a cloak and holding a child in her arms represents motherhood. Every single element reflects a shade of blue.



The celestine

Pablo Picasso

81 x 60 cm

Oil painting on canvas

1904

Musée National Picasso, Paris

The subject is a protector, blind in one eye, who has become a symbol, for the painter, of licentious Spain. The story tells that Celestina intrudes in the love story of Calisto and Melibea, with the intention of making a profit: the death of the young man and the consequent suicide of his beloved lead to death also Celestina and her accomplices.

Prussian blue is used in most of the painting, except in her cloak.