Which is it?

Erotic classicism

This still-life was discovered only after the painter's death. The composition is extremely simple - four apples, a pitcher, a plate - without any decor or personalized objects. It alludes to no season and to no particular place, and this gives it a universal character. The arrangement of the objects makes no practical sense: two apples on the sideboard on either side of a pitcher, on top of which is a plate with two more apples.

The rusticality and simplicity of this still-life contrasts with the abundance to which art history has accustomed us. The chalky colours - grey and beige - recall frescoes in Pompeii and Herculaneum. Picasso probably visited these sites during his trip to Rome in 1917.

With these simple forms and the monumentality of the pitcher in the middle (a frequently recurring object in his paintings), Picasso was fully in line with the return to classicism then in vogue. In front of this silent composition, it is impossible not to think of the metaphysical still-lifes of Paul Cezanne.

Nevertheless, there is something disquieting here. Against the neutral background, the pitcher may also be seen as a female figure with generous forms: with her voluptuously open mouth and the generous swelling of the highlighted belly, this pitcher-woman is as erotic and colossal as the giantesses painted during the same period.

Picasso again uses a classical idiom and interprets it in his own way. The elaboration of the composition shows a very Cezannesque handling enriched by the Cubist experience. The image of a woman's body, which emerges where no one would have expected it, has not been downplayed ; on the contrary, it is overwhelmingly present and sensual.

http://www.pablopicasso.org/still-life-with-pitcher-and-apples.jsp

A genius at large

Painted at the end of the Cubist years, this painting has an impressive solidity. It represents a repudiation of the school of academic Cubists that had grown up in Picasso’s shadow, who saw his new works as a betrayal of the movement he and Braque had invented. Picasso, the supreme individualist, had no time for labels, and no need for disciples.

The artist had married the ballerina, Olga Khokhlova the previous year, and was heavily involved with theatre projects for the Russian impresario, Diaghilev. His life was in good shape, and his imagination teeming with ideas.

Picasso had abandoned Cubism partly because of his growing fascination with the artists he studied in the Louvre. Most interesting of all was Ingres, who heavily influenced the line drawings Picasso made at this time. He also admired Corot, and finally, Chardin (1699-1779).

Still life with pitcher and apples is an early example of Picasso's habit of taking on past masters at their own game, borrowing motifs but effectively reinventing their works to suit himself. He has emulated Chardin's immaculate sense of composition, adding a sensual dimension that remains latent in the works of his predecessor.

Although this picture is often viewed as an example of Picasso's return to 'realism', it must be one of the most subtly eroticised still lifes ever painted. The apples are reminiscent of breasts and buttocks. The jug is unmistakeably feminine, with a dark, suggestive lip. Even the way the plate of apples rests on top of the pitcher is unsettling, as if the female form was being pressed down by a masculine weight. It is a remarkable testament to the artist's transformative powers, and his ability to say a lot with the slenderest of means.

http://johnmcdonald.net.au/2011/picasso-five-highlights/

Back to a simpler life

Picasso's 1919 Still Life with Pitcher and Apples signifies the artist's return to a more classical approach to painting. This shift in Picasso's artistic style follows the cubist period, which brought with it a strong emphasis on primitive-style forms with sharp, angular accents and thick, heavy, dominating brushwork. This 1919 work echoes his earlier academic studies that reflected a more realist representation of the subject matter he was depicting.

In Still Life with Pitcher and Apples, this is most notable through the soft brush strokes and gentle hues of white and grey, used by the artist to define the curved body of the pitcher. This painting captures the three-dimensional quality of realist paintings, emphasised by the round apples, which resemble the olive green hue of soft pears and sit idly framing the water jug.

Picasso has effectively employed traditional tonal techniques to heighten this realist style, most prominently by adding darker tones of the green apples to the pitcher, which creates a murky reflective shadow that emphasises its circular, rigid

form….This painting suggests a longing for the past, a desire to be immersed in a distant and more orderly environment, perhaps a result of the catastrophic devastation of World War I and the impact the war had on France.

https://arthistoryandtheory.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/picasso-at-the-art-gallery-of-nsw1.pdf