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**Picasso - Minotaurs and Matadors, exhibition review: Where beauty meets the beast**

*Picasso's fascination with the minotaur is explored in this revelatory show, writes Ben Luke*

Ben Luke



*Irrepressible: Picasso wearing a bull's head The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty*

Of the many alter egos in Picasso's art, the minotaur prompted his most extraordinary imaginative feats. Aside from evoking a lifelong passion for the bullfight — also captured here, in works from childhood to old age — the mythological creature, when it rampaged into Picasso's art in the Thirties, reflected his trauma at a painful divorce, complicated affairs, and Spain's inexorable progress towards civil war.

Its duality allowed Picasso, above in a bull's head in 1959, to transform his vexed feelings: the minotaur is by turns violent and tender. In three prints made in one day, June 18, 1933, Picasso pictures him in a ferocious love-making scene, then tenderly watching a sleeping woman, and menacingly stooping over her.

They're all masterpieces: tumbling, frame-filling compositions drawn in Picasso's miraculous, unwavering line. Indeed, the prints, drawings and gouaches are the show's real highlights —

such as the transcendent group of etchings *La Minotaumachie* (1935). The oil paintings are not of stellar quality for Picasso — though for most artists, they'd be career high-points.

What leaps from this exhibition, whether in the bullring or the minotaur's labyrinth, whether with the brush, the pencil or the etching needle, is Picasso's irrepressible inventive genius.