



Dissecting Picasso's Political Identity: Three Nude Paintings

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Picasso tended to avoid using his art to comment on specific political events, preferring instead to make more general statements about the human condition... notable exceptions... did respond to specific events, although frequently expressing his reactions through a metaphoric language of universal signs and symbols.

- William Robinson, "The Fall of the Republic," in *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí*

An account from *Picasso's Women* depicts the vacationing Pablo Picasso as an insightful, yet irreverent, participant in Europe's political discourse: "Everybody was pleased to see... Picasso doing imitations of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco at lunch, painting portraits in mustard, wine and vegetable juice on the tablecloths." [1] Informal biographies recount an artist who flirted with, but ultimately eschewed, polemical content. Would a focused study of Picasso's nude paintings during the years of his most public political allegiances, roughly 1936-1952, uphold such a claim?

Early twentieth-century Spain teemed with the resentments of the impoverished rural class towards both a brutal dictatorship and the unsuccessful restoration of an elitist monarchy. Socialists, Communists, and, most successfully, Anarchists sprang from the masses in radical protest. Picasso's *Quatre Gats* companions expressed affinity with the Barcelona Anarchist movement, but lacked the militancy of the more extreme Anarchists, as *Barcelona!* exhibit coordinator Jordi Falgout has aptly demonstrated. Nevertheless, the bombings and assassination attempts committed by the Anarchists, the disdain felt by the left-wing minority Socialists, and the violence of the reactionary Nationalists eventually culminated in a Spanish Civil War. The resulting tragic loss of Spanish lives and the censorship of Spanish arts and culture disturbed Picasso deeply. Their occurrence instigated his sixteen-year span of intentionally political paintings. The most prominent of these works addressed, respectively, the Spanish Civil War, the Nazi Holocaust, and the American suppression of North Korean Communism.

This paper will analyze Picasso's visual language applied specifically to nude paintings with political content. The three richest works with which to perform this investigation will be used as examples of Picasso's intentions and artistic strategy. They include: *Guernica* (1937), *Le Charnier* (*The Charnel House*, 1945), and *Massacre in Korea* (1951) (see figs 1-3). These works will first be situated within the historical events to which Picasso was directly exposed. Their iconographical content will then be dissected for meaning, for what they reveal of Picasso's political allegiances, and for their degree of accessibility to his politically oriented audience. As I will later explain, this question of accessibility determined the social impact of each work.

I contend that Picasso was, in fact, concerned with political issues and manifested his views visually. However, I also seek to prove that, as always, he subordinated his subject - here, political affiliation - to his quest to redefine extant artistic motifs with his own definitive visual language. When twentieth-century European politics were in accord with his goals, Picasso allowed interpretation of his works to be political as well. But, as discord arose between Picasso and the leaders of the partisan organizations in which he participated, he refused to yield to their agenda and compromise his vision. As a result, much of his political content failed to generate the persuasive, single-view ideology indicative of most "political" art, and eluded his audience. For this reason, it is more accurate to categorize Picasso not as a "political artist," but as an artist for whom politics served, for a time, as fecund subject matter. The human nude was a conventional testing board for Picasso. Picasso portrayed political themes by translating three subjectively experienced war tragedies, the previously mentioned wars, into universal allegorical subjects. Each conjured abstract notions of justice and inhumanity - using human nudes, animals, and inanimate objects. With his signature strategy of synthesis and reinvention, Picasso visually fused Classical figures, Christian theology, indices of Spanish culture, and his most dominant personal motifs. In doing so, he both satisfied political painting and subordinated the genre to his consistently evolving iconography.

1) *Guernica*



Fig. 1, Picasso, Guernica (1937)

In the year 1930, the Spanish dictator, Miguel Primo de Rivera, was overthrown, along with the Spanish king, Alfonso XIII. The Second Republic - a tenuous alliance of Anarchists, Socialists, and leftist democrats - replaced both the dictator and monarchy. This government nominally sought to repair the manifold problems of rural poverty and joblessness. The Second Republic legalized woman voting, permitted divorce, and passed laws to improve labor conditions. In reality, however, the new government's attempts to connect with its citizens failed, yielding a sharp division of classes. The Second Republic's Anarchists, Socialists, and Communists (the PCE) failed to resolve their diametrically opposing means of achieving a social utopia. The Catalans, Basques, and Galicians each pressed for recognition of their autonomy within the larger Spanish government. The industrial revolution had not yet reached northern Spain, and *braceros*, migrant farm laborers, had been financially exploited for decades. Local political bosses intimidated the working class into electing them for unlimited terms. In 1933, recognizing an opportunity in the unrest of the masses, José Antonio, the son of de Rivera, established the right-wing Falange Española, aligning it to the doctrines of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. In contrast, however, he blended a staunch Catholicism to his fascist rhetoric. In November 1933, the Falange Española won the elections and violently smote numerous protests. Rightist General Francisco Franco, who had been in unofficial exile in Spanish Morocco for his mutinous sentiments towards the Second Republic, now eagerly awaited his chance at power.

Advance to 1934. Artists Juan Miró and Salvador Dalí have evacuated Barcelona, the "city of bombs." Picasso also has fled the city, but exchanges letters frequently with his family members, who have remained there. He scrutinizes Barcelona newspapers and seeks firsthand accounts of the battle between the Fascist rebels and the Republic. With a nephew serving in the Republican Army, Picasso remains loyal to the Second Republic. Aware of Picasso's devotion to the republican cause, the threatened government appoints him director in absentia of the Museo del Prado, and he gleefully demands that friends and lovers address him as "Director Picasso." It is unlikely that, at this time, Picasso is attuned to the events of a small Basque town called Gernika. But, with the vicissitudes of Nazi policy, this will change catastrophically. On July 17, 1936, in response to the leftist Republic's return to power, General Franco orchestrates a rebellion in Spanish Morocco. His mutinous sect of the Spanish military initially seems trapped when the majority of the army remains loyal to the government, isolating the insurgents in Morocco. But Franco has forged a favorable relationship with the Italian and German nationalists. Mussolini supplies 17,000 troops for Franco's defense. Hitler dispatches German planes to transport the entirety of Franco's army to the Spanish mainland. Chaos ensues. Radical loyalists respond to the conservative militarism and religiosity of the rebels by attacking clergy and burning churches - including a cathedral designed by Gaudí. What is anticipated as a weeklong coup will become a three-year-long civil war. In return for providing Franco with the upper hand, Hitler dispatches German officers to closely guide Franco's subsequent acts of terrorism. The most unanticipated - and cruelest - of these acts is the bombing of the undefended Basque region - specifically, the town of Gernika. The Basques are uniquely situated in Spanish cultural history as partially independent of Castilian rule. The Basques represent the freedom of the Spaniard and his/her capacity to contest injustice. Franco personally detests the fierce independence of the Basques, and Hitler's chief of secret service, Wilhelm Canaris, believes that the suppression of the Spanish Republic is crucial to Nazi conquest.[2] For these reasons, Gernika, a city known for the tree symbolizing its autonomy, is attacked by the Nazi Condor Legion on the morning of April 26, 1937.[3] The bombs rain two separate times - first to kill, then to destroy the evidence of an air raid and make the tragedy appear to have been done by liberal republicans on the ground. Picasso responds to Franco's seizure of power and his desecration of both the Prado and the artist's native Málaga with the vitriolic print series *Dream and Lie of Franco* (1937). In these engravings, Picasso deforms Franco into a bug-eyed, moustached monster who engages in various barbaric behaviors. In the first edition, the insect-like Franco rides on a pig, destroys Classical sculpture, and is mauled by a charging bull. In the second edition, Picasso crafts the earliest examples of what will evolve into an enormous and emotive mural. He depicts a dying horse, a woman in anguish, a mother holding her dead child, and a stoic bull. Franco also satirically echoes Diego Velázquez's portraits of royalty, as though he does not deserve to assume such a dignified mantle of Spanish authority. Finally, these prints, the first of Picasso's political works, are a link to the visual culture of Barcelona. Picasso bases their format on

popular, traditional prints of Don Quixote and other Spanish cultural heroes. These prints are called *aucas*.^[4]

Following the second edition, architect Joseph-Luis Sert recruits Picasso to participate in the Spanish Pavilion of the 1937 International Exposition of Art and Technology Applied to Modern Life. Situated between the German and Soviet pavilions, the space is an attempt to solicit sympathy and aid from powerful Western empires such as France, Great Britain, and the United States for the Spanish. Picasso uses this exhibition opportunity to address the bombing of Gernika itself, made horrifically public by the testimony of a resident Gernika priest in Parisian newspapers.^[5] Picasso's 25-foot x 11-foot mural, *Guernica* (1937), a play on the French word for war, "guerre," and the name of the victimized village, remains one of his most hauntingly expressive pieces.

The most thorough analysis of the individual components of *Guernica* is provided by Eberhard Fisch in his book, *Guernica*. Fisch defines the most exceptional component of all of Picasso's political pieces - originally his strength, but, eventually, his downfall - in this manner: "Earlier war pictures often glorified war and victory. In *Guernica* there is no victory. There is only suffering."^[6] The totalistic suffering is that exceptional component. Picasso adopts a "massacre of the innocents" genre of war painting that is clearly influenced by the prints and paintings of Francisco de Goya, such as the earlier Spanish artist's chef d'oeuvre, *The Third of May 1808* (1814).^[7] But rather than parroting Goya's anguished depiction of unjust slaughter, Picasso seizes this public opportunity to demonstrate, through the nude, the culmination of his newest motif-mixture.

Fisch devotes his study of *Guernica* to a strict step-by-step analysis of its component signifiers, a process that is quite illuminating. He lists the subjects in the compositional framework from left to right: the bare-breasted mother, the bull, the bird, the remnants of the warrior, the horse, the ceiling light, the bare-breasted woman on the ground, the woman in midair, and the oversized female being. The picture is comprised of gradations of black, white, and various warmths of gray. It reads jarringly from right to left, as opposed to the conventional western standard - perhaps a deliberate attempt to unsettle the viewer's expectations. In this flow from right to left, the actions of the various characters range from the most active to the most passive. The ceiling light stands alone as a representation of fixed action. Far from the disorder it initially presents, the composition is a triangular arrangement of form and gesture reminiscent of a Classical pediment. The space behind the figures is ambiguous, neither outside nor inside, and, though the attack took place during the day, the artificial light suggests nighttime. Fisch exhaustively explores the significance of each part of the mural. I will summarize his findings on the most pivotal components as follows.

Perhaps the most disturbing representation is that of the flying woman on the far upper right of the canvas, called the "light-bearer" for our purposes. She is not a victim fleeing the bombings as she is substantially larger than the other female figures in the painting, and as her clothing and hairstyle differ. Her extended hand and the light it holds terrify the wounded central horse, whom Picasso, himself, remarks is both a symbol of suffering and "the people."^[8] Her other hand, barely visible outside the dark window through which she swoops, evokes flames, or an explosion. This is a female figure whose conventional femininity, so precious to Picasso, has been subordinated to ferocity. She is not the savior within the mural's struggle, but rather, the antagonist. That she is "unnaturally" (in Picasso's view) aggressive further signifies her malevolence. Fisch interprets the light-bearer as an angel, demon, and god in one being: the human embodiment of a Nazi bomber plane. He argues that Picasso extracts Classical mythology: she is an Erinnye, a Greek female fury that avenges death under the jurisdiction of Persephone, bride of Hades. Yet she is also the Christian epitome of evil: Lucifer. In the Biblical book of Isaiah, the fallen angel Lucifer is renamed Phosphor-Lucifer, a bolt of lightning descending from heaven, also called the Morning Star. Like Phosphor-Lucifer, Franco, the figuratively implied devil, has fallen through his rebellion against authority, caused by his sinful pride.^[9] This argument for the light-bearer's meaning becomes even more compelling when Fisch indicates that the bombs dropped on Gernika contained a brightly burning substance - phosphorus. It is also fascinating to note that the arm bearing the light is in direct conflict with the sword held in the hand of the fallen man. The sword was not a weapon used in the Spanish Civil War; it, like all other elements of *Guernica*, is symbolic. The man himself, dismembered and surely dead, is the symbol of a Republican soldier and possibly of chivalry itself.

Fisch logically concludes that the ceiling light cannot be literally interpreted as a still life object that authenticates the actual bombing event - because Gernika was bombed by daylight. Instead, the ceiling light assumes the role of "contrast to the dangerous firelight [of the lightbearer], electric light as a symbol of the spiritual, technical, yet humane development of humanity."^[10]

Likewise Fisch's interpretations of the bird and the bull are revisions of previous scholarly readings. Due to the following contextual evidence, I am inclined to support his amendments. Due to low quality reproductions, the bird usually appears as a rod-like white shape to the left of the horse's gaping mouth. To previous viewers, it has represented the dove of peace, a character that joins the woman with upraised arms, the horse, and the mourning mother in their cries for justice. But this identification is problematic as Picasso did not create his own dove of peace until 1949, long after the

completion of *Guernica*. For this reason, it may instead resemble another of Picasso's adoptions of Classical motifs, this time that of the ancient Romans. In such a context, the bird becomes the sentinel goose, whose cries warned the Roman empire of approaching danger.[11] Here, the sentinel bird may warn Gernika, albeit in vain, of the approach of the Condor Legion. The bird's mouth is also closely juxtaposed against the enlarged ear of the bull - implying that it eagerly seeks a listener. In fact, the bird creates a direct visual route between the groans of the slowly collapsing horse, who embodies agony, and the bull's ear. It is reasonable to hypothesize that Picasso uses this universalizing Classical motif to symbolize his newspaper and radio reports, which are modern sentinels. The motif of the bird of warning will reappear in the early stages of Picasso's next political allegory, *The Charnel House*, in the form of a crowing rooster, this time an inextricable element of Spanish culture.[12] But in *Guernica*, the sentinel bird, with its mediating position between horse and bull, is the first clue regarding the meaning of the bull.

The bull is the only figure in the entire composition that completely faces right. Yet his head turns ambivalently to the left, following the current of the other players. His tail swishes upward, resembling a billow of smoke. His enlarged ear absorbs the sounds of anguish that reverberate from nearly every character in the picture. Earlier scholars of *Guernica* have insisted that the bull represents the smug victory of Franco and his fascist regime. Yet, to me, this seems a puzzling account of a prominent figure in Picasso's cast of characters, a figure whose identity is never clear-cut as protagonist or antagonist. In a direct sense, the bull's frequency in Picasso's work derives from the artist's love of the corrida and its representations of the titanic struggle between man and beast. Indeed, the bull in contemporaneous prints becomes part of Picasso's alter ego, the minotaur, a frustrated hybrid of passionate human and savage monster. Bull's blood is a traditional Spanish symbol of heroic self-sacrifice, something interwoven with concepts of chivalry, or lack thereof, in war.[13] Significantly, in *Guernica*, the bull is the only character whose gaze directly confronts the viewer, suggesting to me that he may represent the artist's sentiments towards the Civil War. For this reason, he may be the linchpin of the entire painting.

Fisch describes the bull not as the embodiment of the artist, but of Spain itself. The bull, a fusion of light and dark, may stand for the indifference of the Western world. This is because, at this point, Great Britain and France have signed a non-intervention treaty with Germany and Italy, essentially abandoning the republic. Based upon its schismed light and dark sectors, Fisch indicates that the bull may even symbolize the ambivalence of Spain and its internally warring factions.[14] This explains the bull's conflicting pose, and the manner in which his ear is placed near the warning cries of the bird and death-cries of horse, women, and mother. But one must remember that Picasso annually renewed his Spanish citizenship despite his residency in Paris. We must heed Picasso's ardent self-identification as a Spaniard. We must also consider that the bull, a creature both alienated from the Spanish public and subject to ritual spectacle, was an animal with which Picasso always intensely empathized. As Fisch suspects, the bull may, in fact, represent Spain itself at civil war. But it may also represent Picasso, individual human and artist, perceiving himself as a living allegory of Spain, its ambivalence and its suffering. Picasso is both entrenched in the plight of his homeland and geographically distanced from it. As such, he feels conflicting desires to express his outrage, but also cocoon it in his heterogeneous and experimental visual language. And he is certainly confident enough to showcase that visual language at the Spanish Pavilion. As the bull, he communicates his confusion, but also his artistic tribute to Spain, to the viewer with his penetrating, frontal gaze.

The two partly naked human figures - the mother on the far left and the wounded woman on the far right - do not exceed the other symbolic elements in the depiction of wartime suffering. In fact, Fisch's analysis of their significance is singularly finite, limited to the study of the fallen woman's swollen knee. Accounts of the Weeping Woman, to be discussed shortly, must be addressed in order to extract anything about nudes in *Guernica* that cannot be sufficiently represented through the animals and inanimate objects. Perhaps this is due to Picasso's use of these alternate forms in *Gernica* to stand in for the human vulnerability and victimization more conventionally shown through the nude. The genre of the nude, while a staple subject of Picasso's artistic experimentation, is clearly not the only visual tool that he employed.

The crux of this investigation is that *Guernica* is symbolic and allegorical and not meant to resemble the tragic event realistically - much to the chagrin of Picasso's critics. It is an attempt at universalizing Spain's plight through commonly recognized Classical motifs and allegories, superimposed by the contemporary Christian and Spanish signifiers that I have discussed. And why is this painting not violently suppressed by Nazi forces occupying France and doubtlessly privy to the contents of the Spanish Pavilion? I believe there are two reasons. The first is, as author Russel Martin states, "Because of Picasso's renown, criticism most often was expressed with silence and the specter of utter disinterest rather than with words." [15]

The second reason, more powerful and ultimately problematic, is Picasso's visual strategy. The universalizing of a particular historical event is a double-edged sword for a political artwork. In this context, the mangled, weeping, looming, and screaming figures evoke an immediate emotional poignancy and kindle moral outrage, regardless of the personal background of the viewer. The Nazis

and Spanish republicans are engaged in a vicious blame game in 1937, when *Guernica* is unveiled at the Spanish Pavilion. Because the mural does not *directly, realistically* indict the Nazis as the true culprits of the bombing, it evades the dangers of taking a definitive partisan stance.

In this very evasion, the work appears to make a strong statement only about the human condition in general and the overall tragedy of war. It does not advocate any single political position - at least not in the immediate sense. Additionally, the somewhat esoteric abstract language with which Picasso presents his figures is too off-putting to his target audience. This trend will resurface in Picasso's subsequent political masterpieces, ultimately rendering their social impact delayed, at best. Picasso is an artist unused to considering sympathy with the viewer in his quest to destroy and recreate all artistic conventions. His self-exploratory goals may suggest that he is artistically unsuited to serving a political agenda. Such an attitude may account for the discomfort of Sert, who solicits Picasso's participation in the Pavilion, and for the lack of enthusiasm on the part of critics who sympathize with the Republicans. Only Picasso's staunchest supporters, such as Dora Maar and Christian Zervos, will acclaim his efforts. Maar photographs the mural in each stage of completion, documenting its course. Zervos publishes an entire issue of his magazine, *Les Cahiers d'Art*, to combat the "grumbings" of the critical majority. At one point he states, "This work will...arouse our convictions that there are greater things than 'reality,' and that to participate in their grandeur is to rise again in dignity." [16] Zervos accordingly claims that surmounting literal reality most profoundly addresses reality's problems. Ironically, this very advocacy of Picasso's mural only stresses the limitations of Picasso's political art.

One additional consideration of *Guernica*'s meaning remains before my investigation extends to *The Charnel House* and *Massacre in Korea* - that of the weeping mother and dead child in the left corner of the composition. I wonder if the distortions of these figures' bodies and the mother's anguish evoke Picasso's personal guilt over his abandonment of Marie-Thérèse Walter and their daughter during the year of *Guernica*'s production. The mother and dead child characters are an obsessively repeated motif in Picasso's work after the completion of *Guernica*. One wrenching instance is the *Woman with Dead Child on a Ladder*, 1937, an almost identical copy of the screaming mother of the *Guernica* mural. The insertion of insider symbolism is not new in Picasso's oeuvre. The possibility that a politically-oriented painting might simultaneously express personal connotations is compelling. The bull as Picasso is, again, a case in point. Mary Matthews Gedo is one art historian who expounds upon the idea of Picasso's personal implication in *Guernica*. Quoting Picasso's friend Roland Penrose, she notes that the head of Franco in the *Dream and Lie* prints takes the form of the P in Picasso's signature. [17] This projection of the artist's self-identity into the most heinous portions of his political art is then extended to *Guernica*. The mother and dead child, and the apocalyptic setting, derive from Picasso's only experience comparable to a massive bombing: the earthquake that struck the day of his younger sister Lola's birth, December 27, 1884. [18] Gedo recounts all the frightening memories of this trauma that Picasso drew upon in his depiction of a wartime attack. She describes the dead infant, a stand-in for the vulnerability and potential injury of Picasso's sister, as "one gaping, bloody wound from neck to groin," also rendering explicit that early sketches depict the infant still in the birth canal, "enclosed in a diamond-shaped [vaginal] cavity." [19] Such an interpretation of the source of the mother and dead child is consistent with Picasso's tendency to use autobiography to enliven his works. It also explains why Picasso's future Communist audience views *Guernica* as less contrived and artificial than *The Charnel House* and *Massacre in Korea* - subjects for which Picasso, though passionate, lacked foundation in personal experience.

Regardless of the existence of secret guilt or lamentation over lost lovers, however, there is another repeated motif generated around the time of *Guernica* that removes any doubt as to a woman's influence: the "Weeping Woman," Dora Maar. Born Henriette Theodora Markovitch, Dora is the brilliant and intense child of a Croatian man and Frenchwoman. Maar is closely associated with the Surrealists during the 1930's. She is both a professional photographer and a sophisticated student of politics. She meets Picasso through Paul Eluard and, after replacing the less cultivated Marie-Thérèse, she becomes the only woman involved with Picasso whose intelligence matches - and even exceeds - his own. It is her emotional volatility as much as her intellectual fervor that attracts Picasso. According to Francois Gilot, he enshrines a pair of gloves stained with Maar's blood after she frantically drives a knife into the spaces between her fingers. This combination of unbridled mind and feeling becomes inspiration for Picasso's early political art. For instance, the hairy-faced Franco-beast from the second edition of *Dream and Lie of Franco*, the prints that directly precede *Guernica*, derives from Maar's chilling photograph of Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi. [20] At the same time, Maar's powerful pro-Communist rhetoric actively changes Picasso's sentiments toward his political subjects. Her role as Picasso's current female muse acquires a uniquely ideological - as opposed to sexual - flavor. When Picasso's mother writes to him from besieged Barcelona detailing the atrocities of Anarchist and Communist neighbors, he becomes furious with the Communist Republicans. However, Maar easily chastises his simplistic understanding of Spanish politics. In *Picasso's Women*, the author states that Maar enters Picasso's studio and delivers "several sharp lectures to focus his mind" while he produces *Dream and Lie of Franco*. [21] Furthermore, when the time arrives to paint *Guernica*, Maar capitalizes on Marie-Thérèse's distaste for "violent" paintings and offers Picasso the perfect studio space in which to produce the mural. [22] At times, Picasso even shoves a paintbrush into

Maar's hands, demanding that she "show him what she means" when she suggests a manner of depicting one of the mural's elements.[23] Maar's fanatical championing of the painting, manifested in her photographing of every stage of its development, is self-evident.

But does Maar herself actually appear as a motif in *Guernica*? The identity struggle of Spain - and Picasso himself - evoked in *Guernica*, and, more significantly, the lingering "Weeping Woman" motif that it generates, are instances of her presence. In the winter of 1937, while *Guernica* travels to Scandinavia as an icon of anti-Franco intellectuals, Picasso begins to tire of the inferiority he feels through Dora's wit. His conflicting feelings culminate in a series of claustrophobic, acid-hued paintings of Maar sobbing amidst otherwise cheerful scenery. Always her mouth gapes and a sharp-tipped tongue extends from horse-like teeth - reminiscent of the horse in *Guernica*. Both the Weeping Women and the war mural express Picasso's preoccupation with the *gritos* - "cries, screams, howls and shrieks" - of the victims of warfare. And just as in *Guernica*, the portraits of Maar are not meant as literal representations of an individual's suffering, but rather are transcendental symbols of agony. They are an ambivalent representation of the woman whose insistent, intellectual nagging generated the 1937 masterpiece. Interestingly, Maar detests these portraits for their victimization, a nearly identical reaction to that of the French Communist Party towards Picasso's later "massacre of the innocents" political motifs.

II) The Charnel House



Fig. 2, Picasso, *The Charnel House* (1945)

During the 1940's, Picasso continues to experiment with a visual language that depicts specific, contemporary political content through stylized allegory and symbolism. As such, the artist's personal views remain couched in images of immediate and universal emotional impact, but with cryptic meaning. Politics remain relevant, yet subordinate to, artistic experimentation. A progenitor of this 1940's series is *Bull, Skull, and Fruit Pitcher*, 1939. As in *Guernica*, the confrontational spirit of the Spanish corrido's life-and-death struggle grimaces at the viewer. But this time, the bull, like Spain, and perhaps like Picasso's access to his heritage, is dead. Its flesh still clings to its bones, giving an impression of a vitality and warmth not yet lost. It is reminiscent of the reproachfully staring ox head in Antwerp artist Pieter Aertsen's still-life of irony, greed, and corruption, *The Meat Stall* (1551). Picasso's still life may also be such a moralizing satire of these vices - but with an added sense of hope, pride, and future triumph. For in the center of the abstract space, a tree with a white bubble or force-field rises. According to William Robinson, this tree represents the sacred oak of Gernika which miraculously survived the bombing of the Condor Legion.[24] Its presence in this painting suggests that the plight of Spain and the political maelstrom surrounding the country are still dominating subject matter in Picasso's mind in 1940. By 1944, Picasso's work has been banned from exhibition for several years by occupying forces. However, he is now able to exhibit his paintings at the Salon d'Automne and to reach a growing audience with the content of his work. He has become closely aligned with the Communist Party of France (FCP). The FCP embodies the republican ideals of the individuals in Spain whom Franco has crushed. Their leader, Maurice Thorez, shrewdly courts Picasso as an internationally acclaimed cultural and artistic figure. Thorez believes that Picasso's public endorsement of the FCP lends a sense of moderation and credibility to the organization. To serve anti-Fascism, Picasso agrees to pose for magazines such as the Communist-run *L'Humanité*, one of the few papers to have critically supported *Guernica*. He marches with the Front Nationale des Intellectuels and is part of a brief project to create an *Encyclopédie de la Renaissance Française*. [25] Picasso also becomes a member of the Comité France-URSS and condemns Matisse and Aristide Maillol for their

anti-Resistance views. The list of committees, projects, and commissions that Picasso undertakes for the FCP in this time period is too great to address in the body of this paper, but the point is their exhaustive quantity, tirelessly addressed by the artist.[26] Additionally during this time, accounts of the Auschwitz gas chamber murders emerge in Parisian newspapers.[27] Picasso's friend, poet Jean Cocteau, sees photographs taken by the Office for War Crime Investigation.[28] This sparks frequent conversations between Picasso and Cocteau about the horrors of the concentration camps. Picasso begins to assemble found-object sculptures, such as *La V?nus de Gaz* (1945), a hybrid of a valve and gas-burning stove. This trend is revealing: Picasso's zealous party loyalty and the Nazis' atrocious war crime are a fertile combination. A nude painting becomes Picasso's testimony of solidarity to the Communist cause - the moral and cultural rebirth of ravaged post-war Europe.

This painting, *The Charnel House* (1945), also shows Picasso's attempt to now distance himself from cryptic, allegorical symbols while creating a political piece. Ultimately though, Picasso returns to *Guernica*'s trends. The work is, like *Guernica*, composed along a triangular line of movement. It reiterates bulging, expressionistic forms taken from Picasso's Cubist language. It, too, describes a civilian struggle against a corrupt power - the "massacre of the innocents" theme taken from Goya's *Third of May*. In fact, by referring to another Spanish painting that was received as political, Picasso most clearly states that *The Charnel House* is political as well. And the elements themselves? Three grayscale human figures collapse in defeated, smoke-like languid poses. These figures are a bare-breasted woman (upper left), a man with upward-turned, bound hands (right), and an infant (left, below the woman) who cups his palms against the flow of his mother's blood. In an exaggerated tilt of perspective, a sterile white table towers over the collapsed figures. The tabletop presents eerily commodified bowls and pitchers to the viewer, and the left table legs form a space that resembles an open door. Zervos's documentary photographs of each stage of the work's completion reveal a sharpening contrast of black and white forms. The child's eyes graduate from stunned and wide-open to closed. The still life that emerges by the third of four photographs is taken from Picasso's *Le Casserole ?maill?* (1945). The candle, however, has been omitted. Picasso paints candles to mourn the death of close friends, such as Casagemas in 1901 and Max Jacob in 1944. I believe that the candle's absence from a Holocaust image may betray Picasso's guilt over the Jewish Jacob's death - for he had been unwilling to take the risk of advocating Jacob to the Nazis. Finally, Utley suggests that the groaning expression on the nude woman's face, one of ambiguous pain and satisfaction, shows Picasso's formula of deliberately muddying rape, death, suffering, and *la petite mort* (orgasm).[29] In this context, the woman sexually submitting also represents France's collaboration with the Nazis and Picasso's honoring of the FCP's demand for *?puration* (cleansing and retribution) of Nazi collaborators.

Picasso's first study for *The Charnel House* is a 1945 sketch of a rectangular space containing piles of forms that allude to human skeletons. In the foreground, a rooster cries out and flaps its wings - evocations of distraught noise as in *Guernica*. The rooster is a symbol of the triumphant Gallic cock surmounting wartime atrocity. But, even more significantly, juxtaposed against a sheaf of wheat in the right foreground, the rooster becomes a traditional symbol of renewal through sacrifice. This is due to a combination of Picasso's personal grounding in Spanish symbolism and his adoption of two separate motifs, one ancient, one modern. Picasso is fascinated by images of self-sacrifice, such as the myth of the bull's blood spilled in the Spanish *corrida* as, perhaps, evident in *Guernica*. Like the bull, the rooster signifies heroic self-sacrifice. It is the "sun-bird" of ancient Mithraic cults of spilled blood and ritual cleansing - cults which lie at the foundation of the Spanish *corrida* tradition.[30] Furthermore, the rooster is a Christian symbol of dawn and redemption. The sheaf of wheat placed next to the rooster is also a symbol of rebirth, part of a modern French Communist rhetoric that details the "harvest" of a new Communist society. Significantly, by the time that the final version of *The Charnel House* is executed, the rooster and wheat have vanished. During the year that has passed since the original version was begun, more Holocaust atrocities have surfaced, sobering Picasso and his contemporaries to the point at which a dawning Communist Renaissance appears futile. However, the bound hands of the adult male figure in the composition resemble the feet of Picasso's 21 rooster sketches - suggesting a hope that is compromised, but not extinct. *The Charnel House* is unveiled at the Communist-sponsored exhibition "Art et R?sistance" in February and March 1946. While Picasso sees this transformation of cock to man as a clever artistic subtlety, Communist patrons find the erasure of the heroic bird to be anticlimactic. The confused public reception of the completed piece influences the party's opinion. They have begun to believe that Picasso is unsuccessful at clearly demonstrating political views. Perhaps they are correct, at least, about his inability to feel engaged with the subject, for Picasso never fully completed *The Charnel House*. [31]

III) Massacre in Korea

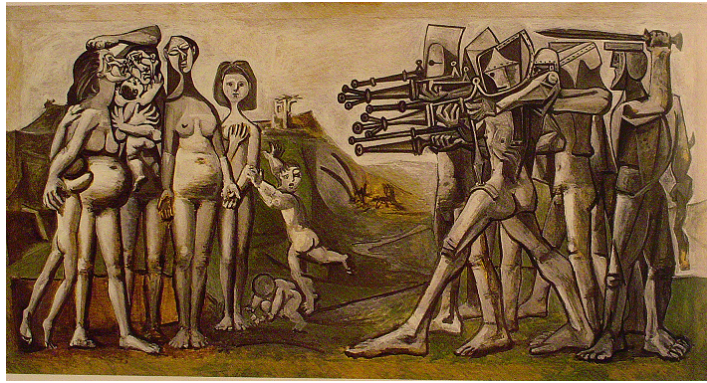


Fig. 3, Picasso, *Massacre in Korea* (1951)

By the time that the painting *Massacre in Korea* is executed in 1952, Picasso has long been aware of corrupt American intercessions in Spanish and European politics. During the Spanish Civil War, for instance, Texaco, Standard Oil, and General Motors provided oil and other supplies to General Franco on credit.[32] But it is the American intervention in the Communist protest in North Korea that spawns Picasso's third great political nude. In 1951, China accuses America of dropping grenades filled with disease-ridden insects in North Korea, massively killing Communist populations.[33] Picasso believes these rumors of bacteriological warfare in North Korea. He accepts an assignment to produce anti-American posters for the Chinese government. The artist who, in 1937, felt political solidarity with American artists contributing to the Spanish Pavilion, now condemns American politics. However, less than a decade after *Massacre* is completed, Picasso will patently deny that there are specifically anti-American sentiments in this painting.[34] But in 1952, it is Picasso's passion to defend his pro-Communist stance that catalyzes his third prominent political nude.

Picasso makes a blatant effort to create a political masterpiece that is immediately understandable to his target audience. The finished painting, *Massacre in Korea*, features a palette of grays, greens, and yellows. Once again, as with *Guernica* and *The Charnel House*, Picasso organizes the figures along triangular structures, only this time two triangles exist - one for the victims and one for the firing squad. Like its predecessors, this painting embraces Goya's *Third of May* format. Yet in *Massacre*, the composition more directly mimics the precedent set by Goya. The clear semblance between the two works reflects Picasso's increased attempt to link Goya's victims to his own vulnerable, nude women. While it suggests his desire to please his political patrons who requested greater "clarity" in his paintings, *Massacre* also may represent a more authentic impulse of self-expression. In contrasting soft, nude femininity against machine-like, nude masculinity, the painting of martyrs and brutes allows Picasso to depict conflict through sexually charged opposition. His use of nudity exacerbates the aggression of the men and passivity of the women, subjects of Picasso's perennial obsession. Utley even argues that Picasso's self-reflexive depiction of the nudes' roles in *Massacre* makes it a work of art more genuinely evocative of its creator than the more nuanced *Charnel House*. [35] Unlike *The Charnel House* or *Guernica*, *Massacre in Korea* will not be considered "universal," but, rather, applicable to specific contexts. For instance, though the original meaning of the work cannot be extracted from its cultural milieu, it acquires *new* meaning in a *new* cultural milieu in Hungary and Poland. In 1956, it is hung on a black board in the streets of Warsaw as a protest against tyranny.[36] Unfortunately, it is not only Picasso's visual style, but also the very concept of the martyr, that his Communist audience will find distasteful.

The FCP accuses Picasso of anachronism - who, they ask, wants a revamped history painting to serve as a modern social message? The FCP then labels Picasso apolitical due to his unwillingness to embrace Social Realism. Laurent Casanova, a Communist intellectual leader, insists that this aesthetic is embodied in the style of French Realist Gustave Courbet - and only this style.[37] Picasso's *Portrait of Stalin*, 1953, is also lambasted due to the burgeoning bias for the Social Realist. The work fails to naturalistically, yet flatteringly, depict a dignified old man. The majority of the international Communist audience rejects the portrait, even though Picasso's FCP allies publish the work in the April issue of *Lettres Françaises*. [38]

Opponents continue to complain that Picasso bases his pieces on the "massacre of the innocents" motif of earlier Spaniard painters. *Massacre in Korea* banishes, for instance, the triumphal hero of works such as Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii* (1785), although it maintains David's segmenting of weak females from proactive males. The reversal of the *Horatii* composition creates movement from right to left, a jarring inversion of traditional pictorial standards reminiscent of the right-to-left movements in *Guernica*. Picasso cleanses his *Massacre* composition of the esoteric, personal iconography that shapes *Guernica* and *The Charnel House*. Ironically, when he does so, this "victimizing" quality that the FCP so detests becomes blatant, and even more offensive, to his target

viewers. The Communists apparently do not recognize that the work's political message is phenomenally persuasive in contexts outside their own, such as the Warsaw demonstrations. Therefore, to appraise the political impact of *Massacre of the Innocents*, one must recognize that its failure to move its initial audience is also an isolated incident. Due to patron pressures, *Massacre* is blunter and more conceptually straightforward than Picasso's earlier political works. Yet the painting also capitalizes on Picasso's most self-reflexive motifs, such as the erotic struggle between the genders, in order to convey its point. Though spare of Picasso's complex allusions and hybrid iconographical meaning, this work does in fact succeed as a visual political statement.

As the late 1950's approach, Picasso distances himself from the party that has scorned his efforts to wed personal artistic vision and collective political ideology. He creates two enormous, full-color murals, *War and Peace*, 1959, in an abandoned church in Ceret. But these works are straightforward Greek allegories, devoid of the artist's characteristic flair for ironies and subtleties; the FCP seems to have neutered Picasso's self-explorative and hybrid style. Despite numerous overtures, the reacceptance of the Stalin portrait, and the bequeathal of several honorary awards, the FCP is never again able to entice Picasso into becoming their visual agent.

Conclusion

Gertje Utley makes an insightful observation about Picasso's visual strategy. She states, "Art for Picasso was neither an aesthetic operation nor did it mirror reality. Instead, it created reality on its own terms, parallel to the creation of nature and could thus, and only thus, have an impact on the world." [39] Such was both the strength and the limitation of Picasso's political nudes. These "analogies to real life" are the artist's transcendental, yet personal, language. They are the culmination of icons replete with meaning that is immediately accessible only to the artist-god, Picasso. Whether they are the bull of the Spanish corrida, the Mithraic sacrificial rooster, or the massacred innocents of the artist's forebears, these icons are a foreign language to viewers other than Picasso. As such, they are a cryptic message, an aesthetic delight to unravel and decipher. When his message has a political agenda, Picasso conveys it with the nuance and characteristic motif, such as the nude, for which he has become renowned. Yet for Picasso, this very process of destroying, blending, and creating his unique style and iconography is the ultimate goal. To champion a particular political position is an important - but peripheral - achievement. It is never the pivotal objective. When the decision exists between pleasing his party and creating challenging, innovative art, Picasso chooses the latter. And when his style grows too constrained by political agendas, he distances himself from the people who stifle his creative impulse. Picasso is an artist for whom politics are another temporary tool of self-discovery - just like his friends, his women, and his environment. He is not a "political artist," not an illustrator of the ideas of others. He is "God," a creator, the artist who uses human struggles and interactions to create a prolific visual world all of his own.

Note: While the research on this topic was initiated while Amber Stitt was an undergraduate, she now is a Ph.D. candidate at Case Western Reserve University. The University of Tampa Journal of Art History continues as a forum for undergraduate research; however an exception was made in this case as the faculty at Case Western viewed this student paper as best representing their institution.

[1] Roy MacGregor-Hastie, *Picasso's Women*. (Butler and Tanner, Ltd., 1988), 147-148.

[2] Russell Martin, *Picasso's War*. (New York: Dutton, 2002), 16.

[3] Eberhard Fisch, *Guernica*. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1988), 18.

[4] Carmen Belen Lord, "Picasso's 'Dream and Lie of Franco,'" in *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí* ed. William H. Robinson. (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, in association with Yale University Press, 2006), 460.

[5] Martin, 37.

[6] Fisch, 23.

[7] Interestingly, Picasso painted *Guernica* in the month of May, 1937. Picasso had a ritualistic personality, and he was deeply invested in Spanish artistic heritage. The timing of his painting could be an additional nod to Goya as a favorite Spanish old master, and Goya's masterpiece as possessing political content worthy of adoption.

[8] Fisch, 43: Fisch documents an encounter between Picasso and an American soldier named Jerome Seckler, to whom Picasso made this remark.

[9] Fisch, 45-46.

[10] Fisch, 49.

[11] Ibid, 48.

[12] Gertje Utley, *Picasso: The Communist Years*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 58.

[13] Utley, 60.

[14] Fisch, 47.

[15] Martin, 119.

- [16] Christian Zervos, quoted in Martin, 123.
- [17] Mary Matthews Gedo, "Art as Autobiography," in *Looking at Art from the Inside Out: the Psychoiconographic Approach to Modern Art*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 163.
- [18] Gedo, 170: Picasso was only three years old when the natural disaster hit M?laga, but the three-day earthquake apparently scarred him deeply. Gedo claims, "Fifty-seven years later, Picasso vividly described this event to his biographer, Jaime Sabart?s...the screams, the confusions, the destruction, the flames, the sudden transitions from indoors to outdoors - all these must have been part of the artist's own confused recollections of that long-ago night." Gedo even suggests that the childlike rendering of Picasso's May 1 preparatory drawings for *Guernica* reveal a regression to his psyche at the time of the earthquake. The fourth of these drawings depicts the horse character as pregnant, and may represent the fear and agony of Picasso's mother during the earthquake.
- [19] Gedo, 167-168.
- [20] Judi Freeman. *Weeping Women: The Years of Marie-Th?r?se Walter and Dora Maar*. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Rizzoli, 1994), 27.
- [21] MacGregor-Hastie, 151.
- [22] Ibid, 152: The specific location is the Rue des Grands Augustins.
- [23] Ibid, 152.
- [24] William H. Robinson, "The Fall of the Republic," in *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí* ed. William H. Robinson. (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, in association with Yale University Press, 2006), 478.
- [25] Utley, 151.
- [26] Ibid, 152: Gertje Utley lists some of Picasso's Communist affiliations during the year 1944: Front National au Profit des Prisonniers, D?port?s et Victimes du Nazisme, Ex-Prisonniers et D?port?s de Guerre Sovi?tiques, and the Amicale des Anciens Volontaires Fran?ais en Espagne R?publicaine.
- [27] Ibid, 57: According to Utley, Picasso's Communist acquaintance Aragon wrote in *Le Mus?e Grevin*, 1946, that Picasso had extensive exposure to such accounts of Auschwitz and other German concentration camps.
- [28] Ibid, 56.
- [29] Utley, 72.
- [30] Utley, 60.
- [31] Gedo, 160.
- [32] William H. Robinson, "Barcelona in the Maelstrom," in *Barcelona and Modernity: Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí* ed. William H. Robinson. (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, in association with Yale University Press, 2006), 424.
- [33] Utley, 166.
- [34] Ibid, 165.
- [35] Utley, 150.
- [36] Ibid, 152.
- [37] Ruth Marie Capelle, " 'War and Peace': Picasso in Vallauris, 1948-1959," in *Radical Art History*. (Die Deutsche Bibliothek, 1997), 51.
- [38] Capelle, 52.
- [39] Utley, 172.