

Review Copy

PABLO PICASSO
Spanish Civil War ~ 1937-1939

The Picasso Project

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The military uprising against the socialist Popular Front "Republican" government in Spain begins in July of 1936. The Republican government makes Picasso the honorary director of the Prado in September, one month before his 55th birthday and just two months before the museum is bombed by the "Nationalist" Franco forces and evacuated. By the following January, the Nationalist military forces already control half the country and bomb Madrid for a second time. Picasso and his French friends are supporters of the Republican government and he creates his etched caricatures of the leader of Nationalists in early January, *Sueño y mentira de Franco*. At this same time representatives of the Republican government visit the artist at his Paris apartment on rue de la Boétie, requesting that he contribute a mural to the forthcoming World's Fair in Paris. Reluctant at first, he is later overcome by the bombing of Guernica and produces the famous mural of the same name (reproduced on the dust-jacket).

During the first quarter of the year in Paris, Picasso primarily paints portraits of Marie Thérèse; still-lives, often with a pitcher; sharp edged morphic studies and portraits of Dora Maar. In April he sketches an artist and model series and a minotaur in a still-life. On April 26, 1937 the German allies of the Nationalists destroy the Basque town of Guernica, bombing and strafing civilian and not military targets. As Herschel Chipp put it, "Modern total war and *blitzkrieg* both received their baptism" in this unprecedented use of air power for "terrorizing the populace." Five days later a million outraged participants march in the largest May Day in the history of Paris. Picasso begins working immediately on his own *Guernica* project that same afternoon, forgoing his typical weekend, spent with Marie Thérèse and their 20-month-old daughter, Maya.

During May and early June, Picasso creates 53 studies and paintings for *Guernica*, culminating in the final version on June 4. The first studies are of a horse being attacked by a bull. These are followed by a woman in pain, with the same tongue-as-blade as the horse. At times the woman seems to be saving a child but in the full size studies and final version, the child is dead. The mural is displayed at the Spanish pavilion from July-October 1937 and then begins an odyssey, leading to a prolonged stay between 1939-1981 at MOMA/NY before being returned to Madrid.

During June and July in Paris, Picasso draws and paints a series of weeping women one of which is the woman from *Guernica*. He spends the summer in Mougins, painting portraits of his female companions, Nusch Eluard and Lee Miller as a surreal *L'Arlésienne*. There are also distorted images of a woman with a harlot-like grin.

During the fall in Paris, Picasso paints two-sided views of Dora Maar; a series of weeping women; and of Marie Thérèse. By October, all of northern Spain has fallen to the Nationalists. In the winter, he creates small scale sculptures, primarily of his hand and then using pebbles, which prefigure his later ceramics. In late 1937 and early 1938 there are studies of a faun-like minotaur; these are followed by two-sided views of Marie Thérèse and of his daughter Maya. In February there are still-lives of an apple and pitcher. In March, Picasso begins a series of two-sided views of a woman with prominent nostrils and continues these in April and May. The personage seems to be a composite of Marie Thérèse and Dora Maar. An aggressive rooster with the bladed tongue appears in March and early April.

Picasso tries a new style of rectilinear composition with parallel lines in May and June and again in July. There are sketches of a woman in profile in June in Paris and painted versions in July in Mougins. During the summer in Mougins, he creates a series of a male with lollipop and ice cream cones. There are variations on compositions with pronounced parallel lines often with a primitive geometric appearance. Nusch Eluard is represented almost naturalistically and then distorted in the two-sided and rectilinear styles.

During the fall in Paris, Picasso paints a still-life with a bull and artist's palette, in which the bull seems to be the artist. At this time, Barcelona is falling to the Nationalist forces. In December there are a few portraits of Dora Maar and Marie Thérèse and of his loyal retainer, Jaime Sabartés. In January, 1939, there are two-sided profiles of a woman, mainly Marie Thérèse, reclining on an elbow and then reclining full-length. A woman in a chair appears on January 21 and this motif continues through March. The still-life with the pitcher or bull's head reappears. In March there is a series of oils and monotypes of a woman, principally Dora Maar, with a pronounced nose and nostrils. She becomes increasingly distorted and is seated in April. The Spanish Civil War ends on April 1, 1939, with the victory of the Franco Nationalists. Tens of thousands of Republicans flee to France and North Africa. An ominous bestiary appears in April, with a bull's skull, a bird and a bird being killed by a cat. A sketchbook from the spring has a number of naturalistic studies of Dora Maar and of classical figures. A series of angled and rectilinear profiles appears in May and June in Paris followed by a group of distorted women, seated, the last ones done during the summer in Antibes. The celebrated painting *Night Fishing in Antibes* is Picasso's last work before the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 and the beginning of W.W.II.

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