

Pablo Picasso Guernica (The horrors of war) – Surrealism art

If the world hadn't know Picasso or the Surrealistic movement in a positive light, we wouldn't have been privileged to talk of the paintings that look awkward at the first glance and an in depth examination will make us feel ashamed of declining human values. Pablo, the symbol of pain, famous for many works like "The young ladies of Avignon", "The Old Guitarist", "The weeping woman", etc. probably delivered his most painful expressions through his masterpiece "Guernica". Picasso Guernica is considered one of the most powerful paintings to deliver an anti-war message.

Pablo Picasso through the use of black, gray and white shades was successfully able to evoke the horrors of war. There are many layers in Guernica, but its theme majorly revolves around five major components – the bull, mother and child, the head, wounded horse and three women. The central stage is taken by the horse with a spear like protruding tongue screaming in anguish. This represents mainly two terrible practices of the time – Spanish civil war and the bull fight. However, Picasso doesn't leave the horse of Guernica to die submissively and created hope amidst all horror by the help of a small plant flowering at the feet of the horse.

The bull in Picasso Guernica is perhaps the calmest of beings witnessing the horror with a dispassionate look. Based on the interests of Picasso, it is understood that he loved to depict himself as a bull as the bull is the greatest symbol to represent Spain and many art critics believe that Pablo Picasso included himself in the painting as a silent spectator who couldn't react to the horrors of war. The other reference on the bull of Guernica is that of Roman rituals where sacrifice, penance and religion are involved. Picasso once answered when asked to interpret the symbols in the painting, "the bull is a bull" and he had no intentions whatsoever to reveal his version of the Guernica.

The idea of the screaming woman with her child is believed to be taken from the panel painting "The Descent from the Cross" by van der Weyden. As Picasso used to be the director of the Prado museum where the oak panel work is situated the work might have influenced the inclusion of anguishing mother. A strong symbolic meaning is sent to the world through the mother with the eyes resembling tear drops bearing her dead child of Picasso Guernica that no one can escape from the pangs of death. War, conflict, criminal tendencies and the like can leave so many families in grief. The mother who lost her child after all the sobbing and tearing her clothes in desperation couldn't find her respite. The anguish will continue as long as there is war and as long as there is unnatural death.

The head with an outstretched arm and mouth agape is interpreted in many ways. In the painting of Picasso Guernica, one can observe the severed hand holding a sword indicating the outcome of war. Whereas some interpretations claim that the head represents the horrors of a major earthquake in Malaga and this natural disaster demolished more than ten thousand homes. As Pablo Picasso had a great memory right from his days of childhood he might have represented the earthquake through the head out of subconscious memory. A more related interpretation is that the head is related to the painting "The Dream and Lie of

Franco”, where Franco destroys anything that he sees and that includes a bust. There was a constant increase in violence during the time of drawing Guernica and the head expresses the result of bombing done in Prado.

In the Guernica, the obvious interpretation of the three women is that they are Pablo’s mother, wife Olga and Dora. His mother along with his sister was living in Barcelona and it was a time when Franco increased the bombing throughout. Picasso was fearful about their welfare and at the same time Olga looked to sue the artist because of his infidelities. As the world around him seemed chaotic an exotic character entered his life – Dora Maar. She played a positive role during the development of Picasso Guernica. However, there was a great fight between Dora and Olga witnessed by Picasso in his studio at Paris. These contrasting psychological debates are reflected in the Guernica and the interpretations can go as far the three women represent the women mourning at the cross, three graces or three fates witnessing the blood spilling war.

Although, Guernica represents the horrors of war, Picasso never left it there and incorporated a message of hope with his masterful work. The plant near the foot of the horse, a woman bearing the torch of liberty, the bull that sinks in everything without any display of emotions, the candescent bulb burning bright, etc. are all symbols of hope. If it weren’t for those gleaming beams of hope, Picasso Guernica would have been incomplete with nothing to display but the deathly pangs of war.

Dimensions: 137.4 inches x 305.5 inches or 349 centimetres x 776 centimetres

Type: Oil on canvas