

# GUERNICA – by PABLO PICASSO

- essay on the masterpiece -



Spain, April 1937. The city of Guernica is destroyed by a surprise air attack. The German airforce Luftwaffe mobilized 24 bombers for this raid, attacking in two successive waves: the first hit the city on 26 April 1937, but it was poorly coordinated, composed of 6 bombers. The second wave, violently attacked, with 18 bombers, on the morning of April 27, was a real massacre. This bombing was and is still considered in international opinion as a war crime, given that Guernica did not have the anti-aircraft defence, the victims belonging to the civilian population alone.

The balance of attack was overwhelming: 1654 dead and over 800 injured.

In 1936, the Spanish Republican government asked Spanish painter Pablo Picasso to create a painting on modern technology for the Paris exhibition in the Spanish Pavilion.

On May 1, 1937, Picasso was terrified of the news he received from Spain about the devastating event that had hit Guernica.

Thus, the famous painting bearing the name of the bombed city represents the memorial, the homage brought by the famous painter to the missing. After hundreds of sketches, the painting was done in less than a month, then sent to the Spanish Pavilion of the Fair, where it quickly became the main attraction of the visitor. The artist's pain shocked the viewers as he suggested the confrontation of the Spanish people with suffering and not a typical technology celebration, as they expected to see at the fair. A striking replica gave Picasso the Nazi officer who had come to visit his studio when Paris was occupied by the Germans. He, astounded by the beauty

of the painting, asked him if he did really painted it, and he responded with an irony mixed with sadness, contempt and fury: "No, you did! "

The painting itself is not accessible to any viewer, it is not easy to decipher, virtually depicting a picture of universal suffering without space and time coordinates. As the eyes adjust with the shapes and the frenzy, the figures begin to appear. On the left side, we see a woman whose body is back, holding her baby's innocent body and screaming in pain and pain, this being one of the most devastating elements of the painting. On the right side of the woman is the head and part of the bull's body, the only figure seemingly calm and unharmed in the midst of chaos. This is suggested by a dead or wounded man with a cut arm and a mutilated hand, a broken sword, a sign of the impossibility of defending. In a closer look, the fact that only the arms and the head are visible, the rest of the body being concealed by the overlapping of other figures. At the centre of the painting is the body of a fearsome horse pierced by a spear, whose open mouth suggests the screams of pain. On the right we notice three other characters: two seem to be waiting for divine help, and the one at the top seems like a figure a character who watches wonderfully and helplessly at the provoked disaster, whose hand tries to keep the natural flame of the natural screeching through the window of a burned house. The faces of all are distorted in agony, the eyes are dislocated, open mouths, suggesting desperate screams and their tongues in the form of daggers.

The grey, black and white monochrome palette is striking for the eyes of the viewer. This can be applied either by the painter's desire to play the newspaper and photo reports, black and white or by the desire to objectively suggest an eyewitness. At the same time, the entire composition creates the illusion of a newspaper material. The sharpness of the black and white scratches along the surface of the painting outlines a dramatic intensity of visual kinetic energy and the pinched motion.

At a somewhat superficial look, we can say that this composition is chaotic and confused, in a permanent metamorphosis, and the spectator is exposed to an intense scene of violence. The room is compressed and ambiguous, labyrinthic, giving more perspective to viewers, a specific feature cubism before Picasso. The images overlap and intersect, sharpening the shapes and making it difficult to classify their boundaries. The bodies are distorted, half-shaded, the forms are discontinuous and fragmented. Everything seems to be a heterogeneous mixture in which sharp limits seem to pierce and scatter the broken bodies. But in all this seemingly artistic chaos, there is a superior, visual order. Thus, Picasso balances the composition by organizing it in three vertical groups that move left and right, while the central figures are stabilized in a large triangle of light.

On the issue of the symbolism of the painting, we can discuss it indefinitely. Asked about this matter, Picasso said it was simply an appeal to people, massacred people and animals: "In the panel on which I work and call Guernica, I clearly feel sorrow for the deploration of the military camp that led Spain into an ocean of pain and death. The cat and the bull are the deadly struggles between the Republican fighters (horse) and the fascist army of Franco (the bull)."

Picasso just said that the bull was brutality, the darkness, adding that "it is not the duty of the painter to define the symbols. Otherwise, it would be better if he had written them in words. The public looking at the image must interpret the symbols as they see it."

Thus, painting does not seem to have only one exclusive meaning, but it emits ambiguity, the lack of historical specificity, or the fact that brutal wars continue to exist, preserves the authenticity, universality and magnificence of this picture as it was in the context of 1937.