**Picasso, Pablo (1881-1973)**

Born in Malaga, it was in Barcelona that Picasso first identified himself as a subversive Modernist with a critical, contestatory and transgressive praxis exposing the savagery underlying civilization alongside the paradoxical contradictions of modernity. Living in Paris from 1901, Picasso excoriated the deprivations of *La belle époque* by portraying the outcasts of Montmartre in his Blue period and circus performers in his Rose Period. Drawing upon African indigenous cultures, from 1906 he revealed how prostitutes from France's African colonies became ravaged with venereal diseases in his 1907 painting, *Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon.* Inspired by new scientific discoveries and the detritus of everyday life, from 1908 he depicted bodies and objects in fragments seen, felt, heard and smelt from different positions over time producing, by 1912, Cubist Collages and Assemblages. Retreating into Ingreseque Neo-Classicism and Crystal Cubism after World War One, from 1927 his Cubistic fragments resurfaced into metamorphoses of the body during orgasmic ecstasy. To expose the barbarity of Fascism, particularly during the Spanish Civil War, in 1935 Picasso produced *Minotauromachy* and, after Fascist bombing of the Basque town of Guernica in 1937, prepared his mural with that name. Refusing to leave Paris during Nazi Occupation, Picasso created symbols of torture, mutilation and death*.* After the liberation of Paris, he joined the French Communist Party and began paintings of *The Charnel House* (1944-45)to expose where Fascist mass slaughters lay concealed. Creating a dove for the French Communist Party as an international symbol of peace, Picasso was horrified when the Korean War erupted, painting *Massacre in Korea* in 1951 and, following the Cuban missile crisis, *The Rape of the Sabines* in 1963 to expose how rape remained an undeclared weapon of warfare. His Modernism was, in his words, "an instrument of ... attack ... against the enemy."

"What do think an artist is?" asked Pablo Picasso in Nazi occupied Paris.

An imbecile who has nothing but eyes if he is a painter ...? Quite the contrary, he is at the same time a political being, constantly aware of what goes on in the world, whether it be harrowing, bitter, or sweet, and he cannot help being shaped by it. ... painting is not interior decoration. It is an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy.

Through his Modernism, Picasso illuminated how modern life entailed reconciling technologies of mass production with mass destruction, the politics of Anarchism with Republicanism, Communism with Fascism, Apollonian with Dionysian cultures, comedy and tragedy, sex and death, bestial monsters like the minotauromachy and tender lovers like Marie-Thérèse Walter. Creating forms that seem in states of constant metamorphoses, Picasso conveyed how the experience of modernity was perpetually fraught with feelings of vertigo and the loss of security in a world spinning out of control.

**Anarchism, Calalan Nationalism and the Blue Period**

Catalan nationalism was at its peak when fourteen-year old Picasso moved with his family to the capital of the ancient province of Catalonia in 1895. Initially trained by his father, the painter and art teacher, Don José Ruiz y Blasco, at sixteen Picasso was enrolled at the Fernando Academy of Fine Art in Madrid but spent more time at The Prado studying Goya before returning to Barcelona in 1898. Absorbed in Anarchist daily newspapers, periodicals and art journals while frequenting *Els Quatre Gats*, Picasso's drawings and paintings of the oppressed, inspired by Isidre Nonell, were first published in *Joventut*. Consistent with Peter Kropotkin's "propaganda of the deed", he pictured social inequalities. Far from this concern abating on moving to Paris, it intensified.

To visit the 1900 Exposition Universelle where one of his paintings was being displayed, Picasso set off for Paris with his close friend Carles Casagemas. Bowled over by the "modern art centre", Picasso settled there in 1901, devoured Toulouse-Lautrec and Van Gogh and had his debut exhibition with Ambroise Vollard. After the suicide of Casagemos, Picasso's joy turned to grief, his art appearing shrouded in melancholy. Filled with the blind, emaciated beggars, alcoholics, madmen and other outcasts of Montmartre enveloped by a mournful azure light, Picasso's Blue Period was what his friend Jaime Sarbartés calls "a testimony of conscience". During this "golden age of venereal peril", far from shying away from such polemical issues as the venereal disease of syphilis, suffered by Casagemos, Picasso negotiated with Saint-Lazare Prison Hospital to canvas its afflicted prostitutes and their babies that would be, following Albert Fournier's thesis, heredo-syphilitic.

**Rose Period, Tribal Art and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon***

During his Rose period starting in 1905, whilst capturing the "mutualism" amongst those who performed on the social margins, particularly in the circus, Picasso visited France's tribal collections at the Trocadéro and was bowled over. Drawing upon the art language of African indigenous people, he began to depict in geometricised facets the prostitutes from France's North African colonies and the Congo employed in French brothels and contaminated with syphilis. (*Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* June-July 1907) Illuminating why France's "civilizing mission" became better known as the "syphilizing mission" in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* André Salmon recalls that "it froze them to the spot with fear" while Georges Braque likened it to drinking petrol and eating a flaming fuse; i.e. an anarchist bomb.

**The Fourth Dimension, Cubism and Collage**

Excited by the fourth dimension, X-rays, electromagnetic waves, radioactivity and chronophotography, as well as the relativist philosophy of Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche, Picasso joined Braque from 1908-9 in depicting bodies and forms in fragments from many different perspectives over time recalled in sensory memory, as illustrated by his Cubist portrait of his lover, Eva Gouel. Nicknamed after a popular song, *Ma Jolie,* he included these words in his painting. (*Ma Jolie,* Paris Winter, 1911-1912) "We were trying to set up a new order", he explained. When France entered the First Balkans War in support of the Balkan League, Picasso used fragments of newspaper headlines and articles of this war to make three-dozen Cubist collages and assemblages. In *Guitar, Sheet Music and Wine Glass,* his juxtaposition of a wine glass, guitar and sheet music about love with a newspaper saying "The Battle has begun" signal how the everyday pleasures of wine, sex and music were not immune from this all-encompassing crisis. (*Guitar, Sheet Music and Wine Glass,* November 1912) Through his upright placement and inversion of newspaper texts in other collages, Picasso also revealed how war and French militarism were spurred on by the conservative press while pacifist challenges to it were marginalized.

**Rubbish and Cubist Assemblages**

Receiving an exclusive contract during this War from the German-born Paris-based art dealer, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Picasso wallowed in such everyday detritus as cardboard boxes, wooden crates, wallpaper, simulated wood graining, advertising, packaging and labels to make Assemblages confounding classification. Although Picasso never exhibited them publicly and refused to join other Cubists at the Salons, he was still mythologized as the leader of Cubism. Hailed as innovatory by his friends, the poet critics Salmon and Guillaume Apollinaire, Picasso's Cubism was denounced by other critics as alien to the French temperament and comparable to decomposing syphilitics. During the First World War when Picasso produced costumes and sets for Sergei Diaghilev's ballets, *Parade* and *Le Tricorne*, its deconstructions were even likened by Fauve painter, Maurice de Vlaminck, to the destructions of the War itself.

**Ingreseque Neo-Classicism, Crystal Cubism and Surrealism**

In the "straightening up" following the Warwhen Picasso married Ballet Russe dancer, Olga Khokhlova, he appeared to retreat into Ingreseque Neo-Classicism and Crystal Cubism. After his son, Paolo, was born, Picasso's pasted papers gave way to conspicuously well-made easel paintings. With his pre-war signifiers of cheap mass-produced commodities displaced by privileged signs of leisure, “nicely combed and curled", Francis Picabia observed, "Cubism smiles courteously at monsieur and no longer picks its nose.” After publication of *La Révolution Surrealiste,* André Breton's purchase of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and his appropriation of Picasso as a Surrealist painter, Picasso's transfigurations seemed to culminate in monsters and Dionysian frenzy. "I would love to paint like a blind man", he exclaimed, "who pictures an arse by the way it feels." To capture orgasmic ecstasy, arms and fingers become erections in *Le baiser (The Embrace)*, noses and toes morph into phalluses, navels into anuses while mouths and eyes twist into vagina dentatas. (*Le Baiser (The Embrace),* 1925) "When I love a woman", Picasso explained with a hint of the sexual violence stirred by his eighteen-year old lover, Marie-Thérèse Walter, "that tears everything apart - especially my painting."

**Fascism, *Minotauromachy* and *Guernica***

Amidst rampant Fascism when demonstrations against the French government continually erupted in Paris, Picasso began his etchings of *Minotaurs,* printing them just before the February 1934 riots when the French Fascist League tried to burn down the National Assembly. After Stalin's launch of the Popular Front against Fascism when the Spanish Republican Popular Front came to power, Picasso was appointed Honorary Director of the Prado. Following election of the French Popular Front, Picasso illuminated in his *Minotauromachy* how the light of liberty burned brightly amidst the blackness of ferocious Fascism. (*La Minotauromachie (Minotauromachy),* 23 March 1935) An ardent supporter of both governments, Picasso was devastated when General Franco declared war, as was his new lover, photographer and French Communist Party member, Dora Maar. In his etchings, *The* Dream and Lie of Franco, designed for publication as postcards, this staunch Catalan nationalist demonized Franco as a meglomaniac murdering women and children as ruthlessly as he destroyed art. When Hitler’s Luftwaffes and Mussolini’s airforce bombed the resistant and defenseless Basque town of Guernica relentlessly on a market day in April 1937, Picasso added four more plates to this series and his poem:

**Cries of children cries of women cries of birds cries of flowers cries of wood and of stones cries of bricks cries of furniture of beds of chairs of curtains of casseroles of cats and paper cries of smells that claw themselves of smoke that gnaws the neck of cries that boil in the cauldron ...**

Commissioned by the Spanish Republican Government to create a mural for their Pavilion at the Paris World Fair, Picasso began drawings of weeping women that evolved, as Maar's photographs testify, into *Guernica.* (*Guernica,* 1937)Aware that Hitler's and Mussolini's planes had also flown low enough to machine gun women, children and animals, Picasso depicted their mutilated bodies in fragments, their mouths shrieking in pain and the agony of a mother cradling the body of her dead child amidst the burning city and omnipresent bull. Painted in the grays of newspapers that communicated this atrocity served *Guernica* well, postcards of it being sold to buttress the Republican plight. In response to the escalation of violence, Picasso painted a series of weeping Spanish women, looking like Dora Maar, so overwhelmed by their torrent of tears that their eyes seem to pop out of their sockets.

**Nazi Occupation, Resistance and Communism**

With his artwork excoriated from German public collections and branded "entartete kunst" (degenerate art), Picasso was endangered from the moment Nazi soldiers occupied Paris. Initially retreating to Renan, when overrun by Nazis Picasso did not flee like other Modernist "degenerates". Despite immigration offers from Mexico and the United States, he returned to Paris and, unlike other Modernists, refused to collude with Vichy and the Nazis. Although his studio was under constant surveillance by the Gestapo, often searched while Picasso was forbidden to show his work, by no means did this deter him from making art. With whatever scraps of material he could find, feverishly Picasso painted and sculpted symbols of torture, mutilation and death while writing poetry and the play, *Desire Caught by the Tail.* Upon Liberation, Picasso was honoured with a special exhibition at the 1944 Salon d'Automne. With his Spanish friends and family still prisoners of Franco, Picasso joined the French Communist Party and proudly announced why he had done so.

I have become a Communist because the Communists are the bravest in France, in the Soviet Union, as they are in my own country, Spain. I have never felt more complete than since I joined. While I await the time when Spain can take me back again, the French Communist Party is a fatherland to me. In it I find again all my friends ... and so many of the beautiful faces of the insurgents of Paris. I am again among brothers.

***The Charnel House,* *Massacre in Korea* and *Rape of the Sabines***

At the Communist sponsored *Art and Resistance* exhibition, Picasso unveiled *Le Charnier (The Charnel House)* to expose the extent of genocide committed throughout the Second World War and the Spanish Civil War alongside the concealment of slaughtered bodies*.* (*Le Charnier (The Charnel House)* 1944-1946) After creating a dove for the French Communist Party as an international symbol of peace, Picasso was horrified when the Korean War erupted. Although he painted Stalin's portrait in 1953 and two murals on war and peace in 1959, Picasso's *Massacre in Korea* (*Massacre à Korea (Massacre in Korea),* 1951) and *The Rape of the Sabines* were his last artworks produced as "instrument[s] of war for attack and defense against the enemy".

Incensed by reports of American atrocities, particularly the slaughter of 35,000 civilians during the Sinchon Massacre, Picasso depicted pregnant mothers with their children standing by a mass grave and cowering before a firing squad. Like Francisco Goya's *The Third of May,* Picasso draws upon the iconography of *Massacre of the Innocence.* Yet as the bodies of Picasso's soldiers are rigidly phallicized, their huge rifles pointing at their female prey like erect penises, Picasso fuses this iconography with that of *The Rape of the Sabine Women.* Like his series of that name producedat the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis in which he shows women and children ruthlessly trampled, Picasso does not just convey the suffering of the victims. He exposes the hidden atrocity of war – rape - one that he was all too aware had been committed by Franco's Nationalists from the beginning of the "White Terror". Once Georges Bataille likened looking at Picasso's bestial monstrosities to beholding the blinding sun or undergoing sacrifice. In conveying atrocity and bestial monstrosity throughout "the century of violence", Picasso's Modernism was like "an instrument of war" with the force of a blinding sun and the emotive punch of sacrifice.

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**List of works**

Figure 1: Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* Paris, June-July 1907, oil on canvas, 8 ft x 7 ft 8 in (243.9 x 233.7 cm), Museum of Modern Art, New York, 333.1939, acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest; © 2014 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Figure 2: Pablo Picasso, *Ma Jolie,* Paris Winter, 1911-1912. oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 25 3/4 in (100 x 64.5 cm), Museum of Modern Art, New York, 176.1945, acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest; © 2014 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Figure 3: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Sheet Music and Wine Glass,* Paris, November 1912, wallpaper, blue paper, simulated wood graining, newspaper, *Le Journal* and charcoal; McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas: Bequest of Marion Koogler McNay.

Figure 4: Pablo Picasso, *Le Baiser (The Embrace),* Paris, 1925, oil on canvas, 130x97.7 cm., Musée National Picasso; © Succession Picasso 2011.

Figure 5: Pablo Picasso, *La Minotauromachie (Minotauromachy),* 23 March 1935, etching and engraving, plate: 19 1/2 x 27 3/8 in (49.6 x 69.6 cm); sheet (irreg.): 22 5/8 x 29 3/16 in (57.4 x 74.2 cm), Museum of Modern Art, New York, 20.1947; Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund; © 2014 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Figure 6: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica,* 1937, oil on canvas, 349 cm × 776 cm (137.4 × 305.5 in) Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid. <http://www.picassotradicionyvanguardia.com/08R.php> ([archive.org](http://web.archive.org/web/20071010045304/http://www.picassotradicionyvanguardia.com/08R.php))

Figure 7: Pablo Picasso, *Le Charnier (The Charnel House)* 1944-1946, oil on canvas, Musée national d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris.

Figure 8: Pablo Picasso, *Massacre à Korea (Massacre in Korea),* 1951, oil on plywood, 110 cm × 210 cm (43.3 in × 82.7 in), Musée National Picasso; © Succession Picasso 2011.