

# TOTAL WAR: PICASSO



***The destruction wrought by total war is reflected in Picasso's artistic interpretation of the Guernica bombing.***

## Giant, Monstrous Horse Trampling on Dead Soldier

A giant, monstrous horse occupies a large portion of the middle of the painting. Its mouth is open with a bomb-like horn extending out; its four legs stretch out and trample on the ground. Under its hoofs with iron horseshoes, there is a dead soldier; his head, arms and legs have been severed from his trunk by the violent trampling of the horse, while his hand is still holding a broken sword. Mainstream interpretation is that the horse, the same as the other elements in the painting, is a representation of the afflictions of Guernica and is a victim of aerial bombing (Leal n.p.). However, the horse can be interpreted in another way. According to Ian Patterson, author of *Guernica and Total War*, in the 1930s the aerial bombing was a new kind of disaster that descends from above (Patterson 3). The horse's heaviness and its violent force, its iron hoofs falling from above onto the severed body parts of the soldier, are reminiscent of the aerial bombing itself. The bent left arrow over the soldier's body indicates his Republican identity. However, Steer, one of the first journalists to report on Guernica's air raid, comes to the conclusion that this action was not for a military purpose; instead, the main goal for this attack was demoralization (Steel 4). The scene of the horse trampling on the dead Republican soldier is actually a symbol of the demoralizing effect this aerial bombing had on the Republican side— the real intention of this attack. However, supported by scenes of rubble and dead or mutilated women and children, the artist forcefully raises a question: is it sane, or does it even make sense to demoralize an enemy by terrifying them with the brutal massacre of people on their side? In this way, the artist denounces the brutality of war and expresses a call for peace.