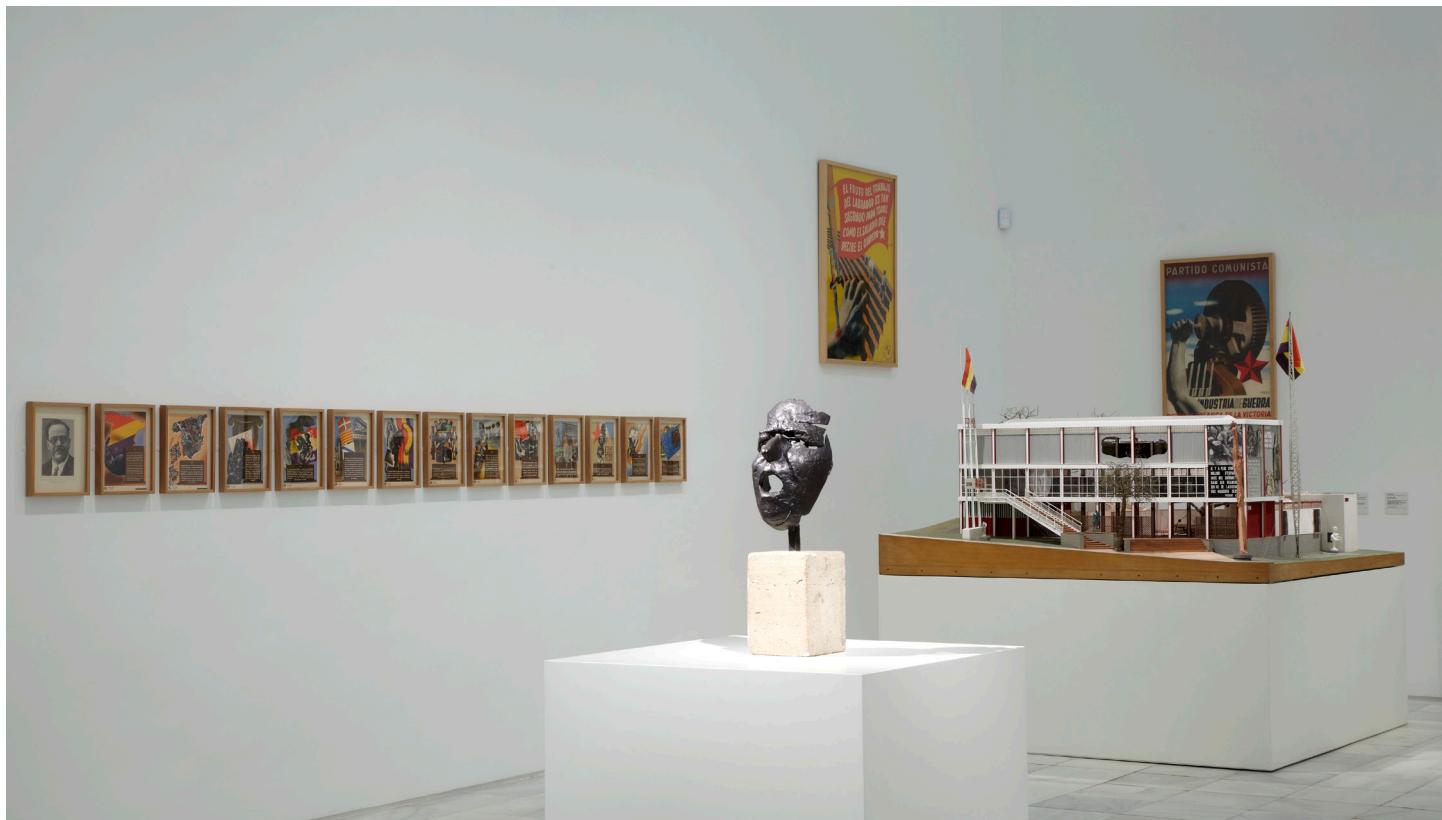


The Pavilion of the Spanish Republic, 1937



The Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 Paris *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* became the Second Republic's most visible and widely publicized announcement of the humanizing role of art against rising violence, both in Spain and the rest of Europe. The design by Josep Lluís Sert and Luis Lacasa stood in direct contrast to the intimidating monumentality of the Soviet and German Pavilions that were staged face-to-face, in direct confrontation, nearby. For Spain and the rest of the world on display at the 1937 Exposition, it was clear that artists played a pivotal role in communicating both long-standing, transcendental ideas about art, culture, and nation as well as the more immediate, and contested ideas of their sponsoring governments.

Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* was the Pavilion's most famous commissioned work, however it was not the only piece to manifest the complexities of balancing experimentation in the arts with political commitment. In addition to prominently showcasing works by artists like Julio González, Alberto Sánchez, Joan Miró, Alexander Calder, and José Gutiérrez Solana, the Pavilion was designed to function as a platform for the complex interweaving of architecture, painting, illustration, photography, propaganda and the popular arts. With the prominent use of photography through the panels designed by Josep Renau, a script was laid from start to finish to guide visitors through a tour of republican Spain that highlighted the positive role of culture, education and popular traditions in countering the devastating effects of the Civil War.

Francisco de Goya (1746-1828)



Among the many artists who served as historical inspiration during the Civil War, none were as influential and relevant as Francisco de Goya. In 1937, his portfolio of engravings *Desastres de la guerra* was reissued and the Comissariat de Propaganda de la Generalitat de Catalunya published Ramón Xuriguera's monograph *Goya, pintor del pueblo*. In July 1938, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London held an exhibition of Goya's drawings and engravings that had great international impact, so much so that the artist's works were reproduced in both the republican press (*El Mono Azul*, *Voz de París*, *ABC*, *Tiempos Nuevos*, *Nosotros*) as well as the insurgent (*Vértice*).

The grotesque vision that Goya brought to his political critique was not lost on artists as a powerful tool for crafting their own views of the present. It was as relevant to Pablo Picasso's interpretation of the genre of history painting in *Guernica* as it was to the works by José Gutiérrez Solana and Antonio Rodríguez Luna that took "España negra" as their theme. These artists, while distinct in their pictorial styles, shared in their admiration of Goya and his ability to shine a dark lens on Spain's complex political and religious traditions.

Pablo Picasso

Guernica (1937)

Pablo Picasso painted *Guernica* at the request of the Republican government for the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition. The work is a testimony and condemnation of the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica's population by the Luftwaffe, who were allied to the rebels, and is considered a fundamental work of 20th Century art, remaining a universal symbol of the fight against oppression.



An icon of the Spanish Civil War, of worldwide anti-war sentiment and of the fight for freedom, *Guernica* is one of the most emblematic images of the contemporary world and the last great painting of history of the European tradition. Converted into a universal symbol of indiscriminate massacres wherever they occur, it carries an implicit message of resistance to authoritarianism and against the rise of the fascisms in the Europe of that moment, which it conveys through an iconography whose meaning has been the subject of polemic for years. At the same time it vindicates, from the spirit of modernity, the intent of the avant-garde to take on a political function and to establish a direct dialogue with the viewer, who is seduced with a spectacle of death and tragedy.

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) painted *Guernica* as his contribution to the Spanish Pavilion in the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* of Paris, in 1937. The Spanish government, straying from the announced theme, wanted to use the Pavilion as an instrument of political propaganda that reflected the drama being lived in the country, in full Civil War after the insurrection of the army against the Government of the Second Republic. The Spanish participation in the Expo thus became an opportunity to broadcast news of this conflict, in a search for international aid. To do so, they relied on some of the most important artists and intellectuals of the country, such as Joan Miró (1893-1983), Julio González (1876 -1942) and Picasso himself, who after receiving the commission, spent the following months indecisive and without painting anything, with a single idea as the subject of the work: *The Studio*, an allegory of painting represented by the painter and the model.

April 26, 1937. On that day, planes of the Condor Legion of the German air force, in aid of the rebel troops beneath the command of General Franco, launched incendiary bombs

against Guernica, a key city in the Basque political tradition. Some foreign press correspondents covering the happenings on the northern front of the war were in Bilbao. The very day of the bombing, they moved to Guernica, gathering the images and testimonies which would reach the international press the following day and affect the entire world. The news of the attack on a non-military enclave with a civil population made up principally of women and children spread throughout Europe, causing the traditional manifestation on May 1 in defense of labor to become a show of solidarity and aid for Spain. His search for a subject had ended. That same day, Picasso made the first notes of what would be the great mural (3.50 m x 7.87 m) taking as his inspiration the destruction caused by the bombing of the city. The drawings and preparatory works made before and during the conception of *Guernica* revealed the original plan and the phases of execution of the work, offering precision and shades of nuance to its meaning, and functioning together as a modern altarpiece. The process of creation, which lasted approximately one month, was photographed by Picasso's companion at the time, Dora Maar (1907-1997), becoming one of the best-documented examples of the progress of a work in all of art history.

Guernica summed up the innovations in Picasso's artistic language realized over the previous thirty years, already present in *Sueño y mentira de Franco* (The Dream and Lie of Franco), 1937, and which defi-

ned his later work. It wasn't necessary to invent anything new. The Picasso-esque style, synthesis of post-Cubist deformation and Surrealist symbolism, proved the most adequate to depict the death and suffering. The languages of the avant-garde superimposed themselves, in a natural way, over a classic composition with a pyramid structure and symmetric organization, recovering the spirit of the Spanish Baroque with its tragic excess and its fascination for pain. The choice of black and white eliminated any anecdotic or hedonistic intention, converting the *Grisaille* into the most-accurate means of expression. Under the influence of tradition and of the great masters, Picasso portrayed the terrible consequences of the war in the light of the electric light bulb, a symbol of technical progress being honored at the Paris exhibit, which replaced the traditional candle as a *vanitas* in a modern key.

The stillness of the composition, photographically frozen image, was a substantial element that converted the mural in a *tableau vivant*. A theatrical stage by means of ephemeral decoration, in which the great drama of the Spanish Civil War was staged with a magisterial command of the theatrical effects of the Picasso who was a decorator of the Russian ballets. To do so he recovered the ritual of death and passion of the mythic bullring, in which the protagonists, the women, the bull, and the horse, take on the quality of what is perhaps the most extreme expression of pain of all of the history of art. Those women, embodied in Dora Maar, will be the fundamental subject of his later works, the "Postscripts", in which shouts and the suffering are expressed through open mouths, tongues like fists, and eyes transformed into needles, ships, or fountains which overflow with tears.

After the closing of the exhibit, an itinerary of the work was scheduled in different European countries and cities of the United States with the goal of raising funds for the Republican cause and the Spanish refugees. The political situation in Spain and the outbreak of the Second World War forced Picasso in 1939 to name the MoMA as depository of the work until, as he stated at the time, the legitimate government of the

Spanish Republic was restored. Before his death and after noting the first indications of political change, the artist changed the clause which granted custody to the museum, expressing his desire that *Guernica* be returned to the Spanish state when it recovered democratic liberty.

With the death of Franco, the paperwork was set in motion for the return of the painting after forty years of exile from a country in which it had never been. *Guernica* and the legacy which accompanies it finally arrived in Spain in 1981, becoming a major symbol of the end of the transition and the national reconciliation, and was assigned to the Reina Sofia Museum in 1992.

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