

## **LESSON ON GUERNICA**

BY ROCÍO ROBLES TARDÍO

The time has come for Pedro Paricio to work with Pablo Picasso. He is ready to deconstruct a composition of figures and elements that are fragmented both metaphorically and in terms of form.

Paricio uses his characteristic colour palette to proclaim *Guernica*'s presence boldly. This series, which he started in 2017, represents something more substantial than the planned and spontaneous artistic dialogues that emerged around the world in the year that marked the eightieth anniversary of the painting and of the bombardment of the Basque city of Gernika. Paricio has completed an undertaking and entered into a dialogue with Picasso – and with *Guernica* in particular.

By contemplating the works in the series and listening to the artist's words, we can picture his studio as the scene of a continuous iterative encounter, like that between Oedipus and the Sphinx, throughout the creative process. But who's who on this stage? On the one hand, there is *Guernica* – the allegory that contains the answer to the work's riddle – and, on the other, Paricio's contribution to the history of art, a constant feature in his work. His process of discovery through questioning conversation dissects the composition to find answers. One voice, four legs, two legs ... we sense that the artist himself is the key to solving this mystery.

From the time Picasso's *Guernica* was first shown to the public at the 1937 International Exhibition in Paris, it was clear that, as well as being a work of art, it was undisputedly useful and indeed valuable as a symbol for absolute change. From that moment, ownership of its image has extended far beyond the people of Spain, to whom Picasso dedicated the work.

In September 1981, following prolonged diplomatic discussions, *Guernica* and the series of drawings and canvasses by Picasso that he viewed as an indivisible unit left the Museum of Modern Art in New York and arrived in Madrid on their way to the Casón del Buen Retiro. It was in this context that another artist by the name of Antonio Saura (1930–1998) shared his feelings and views on the return of the painting. His article, 'Requiem for *Guernica*', was to some extent a preview of his invective published shortly afterwards in 'Contra el *Guernica*. Libelo' (1982). 'I loathe *Guernica* because it's a big poster, and like every vulgar poster the image can be copied many and infinite times', he wrote at the start of the text. Copying and reproducing the iconic painting by Picasso was nothing new in the Spain of 1981. The image of *Guernica* was used in the private realm in a wide range of media (postcards, posters, plaques and textiles) and was visible in public spaces (murals, graffiti, stickers and posters). It expressed the desire (and urgent need) for democracy and protested against some of the measures taken against the populace in the years following the end of Franco's dictatorship.



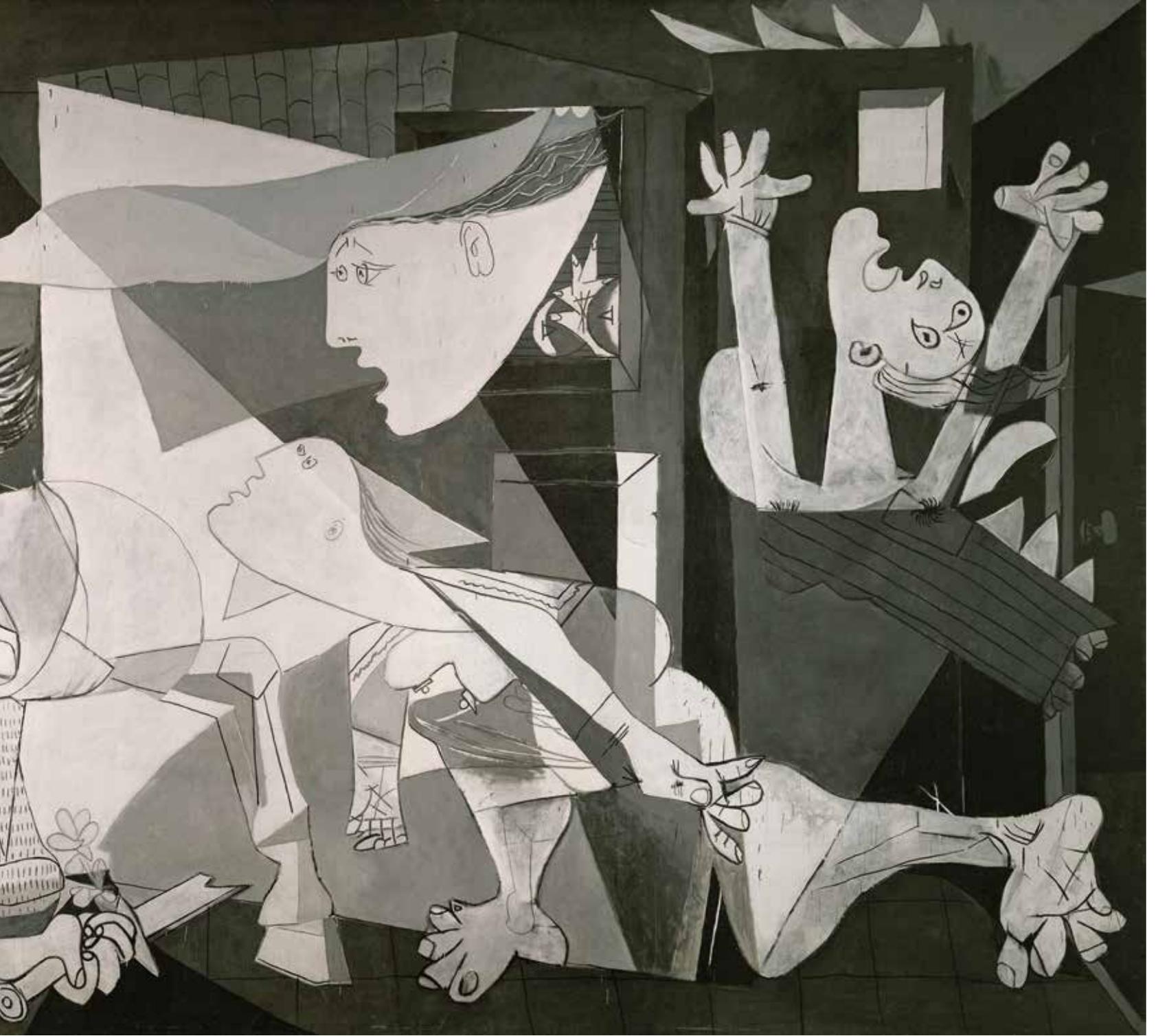
Pablo Picasso

*Guernica*, 1937

Oil on canvas

349.3 × 776.6 cm

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid



In his article Saura highlighted the dangers resulting from loss of meaning and the consequences of the symbolic and actual displacement of a work of art when it becomes a mere image. However, the history, biography and contemporary nature of the painting show us the dual and inseparable nature of *Guernica* and its ability to avoid both consequences. Whereas Saura's statement was a warning about shared spaces in which a painting and its image risk losing their power, Paricio with his 'Guernica '37' series has confronted these common assumptions and overcome them by allowing the characteristic technical and expressive resources in his painting to speak for themselves. With these techniques – or 'colour rap', as it has become known – Paricio has shown that it is possible to create posters, graffiti and postcards from *Guernica* and that they are valid vehicles in visual art for representing all kinds of struggles.

Paricio has used *Guernica* as a basis for overcoming the effect of its public exposure in order to show through his paintings the symbolic power and endless capacity of Picasso's canvas to inform the creation of art ... precisely because new versions of it are constantly being created. *Guernica* belongs to everyone; it is an active force.

Saura wrote, 'I loathe *Guernica* because it was painted in black and white only but now appears in many colours'. While it is important to bear in mind the political, cultural and social context of his words, the literal realisation of Saura's dislike is manifested in the visual confrontation that Paricio has set up with *Guernica*. However, he has resolved the conflict by focusing on aesthetics and the technical aspects of painting, using the same medium and process he has employed in many works in recent years. In this way, the iconographies and artistic solutions that are the hallmarks of Paricio's work coexist with those of Picasso. They are evident in his interpretation of the soldier in *Man from Guernica* (2018); the arms that caught his attention are presented beneath a symbol he has used in previous works, for example, *The Shaman* (2013) and *In the Maze* (2014).

Now that the series has been created, it would be interesting to know what questions Paricio asked and what he learned from the *Guernica*-Sphinx after coming to an understanding of its duality. Paricio's starting point is the image. He interprets the painting as a stage onto which a series of significant figures have been called. From that point, his work with the enormous 1937 canvas is based on disassociation as he separates the figures from the background and from any relationship that they might have with other figures in the painting. In so doing, Paricio puts to the test the *concinntas* or harmony between the seven figures arranged on this stage (bull, horse, woman with child in her arms, soldier, woman walking, woman carrying a lamp and woman in flames) and questions how the figures use the space for the action in the painting.

At the same time, he examines the compositional, symbolic and iconographic independence of each of these figures, which are valid in their own right and are given their own meaning – whatever they refer to – rather than deferring to the huge amount of literature generated by the interpretation of the painting. Paricio's works show that he has recognised the independence of each symbol on the canvas. By completely splitting

them up, he has isolated them spatially to draw even more attention to the synecdoche (a figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole or vice versa) that the use of *Guernica* as an image represents: *Girl from Guernica* (2018), *Bull from Guernica* (2018), *Horse from Guernica* (2017), *Madonna from Guernica* (2018).

Paricio transforms *Guernica* – the work and the image – into a kaleidoscope of colour; he separates figures and places them in suspended space; he strips them of characteristic qualities and adds hints of Francis Bacon – another recognised feature of his painting. We see the woman, the bull and the horse each arranged in their own ring in their own space, where the artist has presented his own list of questions, both real and symbolic.

The *Guernica* phenomena of deconstruction and synecdoche appeared very early on. When the painting was exhibited as part of the show *Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Laurens* at the Liljevalchs Konsthall in Stockholm in spring 1938, a cartoonist extracted the most recognisable elements from the painting to create a graphic and comic account of his visit to the exhibition. From that moment onwards, and throughout the century, the canvas was enumerated as a list – the horse in *Guernica*, the soldier in *Guernica*, the woman with the lamp in *Guernica* – a tragic division insofar as it referred to the reasons and circumstances that led to its creation in 1937, the Spanish Civil War.

While it is true that Paricio also triggers the symbolic value of the canvas by telling the story of the painting itself, his intention is to highlight the questions he directs at *Guernica*-Sphinx. And it is impossible to ignore the fact that his cast of characters and image-types (woman, horse, soldier, and so on) also includes *Artist from Guernica* (2018) – a figure weighed down, yet suspended in the tragedy of a steep fall into the abyss – which may well represent and encapsulate the confrontation now taking place between Paricio and Picasso. The initial suspicions are therefore confirmed: the answer to the riddle is ‘the artist’; and Paricio’s works endorse the idea of *Guernica* as an academy of modern art.

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