

April 5 - September 4, 2017

repellent? How does an artist represent it without falling under its spell? What is involved – psychologically, aesthetically – in giving Terror public form?

The exhibition begins in 1924–25, when Picasso gives a resplendent (but also valedictory) form to his Cubist vision of the room in a series of monumental still lifes. It moves on to the period inaugurated by *The Three Dancers* of 1925, in which an imagery of terror and disfigurement comes to dominate Picasso’s art. As the 1920s proceed, the wild faces and phantoms that haunt Picasso’s interiors become more massive and self-sufficient, finally stepping out into outdoor space. A room called “Monsters and Monuments” gathers together some of the most imposing

– and puzzling – of these new pictures and sculptures of the body. Another gallery assembles many of the visions of horror and mutilation that cluster in the dark (Hitlerian) year of 1934. Then come rooms centering on *Guernica* itself, and the studies of female terror and grief leading up to it – as well as on the Weeping Women done in *Guernica’s* wake. Three final galleries present aspects of *Guernica’s* afterlife in Picasso’s work. The Weeping Women transmute into tragic, often agonized, portraits of Dora Maar. The shattered statue on the ground in *Guernica* lives on in the skulls that populate the grisly still life paintings Picasso did throughout World War II. And in his *Woman Doing Her Hair* of 1940 he reaches back towards true tragic anguish, as Hitler’s armies move closer to Paris.

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From 10:00 a.m. to 2:15 p.m.  
the whole Museum is open,  
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are open Collection 1  
and one temporary exhibition  
(check website)

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Exhibition rooms in all venues  
will be cleared 15 minutes before  
closing time

### Gallery Conversations

A propósito de...  
*Pity and Terror: Picasso's Path  
to Guernica*  
By the Mediation Staff  
Fridays at 11.30 a.m.

Education program developed  
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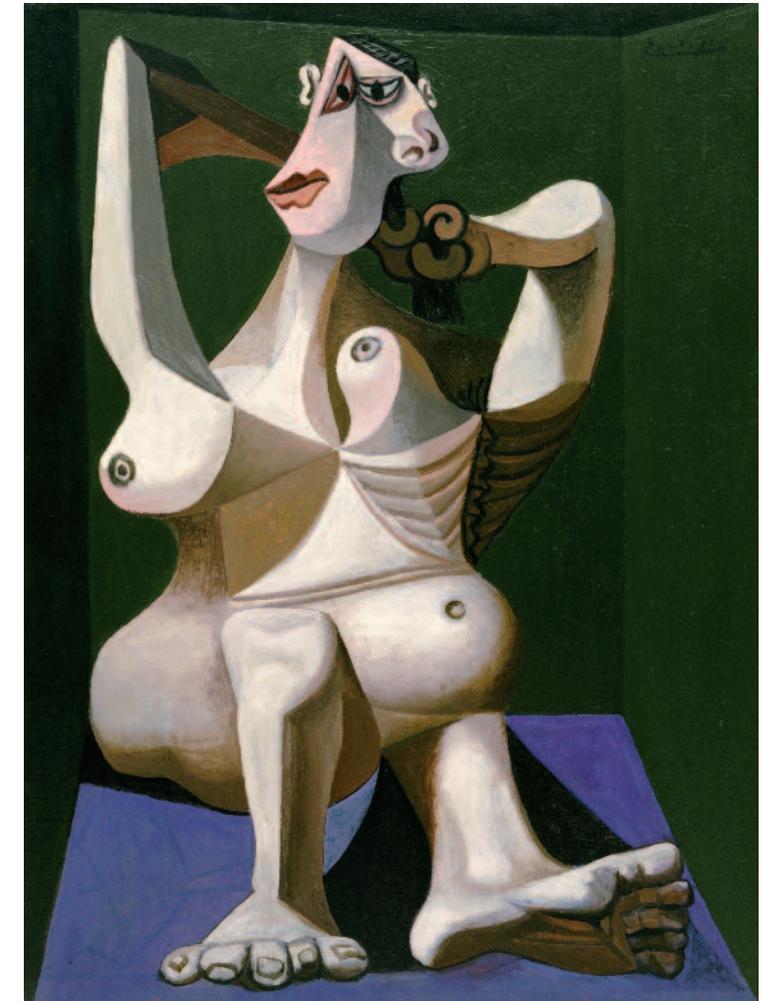


**Exhibition** April 5 - September 4, 2017

Sabatini Building, Floor 2

# Pity and Terror

## Picasso's Path to *Guernica*



NIPD: 0336-17-004-X D.L.: M-9127-2017

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The exhibition *Pity and Terror: Picasso's Path to Guernica*, commemorating the eightieth anniversary of *Guernica's* first showing, has the great mural at its heart. It looks again at Picasso's imagining of modern warfare – war from the air, death from a distance, aimed at the destruction of whole populations – and the special kinds of agony, bewilderment, and terror such warfare brings with it. In particular, the exhibition focuses on the roots of *Guernica's* imagery in Picasso's previous exploration, during the years following 1925, of scenes of frenzied or ecstatic human action, often tinged with menace and sometimes tipping over into outright violence: wild dancing, ominous confrontation between artist and model, monstrous sexual grappings on the beach, women wedged in armchairs with their mouths open in a scream or a predatory roar.



Picasso occasionally commented on this kind of subject matter. He said that the armchair in his paintings of the nude was death lying in wait for beauty; and once, talking about the sadness and anxiety haunting his paintings of Dora Maar, he blurted out that “woman is a machine for suffering.” This last statement could be interpreted as compassionate, or clinical, or even gloating. In *Guernica*, we believe compassion rules. And it is notable that in *Guernica* violence is not made part of an eroticized dance, in which aggression and submission are fused with desirability. Yet in Picasso's work as a whole that fusion often takes place. This exhibition explores the deep ambivalences of Picasso's treatment of violence and sexuality—how his art brings them together in both tender and lacerating ways.

*Guernica* is a painting of an interior world collapsing. A room is being torn apart by a bomb. This is a new and profoundly difficult subject for Picasso to handle. From the beginning Picasso's world in painting had been premised on the containing and sheltering space of the room: it had depended on, and celebrated, a proximity guaranteed by four walls. Yet his art had also been marked, notoriously, by a feeling for everything in modernity that put such familiar room-space at risk. A second strand of the exhibition explores Picasso's new treatment of the interior after 1925: the way the space of the room or studio is more and more invaded by broken or dismembered bodies, with the outside world pressing in through the window. The room becomes populated by monsters or phantoms. And eventually, in and around 1930, Picasso's creatures escape from the

*Les trois danseuses* (The Three Dancers), 1925  
Tate: Purchased with a special Grant in Aid and the Florence Fox Bequest with assistance from the Friends of the Tate Gallery and the Contemporary Art Society 1965  
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room, and begin to take a stand, to show themselves in open, maybe even public, space. Monsters become monuments, often looking as if they are made of stone. Monstrosity in Picasso is not simply a negative; it could as well be a new form of giant vitality and self-recognition, or a rueful admission of human imperfection. There would have been no *Guernica*, the exhibition argues – no final staging of tragedy on a vast scale, with pity the dominant note – had Picasso not previously been drawn, obsessively, to these strange situations of humanity *in extremis*.

When in early 1937 Picasso was asked to produce a painting for the Spanish Pavilion, he told the Republic's delegates that he was not sure he could do the kind of picture they wanted. The world of his art had been till then essentially intimate and personal; he had almost never spoken to the public realm, still less to political events; since 1925 his art had often steered close, claustrophobically, to nightmare or monstrosity. Yet the painting he eventually did for the Republic spoke eloquently to the new realities of war. And the scene of suffering and disorientation he showed us has lived on, as an emblem of the modern condition, for eight decades. *Guernica* has become our culture's tragic scene.

The writer Michel Leiris said of *Guernica* that in it the world had been “Transformed into a furnished room, where all of us, gesticulating, wait for death”. Since 1937, generations of viewers across the globe have found the painting's image of terror indispensable – maybe even cathartic. This exhibition explores its importance as an image, and asks why it has assumed such a



Mother with Dead Child on Ladder (I). Sketch for *Guernica*, 1937  
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia  
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role. It is clear that *Guernica's* epic, compassionate treatment of violence is different – grander, more humane – than the dangerous fascination with the subject that had characterized much of Picasso's work during the late 1920s and early 1930s. But would *Guernica* have been possible without that previous fixation? Isn't violence very often “fascinating” as well as