**Picasso Guernica, discussing the roles, functions and meaning a piece of art can have**

**Introduction**

Guernica is oil on canvas painting measuring 349cm X 776cm (The Open University, 2013). The painting presents a powerful antiwar statement in modern day art. For Picasso, the painting followed a decade of turmoil in his personal life and disappointment with his work. In addition, the painting draws from the politics of Picasso’s indigenous motherland. During the time of the painting, Spain was ravaging in atrocious civil war with the newly elected government being subject to attack from a fascist coup. The new government supporters, Republican forces are loyal to the new government and Generalissimo Francisco Franco. According to Franco, his promises for Spain were prosperity and stability only to deliver death and destruction. Commissioned to paint for the World Fair or exposition in Paris in 1937, Picasso decides not to paint a visual protest against Franco’s treachery but usually avoids politics and refrains from obviously biased art. The official theme for the exposition was celebration of modern technology and with Aeronautics Pavilion that featured latest technological advances. The painting clearly revealed Germans name Picasso’s connection with his homeland Spain as it after small town in Northern Spain that was target of terror bombing during the Spanish Civil War.

**Meaning of Guernica Painting**

Since inception, Picasso’s focus deviates away from politics and chooses to represent the horror of Guernica in realist terms. The painting is characterized by key figures including an agonized horse, a calm bull, and a woman with outstretched arms. The painting also represents the horrors of the war and the inhumane technology use. In reality, Guernica is an indication of the terror to be experienced in the 21st century.

From the spectators’ background, the painting focuses on explaining the events of April 27, 1937 when a civilian population has unparalleled mayhem carried out against them (The Open University Module, 2013, pp. 44-46). The perpetrators of these atrocities were German air force in favor of Fascist forces under the leadership of Franco on Guernica village in Basque located in Spain’s North. This massive bombing was unexpected, for the town people who were noncombatant did not reiterate, and only fled their crumbling buildings in a town that remained under fire for three days amounting to six hundred dead or wounded. Prior to the bombing attack, Guernica was a cultural and religious centre that symbolized Basque identity and without any strategic value as a military target. The main aim of the attack was to terrorize the population while breaking the Basque opposing spirit and put them in shock and awe then into submission.

**Role of the picture**

In the Guernica painting, several victims of the bombing are visible with some alive and others dead. In the forefront, is a corpse framed by living victims visibly wailing in agony. To the left of the picture, a mother is grabbing a baby who must have died during the bombing. From the painting, animal and humans are on equal footing this could be illustration of concurrent dehumanization and brutalization of humans and animals during wartime. The painting illustrates that in the face of war, fear and death, animals and human face animalistic reaction. The bull, the horse and the man with a sword fit well within the traditional setting of bullfighting in Spain. However, in Guernica, the bull remains standing and peaceful, and the matador lay down dead and his spear broken.

**Function and interpretation of Guernica**

The Open University Module (2013, pp. 15-17) reveals that the analysis of any form involves concentration on use of color, medium, and arrangement of the composition techniques. In Guernica, uses a narrow Palette of colors as it uses grey, black and white. The purpose of using these colors is to capture the attention of the world to the bombing of Basque town of Guernica. The black color emphasizes death, pain, confusion, and fear as humans and animals ran away from unexpected danger to save their lives. Black color used in the background also enhances the situation surrounding this people immediately after the bombing. White color used on human and animal images and emphasizes their reactions amidst dehumanizing and demoralizing conditions. For instance, the wounded horse is chaotic, the woman on the left is uncontrollable at the loss of her child, while the women on the right raises her hands as her house burns behind her. given the religious nature of Guernica town, this woman could be crying out to heavens. These contrasting colors bring out the aspect of tension and assist the spectators to draw their attention to important areas (The Open University Module, 2013, p. 16). In the Guernica, much contrast is on the left part of the image where there is more dark color compared to the middle of the painting, which is lighter given the presence of a hand of a woman looking through a window holding a lamp (The Open University Module, 2013, p. 19).

Composition in the Guernica is evident in the representation of depth through overlapping and single point perspective. From the painting, there is decreasing size of figures on the left of the painting as evident in the women and the bull. In the picture, the matador lay down dead and his body overlaps with the horse. Additionally, for the woman on the right only half of her body visible as the other is overlapped in part by her burning house and this creates an illustrates the presence of depth (The Open University Module, 2013, p. 22).

The medium used in the Guernica is oil on canvas. According to The Open University Module (2013, p. 28), oil paint was chosen for numerous reasons including the need for a glossy finish unlike a matte finish, ease of blending to offer soft, seamless shadows, and flexibility. Oil paint offers flexibility needed for thick-textured brushstrokes and thin fine details. Consequently, the painter can make translucent pigments where thin glazes are used for texture depiction like on the bull’s body.

**Conclusion**

The Guernica painting effectively uses different aspects of art like composition, color, and medium to bring out the tension on a bombing attack scene in Basque, Spain. This makes it possible to interpret the meaning of the painting.

# Bibliography

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