

Exhibition: **Crónica del Guernica**
Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, IVAM
27th July – 24th September 2006

Organised by: **Institut Valencià d'Art Modern**

Curator: Fernando Castro

Crónica de Guernica, which can be seen at the IVAM until 24th September next, is an exhibition intended as a reminder of the series on Equipo Crónica's series *Guernica* in the context of the reflections made about Picasso's work on the 25th anniversary of its arrival in Spain. There is a great historic distance and many stylistic differences between Picasso's heroic avant-garde and Equipo Crónica's critical Pop art but what can be found in both is the need to carry out a creative project that involves a moral stance. From drama to humour and from violence to the policy of repression, *Guernica* and Equipo Crónica blended together in a series of really *historic* paintings. Their presentation at the IVAM is therefore a crucial event that strives to arouse the critical potential of memory.

The exhibition comprises works belonging to the collection of the IVAM, the Diputación de Valencia, the contemporary art collection of Fundació La Caixa and a private collection in Madrid.

The catalogue of the exhibition reproduces the works displayed and contains texts by Consuelo Císcar, Fernando Castro and Julio César Abad Vidal.

Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* returned to Spain in 1981 after long-drawn-out negotiations. "This is the last exile returning to Spain today," said Íñigo Cavero on 10th September 25 years ago. For her part, La Pasionaria, standing in front of the painting in the Casón del Buen Retiro, pronounced the following conclusive statement: "The Civil War is over". This impressive painting, inspired by the bombing of Guernica by German and Italian planes on 26th April 1937, is without a doubt the most famous icon of modern times.

On 11th July, one day before the official inauguration of the Spanish pavilion designed by Josep Lluís Sert for the World Fair in Paris in 1937, Max Aub made a speech to the workers that had built it, and said, among other things, "At the entrance on the left, the large painting by Picasso stands out. People will be talking about it for a long time". Indeed this work, where there is a mixture of the iconography of martyrdom on the cross and bullfighting and an obsession with the Minotaur, has been the recipient of all sorts of comments. Baziotès said that Picasso had uncovered a feverishness of death and beauty inside himself and had had the courage to paint it. Whereas Rothko felt it was the first step towards the "doors of hell", Pollock, steeped in alcohol, cried out: "There's only me and Picasso; the rest of you are nothing but whores!" The rage, despair and protest in this work have been transformed into glacial Art History.

It is still an arena for forceful statements, such as the one pronounced on 3rd November 1998 by Kofi Annan as he stood before the tapestry of *Guernica* in the United Nations building, "The world has changed a great deal since Picasso painted that first political masterpiece, but it has not necessarily got any more peaceful. We are approaching the end of a troubled century that has seen the best and the worst sides of human behaviour."

In 1968 Florentino Pérez Embid, Fine Arts Director during Franco's regime, persuaded Carrero Blanco to change the image of the recently

planned Museo de Arte Contemporáneo that was to be built in the Ciudad Universitaria in Madrid. His idea was for *Guernica* to be the pivotal painting in this museum and to this end this personage asked Franco's permission to enter into negotiations with Picasso in order to bring the painting to Spain. The proposal was, of course, quite preposterous. At a press lunch held in Paris in October 1969, Pérez Embid announced, "General Franco believes that Madrid is the place for *Guernica*, Picasso's masterpiece." In the ultra-right-wing newspaper *El Alcázar*, excerpts of Embid's statement were printed beside a picture of the painting: "*Guernica* (donated to the Spanish people by Picasso) forms part of this people's cultural heritage and should be exhibited in Spain as a token of the end of the strife and conflict arising from the last Civil War." It is extremely ironic that the first official reproduction of *Guernica* to appear in the Spanish press was in *El Alcázar*, but it was no less disconcerting to try to discover what it was that the regime really wanted to achieve. It was perhaps this perplexing "politico-cultural" episode that gave rise to Equipo Crónica's splendid series on *Guernica*.

In his book *Guernica. La historia de un icono del arte del siglo XX* (Ed. Debate, Barcelona 2005), Gijs van Hensbergen speaks of the importance enjoyed by Equipo Crónica's *parodical version* of Picasso's famous painting in the late sixties. "In December 1969, at Galería Grises in Bilbao, Equipo Crónica, an artistic group based in Valencia, displayed their series entitled *Guernica*. The leaders of the group, Rafael Solbes and Manolo Valdés, inspired by American and British Pop art, gave their paintings a prodigious touch that today makes us think of the ironic remark made by the late Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, 'Life was better *against* Franco!'"

Of the *Guernica* series, only one painting, *La visita* (The Visit) received international attention and recognition. The life's work of these artists had revolved around a rereading of the classics of Spanish art and the three

images about *Guernica* were an efficacious and incendiary criticism of Franco's regime. First we have *El banquete* (The Banquet), a remake of Zurbarán's masterpiece *San Hugo en el refectorio de los cartujos* (Saint Hugo in the Carthusian Refectory), where the *Guerrero del Antifaz* appears banging the table impatiently to claim his share. But this time the monks are not served bread and wine, but flesh from *Guernica*, Picasso's decapitated head, a crudely fashioned foot and a baby that looks like a rag doll. Then there is *El intruso* (The Intruder), where once again the *Guerrero del Antifaz* bursts into Picasso's original painting to destroy everything in it. But the most disturbing work of all is *La visita*, where we can see *Guernica* hanging in an aseptic gallery reminiscent of El Prado Museum. In the distance, the skylight reveals a glimpse of a typical comic-strip version of a sunny Madrid sky with a few clouds scattered about. Underneath, at the threshold of the colossal doorway, stand the grey little men that represent the army, the navy, the powers-that-be and the institutions, and on the right hand side the protagonists of *Guernica* jump off the canvas in a desperate attempt to escape."