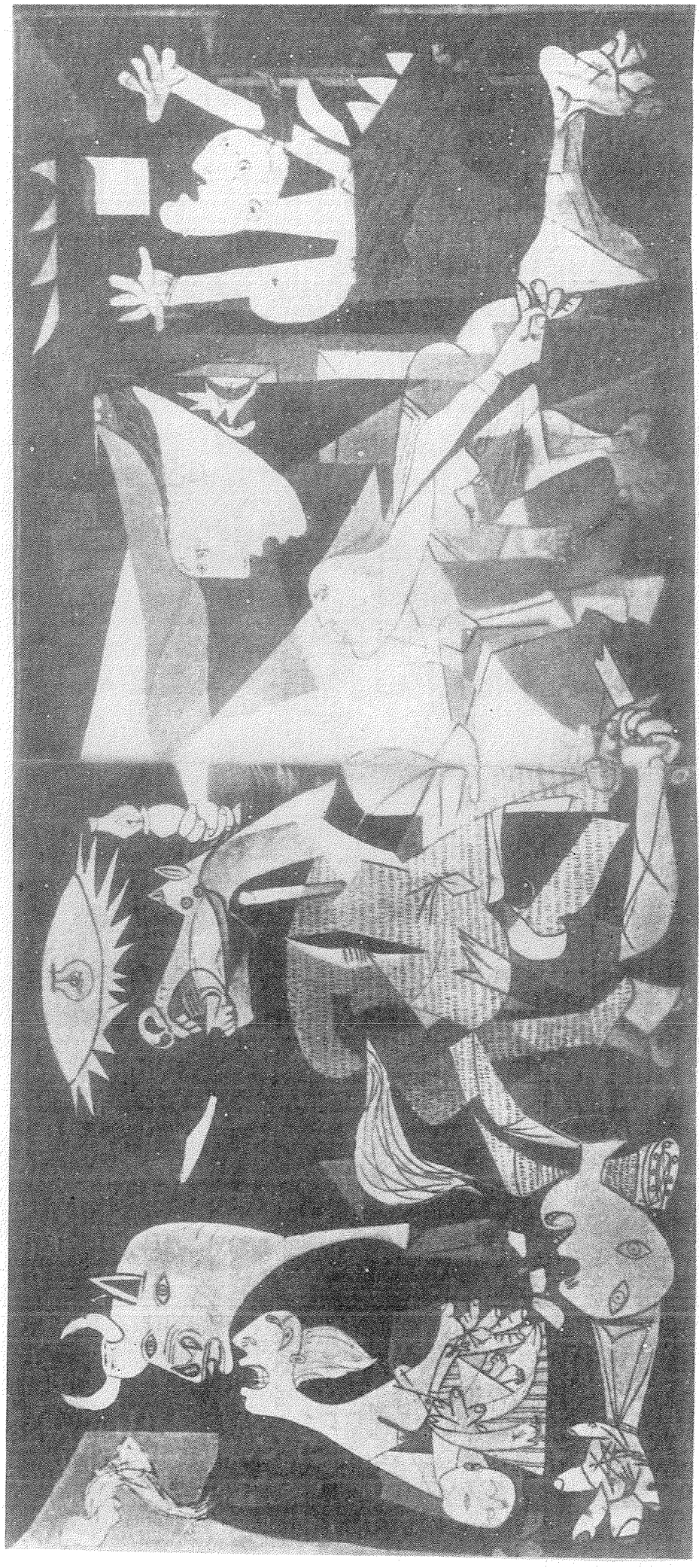


Frontispiece: Pablo Picasso,

Guernica, May-early June 1937.

Oil on canvas. 11'5 1/2" x

25' 5 3/4".

# PICASSO'S GUERNICA

On 27 April 1937 German bombers flying for Franco attacked the town of Guernica.[1] This attack was the first 'saturation bombing' in military history: this Basque city was a market-town, not an industrial or military center; its value lay in its rich history, not in its productive potential. The civilian population of Guernica was intensively and ruthlessly bombed, in an attack that was directed against the very spirit of the Spanish people.

At this moment in history, Pablo Picasso, a native Spaniard, was living in France. From the beginning, his sympathy had rested with the Spanish Republic ---now in exile. He had already expressed his extreme contempt for the Spanish dictator in a series of engravings which he had begun in January of 1937, entitled Dream and Lie of Franco.

In January of 1937 Picasso had been commissioned by the Spanish Government in Exile to paint a mural for the pavilion it was planning for the International Exposition to be held in Paris that summer. As far as we know, he had not yet begun to work on this project when news of the bombing of Guernica broke.

Picasso's reaction to this catastrophe was a flurry of artistic activity. On 1 May he did several preliminary

sketches; and by 11 May he began work on the enormous canvas itself. Two factors make this canvas particularly inviting for study in depth: first, Picasso did a large number of studies throughout the entire time he was at work on the painting; and second, there is a series of seven photographs of the mural ---each recording a different stage in its evolution--- that were taken by Dora Maar.

Although the picture does for these reasons lend itself to very deep speculation about Picasso's meanings and intentions, it at the same time makes a powerful statement that is virtually immediately comprehensible to all who see it. Picasso was very interested that his meaning be understood ---perhaps because he felt so strongly about it. He went so far as to disregard his normal policy of leaving his works untitled in order that there could be no doubt as to what the mural was about:

> In the painting on which I am now at work, which I shall call Guernica--- and in all my recent works--- I am very clearly expressing my horror at the military caste which has plunged Spain into a sea of suffering and death.[2]

To anyone even slightly familiar with the mural's history, perhaps the most striking feature of Guernica is that it contains virtually no references to catastrophe which occasioned its production. There are no airplanes

or bombs in Guernica; there certainly is destruction, but no destroyer is obviously present. If the figures in the painting represent particular political factions, as many have claimed, this fact is not one that readily impresses itself upon the consciousness of the observer. The most striking incongruity, however, is that Picasso chose for his mural the darkness of night, when the bombing of Guernica took place on a sunny afternoon. These problems can lead to only one conclusion: Picasso, in Guernica, was dealing with something that transcends ~~the~~ any particular event. The bombing of Guernica merely triggered the painting of the mural; like the painting itself, the historic event was for Picasso only symbolic of the larger issue. To understand this larger issue, it is best to begin by examining the symbolism of the picture itself. No work of art could have the powerful effect that Guernica has if its meaning were deeply concealed and difficult to discover. On one level the symbolism of Guernica is quite simple and straight-forward, and it would be a real mistake not to exam its meaning on this level.

Guernica was painted completely in black, white, and several intermediate shades of gray. This results in an almost painfull clarity, for without the subtle medmations which are achieved through the use of color the forms stand in sharp, bold relations to one another. It is the blacks and sombre grayes, however, which predominate ---giving the entire composition the feeling of being shrouded in the

darkness of night. Yet, as has already been noted, the bombing of Guernica took place on a sunny spring afternoon. Thus this darkness is not that of night, but rather it is that dark dispair and gloom into which the world was being immersed by the forces of war and destruction. Freed from any particular reference, the darkness of Guernica takes on all the associations that the mind tends to make with it: it becomes a symbol of unknown terror and hopelessness. On the contrary, light ---particularly that cast by the kerosene lamp in the hand of the women who looks in through the window--- tries to dispell this darkness, along with the associated fear and dispair. In the mural darkness clearly has the upper hand, but there is still at least this one becon of hope shedding some light into the world of darkness.

Two of the most prominent figures in Guernica are not human: they are a wounded horse, which occupies a critically important position in the center of the composition, and huge bull that stands at the left of the mural. The horse takes on a particular importance, even if only by virtue of its size and central position. Its flank bears a large triangular wound, and there is a lance buried deep in its side. (Here, by the way, is the only reference to an attack from the air, for the lance seemes to have been hurled down upon the horse from above.) The horse writhes in agony, its head wrenched around high over its back, and its mouth is torn open by a cry of pain. The horse must be viewed

as the victim of the unseen aggressor. The bull presents a somewhat more difficult problem in interpretation. It is one of the two figures who is not directly suffering from the destruction which abounds (the women holding the lamp is the other one). Yet unlike the women with the lamp, the bull does not seem to offer any positive prospects. Quite the contrary, its distorted visage, combined with the animal brutality which one tends to associate with this animal, tends to make one feel it is somehow more a part of the world of darkness than that of light. It is not a real aggressor, but it does not appear to be particularly sympathetic to the victims.

The deeper one goes into the meaning of the mural, the more complicated his interpretation of the bull and the horse must become. On this first level of interpretation, however, viewing the horse as chief victim and the bull, while not actually the aggressor, as something fearful seems to be substantiated by a comment by the artist himself: "The bull is not fascism, but it is brutality and darkness ....the horse represents the people."[3] Below there will be occasion to delve deeper into these particular symbols, but for the time being this interpretation arrived at by direct visual analysis will suffice.

Picasso's stylist manner of treating form greatly augments his overall effect. In Guernica he returns to a great extent to his early Cubist treatment of form. He

fragments and distorts form, often breaking it down into flat planes of uniform value. Very characteristically like his Cubist paintings, he sometimes represents objects from different viewpoints simultaneously. In the head of the horse the viewer sees simultaneously both the inside and the outside of its mouth. This makes all the more dramatic the cry of anguish one senses bursting out of that mouth. It is in his distortion of form, however, that Picasso is most successful in intensifying his artistic statement. As Roland Penrose notes, "The distortions are skillfully controlled so as to accentuate gestures and movements which reveal tense emotion."[4] This is crucial, for the remaining figures are, to a large extent, no more than intense, symbolic representations of the emotions and sensations experienced by victims of such a catastrophe.

At the right of the mural there is a woman who, dress ablaze with stylized flames, has just lept from a burning building. The triangular swatch of lighter gray which rapidly diminishes beneath her represents her downward motion and gives a sense of her horrible acceleration toward her doom. Her twisted face, her mouth open in a futile, terrified scream, her eyes frozen wide open in fear--- she is the embodiment of what it means to be falling. Her arms are thrown upwards, figures extended, in the vain attempt to grasp on to something to save her. But there is nothing that can save her; she represents all the unmitigated terror

of a person hurtling to his death.

On the far left is a mother with her dead child. Her bared breasts, once a source of life to the child, hang uselessly above his small, lifeless form. She kneels, holding the child's limp body with her right arm. Her left arm is extended in an almost questioning gesture, and her head is bent far back. Her gaze is heavenward, and one has the distinct feeling that she is looking for some higher power who could explain her misery. But rather than some heavenly being, she finds only the cold, hard, unfeeling visage of the bull, and from her mouth issues an anguished cry. In her one sees crystalized all the agony which accompanies the senseless destruction, and the dispair which comes from the realization that there can be no ultimate justification for the suffering, and the hopelessness of having no one or nothing to which one can turn for consolation. □

Perhaps the most moving figure in Guernica is the woman who comes running into the center of the composition from the right. She is attempting to move toward the kerosene light, that lone beacon of hope; but to get there she must strain against the forces that are trying to crush her. She sags under the weight of the terrible oppression. Her left knee is driven to the ground, and becomes enlarged into a symbol of the subjugation which this oppressive force desires. Yet she manages to resist. Her right leg, one of the most powerful single elements in the mural due to its

strong modelling, supports her and keeps her from succumbing to the crushing forces of oppression. She manages to thrust the upper portions of her body forward into the swath of light the kerosene lamp has cut through the darkness. In an exaggerated curve, her head and neck strain toward the lamp, as her gaze is fixed upon this symbol of hope.

The woman who holds the important lamp looks in upon this scene of destruction from the outside. Her tear-shaped head and overly-long arm accentuate the fact that she is in the act of thrusting these parts of her body through the window. There is an open-mouthed look of surprized disbelief upon her face, as though the horror and destruction she finds were more than she had imaged, and even more than she can comprehend. Yet somehow ---perhaps it is through her concern--- the lamp she is holding becomes the main symbol of hope in the entire painting.

At the base of the mural lies the dismembered remains of a warrior. The warrior's right hand is still tightly grasping a broken sword. It is obvious that this figure must represent the fact that whatever active resistence might have been offered has been completely crushed.

Perhaps the most inexplicable symbol is the circle of light above the horse's head. This seems to be both an electric light and an eye. As a source of light, however, it would seem to have little effect, for what light is cast

upon the scene clearly comes from the kerescene lamp, and not this electric light. On the other hand, if it is an eye ---a symbolic 'observer' of the scene--- it is a cold, unfeeling one, for it shows no possibility for compassion, and, after all, its pupil is merely a light bulb. Somehow one gets the feeling that this is representationally symptomatic of the modern world: the mechanical, impersonal way of doing things turns out not to be the best, or even the most efficient, way of doing things, simply because it is so coldly unconcerned.

This direct visual analysis of the symbols of Guernica provide a basic insight into Picasso's meaning. Within this mural he has presented figures that vividly epitomize the emotions felt by those who, like the people of Guernica, have destruction rain down upon them from some unseen aggressor. It is a stark, painfully perceptive statement about the depths of darkness man is capable of lowering himself to, yet it is not totally devoid of all rays of hope that can come from honest concern. And most important, it has been seen that more than a comment upon a particular historic event, Guernica is a comment on a general state of humanity. It is of the utmost importance to pay strict attention to the fruits of this sort of analysis, for this reveals the direct reaction of the observer to the picture ---and this is the reaction which the artist himself has succeeded in communicating.

On the other hand, it is possible to go much deeper into the meanings embodied in the painting. Picasso himself provided the world with a carefully dated sequence of preparatory drawings and studies for this great mural, and Dora Maar's sequence of photographs are most fascinating. To ignore these rich sources in an examination of Guernica would be almost neglegent. Yet it is very possible to carry such an investigation to an unwarranted extreme. Rudolf Arnheim, in his wonderfully perceptive book, Picasso's Guernica, the Genesis of a Painting, makes some very valuable observations ---based primarily upon these 'secondary' sources of information; yet he goes to an extreme. He wishes to claim that:

> Our enquiry cannot be limited to discovering by indirection what the painter had on his conscious mind.... Deliberate conscious reasoning and decision constitute only small fragments of the total process.... The assertion that the 'artist never thought of this' has no bearing on the validity of the interpretation, since the artist, like any other person, does not know what he thought below the level of awareness....[5]

Try as he does to validate such a view on the grounds of a belief in a Jungian concept of the 'collective unconscious,' there is something that simply cannot be made to

ring true in such an assertion. To attempt to 'psycho-analyze' the symbolism of a work of art to a level that is beyond even the consciousness of the artist himself sounds like an intriguing psychological undertaking ---but it is questionable at best whether such a study would add valid information to the understanding of the artist's artistic statements as works of art!

Thus this paper will attempt to delve more deeply into the meanings of Guernica ---using Picasso's sketches and Dora Maar's photographs--- while always keeping in mind the basic statement that is made by the mural itself. Perhaps by maintaining the primacy of the basic meaning as derived from direct visual analysis, a profitable use can be made of the 'secondary sources' without falling into the same difficulties as did Arnheim and several others.

In any visual analysis of Guernica the horse, the bull, and the woman holding the lamp occupy positions of primary importance; and this prominence would appear to be justified by the artist's first known composition study for the mural (Fig. 1). Already by 1 May in this sketch in which Picasso hastily blocked out the major features of the composition as he had just begun to imagine it, one finds included these three figures. And these figures retain their primacy throughout every stage of the mural's development.

As to the meaning of the woman who leans in through


Figure 1: Composition Study for Guernica. Pencil on blue paper. 10 5/8" x 8 1/4". Dated "1 May 37 (I).

the window holding the kerosene lamp, there is little disagreement regardless of which approach is taken in analyzing the painting. Throughout all stages of the mural's development she is a concerned observer who looks in upon the terrible scene of destruction, and her lamp is a source of light amid the darkness--- and in the earliest stages, it is the sole source of light. On this figure, therefore, virtually every interpretation is consonant with the one arrived at through direct visual analysis.

With the bull and the horse, on the other hand, there are probably as many different interpretations as there are scholars who have attempted to interpret them in depth. Carla Gottlieb, in an article in the Art Journal[6], neatly systematizes the two poles of possible interpretation of these symbols. She uses the theories of two Spanish authors, Juan Larrea and Vincente Marrero, to represent these positions:

> For Larrea, the bull as "totemic" animal of Spain stands for the Spanish people, sheltering the Madre (Mother) who represents the capital Madrid.... The horse is Nationalist Spain, depicted in her death throes.
>
> For Marrero....the bull signifies cruelty and brutality which overshadows our times; the horse, faithful friend of man, is the pursued and defeated victim.[7]

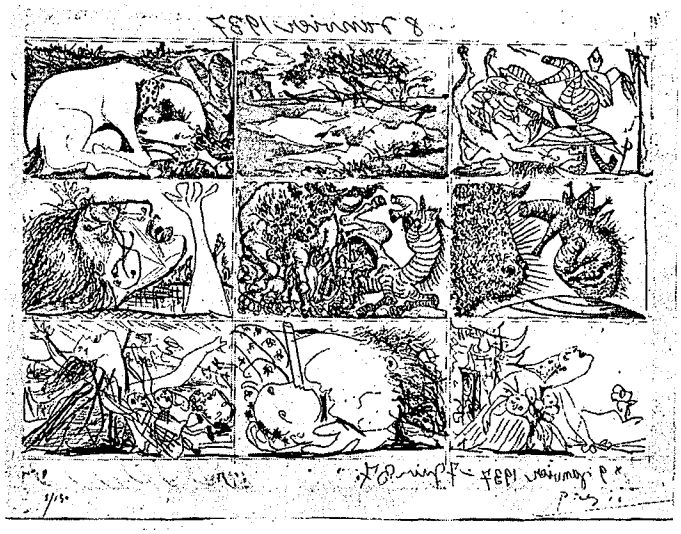


Figure 2: The Dream and Lie of Franco, 1936-37, third stage. Etching and Aquatint.

Between these extremes lie an infinite number of combinations and degrees.

The horse, and particularly the bull, had for several years been serving as symbols in Picasso's art, and both Larrea and Marrero looked back to these earlier works ---especially The Dream and Lie of Franco and Minotauromachy--- to support their theories.

The Dream and Lie of Franco, which Picasso began to etch in January 1937, consists of two plates, each of which is divided up into nine small rectangles. "The story of violence and misery inflicted by the arrogant leader of the military rising reads from picture to picture like a cartoon strip or the popular Spanish 'Alleluias' Picasso had known as a child."[8] The two sheets, together with a powerful poem written by Picasso, stand as a vivid statement which leaves no doubt as to where Picasso's sympathies lay concerning the Civil War. As Gottlieb points out, Larrea's interpretation of the horse and bull in Guernica draws support from The Dream and Lie of Franco (Fig. 2): these etchings "show a bull as opponent of the generalissimo,"[9] and thus representative of the Spanish people; also, in these etchings the horse "cannot be the symbol of the martyrdom of the Spanish People since Picasso treats this animal usually with hostility."[10]

Marrero's reading of Guernica can also find some support in The Dream and Lie of Franco, yet it gains even

greater credibility when examined in connection with a Picasso etching of 1935, Minotauromachy (Fig. 3). In this work it is quite clear that the bull-headed minotaur is clearly an unwanted aggressor, an enemy of the people. He intrudes upon the setting, bringing destruction with him (symbolized by the dead female matador). Here, too, the horse can only be viewed as the ally of the people upon whom the minotaur is inflicting himself.

There would, on the surface, appear to be much justification for referring back to these two earlier works in attempting to substantiate one's reading of the symbols of Guernica. The Dream and Lie of Franco, as Clara Gottlieb notes, "deals with the same Civil War problem and is temporally close to Guernica since its first state was completed on 8-9 January 1937, and its third and final state on 7 June."[11] In the case of Minotauromachy, there is, in addition to a thematic affinity, a remarkable compositional similarity between Guernica and the earlier work. Picasso's mural appears almost to be a reworking of his 1935 etching ---with right and left now being reversed: at the one side of each there is the bull figure; on the opposite side of the etching there is a man climbing a ladder, while at the corresponding position in the mural there is the falling woman (and it is interesting to note that from some of the preliminary sketches for Guernica it would appear that

Figure 3: Minotauromachy, 1935. Etching.

the artist at various times had been considering a male figure and a figure on a ladder for this position in the mural); in the center of both are a horse and a dead 'warrior'; and, perhaps most significantly, in both there is a female figure holding a crucially important source of light ---in Guernica the lamp and in Minotauromachy the candle.

Good rationalizations can be made for the importance of either of these earlier works in governing the reading of the symbolism of Guernica, but for this very reason one is led to realize that neither can provide any real solution to the problems of interpretation. The fact that the bull figure plays such a markedly different role in these two equally relevent earlier works indicates that Picasso did not have a single set of associations he linked with the bull ---and this should tend to be true on both a conscious and sub-conscious level. Instead of attempting to discern a single constant meaning that the bull or horse has throughout all of Picasso's works, one should be led instead to see that for Picasso these symbols could embrace a wide spectrum of meanings and associations ---including not only those derived from the folklore of Spain, but also those from the rich, classical Mediterranean mythological heritage to which Spain was in part heir--- and that the particular reference of such a symbol must be determined by the context of its use in a particular work of art.

It would appear that one of the primary reasons that Picasso chose the horse and the bull as two of the main actors for his mural, was that by doing so he could avoid the problem of having to be overly precise in his referemce. It has already been observed that Picasso went to great lengths to avoid actually painting a representation of the specific historic catastrophe of Guernica. He strove to keep his mural as general in its reference as possible, for by doing so he could achieve a meaning that was far more universally applicable. His use of the bull and horse helps to achieve this higher degree of generalizability for the mural, for, as Roland Penrose notes, "In his use of mythical and symbolic creatures Picasso could indulge his predilection for ambiguity, as a means of approaching truth."[12]

What adds so greatly to the depth of meaning Picasso achieves in his bull and horse is the fact that in addition to the characteristics traditionally associated with them, these two animals posses a wealth of associations derived from classical antiquity. A look at a second composition study done on 1 May (Fig.4) is more than enough to substantiate the assumtion that Picasso was consciously drawing upon this wealth of classical associations. In this study one finds that the dead warrior is wearing a classical helmet. From a wound in the side of the horse springs a small, winged horse--- strongly reminiscent of the Pegassus that sprung

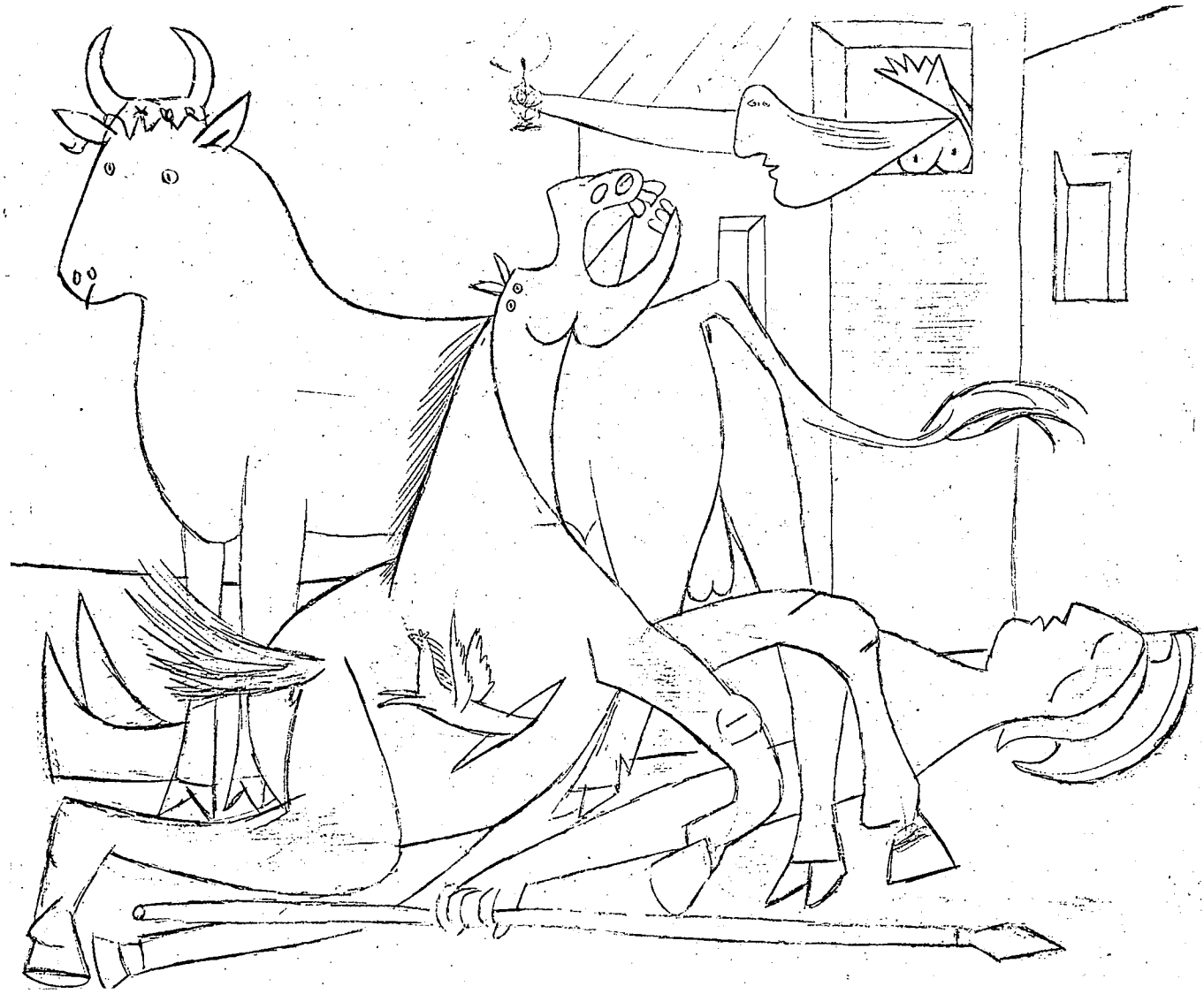


Figure 4: Composition Study for Guernica. Pencil on gesso on wood. 25 1/2" x 21 1/8". Dated "1 May '37."

from the wounded Medussa.

As Penrose so perceptively notes:

> Picasso had found a way....of revealing his sense of drama in the form of a new mythology, which enriched by its references to the classics was at the same time the mirror of our daily thoughts.[13]

Thus it was that Picasso could paint Guernica ---a work which was a comment upon the events of his time, yet which achieved the strength and intensity which is attainable only by something that is meaningful and applicable to all men in all ages.

With this in mind it becomes all too obvious that a solution such as the one ultimately proposed by Clara Gottlieb ---which involves regarding the bull as France and the running woman as the USSR and taking into account their historic positions and what bearing they did have and could have had upon the situation in Spain--- is completely out of the question. Even if her solution did not require that one see the running woman's bared nipples as symbolic hammer and sickles (a not too easily accepted premise), the acutely limited reference of the symbols would be a reduction not at all consonant with the tendency toward universalization which has been otherwise observed. Thus it is that Picasso would object to

labelling the bull Fascism: this symbol could never be anything this narrow; instead it must be taken to represent that kind of "brutality and darkness" that is characteristic of movements such as Fascism.

The particular symbolism of the bull in Guernica still presents an interesting and quite meaningful question. Not that it will be possible to arrive at a finely delineated meaning for the symbol ---by now one should realize that this is not only impossible, but it is also undesirable! Rather it should be possible to examine further the type of generic statement this symbol makes within the mural, so as to better understand its role.

Guernica will stand for all times as proof that a work of art is not complete when an artist begins it. The creation of an object of art is a dialogue between the artist and his creation in which he creates, examines and re-appraises, and then changes, refines and adjusts according to his observations. The dated preliminary sketches and Dora Maar's photographs record this process at work in the creation of Guernica in a way that is perhaps unique in all of art history. Through these sources it is possible to follow Picasso's bull as it develops into what it ultimately is in the finished mural.

Despite Picasso's statement aligning the bull with the forces of darkness, those who would claim it is a symbol of the Spanish People, and therefore allied to the victims,

hold an opinion that is not at all unfounded. There is nothing to give any suggestion that this is somehow a sinister beast in early composition studies such as that of 1 May (Fig. 4). Moreover, the study Picasso did for the bull's head on 10 May (Fig. 5) quite clearly gives the exact opposite impression. In this study the bull's head takes on the visage of a man. It has ideal classical features, without any overt distortion of form. This is definitely a kind, beneficent creature that Picasso sketched on the tenth of May; were this the form in which it had finally entered the mural, there would be no doubt that this figure was on the side of justice and mercy ---so much so as to perhaps warrant the assumption that it was in fact a symbol for the people themselves.

Shortly after this early study for the bull's head, it would appear that Picasso's attitude toward this image began to change. A second study, done on 20 May (just ten days after the first), indicates that the bull figure has now taken on a grossly animalistic meaning for the artist (Fig. 6). Rudolf Arnhein, although he realizes that this second image is far removed from the "concept of animal as ideal, benevolent power"[14] represented in the bull's head of 10 May, still tries to maintain that this does not indicate a "transformation of the bull from Greek serenity to beastly ferocity."[15] For him to doggedly propound this view is, of course, quite advantageous to his overall pro-


Figure 5: Study of Bull's Head (for Guernica), 10 May 1937.
Pencil on white paper. 17 7/8" x 9 1/2".

Figure 6: Study for Bull's Head (for Guernica). 20 May 1937.
Pencil and wash on white paper. $9\frac{1}{4}$" x $11\frac{1}{2}$".

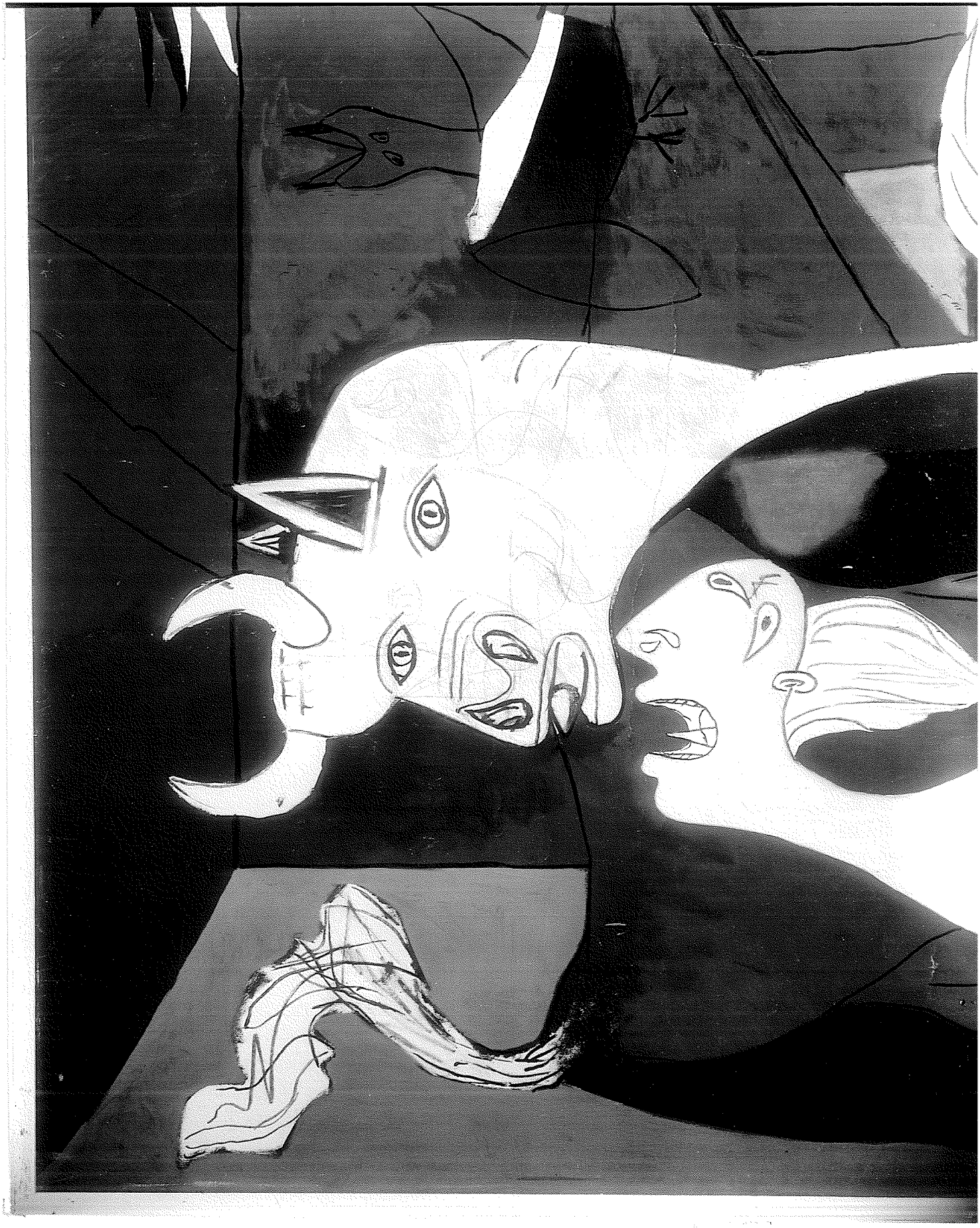


Figure 7: Guernica (detail of mural). May-early June 1937. Oil on canvas. 11' 5 1/2" x 25' 5 3/4".

gram of reading the bull as somehow directly connected with the Spanish People, but it simply is not at all convincing in terms of this study itself. For in this bull's head of 20 May what indeed is being emphasized is the ferocious, beastly, almost swine-like characteristics of this figure. Here, more than at any other stage of the preparation of Guernica, Picasso is considering the bull as a truly evil presence ---perhaps even as an actively aggressive element as the bull figure was in his Minotauromachy.

The head of the bull as it appears in the actual mural (Fig. 7) is not as wholly villainous a representation as it is in the sketch of 20 May, yet it would still appear to be more closely linked to this feeling than to the earlier ones. It is a grossly distorted form, being shown in profile and in three-quarter view at the same time. The one eye has been so completely displaced as to give the impression of being a third eye. Gone are the piggish elements of 20 May, yet the visage remains cold and hard. These facts, added to the observation that the bull seems to be the result of a progression which, though it begins by treating the bull as a benevolent figure, has totally rejected this possibility long before it reaches its culmination, seem to support the visual analysis of this figure as being symbolic of the forces of "brutality and darkness."

This reading of the bull is also confirmed by the compositional setting of the figure. Figure 8 is a Xeroxed copy of Guernica upon which has been superimposed black lines to indicate the main features of Picasso's composition (the blue lines are mearly present to fill in some of the detail that is lost in the Xerox process). It will be noted that Picasso has employed the traditional, Renaissance method of disposing his figures in a triangular arrangement, anchored on each side by string, vertical elements. The horse, as has already been mentioned, occupies much of the important central part of this triangular mass, while the dead warrior lies at its base. The all-important kerosene lamp is at the very apex of this triangular composition, and the light it sheds forms the right side of the triangle. This would appear to be of particular significance, for it is within this triangle that the obvious symbols of righteousness and hope are found ---scarce though they may be: the horse (which virtually everyone agrees is a symbol of unearned suffering, and more than likely associated with the good people of the world); the light, which is a becon of hope; and it would appear that even the running woman is straining to move herself into this 'area where there is some hope of salvation.' Outside this triangular mass, on the other hand, one finds the greatest hopelessness and despair: here is the empty terror of the woman falling from the burning

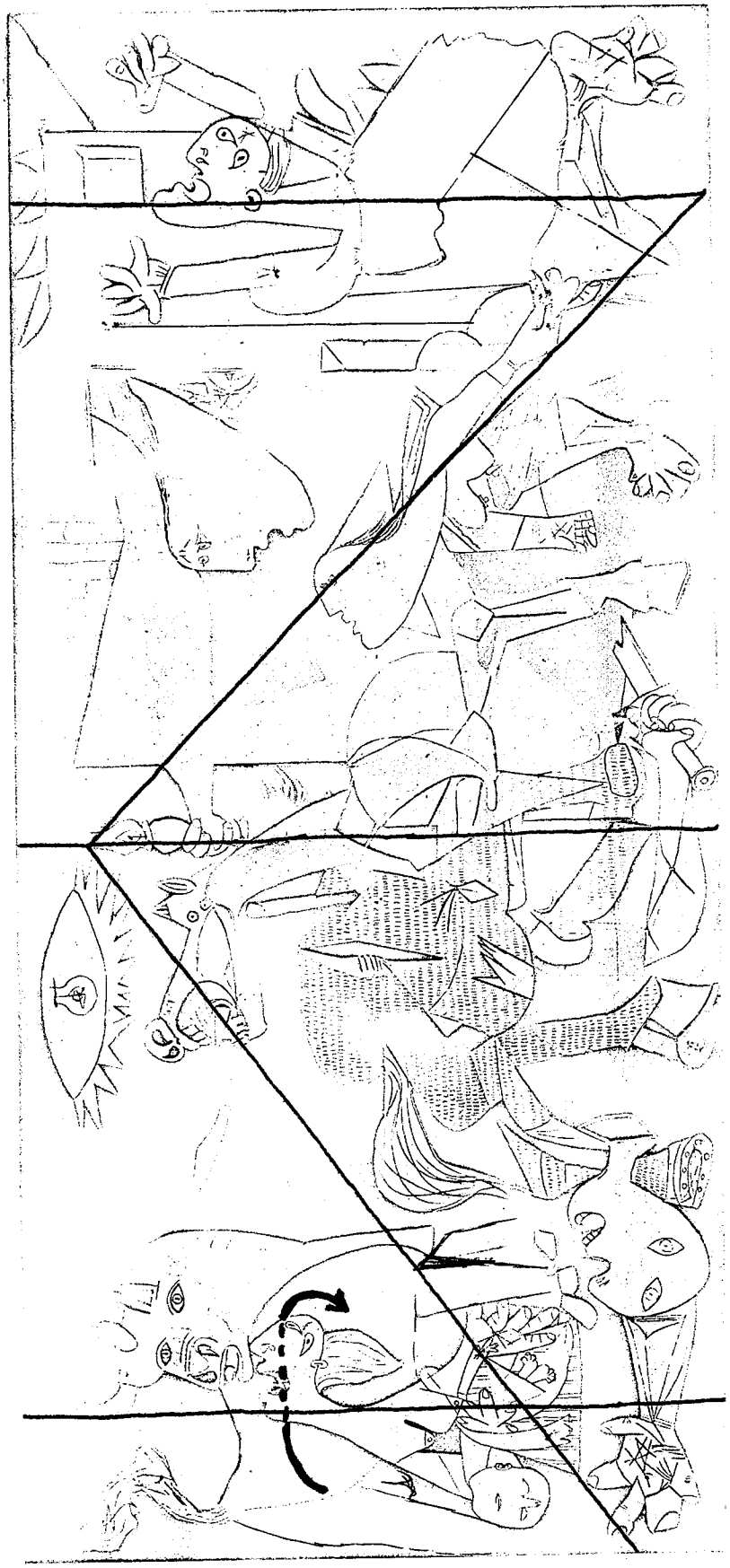


Figure 8: Guernica with an analysis of the main lines of compositional structure.

building, the unbounded anguish of the mother with the dead child ---and here too is found the bull. The building and the falling woman comprise the vertical framing element to the right of the mural, while the mother and child with the bull that encircles them form the corresponding element on the left. It would be curious indeed if Picasso were to choose to place a symbol of good or hope in that part of his composition that seems so utterly devoid of these forces. Rather it would seem more logical to read the bull ---whose body faces the scene of destruction, but whose head is turned coldly and disinterestedly away from it--- as symbolic of cold, unfeeling brutality. This reading is also consonant with one's first, visual aversion to the figure. It seems clear that Picasso meant the bull to symbolize the kind of brutality that could remain completely unmoved by human suffering--- even so immediate a manifestation of suffering as the imploring cry of anguish which issues from the bereaved mother at its feet.

Interpretation of the symbolism of the horse is not nearly so complicated a task, and most athorities tend to be in agreement about it. The horse clearly stands for the victims of the destruction wrought by the forces of darkness. Picasso gives this figure special prominence, however: due to its position and the distinctive rendering of its texture it captures much of the viewer's attention.

This is an indication of Picasso's overriding concern for the actual people involved in the phenomenon he is dealing with; at no time is one allowed to treat this as a totally practical or philosophical problem, but rather one is continually reminded by the suffering of the very prominent horse that this drama is being played out using living beings ---being capable of suffering.

The cigar-shaped light above the horse's head, as has been noticed previously, is an extremely interesting symbol. In the photograph of Stage 2 of the actual mural (see Appendix), this form is a large, round sun which casts light upon the entire scene. Soon afterward, however, it is stylized into its ultimate cigar-shaped form; and in Stage 7 the light bulb is added to its center. In its final form it also has the appearance of an eye, suggesting a symbol for an observer to the scene.

Rudolf Arnheim offers some very fine observations on this symbol:

> It is a lamp, sun, and eye, but these meanings interfere with rather than support each other. This sun is nothing but a lamp, the pupil of this eye is nothing but a bulb; there is the coldness of an inefficient power. Here, then, is a symbol of detached "awareness," of a world informed but not engaged.[16]

There is very little that can be added to so complete an analysis. It is advantageous to note, though, that this potentially powerful yet actually ineffective form lies outside the main triangular composition. It is closely juxtaposed with the much smaller kerosene lamp, which, almost ironically, has so sweeping effect, and stands at the apex of the compositional triangle. This juxtaposition gives a real insight into the underlying meaning of Guernica: the unengaged, 'detached awareness' symbolized by the eye-light is does virtually nothing to dispell the darkness which has descended upon the world of the mural, while the small lamp, in the hand of a concerned observer, is a source of light (and therefore of hope) which is of no little consequence.

One of the factors that contributes to the power of Picasso's statement is that he wisely avoids the use of too much imagery. In studies such as that of 9 May (Fig. 9), or even in the first stages of the mural itself, Picasso attempted to pack more figures and greater detail into his conception of the work. Far from achieving a more powerful statement, this multiplication of forms tended to make the whole more cluttered and chaotic, and thus to reduce its overall impact. By ultimately choosing to limit the number of forms, Picasso achieved a greater intensity than would have otherwise been possible: with fewer forms to demand consideration, the viewer can become more

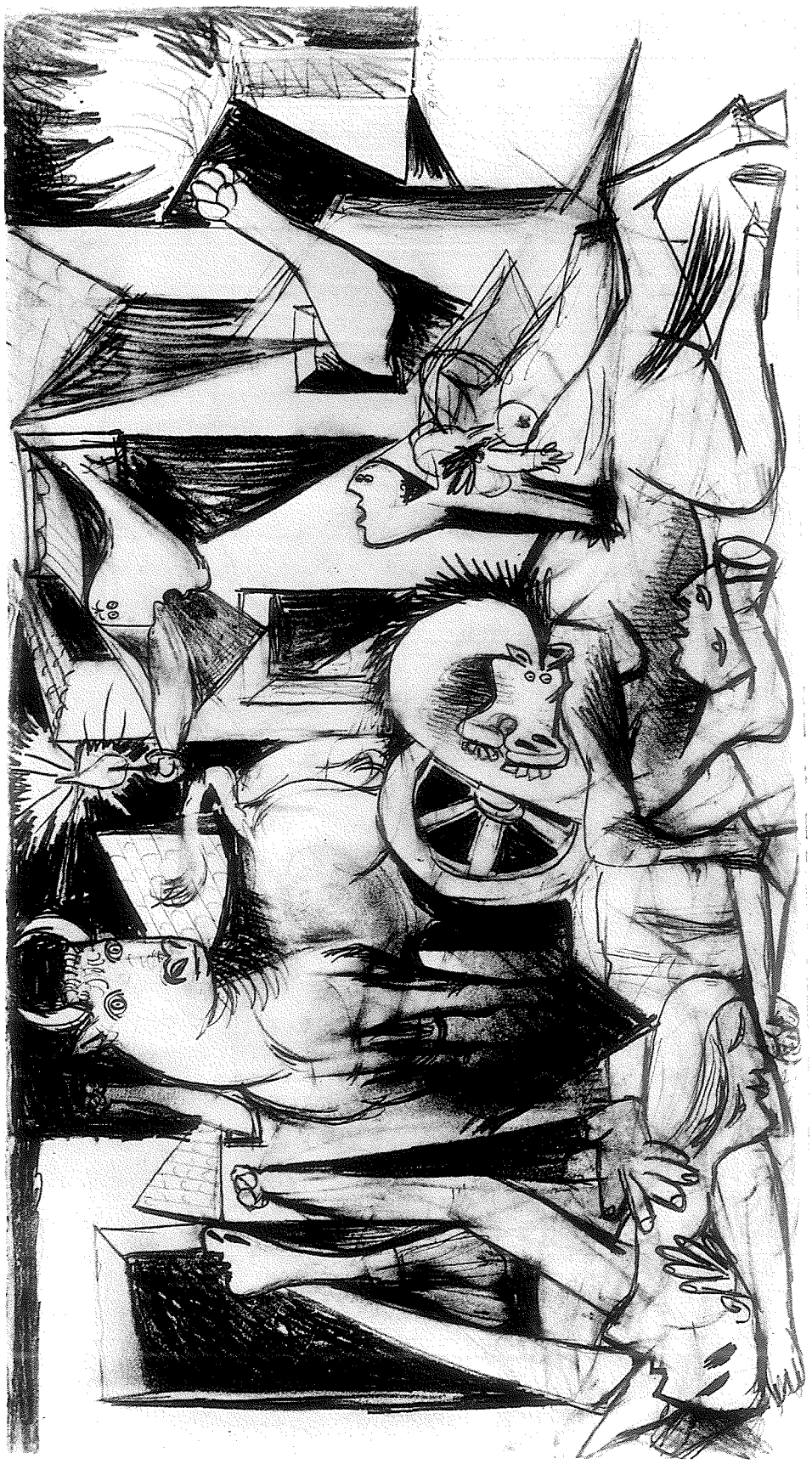


Figure 9: Composition Study for Guernica, 9 May 1937. Pencil on white paper. 9 1/2" x 17 7/8".

deeply involved with the ones present.

When one considers the results of both a visual analysis and an analysis of the historical genesis of Guernica, one recognizes that Picasso is making a strong, coherent statement about a problem which faces humanity. Spurred by the awareness he gained as a result of the shocking tragedy of the bombing of Guernica, Picasso recognized that man was capable of a barbarism and a brutality which could throw the entire world into darkness. As Pierre Daix writes,

> Men now had to be saved from a 'sea of suffering and death,' from the new barbarism which roars what Milan Astray shouted at Salamanca: 'Death to Intelligence.'[17]

Guernica stands as proof that Picasso was well aware of the magnitude of this threat.

Within Guernica one finds the forces of darkness and brutality (symbolized in the form of the bull) and the terror and destruction they can bring down upon the world. In the mural one sees the results of these dark forces: the wounded victim in the figure of the horse, the crushed resistance in the form of the dead warrior, the agonizing emotions as epitomized by the women, and most of all the blackness which tends to swallow everything up within it. What is missing from the mural is the actual

agressor ---the bull may represent the forces of darkness, but he is definitely not the aggressor who is directly responsible for the destruction. In Minotauromachy the bull figure appears to be the aggressor; here he neither he nor any other figure plays this role. Yet this makes the destruction even more horrible, for its victims are not even aware of its origin. It is destruction that rains down from nowhere; it is the 'hygenic' infliction of death of modern warfare.

Symbols of hope are indeed rare in Guernica, yet they do exist. In the genesis of the mural itself, Picasso seems to have elimated, one by one, virtually all the symbols of hope. In the first stage of the mural the dead warrior's arm was raised high, and his fist clenched in a gesture of defiance; but Picasso painted this arm out almost immediately, and by the time the mural was finished all that was left of the warrior was the pitifully dismembered remains. In much the same way, the sun ---at the start a powerful source of light--- becomes a mere, ineffective electric light by the mural's completion. The finished mural has but one lone beacon of hope: the small lamp held by the woman who looks in through the window.

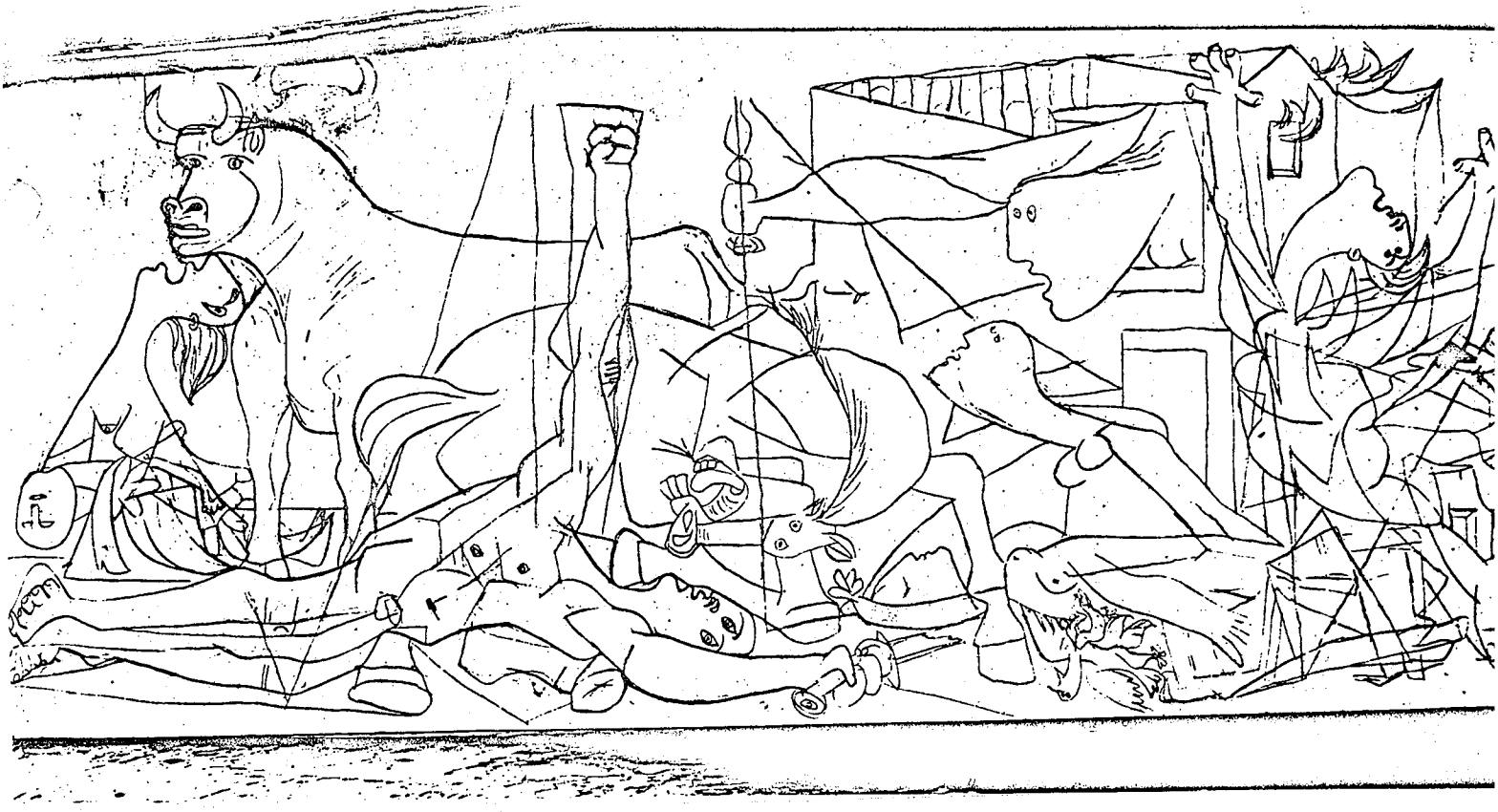
Nevertheless, Guernica is not a negative statement. At first it may appear so, and this is only natural--- Picasso wanted a viewer to recoil in horror from the terrible scene he depicts. Yet eventually one realizes

that, as serious as is this threat to humanity, there is hope. There are those who are concerned, and who, like the woman with the lamp, can do something to dispell the darkness. The destruction may be terrible, but there is yet hope; for if one looks at Guernica long enough, and closely enough, one's eye is lead by the curves of the shadows to a lightly sketched flower. This small, seemingly insignificant flower ---which grows out of the most totally defeated figure in the mural: the dead warrior's hand--- stands as Picasso's symbol of regeneration. Nor was this flower added as an afterthought: it was present in the first stage of the mural, and it remained present throughout the mural's growth. Thus the artist is making a firmly positive statement: the problem is very terrible and very real, yet man can triumph. Paul Eluard, Picasso's poet friend, wrote a poem entitled "La Victoire de Guernica," the conclusion of which seems to capture much of the spirit of Guernica:

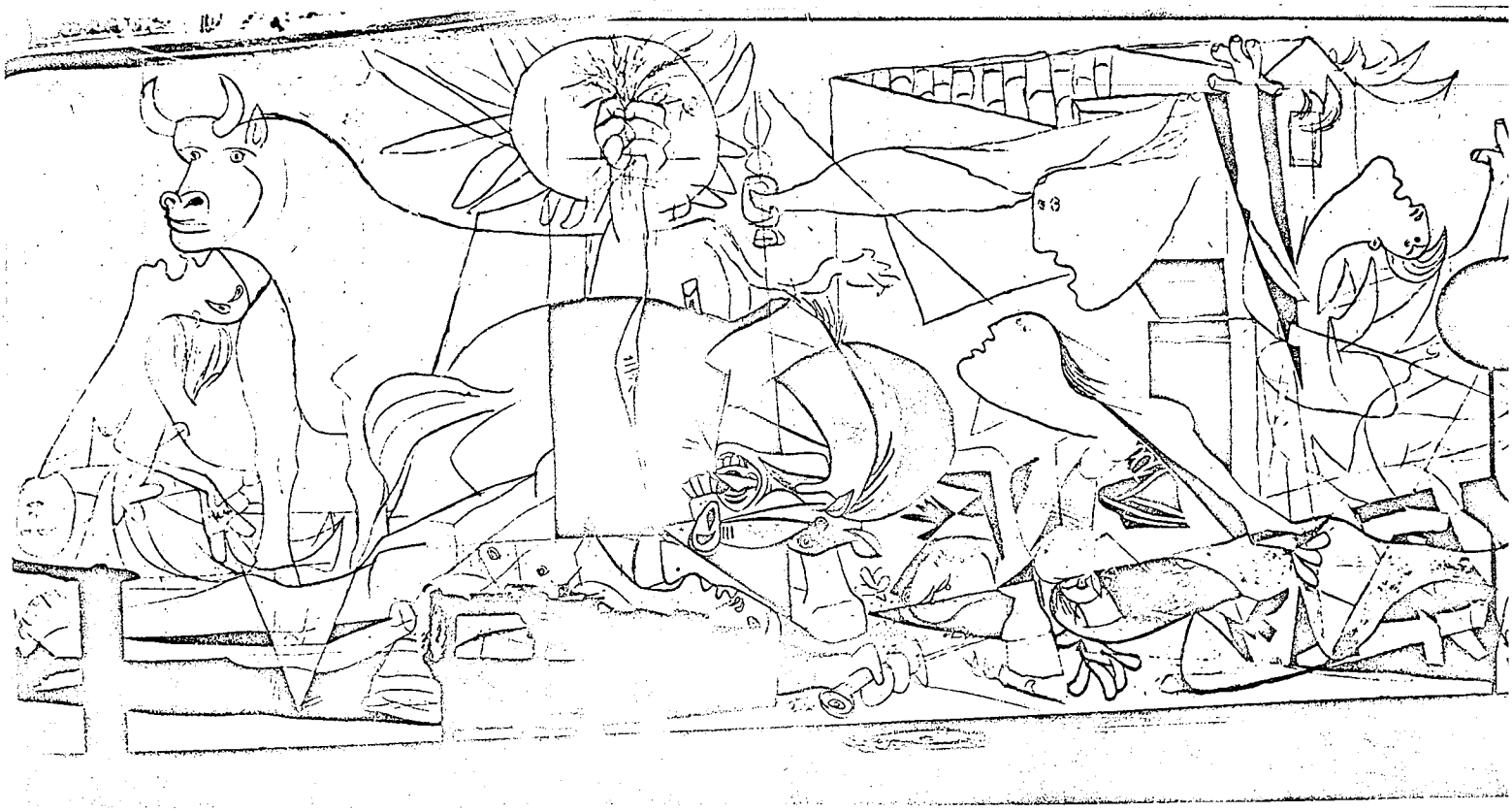
> Parias la morte la terre et la hideur
> De nos ennemis ont la coleur
> Monotone de notre nuit
> Nous en aurons raison.[18]

# A P P E N D I X

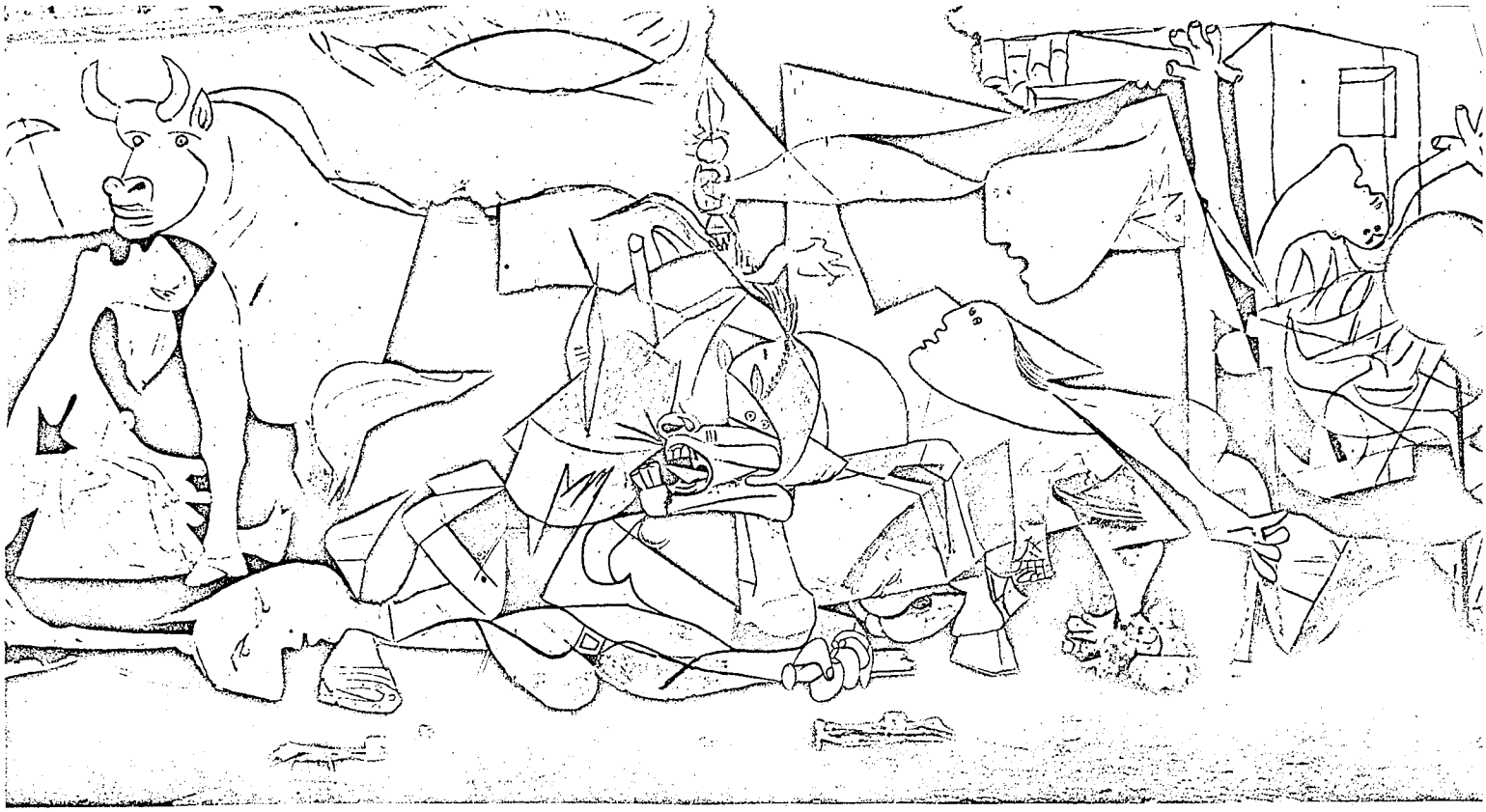
The following are Xerox copies of six of the seven photographs Dora Maar made of Guernica at various stages of its development. Stage one was taken on 11 May 1937, when Picasso was first sketching out his forms on the huge canvas. Stage seven shows the mural nearly complete. With the exception of the first, the precise date of each photograph is unknown.



STAGE 1



STAGE 2



STAGE 3

STAGE 5

STAGE 6

STAGE 7

# N O T E S

[1]There would appear to be an unacknowledged dispute as to the eaxact date of the bombing . Each of the three days from 26-28 April are cited by various sources. This paper will rather arbitrarily accept the date which is used by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where the mural is presently on extended loan from the artist.

[2]Pablo Picasso: As quoted in Pierre Daix's Picasso (New York, 1965), p. 166.

[3]Pablo Picasso: As quoted in Herbert Read's A Concise History of Modern Painting (New York, 1959), p. 162.

[4]Roland Penrose, Picasso: His Life and Work (New York, 1962), p. 274.

[5]Rudolf Arnheim, Picasso's Guernica: The Genesis of a Painting (Berkeley, 1962), p. 17.

[6]Carla Gottlieb, "The Meaning of Bull and Horse in Guernica" in the Art Journal,(Winter, 1964-65, vol. 24, no. 2, New York).

[7]Ibid., p. 106.

[8]Roland Penrose, op.cit., p. 267.

[9]Carla Gottlieb, loc.cit.

[10]Idem.

[11] *Idem*.

[12] Roland Penrose, *op.cit.*, p. 270.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 248.

[14] Rudolf Arnheim, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[17] Pierre Daix, *Picasso* (New York, 1965), p. 167.

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Larrea —

Marrero —