

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART  
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PICASSO'S HUGE MURAL OF DESTRUCTION OF GUERNICA

BY BOMBING SHOWN AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

A striking contrast to the precision bombing of military objectives in Rome is suggested by Picasso's enormous mural Guernica--the "total" bombing of an utterly defenseless town, ancient center of culture and veneration of the Basque country in Spain. The mural has just been put on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street.

Immediately after the destruction of Guernica by the German Luftwaffe on the afternoon of April 27, 1937, Picasso, who had been commissioned to paint a mural for the Spanish building at the Paris World's Fair, began work on a mural symbolizing the catastrophe. The mural has been shown several times in this country, at the Museum and elsewhere.

The London Times of April 28, 1937, gave this report of the bombing:

"Guernica, the most ancient town of the Basque and the centre of their cultural tradition, was completely destroyed yesterday afternoon by insurgent air raiders. The bombardment of this open town far behind the lines occupied precisely three hours and a quarter.... In the form of its execution and the scale of the destruction it wrought, no less than in the selection of its objective, the raid on Guernica is unparalleled in military history. Guernica was not a military objective.... The whole town of 7,000 inhabitants, plus 3,000 refugees, was slowly and systematically pounded to pieces."

This destruction of a defenseless town was an experiment by the German Luftwaffe in the psychological effect on the surrounding population of obliteration by air power of a hallowed center of a people's culture and religion. The Germans considered the experiment (with its horrible mutilation and destruction of hundreds of human beings as well as cultural treasures and landmarks) an unqualified success. Reportedly it was written up in German military journals as an advance in the technique of total war. The technique was later employed against parts of Warsaw and Rotterdam, and in England at Plymouth, Coventry, and the national shrine of Canterbury; while London's great Cathedral of St. Paul's was saved as though by a miracle when all around it was laid low by bombs.

There is a story that after the fall of Paris, Otto Abetz, Hitler's agent in that city, visited Picasso's studio where the artist was still living. He saw a study sketch of the mural on Picasso's wall and asked the artist, "Did you do that?"

"No," Picasso replied, "you did."

The artist has given no exact explanation of Guernica. In the catalog of the Picasso show held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1939 the following description is given:

"Briefly, one sees: at the right two women, one with arms raised falling from a burning house, the other rushing in toward the center of the picture; at the left a mother with a dead child, and on the ground the fragments of a warrior, one hand clutching a broken sword. At the center of the canvas is a dying horse pierced by a spear hurled from above; at the left a bull stands triumphantly surveying the scene. Above, to the right of the center a figure leans from a window holding a lamp which throws an ineluctable light upon the carnage. And over all shines the radiant eye of day with the electric bulb of night for a pupil."