



# Picasso: War, Combat, and Revolution



The Harvard Art Museums presents an installation about “Guernica” showcasing more than 20 drawings and prints by Picasso.

Pablo Picasso’s painting *Guernica* was commissioned by the Spanish government for the 1937 Paris World’s Fair. It was exhibited in Josep Lluís Sert’s Spanish Pavilion, alongside Joan Miró’s *The Reaper* and other works. Completed in early summer 1937, the massive 11×25 foot painting addresses the devastating Fascist-era aerial bombing of the Basque town of Guernica on April 26, 1937. More broadly, the painting confronts the horrors of war.

The current installation, which complements the Harvard course *World Fairs*, focuses on Picasso’s engagement with war, combat, and revolution. It explores *Guernica*’s core themes, the repressive Spanish dictator Francisco Franco, broader imagery of death, struggles of good and evil (represented by matadors, Minotaurs, Classical competition mythology), political and artistic revolution, and issues of desire and capture.

Among those who faced Franco regime reprisals was Picasso’s friend Josep Rocarol. Book illustrations with African and other subjects (visual “primitivism”) had a seminal influence on Picasso in his early Paris years. These works include *The Barbarian Dance* and *Salomé* from 1905 and his transformative October 1906 figural studies. Studies based on this book imagery were foundational to his revolutionary March 1907 masterpiece *Les Femmes d’Alger*, subsequent Cubist interventions, and *Guernica* itself.

At Picasso’s urging, *Guernica* traveled to the United States in 1939 to raise funds for the Spanish Refugee Relief Commission. Remaining here during World War II for safekeeping with the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), *Guernica* was twice (in 1941 and 1942) lent to Harvard’s Fogg Art Museum to be exhibited. MoMA’s

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## Venue

Harvard Art Museums, 32 Quincy St,  
Cambridge, MA 02138

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## Admission

Free

## More information

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## Credits

The installation was made possible in part by funding from the Gurel Student Exhibition Fund. Modern and contemporary art programs at the Harvard Art Museums are made possible in part by support from the Emily Rauh Pulitzer and Joseph Pulitzer, Jr., Fund for Modern and Contemporary Art.



director, Alfred Barr, had been a student of well-known professor and museum leader Paul J. Sachs. The Harvard Crimson described the painting on October 1, 1941, as a “spectacular and controversial” work, whose abstraction had a far “more moving [impact] than a realistic description of an actual air raid.” The timing was significant. The 1941 Harvard exhibition occurred two months before the United States entered World War II (December 7, 1941); the second exhibition followed shortly after, in 1942.

This installation’s related course, *World Fairs (History of Art and Architecture 194W and African and African American Studies 194Z)*, is taught by Suzanne P. Blier, Allen Whitehill Clowes Professor of Fine Arts and Professor of African and African American Studies, Harvard University.

The University Teaching Gallery serves faculty and students affiliated with Harvard’s Department of History of Art and Architecture. Semester-long installations are mounted here in conjunction with undergraduate and graduate courses, supporting instruction in the critical analysis of art and making unique selections from the museums’ collections available to all visitors.