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PICASSO'S ART DURING WORLD WAR, INFLUENCE OF WAR ON HIS ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Nomera Adil¹

¹ Institute of Visual Art and Design, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore

Article Info	Abstract
<p>*Corresponding Author Email: nomera.adil@gmail.com Contact: 03458445544</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: Picasso , self expression, Arts and Design</p>	<p>With the advent of modern art in 19th century, artist began experimenting for his self expression. During both the World Wars, the idea of self expression for an artist also took a rebellious move towards free will to get out of the frustration formed because of wars. Aim to write this paper is to prove the fact that the creativity and versatility of Picasso is due to great wars. If the World Wars would not have happened, the world could not have had Picasso as the Picasso who emerged as the most ingenious artist. To prove the fact, we analyzed the works of Picasso done during, before and after both the World Wars. Moreover, the creative side of his work lead art world of today to reach the horizon where it is standing today.</p>

1. Introduction

With the advent of industrial life and modern world, many grand changes were faced by the people of the world. One grand happening was both the World Wars. With the world coming forward to slaughter the mankind on such a massive scale, frustration, aggravation and nuisance became the permanent air for years. This was not like that during the war years only, but post war decades.

Picasso, born during the modern times of the world art, experimented fervently to produce something different to contribute to the world of art. *Demiselles* was created and the world referred it to the birth of Cubism. Many more

incidents of life, many more sufferings and loss that Picasso faced, led him to create paintings divided into different eras.

Era of Picasso's war paintings started with the beginning of war. People would cluster in cafes in order to keep warm due to fuel deficiencies. The frustration, aggravation, nuisance and suffocation of the war led Picasso amalgamate the subject of his paintings with the feelings of the warfare. Still lifes, sculptures, portraits or even the musical notes in the paintings of Picasso are the natives of the effect of World War on Picasso's work.

Early Art of Picasso

Picasso, who was born in Spain in 1881, an artist whose importance to the world of arts is unconcealed, made new ways of representing the world he owned. He is considered to be the god gifted artist, as he already mastered the perfect drawing and realistic painting by age of 12. His father, who was also an artist and made a modest living through his art career, encouraged and taught Picasso the basics of art. But Picasso being a gifted artist, always remained one step ahead.

“He mastered all the realist techniques of painting by the time he entered the Barcelona Academy of Arts in late 1890s.”¹

From traditional to modern painting he experimented with all the artistic medium during his artistic career. Picasso characterised modern art in the quest for innovation, which made him shift from one style to another.

All through his life, we see a major influence on his work predisposed from his real-life events. However, Picasso's early work is in search of his unique capacity to represent art, yet we notice incidents from his personal life and events happening around him swaying his art pieces. The first and foremost phase of his painting career began with Blue Period in 1900, during his stay in Spain. This period was a result of melancholy and downhearted point of his life when he lost his close friend Casagemas, who shot himself one night in Paris. And Picasso instigated towards the miserable fragments of life. The subject matters of his paintings were beggars, prostitutes, vagabonds and the miserable people of society. The stories he depicted in these paintings were concerning allegories about poverty, blindness, love and death. The sad faces of the figures were

dramatically composed against simplified background, with immeasurable tones of blues, to add more coldness and misery in the pictures.

In 1904, Picasso finally moved to Paris. He got himself a studio space in building where other painters and poets were living. He made friends with Bohemian characters and circus artists, who are certainly more determined towards a positive life. This step drew him away from his obsession for Blue tones and paintings of Blue Period. The actors from circus and strolling players from boulevards not only became Picasso's friends but made their way to Picasso's paintings. These new subjects of Picasso's paintings became frequent and Picasso even started portraying his self-portrait as one of the characters. The prime blue tones transformed into gentle tones of Pink and Grey. And this phase of his paintings is recalled as the Rose Period, which remained from 1904 till 1906.

His restlessness to depict new ways to portray form led him to take his inspiration from the Primitive cultures. Inspired by these basics he began with a portrait of a friend *Gertrude Stein* (1906-1907), finished it in several sittings. When Picasso began work on the portrait he kept it in simplified plainer form, directly influenced from Iberian stone heads. This turned out to be his Transitional Phase, and Negro Phase according to some sources. These works by Picasso carried great emotive strength. Picasso began to emphasize on simplified forms.

“Although the disparity between the style of the face and the rest of the Stein's image is striking, together they provide an insightful portrait of a forceful, vivacious woman. More important, Picasso had

¹Kleiner, *Art Through the Ages*, 694.

discovered a new approach to the representation of the human form”²

African, Iberian sculptures and Cezanne’s paintings influenced Picasso in opening the new vaults to a fundamentally new method of representing forms as formless. Same influence led Picasso to paint *Demoiselles D’ Avignon* fig 1, in 1907. Symbolically painted young ladies of Avignon, represented a new method of form in space. He specifically took Cezanne’s treatment of form and space to a new level. He broken into an ambiguous plane in a combination of views, where the observer sees a figure from more than one place in a given space at a time. Picasso successfully broke the traditional concept of orderly constructed and integrated pictorial space with a dynamic interplay of time and space. *Demoiselles D’ Avignon* became an entrance door for Picasso’s cubist technique. This Cubism movement was worked together by Braque and Picasso. Braque was the first artist to look at the *Demoiselles D’ Avignon* and hence, he started planning his paintings based on the same technique of divided space. This movement received its name Cubism after Matisse described these works of Braque and Picasso to Louis Vauxcelles, who was a known art critic of that time.

During 1908, Picasso was experimenting with his new style and country side landscapes near North of Paris. He developed his new style on the principles followed by Cezanne, and Picasso decided to take his recommendation that nature is just a mere composition of spheres, cylinders and cones. And this principle of depicting nature was equally taken to his other paintings like portraits and still life.

²Kleiner, Art Through the Ages, 694.

“I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them”³

With the beginning of 1910, Picasso’s work shows a deep impression of his inner perception, forms and characters of models were depicted by Picasso solely. The visual reaction of Picasso played a vital role on discovering this new style of painting, which was later called as Analytical Cubism. This style was followed the next two years that succeeded the African tradition’s inspired painting *Demoiselles D’ Avignon*. In order to dig deep and clarify his concept about the object, Picasso felt it necessary to understand and break the object into pieces.

“In order to understand form and interpret its existence on a flat surface they felt it necessary to break into the form, separate its elements, penetrate beneath the surface and become conscious of that which cannot be seen because accidentally it is at the back of the object in question. The appearance of an object taken from one point of view was manifestly insufficient. It should be conceived from all the angles.”⁴

This way of object representation gave way to the appearance of a solid form in spite of broken linear crystalline facets. His work became more conceptual and detached from normal appearance.

“A symbolic moustache gives the clue to the face in which it may be the only recognisable feature. The curve of a guitar or the stem of a glass is a guide to the identity of objects that have been shattered and rebuilt as an integral part of the picture. The eye as it travels over the picture finds itself above, behind and in front of the object at the

³Roland Penrose, *Picasso*, 13.

⁴ Penrose, *Picasso*, 13.

same time, but the movement is in the consciousness of the spectator rather than in the object itself. All these varied aspects are woven together into a new realization of the totality of the object.”⁵

Gradually, Picasso’s work reached to the point where the object became difficult to be traced. And subjects in the paintings could be recognised by the title only. With this grasp, he started using material like oil cloth, newspaper, wall papers or any other ready available paper to paste on the canvas, in addition to his painted cubist composition. This addition served as accumulating the object’s own reality to painting in addition to becoming part of the composition. This was the time when Synthetic Cubism came into being.

War and the 20th Century

With the modern world coming into being, the nationalism, militarism, imperialism and alliances came together. But the positivity of this change did not last long and with the beginning of 20th century, wind around the world was already conversing about the great war. The great upset brought major changes, not just in the history of modern art but in other affairs of life also.

“The first half of the 20th century was a period of significant upheaval worldwide. Between 1900 and 1945, the major industrial powers expanded their colonial empires, fought two global wars, witnessed the rise of communism, Fascism, and Nazism, and suffered the Great Depression. These decades were also a time of radical changes in the arts when painters and sculptors challenged some of the most basic assumptions about

the purpose of art and what form an artwork should take”⁶

It takes a lot to induce the entire world into a war. And with a situation that affects so many individuals, it is pretty obvious that it has impact on humanity. World War I and World War II both dramatically obstructed society, and their impact extended to the arts too. Fear and claustrophobia enthralled the city of France. Life was categorised by rations, curfews and bitter cold winters, where fuel deficiencies led people to cluster together in cafes in order to keep warm.

Other Art Movements and Picasso’s Early Work

Looking at the early art practices being done in early 1900’s, while Picasso was trying to create something very different for the world. Henri Matisse and Andre Derain were also trying to make their place in modern art.

Matisse in 1905, along with a group of young painters exhibited paintings in Paris, in shockingly bright colours and simplified designs. A critic Louis Vauxcelles described the artists as Fauves meaning Wild Beasts. This group of young artists desired to take art towards the direction of Impressionism, while keeping a combination of their emotional proficiencies. They believed colour played a vital role in conveying emotional meanings.

“In contrast to the dark, vaguely disturbing nature of much fin-de-siècle, or turn-of-the-century, Symbolist art, the

⁵ Penrose, Picasso, 13.

⁶ Fred S. Kleiner, *Gardner's Art Through the Ages: The Western Perspective*, (Boston, USA: Wadsworth, 2010), 685.

Fauves produced bright cheery landscapes and figure paintings, characterized by pure vivid colour and bold distinctive brushwork.”⁷

The closeness and boldness of the Fauve images inspired many artists including German Expressionists. Although colour has always been a vital element in German paintings, but this influence from Fauve paintings made German expressionistic artists create wrenching and distorted forms, with ragged outlines and restless brush strokes. This playful work resulted in emotionally powerful painted canvases in the years leading to World War I.

“This Expressionism movement was led by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner.”⁸

Looking at the studies done by Picasso for ‘Les Femmes d’ AlModifiers Avignon’, we find Picasso’s palette inspired by Fauvs. Although Picasso’s early work was a combination of influences from Fauv artists and Paul Cezanne, yet Pablo Picasso was able to create his individuality further in his art pieces. Pablo Picasso didn’t adopt exact colour palette of Fauv’s group, but the wild forms created by Fauv artists couldn’t stay apart from Picasso’s canvases for long. A little bit of influence of Fauv style can be seen in Picasso’s ‘Harlequin’. Wild colour application on the paintings with stark tones is a pure Fauv influence Picasso’s ‘Harlequin’.

⁷Dr. Virginia B. Spivey, "A beginner's guide to Fauvism." *Khan Academy*. accessed June 18, 2017. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/early-abstractiion/fauvism-matisse/a/a-beginners-guide-to-fauvism#>.

⁸Kleiner, *Art Through the Ages*,689.

These paintings done by Picasso are associated to his ‘Rose Period’.

Meanwhile Futurism also came to the surface and trailed ideas from Cubism. Although the Futurists celebrated World War I and the changes they hoped it would effect, the mass destruction and the chaos that conflict unleashed horrified other artists. The universe had never witnessed such massive destruction and murder of mankind on this big scale. Men and women died in millions of numbers and many artists came up with their own expression of war. The Dada movement was initiated on the idea that World War I was triggered by the emphasis of reason and logic over feelings and people, and so they retorted by refusing any sense of reason. Dada art is illogical and strange, integrally nervous of tradition, and devoted to artistic and political chaos. Dada was more a mindset or attitude than a single identifiable style. Dada helped art fully transition into the realm of the conceptual, which is art that is focused almost entirely on the meaning of the piece, not the physical appearance. The devastation of WWI prompted art to become more and more conceptual as people abandoned the traditions of the past. Mainly because World War I was fought majorly on European land, European artists experienced its devastating effects to a much greater degree than other artists of the world. The profound impact of World War I can be seen majorly on art produced between World War I and WWII. However, we don’t see Dadaism influencing or inspiring Picasso at all.

Picasso kept himself busy creating works for Blue Period, Rose Period, African and Classicism. By the beginning of World War I, Picasso had already been creating works on Cubism. We don’t see upsetting themes in his works before the terror of

the World War took over the world. Themes that were being painted by Picasso were bathers, musical instruments, musical notes, portraits of figures resonating music and pleasures of life. Colours were fresh and well contrasted. Compositions spoke of their rhythm and melody, until the horror of world being slaughtered came to artist.

Picasso in 1930s

Previously Picasso had focused on aesthetic involvements, although he was aware of the politics around his life. When one sees their homeland descending into war they automatically get involved in political issues. Picasso even commented once

“Painting is not made to decorate apartments. It is an instrument for offensive and defensive war against the enemy.”⁹

“In 1937, Spanish government requested Picasso to produce some major work for Spanish Pavilion at the Paris International Exposition. Meanwhile when Picasso was thinking about this work he got to hear about word *Guernica*, capital of the Basque region, which was totally destroyed by Nazi bombers. As many as 7000 citizens were wounded to death.”¹⁰

This situation jolted Picasso and put him into action. Hence, he ended up painting *Guernica* fig. 3. Despite the painting's title, Picasso made no specific reference to the bombardment in *Guernica*. There is no mention of bombs or

German planes painted on the mural, rather the composed images in *Guernica* are presentation of human grief and misery of the war. The outcry painted on the mural reflects some of the turmoil that would have been faced by citizens of *Guernica*. Picasso never visited the city but decided to create an intuitive upheaval of the bombardment. In the centre along the lower edge of the painting, lies a slain warrior clutching a broken and useless sword. A gored horse tramples him and rears back in fright as it dies. On the left, a shrieking, anguished woman cradles her dead child. On the far right, a woman on fire runs screaming from a burning building, while another woman flees mindlessly. In the upper right corner, a woman, represented by only a head, emerges from the burning building, thrusting forth a light to illuminate the horror. Overlooking the destruction is a bull, which according to the artist, represents brutality and darkness.

Picasso used his Cubist technique to express brutality and movement in *Guernica*. The division of objects and dislocation of anatomical features is perfected through cubist representation. The cubist division has given visual form to the horrors of the event. Picasso specifically limited his palette to Black n White and shades of grey to emphasize more on the starkness and severity of the incident. *Guernica* was Picasso's way of condemning the brutality of Nazis. And this mourning effected Picasso's other paintings too.

“Pablo Picasso painted *Weeping Woman* (fig 2) as he mourned, and sought to make others mourn, the bombing of the ancient Basque capital *Guernica* in 1937. The greatest war art of the 20th century was not created in response to either

⁹Kleiner, *Art Through the Ages*,716.

¹⁰Kleiner, *Art Through the Ages*,716.

world war, but the civil war that tore apart Spain when General Franco led a far-right revolt against the democratically elected Spanish republic. When German planes sent by Hitler bombed Guernica on Franco's behalf, Picasso unleashed an unparalleled torrent of images."¹¹

Guernica has been translated in numerous ways, none of the interpretations counterparts the other. The main characters in the mural are the Bull and the Horse, although they hold special importance in Spanish culture, yet Picasso must have tried to built different roles from these characters. This has made the symbolic meaning of interpreting the specific meaning of the bull and the horse very hard. Their rapport is conceived in a variety of ways throughout Picasso's career.

When Picasso was asked about the symbolic meaning of elements in *Guernica*

"...this bull is a bull and this horse is a horse... If you give a meaning to certain things in my paintings it may be very true, but it is not my idea to give this meaning. What ideas and conclusions you have got I obtained too, but instinctively, unconsciously. I make the painting for the painting. I paint the objects for what they are."¹²

¹¹ Jonathan Jones. "Picasso's Fight Against Fascism – and the British surrealists who followed him." *The Guardian*. (November 2014):accessed June 18, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/nov/05/conscience-conflict-british-artists-spanish-civil-war-review>.

¹²"Guernica...Questions of Meanings," Treasures of The World.accessed June 22, 2017. http://www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/a_nav/

However, he was denied publicity and prevented from exhibiting his work, resulting in his disappearance from the world stage. However, his disappearance from world stage didn't make him unrecognisable. When German soldiers were searching each and every corner of the world, they came across him. And of course recognised him with reference to the world famous Guernica.

"According to an anecdotal account, the Gestapo searched his apartment. During their visit, he showed them a black and white photograph of *Guernica*. When a German soldier asked him if he had done it, he replied, 'No, it was you!'"¹³

Work During the Spanish War and WWII

During the terrible situation Picasso decided to move away from his house, where he was living at that time.

"In June 1940, when the German occupied most of France, Picasso moved to a small rented apartment in a small fishing village on the Atlantic coast. When this area was also taken over by Hitler's troops, he found himself in a difficult position because only four years ago he created world famous Guernica, in memory of the people of village Guernica in Spain. But he along with his wife, risked his life to live in Paris for the duration of the war and preferred not to

http://www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/a_nav/guernica_nav/gnav_level_1/5meaning_guerfrm.html.

¹³Ivana Andonovska. "Picasso's Perfect Answer to the Gestapo." *The Vintage News*.(May 2017): accessed June 17, 2017, <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2017/05/26/picassos-perfect-answer-to-the-gestapo/>.

return to Spain or take refuge in USA or Mexico.”¹⁴

And so, Picasso continued producing his art pieces in the country side near Atlantic city.

His determination to work apprehensively even during the war years, led him to produce extraordinary works of portraits, poetry and writing. He wasn't even afraid of the atmosphere and an uncertain imprisonment.

“In January 1941, he surprised his friends by writing a play entitled *Desire Caught by the Tail*, a curious blend of Picasso's bitter wit, references to Dora; his wife, macabre imagery and the bleakness of wartime Paris that culminates in disappointment for the bizarre characters obsessed with hunger, cold and love.”¹⁵

Picasso began working with anything that was available at hand. Due to scarcity of almost everything during the war years, Picasso produced sculptures with scrap, useless items, fragment of anything that was available close to him. Today, we see his sculptures made out of pieces of wood, cigarette packs, scraps of paper, wine bottle caps, bones and even a bicycle saddle and handlebars with which he produced a life size head of a bull. The urge to produce something, even led him to paint on the wooden planks and hardboard, as the *Head of a woman fig. 9*, drawn with starkly black lines on the newspaper, created in 1941, reflecting

¹⁴“Picasso: Love & War 1935 – 1945,” National Gallery of Victoria. accessed June 17, 2017, http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/picasso/education/ed_JTE_TWY.html.

¹⁵National Gallery of Victoria, " Picasso: Love & War 1935 – 1945."

the harshness and ruthlessness of war torn Paris. Picasso didn't paint the war or anything political openly but he always claimed that the war was in his pictures.

Though Picasso's many paintings of that time do not talk about subject of war yet the confining spaces and darkened dull tones reflect the misery and irony of war years. According to many art critiques this is often unprovable through argument that works done in war era address war happening or no. we also see violent and disturbing work throughout Picassos life, not just during the war years. Certainly, the pictures of *Dora Maar fig 4*, his weeping mistress, reflects his personal circumstances during this period. Many art critiques are confusing Picasso's symbolic representation to his disordered personal life and they associate his disturbed personal life symbols to his paintings on social themes. Picasso himself said,

"I have not painted the war because I am not the kind of painter who goes out like a photographer for something to depict. But I have no doubt that the war is in these paintings I have done."¹⁶

Dora Maar represents every woman on the canvas. She is beautifully flinging her arms upwards, with exposed breast, twisting her face in torment, yelling expressions telling world that she has lost everything in the war. Could we call it Picasso's self-love or his horrific narcissism that he couldn't keep a boundary between his public and private

¹⁶Mark Stevens. "War Stories." *New York Art*. accessed July 2, 2017, <http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/art/reviews/137/>.

life. His war within is so complementing the war outside the world.

Picasso worked with almost all the conventional genres throughout war period, a notable still life that he did with the topic *Memento Mori* fig 12, which is a term traditionally associated to contemporary meditation upon death. A linear painting painted in whites and greys, a goat skull in the centre, giving meaning to the title *Memento Mori* 'remember you must die'. The *Death's Head* fig 10, a bronze sculpture of a skull that also represents a wrecked and cratered world; the skull unveils an unwelcoming, wrecked rhyme with the ghostly heads in Brancusi's art, which symbolically represent promises and inviolate purity. Presentation of animals is more clearly and powerfully giving meaning to war in Picasso's paintings. Picasso has preferred to portray severed heads during war years in most of his paintings. In his great *Still Life With Steer's Skull and Table* fig 7, has an oppressed representation of life, which is achieved through the clotting paint, which is perhaps dried blood of the animal.

When reports of the death camps started spreading across Europe, Picasso came up with another masterpiece *The Charnel House* fig 11, which was painted in 1945. Picasso once more openly spoke about the horrors of the war, by painting a composition depicting a slaughtered family. This composition is no different than *Guernica*, here also he used essentially cubist space and the curling black-and-white palette of the newsreels. This picture has an unfinished air unlike *Guernica* which was a complete rather extraordinary composition over scale of physical, spiritual and moral. The subject doesn't concentrate into a singular image. We see an abandoned barren still

life in the upper left part of the painting. Picasso has also tried to leave a ghostly and mysterious effect in the painting by rubbed out lines. However, *The Charnel House* is yet another example of Picasso's sublime perception about how an artist must approach the century's horrors.

Conventionally, Picasso's painting titled *Man With a Lamb* is viewed as a representation of hope; it makes obvious references to peace, renewal, and Christian redemption. The work that was done by Picasso during the War years hold world's interest precisely because his anxious receptivity does not form into solutions rather questions. The agitation in his paintings does not end or begin, it just keeps swinging between hope and despair. His strength through his ancient themes, or animals as a subject counterpoint to a century of death without answers.

Conclusion

Art has always helped to escape the antipathies of the present. All through Picasso's life, we notice him taking influence from real-life events and then painting them. Concluding the title, I would say that the terms of subject matters, the images created in concentration are characterised by their determination to enhance the individuality. This is probably most visible in the numerous portraits and still lifes done by Pablo Picasso, specifically during the war time. But Picasso's palette speaks of the misery and despair of the time. Subjects of the paintings and composition solely remained Picasso's own choice but as he mentioned in many interviews that his paintings are itself representing War. We also see influence of Dadaist movement in Picasso's work and Fauvism's palette. Although Picasso's art is considered to be solely his own signature style, but influence of other movements

emerging during World War period is also there. In my opinion, I would not call Picasso's art pieces solely cubist expression but the heir of previous movements too. As we see Fauvism's colour palette influencing his palette in Weeping Woman and Dora Maar.

Furthermore, the limited material available during war years, helped his creativity to reach new heights. His urge to create led him to mould the unwanted materials into masterpieces. Although Picasso does not claim to paint war or reflect war, yet we see his palette and subjects as a metaphor to the world war. Had there been no World War, we might have not seen such innovation and wild creations from his side. Assumption made, he would only be creating pieces like Demoiselles, as the nude figures were of more interest in French and Spanish art at that time. Or we would be seeing more compositions of musical notes and rhythms in his paintings.



Fig 1 Demoiselles D' Avignon 1907/ 495x508

<https://www.moma.org/explore/conservation/demoiselles/>



Fig 2 Weeping Woman 1937

200x243

<https://www.pablocicasso.org/the-weeping-woman.jsp>



Fig 3 Guernica 1937

550x241

<https://www.pablocicasso.org/guernica.jsp>

66x55

http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/picasso/education/ed_JTE_TWY.html



Fig 4 Dora Maar 1937

755x1088

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pablo-picasso/portrait-of-dora-maar-1937-1>



Fig 7 Still Life with Steer Head 1939

1088x703

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pablo-picasso/still-life-with-bull-s-skull-1939>



Fig 5 Head of A Woman 1939



Fig 9 Head of A Woman 1941

60x43

http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/picasso/education/ed_JTE_TWY.html



Fig 10 Death Head 1941

724x1024

<https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/18/405>



Fig 12 Memento Mori 1952

730x560

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/memento-mori>



Fig 11 The Charnel House 1945

728x578

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78752>

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