



Pablo Ruiz Picasso painted the 'Guernica' in 1934. He was born in Malaga, Spain on October the twenty-fifth 1881 to Don Jose Ruiz Blasco and Dona Maria Picasso y Lopez. In 1897 Pablo was admitted to the Royal Academy of San Fernando, following in his father's footsteps to become an artist. During his life he painted many famous pieces however the 'Guernica' is arguably his best and most meaningful painting. After living a full life and having three children, he finally passed away on April the eighth at his villa in Mougins.

In 1917, Picasso did the set and costume design for Serge Diaghilev's ballet "Parade." This contact with the theater world, as well as a trip to Italy, brought him back to figurative painting with a new interest in characters from the Italian comedy. He alternated this interest with his investigation into cubism. During the 1920s, Picasso continued to design theatre sets and painted in Cubist, classical and Surreal modes. In late April of 1937, after hearing news of the saturation bombing of the civilian target of Guernica, Spain by the Nazi Luftwaffe, Picasso responded with his great anti-war painting, "Guernica."

On April 26th 1937, a massive air raid by the German Luftwaffe on the Basque town of Guernica in Northern Spain shocked the world. Hundreds of civilians were killed in the raid which became a major incident of the Spanish Civil War. The bombing prompted Picasso to begin painting his greatest masterpiece... Guernica. The painting became a timely and prophetic vision of the Second World War and is now recognised as an international icon for peace.

Despite the enormous interest the painting generated in his lifetime, Picasso obstinately refused to explain Guernica's imagery. Guernica has been the subject of more books than any other work in modern art and it is often described as... "the most important work of art of the twentieth century", yet its meanings have to this day eluded some of the most renowned scholars.

The preoccupying theme of Guernica is of course death; reinforcing this, in the centre of the painting is a hidden skull which dominates the viewer's subliminal impressions. The skull is shown sideways and has been ingeniously overlaid onto the body of the horse, which is also a death symbol. The skull's mechanical appearance seems appropriate to the modern weaponry used in the 1937 bombing. Picasso often hid one or more related symbols within a particular image as seen here.

Below the dying horse in the centre of the painting is a concealed bull's head contained in the outline of the horse's buckled front leg. Its location infers that that it is plunging its horns into the horse's belly from below... the goring of the horse in the bullfight was a favourite subject for Picasso and has strong sexual overtones.

All in all it is a very respected piece of art with various sequential meanings, furthermore showing Picasso's concentration to detail and good workmanship that can be developed by young students like us.