



Pablo Picasso

Weeping woman 1937

Pablo Picasso

Spanish 1881-1973, worked in France 1904-73

Weeping woman 1937

oil on canvas

55.2 x 46.2 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

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This striking painting of a woman holding a handkerchief to her tear-stained face has rich personal and political associations. It is one of a series of weeping women that Picasso created in 1937. He addressed this theme in a number of different mediums, producing powerful paintings, drawings and etchings that were intended to stand as mute visual witnesses to an unspeakable modern tragedy.

In January 1937 Picasso had been asked by representatives of the Spanish Republican government to paint an enormous mural for the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris International Exhibition in the coming summer. At that time he was already creating art that expressed his opposition to the military regime of the Spanish dictator General Franco.

On 26 April 1937, while Picasso was at work on his Spanish Pavilion commission, German planes – acting in concert with General Franco – bombed the Basque city of Guernica for three hours, levelling it to the ground. As Guernica was well behind the front lines of battle in the Spanish Civil War, its civilian population were undefended, and were slaughtered mercilessly by machine-gun fire as they tried to flee the bombing. This appalling act of war became the subject of Picasso's massive mural for the Paris International Exhibition, which was installed in June 1937.

Guernica was one of the largest paintings ever made by Picasso, and its many narrative elements fed his art for years to come. The weeping women compositions of late 1937 belong to what have been termed the 'postscripts' of *Guernica*. The common stark motif in these disturbing images, of a woman's grief laid bare for public scrutiny, was derived from the figure at the far left of the *Guernica* mural – a woman who screams uncontrollably and attempts vainly to escape the bombing, grasping her dead child to her chest.

Aspects of Picasso's turbulent private life have also been read into *Weeping woman*. In 1935 the artist's marriage to Olga Koklova had officially ended. Relations between the couple had been strained since Koklova's discovery in 1932 of the five-year affair Picasso had been conducting with Marie-Thérèse Walter. By mid 1936, however, Picasso had entered into yet another new romance, with Dora Maar, which was to see Walter herself supplanted in his affections.

Not surprisingly, then, the pain that Picasso himself brought to the many loves in his life may also have informed the artist's obsession with the motif of a grieving woman. Beyond such personal speculations, however, *Weeping woman* stands as a strong, iconic denouncement of the atrocities and inhumanity of modern warfare. The painting's strident palette of acid greens and hot purples allows no rest or forgiveness for the eye – only protest and accusation.

Ted Gott

Pablo Picasso

Español 1881–1973, activo en Francia 1904–73

Mujer que llora, (1937)

óleo sobre lienzo

55,20 x 46,20 cms

Galería Nacional de Victoria, Melbourne

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Esta poderosa imagen de una mujer llorando amargamente e intentando contener sus lágrimas con un pañuelo está llena de implicaciones personales y políticas. Es una de la serie de mujeres llorando que Picasso pinta en 1937. Picasso trata el mismo tema utilizando diferentes medios, pintura, dibujo y grabado, para crear un testimonio visual mudo de una tragedia moderna inenarrable.

En 1937, representantes del gobierno de la España republicana pidieron a Picasso que pintara un enorme mural para el pabellón español de la Exposición Internacional de París. En esa época Picasso ya expresaba en su obra su oposición al régimen militar del dictador, el General Franco.

El 26 de abril de 1937, mientras Picasso trabajaba en la comisión para el pabellón español, los aviones alemanes, actuando de acuerdo con el General Franco, bombardearon durante tres horas la ciudad vasca de Guernica, arrasándola completamente. Como Guernica estaba tras la línea del frente de la Guerra Civil, la población civil carecía de protección y fue ametrallada sin piedad al intentar huir de las bombas. Este horrendo crimen de guerra se convirtió en el tema del enorme mural de Picasso para la Exposición Internacional de París, instalado en junio de 1937.

Conmocionado por la masacre de Guernica, Picasso declaró entonces: "En el mural en que estoy trabajando, y al que llamaré Guernica, y en todas mis últimas obras expreso claramente mi repulsión hacia la casta militar que ha sumido España en un océano de dolor y muerte" Esta valiente declaración del artista de oposición a la guerra fascista de Franco fue publicada en The Springfield Field Republican de los Estados Unidos el 18 de Julio de 1937.

El Guernica es una de las obras de mayor tamaño pintadas por Picasso y muchos elementos narrativos de la misma alimentaron su arte durante años posteriores. La Mujer que llora de 1937 pertenece a lo que en arte se han venido llamando "postcriptos" de Guernica. El tema común de estas perturbadoras imágenes, el rostro desgarrado de una mujer expuesto al escrutinio del público, se deriva de la figura que aparece en la esquina izquierda del mural de Guernica, una mujer que grita sin control e intenta en vano escapar del bombardeo mientras aprieta contra su pecho a su hijo muerto.

Mientras trabajaba en el Guernica y en las mujeres llorando que le siguieron, Picasso era consciente de ser el continuador de un diálogo sobre los horrores y la futilidad de la guerra iniciado por el gran artista español Francisco de Goya (1746-1828). Picasso sentía en esos momentos una particular afinidad con Los Desastres de la Guerra de Goya (grabados hechos en 1820, pero publicados póstumamente en 1863), que narran con gráfico detalle las terribles atrocidades cometidas en 1808 tras la invasión de España por las tropas de Napoleón.

Algunos críticos han creído ver en Mujer que llora aspectos de la turbulenta vida privada de Picasso. En 1935, su matrimonio con Olga Koklova fue oficialmente disuelto. La relación entre la pareja era tensa desde que Koklova descubriera en 1932 que Picasso tenía una aventura amorosa desde hacía cinco años con Marie Therese Walter. A mediados de 1936 Picasso inició otro nuevo romance, ahora con Dora Maar, que acabaría suplantando a Marie Therese en el corazón del artista.

No es de extrañar que el dolor que Picasso mismo causó a muchas de las mujeres de su vida sea la causa de su obsesión con el tema de la mujer que sufre. Pero, por encima y más allá

de especulaciones personales, Mujer que llora sigue siendo un testimonio icónico de denuncia de las atrocidades de las guerras. Los estridentes verdes y morados de la pintura no permiten al espectador el descanso ni el perdón, sólo la protesta y la acusación.

Thinking and discussing before the visit

- Using libraries and the internet, research Picasso's early works as a teenager, such as *Portrait of the artist's mother*, 1896 (see link below). Compare them with later works made in his Cubist period and beyond. How and why do you believe he changed his style?
- Picasso meticulously dated his work, which he treated like a diary. Compare a work from the Second World War years (1939–1945), when he was confined in Paris, with one from a happier period in Picasso's life, such as *The doves*, 1957. How do the subject matter, technique and style reflect those periods?
- Picasso and his art were profoundly affected by the Spanish Civil War, (1936–39), which caused him to live in exile in France. Research the causes of the war, the role of General Franco and the outcome.
- In small groups, discuss what constitutes beauty and ugliness in art with reference to works familiar to you. Choose a series of works by Picasso and prepare a PowerPoint presentation that explains how these concepts are illustrated in his work.
- Discuss who should decide what is displayed in a public art gallery. Justify your ideas. Draw up a list of criteria that you think they should use to make their decision?
- Why is Picasso represented in galleries around the world? What factors may have contributed to the universal appeal of Picasso's work?
- Picasso's paintings have risen in value from hundreds to millions of dollars in the space of seventy years. Discuss whether this can ever be justified? What other values can be applied to a precious work of art?

Gallery visit activities

- What are your first thoughts when you look at this painting?
- What does it make you wonder? How does it make you feel?
- What makes this woman's face unusual compared with traditional portraits?
- Imagine you are describing this painting to someone who has never seen it before. Describe the colours, lines and other art elements evocatively so that the person could visualise them.
- Which of the art elements do you believe is most important in conveying the mood of the painting?
- Describe the composition of the work. Why might the artist have placed the woman's face in a dark confined space?
- Which two views of the woman's face has Picasso combined?
- Discuss how, in each case, the colours, lines, dual view of the face and composition contribute to the meaning of the work?
- Extend descriptive powers by elaborating on a section of the painting.

Pablo Picasso is usually acknowledged as the greatest and most influential figure in twentieth-century Western art. His innovative spirit led him to pioneer different styles across a diverse range of mediums including sculpture, ceramics, mosaics, drawing, printmaking, collage and stage design.

Choose one work by Picasso that you particularly admire. Imagine that you are a famous person who has been asked to talk about this work on television. Take on their persona to explain why or why not you appreciate the work. Consider the materials, art elements, the time it was made and the effect it has on you.

Useful links

<http://www.museupicasso.bcb.es/>

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

Gallery visit activities, continued

- Model an example first such as 'the eyes are popping out of giant boat-like sockets which are capsizing from the weight of the tears.' or 'her nose is sharp and triangular'.
- Ask a student to choose one aspect of the portrait such as the eyes, nose, mouth, hair or handkerchief and describe it in detail. Encourage other students to build upon the description adding new material. When this aspect is exhausted, continue the same process with another aspect of the portrait.
- Discuss as a class how this group description may have contributed to understanding of the possible meaning of the work.
- Why did Picasso paint the woman in this raw and confronting way when he had the ability to paint in a high realism style?
- This portrait is believed to communicate the agony of a victim of the Spanish Civil War, a distraught woman mourning the death of her child. In your opinion, to what extent has the painting succeeded in communicating the horror of war?

Post-visit activities

- Tate Modern, London owns a painting in the Weeping woman series (26 October 1937) Locate the painting on the internet: <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=11871>
- Discuss how Picasso has used colour differently from the NGV version and why.
- Research the theft of the *Weeping Woman*, 1937 from the NGV in 1986.
- You will notice that art museums often provide short texts next to works of art (didactic panels) that allow viewers to reach a deeper level of understanding – they include information about the artist and the artist's intention. Study examples of didactic panels. Imagine you are a curator and write a panel for *Weeping woman*, 1937.
- Locate an image of Picasso's famous and harrowing painting *Guernica*, 1937, which is one of the greatest masterpieces in the history of art – a monumental outpouring of grief and rage condemning the senselessness of war. It was painted in response to the suffering and despair following the bombing of a Spanish town of the same name during the Spanish Civil War (1936–39).
<http://www.museoreinasofia.es/museoreinasofia/live/index.html>
- Describe how Picasso has used the art elements such as colour, line and shape to evoke his strong feelings about the bombing.
- Can you see the screaming woman with a dead child in her arms? How does it relate to *Weeping woman*, which was derived from this image?
- Although Picasso declined to explain the symbolism in the painting, commentators have interpreted images in the work in different ways. How might you interpret the symbols of the horse, the bull and the bare light bulb?
- Locate the painting *The 3rd of May 1808 in Madrid: The executions on Príncipe Pío hill*, 1814, by Spanish artist Francisco de Goya y Lucientes. What ideas does it convey about war and how? In what ways is it similar to and different from *Guernica*?
<http://www.museodelprado.es/en/ingles/collection/on-line-gallery/on-line-gallery/obra/el-3-de-mayo-de-1808-en-madrid-los-fusilamientos-en-la-montana-del-principe-pio-2/>
- What role can art and photography play in documenting and expressing the many sides of war?
- Create a work of art that responds to a conflict taking place in the world today.

As a class, consider all the different people who may view this painting, such as a child, a refugee, a relation of General Franco, an inhabitant of Guernica today, a war correspondent. Take on the role of that person and describe the painting from their viewpoint.

Discuss the following quotation made by Picasso in 1932 about portraits:

'The artist loses himself in a futile effort if he wants to be realistic. The work can be beautiful even if it doesn't have a conventional likeness.'

In what ways might it apply to *Weeping Woman*?

Read the following quotation by Picasso:

'We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth.'

Discuss in what ways it might apply to *Guernica*.

Useful links

http://www.artdaily.com/index.asp?int_sec=11&int_new=24389&int_mod=1
(click on 'Artists')

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