

Agenda: Picasso

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Published in *Ciudad Picasso*, by Rogelio López Cuenca, Juana de Aizpuru Gallery, Madrid, November 2011

"There ought to be an absolute dictatorship...a dictatorship of painters...a dictatorship of one painter...to suppress all those who have betrayed us, to suppress the cheaters, to suppress the tricks, to suppress the mannerisms, to suppress charms, to suppress history, to suppress a heap of other things. "

Pablo Picasso (1935)¹

(several voices) Sure, sure... No doubt... Of course, of course...

-Salvador Dalí: Because that is something we must keep in mind. Or else we'd be comparing apples and oranges.

(someone stands up in the front row) That is absolutely true, everything has to be in its place. *(words of approval)*

-Salvador Dalí: After all, genius is always above any particular ideas. There is a reason why everyone agrees when it comes to pointing out a genius: it would be crazy if this were not so. We know that Picasso has on occasion tried to kill art, with his communist materialism, but there is one thing I can tell you: he is hardly communist by now, and that is why we must now ask him to return home once and for all, to his country, to the land that saw his birth, the land that brought him up. *(he looks up at the chandelier hanging from the ceiling)*. From one genius to another genius: Pablo, thou art the glory of Spanish painting and must be above any differences in thought. *(standing ovation)*

-Brassaï: Just a point here. I assure you that he never dealt with politics until the War. And his communism... well, that had more to do with some of those surrea ... friends of his in Paris. Like a good Spaniard, he was more into monarchy... I just wanted to make that point, thanks.

-Luis Araquistáin: Gentlemen, I can state that Picasso is no longer a communist. I do not know if you have seen the portrait of Stalin that he painted. There is no denying that it is full of a profound and unbeatable humor. You must have read about Breton and others, how they kicked up. He has also failed to pay his fee to the French Communist Party. I bear witness to this, because he told me himself.

¹ Pablo Picasso, "Conversación con Christian Zervos", *Cahiers d'Art* 10, no. 7-10, París, 1935, p. 173

-Javier de Salas (*from the back of the room*): But how can we celebrate Picasso without Picasso? Please get serious! Anything he says in the international press will be the end of us. (*whispers*).

-Juan Cortés: Well, first things first: we can always gather a good number of works that he cannot place a veto on and then sell this as a token of national love for one of his children. At the end of the day, some of his works may be good, but let's face it, he's a clown. Aren't all artists a bit odd? We can claim, precisely, that great Spanish artists have always been rebellious...

-Alfredo Sánchez Bella: No, no, no ... I still think we'll be the laughingstock of the world. I'm not convinced at all. We must do something about it. Damn! Why is everything modern exclusive to the Reds? And when we want to do something, our attempts are turned into political motives... It is outrageous!

-José Ortega y Gasset: Come, gentlemen. Let's focus. We all want Picasso to return to Spain and have the recognition he deserves, right? (*voices of approval*) Okay. Listen, I've talked to d'Ors, to the Duke of Alba, to Don Pedro Sainz Rodriguez, to Marañón, and we have also prepared a letter asking him to change his residence to Spain, so that he can be buried in his country. This is an important and necessary step. We cannot put the cart before the horse. He doesn't need to live here all the time, but at least for a few seasons.

-Federico García-Sanchiz (*yells*): As a member of the Royal Spanish Academy of Language, I reject Picasso as a man and as an artist. (*clamour*)

-Ernesto Giménez Caballero: I totally agree with this gentleman. Picasso's success is owed to the bourgeoisie and the capitalists...

-Federico García Sanchiz: Listen, I wasn't referring to...

-Juan de la Encina (*shouting over the crowd*): Because Picasso is in no way a herald of new times and opener of new paths, but only a skillful and eclectic reproducer of trends. Picasso imitates and reproduces everything. (*the commotion increases*)

-Camilo José Cela (*loudly*): But what fallacies you speak! Spaniards like Picasso are the true innovators! They are the soldiers of a combative art desperately gazing at reality, as did Saint John of the Cross and Miguel Hernández: an art with its feet on the ground, and not on just any ground - that is the sin of Cubists and Surrealists - but on the mother earth that nurtures us and gives us the guts to fight, plunging fully into the world, getting splashed with blood and, if necessary, getting covered with shit and disgrace. Picasso is

baroque, damn it! And nothing is more fundamentally Spanish than a baroque artist.
(unanimous acclaim)

-Luis Felipe Vivanco: Yes sir. Picasso is above all an expressionist, not a cubist. Isn't his "*Weeping Woman*" a *Mater Dolorosa*? Isn't there a desperate and rebellious archaism of pain in her which places her very close to the religious, the highest Spanish tradition?

-Manuel Abril: What nonsense! To sully our national paintings like that! Picasso is a complete failure, he has taken to the obsession/craze of inventing escapades, he is an idol of Jewish dealers and swanky critics and essayists ... This event is a farce! *(total uproar)*

-Dionisio Ridruejo and Miguel de Unamuno, *in unison*: You sure are a farce! You are culturally myopic, bigoted and silly. But don't you realize that, above all, Picasso is Spanish? Spanish! You don't understand? *(thunderous applause covers some boos)*

-Antonio Manuel Campoy: Painting, particularly in this hour of the world, paradigmatically has a Spanish name: Pablo Ruiz Picasso! *(rejoicing)*

-Jose Ortega y Gasset *(moving his hands up and down)*: Please, please ... *(speaking to his neighbour in a low voice)*: Here's why the new artist divides the audience into two kinds of individuals: those who understand him and those who don't) ... please, please ... we are here to see what we can do, not to have a squabble. Culture should unite us ... Culture is not to create conflicts.

-Eduardo Ducay: I would like to say a few words, please. This has to do with what Mr. Ortega y Gasset just pointed out. Do you really believe that art can endanger our national character? That it can undermine the integrity of that collective human condition? I find it hard to believe that the enemies' aesthetic cannons can turn against a country to annihilate and destroy its character and the way in which it expresses itself. A way of painting cannot go against anyone. The expression anti-Spanish as a qualifier cannot be used simply because an artist creates in his own way. The word is even more inappropriate when applied to artists who, in all their works, have proved that they are Spanish to the core, because they are great rebels, great inventors, great creators. *(long and prolonged applause, bravos and excited faces)*

-José Ortega y Gasset: Thank you, Mr. Ducay. We are very moved. Let's see, Mr. Roces, I think you also wanted to say something.

-Wenceslao Roces: Yes. You probably already know that Mr. Renau, who is here beside me, has made the necessary arrangements for Picasso to take over the Prado Museum. In a letter approved by President Azaña in person...

Voices: Go home! Go home!

-José Ortega y Gasset: Please, please...

-Wenceslao Roces: ... it was specifically stated that the decision was taken based on the fact that he is the most universal artist that Spain has. Picasso responded enthusiastically, and I quote: "I've never felt so Spanish and so attuned to the cause that is being aired." (*applause*) Yes, and Mr. Renau, in the letter, correct me now if I'm not telling the truth, asked him to come to Spain and offered him all of the elements, both of material and spiritual nature, absolutely all of them, for him to be able to do so.

Voice in the audience: Then why is he not coming?

-Wenceslao Roces: Well, I'm not sure, but I wrote to him myself asking him to come, even if only for a few days, to make an on-the-spot assessment of the government's work in the management of our national art treasure. In short, why am I telling you this? Because I believe that we'll have to use other means to convince him. I don't think that simply inviting him will do, no matter how tempting the invitations may be.

-Florentino Pérez Embid (*gestures for permission to speak*): I've also made some arrangements in this regard. I got in touch with the government...

Voices: Boo... Boo...

-Florentino Pérez-Embid: ... and I stressed that, after Goya, Picasso is the greatest name in the history of painting. He has at times, as is frequent amongst artists and has already been pointed out by Mr. Cortés, embraced bizarre political attitudes, though they have never been consistent or sustained for long. The problem is that the French political circles have repeatedly tried to identify the painter with that country but, like it or not, Picasso remains Spanish (*hoorays and bravos*). In addition to that, the Spanish government owns the most famous and pictorially most important of Picasso's paintings, the Guernica. We are now preparing the Spanish Museum of Contemporary Art, of imminent creation, and this painting would go well in it, wouldn't it, Luis?

-Luis González Robles: Absolutely.

-Luis Carrero Blanco: It's true that...

Voices: Go home! Go home!

-Luis Carrero Blanco: It is true that Mr. Pérez Embid contacted me to learn our opinion on the advisability of taking the necessary steps to recover the painting. And, after talking to the Head of State, I can confirm that we have full compliance.

-Florentino Pérez Embid: Also, Mr. Joaquín de la Puente has thought of someone like Luis Miguel Dominguín to help in this task... I'm saying this because of the contacts of the matador with the artist. *(nods of approval in the room)*

-Joaquín de la Puente: I have no doubt that we are on the right track. You know how the artist from Málaga likes bullfighting. I think we do have a duty to provide Picasso with as much as can be and as much as he deserves. The picture, upon its arrival in Madrid, would be shown to the public at the Prado Museum. The work will be presented exactly as he wants it to be. There even is a strong possibility that a pavilion to accommodate as many pieces of his work as we could collect would be built, by way of a monument to his Iberian genius.

Voices: Brilliant idea... well done... surely... you can count on us...

-Luis González Robles: I feel it necessary to emphasize that we all need to stop the French from irrevocably taking hold of Picasso. By the way, here is Mr. O'Hara, from the MOMA, who thinks exactly like me. Go ahead, Mr. O'Hara, you're among friends. Tell them what you think, so that they'll see that it is not vain jingoism.

-Frank O'Hara *(in broken Spanish)*: I don't know if I should ... well, I just say that when they see what Spanish artists in exile ... um ... when live outside always be obvious how they look for Spanish identity. I believe the reason is roots in Spain to be very deep. That's what I want to say. *(Bravos)*

Luis González Robles: See?

-Luis Felipe Vivanco: Just one more thing, one more thing. Remember that Picasso did not leave the country but a city, Barcelona, for lack of artistic atmosphere. He never abandoned his land, but narrow-mindedness. That's what we have to offer. The fact is that things have changed dramatically, this is now a modern country.

-Dionisio Ridruejo: Very well said, yes sir.

-Roland Dumas: Okay, I'm speaking as an advocate of Picasso here. We've always said that perhaps he would come back if the republic came back too... this is not just about being modern. *(general clamour, booing and cries of out, out)*

-Alexandre Cirici: Wait a minute, wait a minute. If there is a city that has always been modern, that's Barcelona, no disrespect to anyone, of course. *(some boos)*

-José María Moreno Galván: Exactly, can you imagine Picasso in Madrid? He would have ended in the school of Gutiérrez Solana! Picasso is the symbol of the Mediterranean character.

-Carmen Calvo: No wonder, seeing as he's from Málaga. It couldn't be otherwise! *(mild applause)*. They say it once crossed Picasso's mind that you had to be born in Málaga to be a Cubist.

-Alexandre Cirici: Well, he might come from Málaga, but everything he is as an artist he owes to Barcelona. And what better example of it than the active involvement of the artist in the museum we have made for him there? Why did he turn down other offers while being so enthusiastic about the Museum in Montcada Street? Huh? Tell me, tell me.

-Maria Zambrano: He feels he's from Málaga from head to toe, just as I do. This I swear on my parents' grave. Talk to anyone in Paris. He keeps shouting it from the rooftops.

-Alexandre Cirici: Also, I don't understand why we should make another museum for him in Madrid, as I've heard around the place, when we already have one.

-Juan Eduardo Cirlot: He's right, why?

-José Ortega y Gasset: María, Alejandro... please. It's not the time to discuss that. He is Spanish and that's what's important. You see, we are still in the quagmire of not finding the way to bring him with us. Tomás...

-Tomás Llorens: I'm very surprised to hear all of this. I do not understand why we have to bring him to this country when, in reality, it's all about drawing him to our art. Let me explain. We are now preparing the Spanish pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and obviously we want to do something different, to prove that Spain is changing, that we are modern. We have already asked the MOMA to lend us the Guernica for the pavilion, as a universal symbol of Spanish art, as an icon of the meeting of the nation with itself. That is what it is all about: about making Picasso understand that Spain is wherever there is art, that is to say, everywhere. *(applause)*

-Luis González Robles: But I told you already! The sun never sets on the Spanish exhibitions.

-Felipe González: I agree that there is a path to explore there. If we are the ones to

approach his work, he will approach us. I must remind you that I was the first Spanish politician to be photographed with the Guernica in New York. (*scattered insults*).

-Juan José Ibarretxe: And what about that? Another murky Spanish maneuver to deprive the Basques of the painting. (*boos*).

-Miguel de Unamuno: Heck, there is nothing more Spanish than a Basque! (*Laughter and some applause*)

-Juan José Ibarretxe: It's all a smokescreen. Ours were the dead bodies, but they get to keep the painting. The flames on the canvas are the flames of our homes, and the streets are our streets. This is pure cultural kidnapping, carried out by the Madrid government. It is perfectly feasible that the Guernica, which has traveled half the world, will come to Euskadi, connecting the painting and the martyred city which gives it its name, in the land where the tragedy occurred. Also, the Guernica is now one among many at the Reina Sofía, but would become a preferential centre of attention at the Guggenheim.

-Javier Tusell: Now, that's true. Picasso's will is for the picture to be in the Prado. It's a disgrace to misrepresent his wishes, a real disgrace.

-Carmen Calvo (*addressing Ibarretxe*): That's right... The picture is a universal emblem against any war. If Picasso had seen the bombing with his own eyes, then perhaps... but to him Guernica is a metaphor for the world. We believe that the picture should be precisely in the birthplace of its author, in his beloved Malaga, with its residue of mixed cultures, tourists and therefore representing the symbol of universal brotherhood.

-Ángeles González Sinde: Moving the Guernica out of the Reina Sofía is out of the question.

-Manuel Borja-Villel: Absolutely.

Many voices crying Scam! Scam! Scam!

-José Ortega y Gasset: Please, please... calm down, calm down... what kind of image are we portraying. I suggest a recess for some light refreshments and let's see if we can cool things down. We all have the best intentions to sort out this situation. Come on, come on, friends...

* Most observations are drawn from the following bibliographic sources:

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