

(A) Answer this question with reference to any artist(s) you have studied discuss the artist's(s) use of techniques and/or composition in the artwork(s). (10)

(B) Explain the influence of social, cultural and/or other factors on any of the art work(s) discussed. (10)

I will discuss the paintings '*Les Femmes d'Alger*' (1907) and '*Guernica*' (1937) by Pablo Picasso.

(A) Techniques in '*Les Femmes d'Alger*'

'*Les Femmes d'Alger*' was Picasso's first true masterpiece. It is a shocking painting, both in its subject matter (it depicts 5 prostitutes in a brothel in Barcelona), style and technique. The women in the painting have been painted in an extremely crude fashion- large angular shapes replace limbs, and the limited use of pink and yellow emphasise the different geometric shapes rather than recognisable body parts. Picasso uses thick black and brown outlines to distinguish parts of the body rather than blending tones together to create form. The paint has been applied quickly with large sweeping brushstrokes, a technique that gives the painting an expressive and energetic quality.

Techniques in '*Guernica*'

Painted on a grand scale, this massive painting has become one of the most famous and iconic anti-war paintings. Picasso discards colour and uses only black, white and grey tones- a technique that gives the figures a ghostly quality. Picasso's painting technique is bold and brash- drips of paint can be seen on the arm holding the lamp, creating a sense of immediacy. Paint is applied quite thinly in parts of the canvas e.g. in the bull's head, where earlier versions of the composition can be clearly seen. This technique adds a vital energy to the painting. The figures are outlined with black paint, a technique which allows the viewer to recognise each disparate character even amongst the chaos of the scene. The style/technique used by Picasso in *Guernica* could be described as pseudo-Cubism for although it bears the hallmarks of Cubist painting, it does not fit into the category of analytical or synthetic Cubism and was not painted between 1907 and 1918.

Composition in '*Les Femmes d'Alger*'

Figures in profile on either side of the canvas draw open curtains to reveal an almost horrific scene. The two women in the centre of the canvas form the heart of the composition and stare provocatively out of the frame. The space between the central figures and the women on the right of the composition seemingly shows a blue sky but it is cut into fragmented geometric shapes and leads to a feeling of unease. Indeed, the whole composition appears to have little or no spatial depth and the disjointed perspective forces the eye to dart around the canvas. One of the most startling aspects of the painting is the squatting figure to the right of the painting. She seems to have her back to the viewer and yet we see her face from the front. This multi-layered compositional technique bears the hallmarks of Cubism, a movement which Picasso would soon develop with Georges Braque.

Composition in '*Guernica*'

Picasso uses a triangular composition for the figures in the centre of the canvas, a traditional compositional technique used since the time of the Renaissance. Picasso also positions figures around each edge of the composition which gives the painting rhythm and forces the eye around the canvas. A large light bulb oversees everything in the composition, possibly symbolising the blinding Spanish sun or the light of a torturer's cell. A broken sword is placed prominently in the bottom centre of the composition, no doubt symbolising the futility of war. Picasso isolates a weeping mother and dead child on the left of the composition and a tragic, helpless figure on the right- these figures symbolise the suffering of the innocent inhabitants of Guernica.

(B) Influence of social, cultural and/or other factors on 'Les Femmes d'Alger'

This disturbing depiction of prostitutes in a brothel was painted in the small town of Montmartre on the outskirts of Paris. Picasso had moved to Paris at the start of the 20th century to be part of the artistic scene there. Since the time of the Impressionists (1870 onwards), Paris was the cultural centre for art in the world and the large concentration of brilliant talent constantly inspired and motivated the young Spanish painter.

The composition of 'Les Femmes d'Alger' was inspired by Paul Cezanne's 'Bathers' (1906) while the pose of the central figure closely resembles a woman in Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres's 'The Turkish Bath' (1862)- a painting that was greatly admired by Picasso.

Three of the women in the painting wear noticeably African-inspired masks. Picasso would have seen masks like these in museums in Paris at the time and there is little doubt that their unusual form and 'primitive' quality were a major influence on him. The 'primitive' influence and flat colours in parts of the canvas may also have been inspired by the French painter Paul Gauguin. The squatting figure to the right of the painting seems to have her back to the viewer and yet we see her face from the front. Cezanne had experimented with showing how the left and right eye see things differently and reduced nature to geometric forms but Picasso now took these experiments a step further. By showing how something might look from the front, the side and the back, all in the one picture plane, Picasso opened the door to Cubism. Soon after, Picasso and Georges Braque would cement their reputation in the history of art with their Cubist experiments (Braque had encouraged Picasso throughout the production of 'Les Femmes d'Alger' and the 2 artists would work very closely together over the next few years).

While Cezanne, Gauguin and 'primitive' art were major influences on this specific artwork, part of Picasso's genius was how he was able to pick and choose aspects, techniques and subject matter from the whole history of western art and make it his own. As he said himself: 'Good artists copy, great artists steal'.

Influence of social, cultural and/or other factors on 'Guernica'

This painting is a passionate response to the German carpet-bombing of Guernica, the Basque capital in Northern Spain. The bombing took place during the Spanish civil war, when Hitler allowed German planes to be used as a favour to General Franco, the Spanish dictator. The use of black, white and grey is possibly influenced by newspaper editorials of the time. In the days before television and 24-hour news reports, Picasso would have followed the tragic story of Guernica in French newspapers like 'La Figaro'. The screaming and distorted female figures were directly influenced by Picasso's studies of Dora Maar. She was Picasso's mistress at the time and sat for many of his paintings and studies during that period of his career. Maar is the famous 'weeping woman', another famous Picasso painting from 1937. Part of the imagery in Guernica is inspired by Spanish myth and legend; the bull for example is often used as a symbol of Spanish culture. The bull or minotaur (half-bull/half-human) appear in many of Picasso's works.

It could be said that a major influence on Guernica is Picasso's own body of work, for many of the objects and figures had already appeared in previous paintings. Goya's famous '3rd of May' painting also influenced the painting (another large-scale Spanish disaster mural).