

## **Cultural, historical and social influences on Pablo Picasso's 'Weeping Woman' (1937)**

The Weeping Woman is known as a 'postscript' to Guernica, Picasso's famous response to atrocities committed during the Spanish civil war. The Basque town of Guernica was devastated in 1937 by the German air force, sent by Hitler on behalf of General Franco. The painting shows a scene of massacre and suffering in which women and children were the principal victims.

One of the main figures in *Guernica* is a weeping, screaming woman holding her dead child. Picasso made numerous studies of the woman's head during the painting of the mural. After its completion, however, he continued to return to the theme, almost obsessively. This Weeping Woman is the last and most elaborate of the series.

Despite its relatively small scale (60cm x 50mm), it packs a serious emotional punch. The bright primary and secondary colours immediately capture the eye and the thick black lines emphasise the figure. Compositionally, 2 viewpoints can be seen at once which is typical of Cubism. This was a movement that Picasso pioneered along with Georges Braque in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Dora Maar, Picasso's lover and muse, was the model for this Weeping Woman. Picasso painted Maar many times, often in extreme states of distress. He said that: *'I couldn't make a portrait of her laughing. For me she's the weeping woman. For years I've painted her in torture forms, not through sadism, and not with pleasure either; just obeying a vision that forced itself on me. It was a deep reality, not the superficial one'*.

As well as modelling for Picasso, Maar influenced him with her intelligence and passion. She was a prominent member of socialist political parties and inspired a normally non-committed Picasso to take a stand against fascist and authoritarian governments. Maar also helped Picasso find a studio in the St. Germain district of Paris. This was a crucial influence on Picasso's work because the large studio space allowed him to paint the massive Guernica. Without Guernica, there would be no weeping woman.