



Guernica: La historia de un ícono del siglo XX

Gijs van Hensbergen

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Guernica relates the powerful story of Picasso's 1937 masterpiece, a painting that from its birth out of war and violence became known worldwide as a symbolic cry for peace. The acclaimed biographer of Gaudí traces the iconic painting's beginnings amid the Spanish Civil War through its use as a weapon in the propaganda battle against Fascism, through the years when it became the nucleus of the Museum of Modern Art's creation in New York, to its role as a symbol of reconciliation when it returned to Spain after the death of Franco, as democracy was reestablished.

Guernica: La historia de un ícono del siglo XX Details

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Jessica says

One of the most powerful paintings of the twentieth century and its creator presented with fascinating historical, political and biographical context. Beginning with the tragic events in Spain leading up to the second world war, van Hensbergen provides an engaging account of culture and art during and after the war in Europe and America as Guernica, the painting, travels from France across the ocean and finally back home to Spain. Though at times the author goes a bit over the top with his admiration for the art world, for someone unfamiliar with the battles artists encountered in their attempts to bridge the gap between mere aesthetics and political statement, this book provides an excellent primer.

Iben says

He pushes a little too hard in this book, but the section on the Spanish Civil War is fascinating.

Marvin says

I put this book on my reading list after my son enthused about seeing Picasso's mural, Guernica, on his trip to Spain. But this art-historical biography of the painting is not really my cup of tea, and it was probably foolish of me to think it would be.

John says

Kinda boring. Picasso was a jerk.

Rachel says

Informative, if limited.

Gwilym says

The life of Picasso's Guernica has been documented well by Gijs van Hensbergen in this considered yet occasionally flawed biography. The first half of the book is a lively and educating exploration of Picasso and his relationship with the Republic. Making sense of the place of Picasso, the war and the painting in the wider world of modern art takes us to New York and explores the relationship between Picasso and later masters such as Pollock. Even if you are not fully aware of all the paintings involved, van Hensbergen does a

fair job of keeping the relatively uninformed reader in the loop.

Moving toward the end of the journey the book seems to lose its direction and clarity. Where before concepts, artists and paintings were introduced in an understandable framework the author later seems to drop names and flit back and forth without concern for cohesion. Although we can appreciate the importance of following the life of Picasso to understand where Guernica moves the detail is sometimes tedious and seemingly irrelevant. Too much emphasis is placed on the bureaucratic and moral wrangling of the art diplomacy to return Guernica and too little to how it has fared back in native Spain. A discussion of how it fits as an icon - including the infamous UN incident - would have been a more appropriate discussion to fill this space given over to bizarre Picasso family feuding.

In conclusion, a good book that is only let down by the poor structuring toward the end. If you have an interest in Guernica and wish to understand how and why it is elevated to the status it is, this book can go a long way in educating you. Take it with a copy of Russell Martin - Picasso's War: The Destruction of Guernica, and the Masterpiece That Changed the World. Be aware also that Gijs van Hensbergen gives little airtime to exploring the meanings of the painting - this is not a theory book, more an account of the object and its relationship to the owner and owners of it.
