

My Guernica

Capturing the depth of suffering within rather than ogling cruel details of the horrors of war, that are not just an affront to civilization, but to the very notion of humanity, *My Guernica* strives to make us see more clearly and question the crimes of our own time. In its courage to pursue the truth, undeterred by ever-changing fads, complacency, indifference and egregious propaganda-inciting lies; in its desire to hold out hope amidst devastation, this series of works is a tribute to life itself.

The title, *My Guernica*, references Picasso's *Guernica*, the painting that portrayed the atrocities of war at their fullest and has become a universal anti-war symbol; a timeless warning for generations to come about what mankind is capable of.

Chosen for bombing practice by Hitler's burgeoning war machine, the Basque village from which Picasso's work would take its name, was pounded with high-explosive and incendiary bombs for over three hours. Townspeople were cut down as they ran from the crumbling buildings. Over sixteen hundred were killed or wounded. Guernica was a revelation of the horror of bombing raids on civilians. Its flames now burn in Ukraine, as the Russian Federation is doing to countless Ukrainian cities (Mariupol, Bakhmut, Kharkiv, Kherson, among others) what the Nazis did to Guernica on behalf of the fascist side in the Spanish Civil War. On four-hundred-and-fifty-third day of the full-scale invasion, NATO Parliamentary Assembly recognized at last Russia's crimes in Ukraine as genocide and its regime as a terrorist state ruled by its own particular brand of fascism.

Guernica's ghosts and Ukraine battling for its very existence relay a message that is stark, with immediate impact: it is not only bombs that are capable of killing thousands. In the 1930s, totalitarian propaganda machines attacked the very idea of truth. Hitler and Stalin waged a permanent war on facts using radio, cinema, censorship, secret police and patriotic brainwashing at mass rallies. The very same extreme tactics are used by Putin to transform modern Russia into a totalitarian state it has become, while their softer derivatives allow certain politicians to say whatever they like and to dismiss anything that doesn't suit them as "fake news." The overabundance of information on the internet supplies every fact with a counter-fact, creating as many conspiracy theories as there are opinions, so that it's no longer viable to trust anyone or to believe anything.

Yet, it is possible for a single person bearing witness to the truth to capture the human reality of a particularly vile period in such a way that it will have outlasted all propaganda. The power of *My Guernica* is to narrate the truth about the violence of the historical moment in which we're presently living so viscerally and permanently, that it will outstare the daily lies of the contemporary dictators on the one hand and, on the other, out-speak the media where it falls unduly silent.

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