



# The Art of War

## It's a horrible

work, anything but sweet or lovely, and certainly not 'aesthetically pleasing' or harmonious. But this does not say anything about its quality.

A masterpiece by Picasso? Yes, there are many who would question such a statement and ask 'How can you call it such? Are you trying to be high brow? Is it an intellectual conclusion you reached? Or is this just repeating what a small group of self-proclaimed elitists are dictating that everyone should believe? Are you joining the tyranny of that clique that threatens to call everyone else ignorant, stupid, behind-the-times or simply dull?'

At first the design may appear strange and bizarre, so that we cannot possibly understand it at all, and certainly cannot figure out why it calls up such strong emotions in us. Yet it appears that the inner logic of the scene, the convincing power of its symbolic language, takes hold of us and irresistibly works itself into our soul.

Chunks of a man, his sword still clutched in his hand, lie scattered on the ground. A woman whose child has been killed becomes a monument of sorrow and hopelessness. A terrified, dismayed figure drags itself along, and another raises his hands to heaven in his utter distress. These figures are not individual people but symbolic figures who collectively express the misery of all...the woman jerking her head out of a window and holding an oil lamp...relentlessly powerful, could have been

imagined only by a truly great artist...To the left there is a bull, the symbol of the Spanish people, conscious of its own might, unmoved, for Spain will not capitulate! The horse appears as a symbol of Spain, but this time in fear and agony.

Words can hardly do justice to this work. So purely artistic is the arrangement of the whole, with its underlying unity that allows no unnecessary line or speck of colour. The whole surface expresses the artist's coming to grips with one single theme: Guernica, a complexity of human emotions...a wealth of emotion that could never have been achieved as convincingly had the subject been something idyllic or cheerful..

The theme of terror which one finds again and again in...Picasso's work...a way of voicing emotions that are normally only experienced in a nightmare or terrifying daydream...the signature masterpiece of modern art.

### Hans Rookmaaker

Extracted from *Art, Artists and Gauguin: The Complete Works of Hans R. Rookmaaker*, Vol 1 (Piquant, 2002).

**Guernica**, a Basque village bombed on 28 April 1937 during the Spanish Civil War by German pilots sympathetic to Franco.



*Guernica*, Pablo Ruiz y Picasso, 1937, 1 May - 4 June 1937, oil on canvas, 349.3 x 776.6 cm.

*The Confined* (detail, see p. 9), Margaret Hudson-Ware, 2002, oil on canvas, 200 x 300cm.