

Curating Archives, Archiving Curating

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Chapter Three: *The Picasso Material*

Guernica at the Whitechapel Gallery

In the text that follows I give an historical account necessary to understand Picasso's painting *Guernica* and its significance as a work of art and a political symbol.

Gernika is a Basque town in the north of Spain, which was bombed in April 1937. It also lends its name to Picasso's renowned painting, which was commissioned by the Spanish government to decorate the Spanish Pavilion in the International Paris Exposition of 1937. The painting reflects a synergy of the artist's spontaneous reaction to a war crime and his inspiration to produce an artwork, on commission, that would stand out in the international exhibition. According to various sources, such as biographers and fellow artists, Picasso was deeply disturbed by the relentless bombing of Gernika and decided to paint the canvas with reference to the event.⁹⁶

The news of the bombing had circulated around the world, creating an electrified climate throughout Europe and the United States, inciting responses from

⁹⁶ The bombing of Gernika in April 1937 was a catastrophic event which devastated the rest of the world. Carried out by German Nazi pilots (a fact that was covered up and denied by the Nazis and by Franco), it destroyed the majority of the city and caused the death of hundreds of innocent civilians. Public opinion perceived the bombardment of the city as totally unjustified. As Herman Goering, commander in chief of the German Air Force, declared during the war-crime trials, the bombing was also an opportunity to test 'experimental fighter units, bombers, and anti-aircraft guns ...under combat conditions; and added that he constantly rotated German 'volunteers' so that 'the personnel too, might gather a certain amount of experience'. See the *International Military Tribunal: The Trial of the Major War Criminals* [Nuremberg, 1947-49] (testimony of 14 March 1946), IX, pp. 280-282. This is cited in *Picasso's Guernica*, ed. by Ellen C. Oppler (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1988), p. 57.

civilians, politicians and the media. The bombing of Gernika was, at that point, the biggest and cruellest attack against civilians.⁹⁷ Picasso was in the early stages of the commission for the Spanish Pavilion and the bombing provided him with an ideal subject.⁹⁸ In May 1937, he started sketching drafts and did as many as six sketches in one day. Two months of intense work led to the final painting we know today as *Guernica*, apparently named by vox populi.⁹⁹ The canvas was ready to be exhibited in the 1937 Paris Exposition, which bore the ambitious title 'International Exposition – Arts and Technology in Modern Life'. The Spanish

⁹⁷ Historical accounts concur on the duration of the bombing which has been declared to approximately three hours. Bomber planes were targeting the busiest parts of the town during the busiest hours. The raid did not destroy specific targets; instead, raids were focused on the destruction of the whole of the town. Gernika was a particularly important place for the Basque people; an ancient town honoured throughout Spain as the oldest centre of democracy. The Nazis attack is considered an attack not only to the town per se but to a symbol.

⁹⁸ Picasso, of Spanish origin, was living in France at the time. Although not explicitly political in either his art or in his personal life, Picasso was mobilised by the bombing. As Picasso has mentioned in interviews, his works were never political or propagandistic, except of *Guernica* – which was his chance to associate his work with his native country and with the horrible realities of war. See 'Picasso in conversation with Jerome Seckler'. Seckler was an American soldier, and part of the first troop contingent to liberate France. He was also an amateur painter who had studied *Guernica*. Seckler met Picasso in two occasions in 1944 and 1945. Their conversation includes important comments by Picasso on his political approach to *Guernica*. The interview was published initially in *New Masses*, March 1945 (New York: International Publishers, 1945), pp. 4–7, and has been frequently republished.

⁹⁹ Juan Larrea narrates the anecdote that Picasso held many gatherings in his studio, inviting constructive comments about the work in progress: 'Then one afternoon, towards the middle of June, a group of us went to see the painting which was practically finished. We formed a line of some fifteen well-known persons in front of it and admired the monumental masterpiece, which produced in me profound emotions. And then when we were all more or less silent, Picasso stepped away from the group and, approaching the mural, tore off the remaining papers.' Larrea continues: '... moments later, Picasso repeated the manoeuvre: again he approached the mural and tore off the remaining paper strips and the last one to go was the one on the neck of the child. This evoked a spontaneous round of applause from those present and the applause was followed by warm congratulations. That is how *Guernica* – with the impressive austerity worthy of the Escorial monastery – set off a wonderful hubbub ... if I am not mistaken, the mural received its name by vox populi. Paul Eluard, Christian Zervos, and other French personalities began to call it by this significant stark name inspired by the passionate tempers of the times, a name that Picasso – sharing everyone's outrage – accepted as his own. See Juan Larrea, 'The Unveiling', in *Picasso's Guernica*, pp. 200–201.

pavilion was made of prefabricated flexible materials, and was designed according to modern architecture.

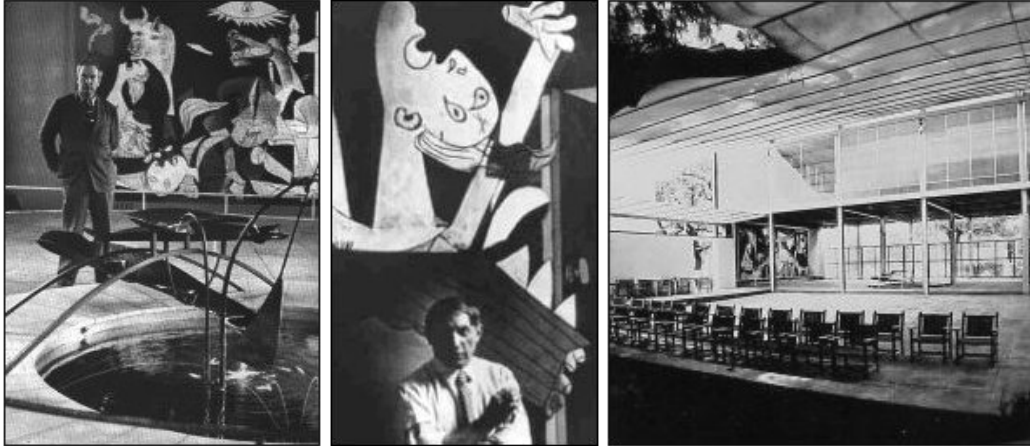


Figure 8, 9 and 10: Views of the Spanish pavilion in the 1937 International Exposition: (left) Alexander Calder by his work *Mercury Fountain*, with *Guernica* in the background; (centre) Picasso in front of *Guernica*; (right) view of the Spanish pavilion from the patio.

The pavilion interior was simple with large open areas where the public could view works of art, including Alexander Calder's *Mercury Fountain*, Picasso's *Guernica* and Joan Miro's *The Reaper*. The works of art were all by well-known artists and in this way compensated the visitor for the modest structure.¹⁰⁰ The pavilion was not designed as a renunciation of Spain's situation; on the contrary it was created very much with the idea that it was representative of a country under civil war. Visitors could either gather in the space which functioned as an

¹⁰⁰ Josep Lluís Sert, a young Catalan architect, designed the pavilion with the assistance of Lluís Lacasa. The pavilion was clustered among the other European pavilions and positioned very close to the Nazi and Soviet buildings. The Nazi pavilion was an exorbitant 35 metres high, and featured at its apex a German imperial eagle clutching a swastika. The Soviet pavilion featured Vera Mukhina's colossal steel sculpture of a young worker and peasant woman carrying the hammer and sickle of the Soviet revolution. The architects of the Spanish pavilion chose, for reasons of practical economy, prefabricated material from which they assembled the whole pavilion. The simplicity of the pavilion came into contrast with the lavish décor of many of the other pavilions which used marble and expensive materials. See *Picasso's Guernica*, pp. 65–72.

auditorium and patio, or they could enter the structure to view the works of art and attend other events, such as music performances or film.¹⁰¹

The first reactions to *Guernica* when it was shown at the Spanish pavilion were mixed. Intense criticism was raised around the fact that *Guernica* was painted in cubist style and was thus not directly figurative. Many critics commented at the time that it was very difficult for the general population and international visitors to understand the work. The media's point was that if the work was about a major social trauma, which severely affected ordinary people, the work had to be understood by ordinary people, who were not connected to the world of art, or conversant with art movements. Against this criticism Picasso maintained an unwavering position.¹⁰² On the other hand, a number of art historians and critics expressed views in favour of *Guernica* as a profoundly symbolic painting, rather than a mere cubist abstraction. *Guernica's* individual elements have been analysed broadly; much has already been written and the analysis continues into the twenty-first century. In spite of the concerns that the message of the work was convoluted and difficult to comprehend, *Guernica* has become a symbol for the atrocities of war and the struggle for democracy. At this point I do not wish to detail various critiques raised in relation to *Guernica* but I

¹⁰¹ For more information on the Spanish pavilion's construction, including designs, plans and photographs, see *Picasso's Guernica*, pp. 65–72.

¹⁰² Picasso was adamant that his work was a result of his own personal processes and he was not going to compromise to be understood by the masses.

will give a brief account of the main symbols which form *Guernica's* subtext, and which have been much discussed and analysed.

The bulb, the bull, the mother and infant, the feast, the horse – all can be interpreted as symbols which relate to Spanish culture, to liberty, to revolution, and to the human struggle. These symbols, sometimes elusive, have been analysed and through their analysis have prompted different readings of the painting.¹⁰³ When asked to interpret his own painting at the Museum of Modern Art symposium on *Guernica* in November 1947, Picasso explained his images as follows:

But this bull is a bull and this horse is a horse. There's a sort of bird too, a chicken or a pigeon, I don't remember now exactly what it is, on a table. And this chicken is a chicken. Sure, they're symbols. But it isn't up to the painter to create symbols; otherwise, it would be better if he wrote them out in so many words instead of painting them. The public who look at the picture must see in the horse and the bull symbols which they interpret as they understand them. There are some

¹⁰³ The key symbolic figures are listed here:

Bull – symbol of Spain perhaps related to Picasso's native heritage; mother and child – recent proponents of psychobiography claim that Picasso is representing his mother giving birth to his sister Lola during a catastrophic earthquake that rocked Malaga in 1884; electric bulb – a device which could symbolise progress, but its shape also resembles a godlike eye observing the scene; the hand with the candle – shedding light on the disastrous scene, 'enlightening' the world; horse – a symbol of a universal victim, which tends to draw the attention of the viewer much more than the weeping women; bird – perhaps a pigeon, a favourite symbol of peace and associated to Picasso's iconography, specifically his celebrated 1949 'peace' poster. See John O. Jordan, 'A Sum of Destructions: Violence, Paternity and Art in Picasso's *Guernica*', *Studies in Visual Communication*, 8.3 (1982), 2-27.

animals. These are animals, massacred animals. That's all, so far as I'm concerned. It's up to the public to see what it wants to see.¹⁰⁴



Figure 11: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, oil on canvas, 3.49 x 7.76 m, courtesy Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Spain.

Picasso believed that the painting belonged to Spain and he wanted it to become the property of the Spanish people but with one precondition, that Spain should have it only when it became a democratic state. The work was created in France in 1937 and it remained in Europe for almost two years after the first showing at the Paris Exposition.¹⁰⁵

In 1938, one year after *Guernica* was painted, the work travelled around Europe as part of a campaign to raise funds for the Spanish war relief. It was on this tour

¹⁰⁴ Symposium held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA). Transcripts available in the MoMA Library. The Moderator of the discussion was Alfred Barr; the participants: Josep Lluís Sert, Jerome Seckler, Juan Larrea, Jacques Lipchitz, and Stuart Davis, with questions from the audience.

¹⁰⁵ In 1939 *Guernica* travelled to the United States, where it resided until 1981, when democracy was secured in Spain. At that time Picasso's lawyer Roland Dumas approved *Guernica's* transfer. The canvas, together with all the studies, was returned to Spain and was initially housed in the Casón del Buen Retiro in Madrid until 1992 when it was finally moved to the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia.

that the work stopped in London and was shown at the Whitechapel Gallery, amongst other venues. This was a significant event for London's artistic and political scene; perhaps in the West End, where it was shown first, it was appreciated primarily for its artistic value, with some attempt made to diminish its political meaning.¹⁰⁶ In the East End, it was received primarily as a political event and discussions about its artistic value were secondary. The exhibition of *Guernica* cannot be seen in isolation from the demographics of where it was shown. For instance, over the centuries, London's East End had become established as a rich font of political and cultural activity: as a centre of crafts and industry, as the point of reception for immigrants from many lands, and as the home of radical political and social movements.

Here, it is important to present to the reader the background of the London art scene, in order to draw connections and highlight the significance of this exhibition. The political situation in Europe did not leave the artistic community unaffected. These years immediately prior to World War II were pivotal for the strengthening of artists' groups in Britain, many of whom were also pursuing

¹⁰⁶ Ironically, a few weeks after *Guernica* was shown at the New Burlington Galleries, an exhibition with a very different agenda opened near the room where *Guernica* was shown. It was an exhibition by Ignacio Zuloaga, a Spanish painter known to be a supporter of Franco. The exhibition was organised by Lady Ivy Chamberlain whose husband Sir Austin, had described Mussolini as 'a man with whom business can be done'. Lady Ivy wrote in the catalogue essay: 'For many years generations of Spaniards have been struggling to rehabilitate their nation. Zuloaga portrays the spiritual aspect of that struggle; it is part of his endeavour to recover the soul of Spain.' The exhibition of Zuloaga seems to have been a carefully orchestrated event designed to diminish *Guernica* and the Republicans' message. The exhibition attracted a good deal of attention in Spain, and focused especially on 'old' Spain and folklore. See Gijs Van Hensbergen, *Guernica, The Biography of a Twentieth Century Icon* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004) p. 92.

political agendas.¹⁰⁷ Other factors assisted the climate of growth and enabled new platforms which sustained diverse art activities, such as the newly established London Gallery and a periodical, the *London Bulletin*, which aimed to support the artists' groups who were forming under the wider umbrella of surrealism. The painter Roland Penrose was a key figure in organising artist groups and instigating activities and discussions.¹⁰⁸ Penrose was also a close collaborator with the Belgian surrealist E.L.T Mesens, who was in a transitional phase between leaving Belgium and settling in London. During 1937, Mesens took over the London Gallery at 28 Cork Street.¹⁰⁹ The gallery had been active in promoting modern art but did not have a specific policy before that time. Under Mesens's direction the gallery became a centre 'for resistance against obscurantism, making surrealism a pivot of living, avant-garde art'.¹¹⁰ In a way, the London Gallery and the *London Bulletin* became the rallying force before the outbreak of war, for all progressive actions in art and culture; it did not concentrate specifically on surrealism. Spain held particular interest because of its political situation; the civil war outbreak, and the threat fascism posed to democracy.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ See below for information on the Propaganda Art Courses, organised in East London by Norman King.

¹⁰⁸ Penrose became a known public figure later in the forties, as the founder of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) London.

¹⁰⁹ The London Gallery was originally founded in 1936 by Mrs Clifford Norton and Mrs Cunningham Strettell.

¹¹⁰ Michael Remy, *Surrealism in Britain* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, Ashgate, 1999), p. 148.

¹¹¹ Amongst many fundraising events and marches that were organised to help the Spanish people, British surrealists contributed 'Declaration on Spain', a statement published in 1936,

The organisation of a Picasso exhibition in London, and particularly the decision to show *Guernica* in art galleries and other spaces, should also be seen in light of this vibrant pre-war climate.

Penrose, Picasso's close friend, arranged directly with the artist for the painting to be lent for a tour immediately after the 1937 Paris Exposition. In Penrose's absence, Mesens organised the first showing at the New Burlington Galleries.

The tour was organised to raise funds in aid of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, and its itinerary is listed here:

New Burlington Galleries, London (4–28 October 1938);

Leeds; (November–December 1938);

Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (31 December 1938 – 14 January 1939) and Manchester (1–15 February 1939).¹¹²

After the tour of English cities, the painting returned to France.

Guernica was shown for the first time in London at the New Burlington Galleries; it attracted many visitors but the attendance numbers were not as high as in Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and especially in East London at the Whitechapel. At the New Burlington Galleries approximately 3,000 visitors were recorded.

which openly denounced the British Government for its non-intervention policy in other European countries, such as Portugal, thus, allowing Franco's forces to continue without much resistance from Europe.

¹¹² In Manchester the painting was shown at a car dealership. See van Hensbergen, p. 95.

Attendance was at its highest when the work was shown at Whitechapel, where approximately 12,000 visitors visited the gallery and £250 was raised.¹¹³

‘The misgivings of those who imagined that Picasso’s work would mean nothing to the working classes have proven false’, noted Penrose.¹¹⁴ The violence and absurdity of the bombing of Gernika had a profound and shocking effect upon the spectators. The exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery was organised under the auspices of the Labour Party and the Stepney Trade Council. Clement Attlee, Leader of the Labour Party, opened the exhibition and a number of other dignitaries were also invited to speak at the launch. The Whitechapel Gallery Archive unfortunately does not hold extensive records from the opening event. There are very few photographs of *Guernica* installed in the Whitechapel in which the work can be seen as a whole, but it does appear as a backdrop to Attlee’s speech. Research on the actual display relies on a limited number of sources, such as press cuttings from that period as well as notes from past archivists and volunteers who were interested in finding out details about *Guernica*’s showing.

It is believed that approximately forty people were present at the opening event. One of the confirmed speakers was the artist Julian Trevelyan and it is possible that other speakers included Tom Driberg (left-wing journalist and politician)

¹¹³ Information on visitors’ attendance can be read in the local press of that period, copies can be viewed at the Whitechapel Gallery Archive.

¹¹⁴ *London Bulletin*, January–February 1939, p. 59.

and James Cant.¹¹⁵ Considering the significance of this event, there is still a lot of research to be done in order to gather the missing information from the Whitechapel's archive. For one of the gallery's most significant events the archive refuses to provide easy answers. One can continue the research through further exploration of photographs and records, and by looking for people who were present at the opening event. It is known, for instance, that members of the International Brigade were in attendance, and perhaps surviving members would be willing to contribute material that would both enhance the archive and shed light upon the interesting synergy between art and political propaganda. The fact that *Guernica* appeared at the Whitechapel in 1939 has been very significant for the gallery's history. Press from that period represents it as a significant occasion and a landmark event for the surrounding community. In *Surrealism in Britain*, Remy writes:

Though Picasso's painting became the occasion for a rather mixed gathering of politicians, writers, art lovers and realists and surrealists alike, the aim of the

¹¹⁵ The information about the speakers is taken from a single sheet of A4 typewritten paper (with some handwriting) that is deposited in the Whitechapel Gallery Archive. The document is unsigned and undated and was found amongst assorted material related to *Guernica*. The handwritten comments seem vague and the information on the sheet is unconnected; the person who wrote the notes seems to have been searching for information on *Guernica*'s presentation at the Whitechapel. The author mentions that they have been in touch with Julian Trevelyan and according to Trevelyan's testimony Tom Driberg, James Cant and F.E. Williams all spoke about the painting at the opening ceremony at the Whitechapel. Then the author continues by mentioning that Trevelyan provided Williams' telephone number (which he or she discloses). The person spoke to Williams, who said he was never involved with the Whitechapel presentation, and had seen the work when it was shown at the New Burlington Galleries. See inventory item IV, pp. 123-24.

exhibition, widely publicised, was the raising of funds in aid of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief. It must be admitted that most of those who agreed to be patrons were more interested in the political meaning of the work than in the aesthetic challenge it posed.¹¹⁶

As the statistics demonstrate, the exhibition at the Whitechapel attracted those who were more politically sensitised. In my view, this also relates to the demographics of East London, a neighbourhood constituted by immigrants, people with lower incomes – hence groups which were more sensitive and vulnerable to political change – as well as a significant number of Jewish immigrants who had formed strong intellectual circles, buttressed by left-wing ideology. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the exhibition raised awareness of *Guernica's* political scope and, by extension, of the atrocities of the fascist regime sweeping Europe.¹¹⁷

Further evidence of East London's status as a political hotbed in the 1930s, is provided by the establishment of the innovative Propaganda Art Course, which was organised by Norman King, a political activist and photographer whose wife

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 150.

¹¹⁷ Spain was already engaged in civil war and dictators ruled Europe. Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy and Franco in Spain collaborated in support of right-wing factions. The Spanish Civil War started in 1936 when rightist plots intensified against the newly-shaped government, which was formed by Republicans, Socialists, Communists, labour unions and even Anarchists. The civil war erupted in July 1936 as a coordinated revolt of army chiefs in Spanish Morocco and in the garrison towns of mainland Spain. Mussolini and Hitler assisted the insurgents. In November 1937, the two dictators recognised the Nationalists. (Depending on which side historians were on, they either employed the term 'Nationalists' or 'Rebels' and 'Insurgents', and for the government forces as either 'Loyalists' or 'Republicans'; Franco's side, as the official government of Spain, named them the Reds (*caudillo* being equivalent to *il Duce* and *der Führer*).

donated his personal papers to the Whitechapel Gallery Archive. The course took place twice a week at the Christchurch Parish Hall on Commercial Road.¹¹⁸ King was also involved in bringing *Guernica* to the Whitechapel, possibly through his connection to the Communist party; both King and his wife ran as candidates for the party in the 1949 local elections.

Since the 1930s, the exhibition of *Guernica* has been the subject of some attention at Whitechapel Gallery, most notably in recent publicity material in support of the Whitechapel Project (the gallery's expansion to include the adjacent Whitechapel Library building): 'The Whitechapel has premiered international artists such as Pablo Picasso, Frida Kahlo, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Nan Goldin...'¹¹⁹

As mentioned above, the archive does not hold extensive material from the exhibition of *Guernica*, or from the politically significant opening ceremony fronted by Clement Attlee. It does, however, hold other records which refer to Picasso and which are from a different context and era. For my own research it was extremely important to have come across these records in a fairly condensed block of time. The later Picasso records lingered in my memory, and allowed me

¹¹⁸ The aim of the Propaganda Art Course was to train people to make their own material for propaganda purposes such as posters, banners, typography and leaflets. Classes took place twice a week in the evenings and the course issued leaflets and notes covering the various subjects. The Whitechapel's archive has a number of the leaflets, as well as many photographs from demonstrations and other group activities that King and his fellow colleagues organised.

¹¹⁹ Similar phrases feature in a variety of brochures and other printed material to promote specific events, development schemes and the Whitechapel Project. The sentence I quoted is taken from the Whitechapel's Facebook entry.

<http://www.facebook.com/WhitechapelGallery?_fb_noscript=1#/WhitechapelGallery?v=app_2374336051>, [accessed on 30 September 2009]

to associate and interweave what were genuinely unrelated events. The fact that through my browsing I had acquired a spherical reading of the archive was very important as I was able to highlight records which were incomplete and presented many gaps.

I will refer again to the content of one of the first boxes I encountered, as mentioned in Chapter Two. The material of interest was from the 'Directors' Files', in papers deposited by Robertson.¹²⁰ From the first reading, I found the material enlightening. The papers indicated that in the 1950s, Robertson attempted to establish a Picasso exhibition at the Whitechapel. The file included all the correspondence between Robertson and various British and international organisations, regarding fundraising, the loan of works and other details concerned with the exhibition. From the letters I have now researched it is clear that Robertson did not have an easy task, as many museums were unable to lend Picasso works, due to either their condition or availability. In addition, it is apparent that some of the sponsors, including the American Embassy in London were unable to offer financial support. At the time, although these records seemed revealing and of historic value, I was not in a position to draw links with other archival records. The political reflections they conveyed, and the fact that I had started this research with the intention of discovering the impetus for a curatorial project, prompted me to note them in detail. Further to the

¹²⁰ Chapter Two, Experiencing the Whitechapel Gallery Archive, pp. 88-89.

aforementioned material, I came across a significant box of 1980s files, containing Nicholas Serota's documents, outlining an idea he was developing to bring *Guernica* back to the Whitechapel Gallery; an idea triggered by the fact that *Guernica* was finally leaving MoMA to return to Spain. Serota considered this occasion a remarkable opportunity and envisaged a revival of the 1938/39 tour. His attempts, as the archived correspondence reveals, resulted in a negative outcome and *Guernica*, once again, failed to return to the Whitechapel Gallery.¹²¹ My research for archival records that would result in a curatorial project addressing *Guernica's* pre-war display, highlighting its significance for the Whitechapel's history as well as its broader political significance, continued until I felt I had found sufficient material to plan the intended event.

¹²¹ Note the similar outcome to Robertson's attempts earlier in the century; MoMA refused collaboration, in spite the director's concerted efforts and the fact that the Whitechapel could offer a secure environment for the painting.

Inventory of material

Below, I will provide a full inventory of the archive contents related to Picasso and *Guernica*. These are the precise records that I had noted in anticipation of a curatorial project that would highlight their multifaceted political potential.¹²²

There is only limited material related to the first presentation of *Guernica* in 1939, and from Serota's efforts in the 1980s, and for these periods I have provided either a transcript or a precise description of these documents. The Whitechapel Gallery Archive records the early exhibition of *Guernica* via a small number of black-and-white photographs showing Clement Atlee speaking at the official opening, in front of the large canvas.¹²³ In addition, there are a small number of listings and press cuttings. Very little information is available as to the exact content of the exhibition; and the identity of the official speakers, their topics of address, as well as other details of the exhibition remain unknown.

Each item is presented in the order it was found within the original file. The order should, in principle, be chronological, although frequently, as a result of previous consultation, items lose their exact sequence. I wish to maintain and respect the order in which I found the documents. Although in some cases it

¹²² As the 'Directors' Files' form an independent category in the archive, I have scanned the group of documents; two letters from the archive are reproduced on pages 146-147, and the complete correspondence is included in the attached CD.

¹²³ The original photographs from the opening ceremony belong to The Roland Penrose Archives, Dean Gallery, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

would have been justified to intervene, to alter their sequence and reinstate a chronological order, I refrained from doing so. I have also included the catalogue numbers which appear at the top of each group.¹²⁴ This number refers to the general file to which the document belongs and is not the number of an individual document:

WAG/EAR/4/62 – This file contains early documents related to the exhibition of *Guernica*, Serota's correspondence as well as recent research that Jon Newman conducted to trace more archive material from the 1939 event:

- I. An A4 typewritten page probably produced in the 1980's. There is an underlined headline: people to call: pics/articles on *Guernica* at WAG Jan 1939 [sic]. The page contains a list of newspaper titles, including many still published today, such as *The Times*, *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Daily Express*, *Sun*, and other titles, such as the *Listener* and *Illustrated London News*. Handwritten notes alongside each newspaper title note 'will ring back', 'to let us know in 10 days', 'nothing', etc.

¹²⁴ The catalogue numbers at the Whitechapel are a basic indication of the nature of the material, as is common in archives, libraries and museums cataloguing. The logic is AUTHOR/TYPE OF MATERIAL/PERIOD/INDIVIDUAL NUMBER. WAG stands for Whitechapel Art Gallery, and accordingly (see above) EAR for Early, DIR for Director and PHOT for Photograph. The numbers indicate the natural chronological sequence of the material and the very final numbers refer to specific items. For example WAG/EAR/2/1-15 means that this is a file whose author is the Whitechapel, it contains early material (1887-1947), these are exhibition related, and the quantity of items in the file is 15 (each numbered 1-15).

- II. An A4 letter produced on a word processor, printed on headed paper from Lambeth Environmental Services and signed by Jon Newman, Archives Manager in Lambeth.¹²⁵ The letter is dated 15 December 1997 and is addressed to Mrs Marion King, whom Newman thanks for the granting of access to her late husband's papers 'last week'.¹²⁶ Newman adds that King's daughter has recently informed him that she has found further material relating to the *Guernica* exhibition in 1939. 'This is terribly exciting', he writes, and he is looking forward to another visit. Newman closes the letter by saying that he has spoken to the head of the Finsbury Library about her husband's papers and drawings and there is interest in acquiring these for the library.
- III. Two A3 photocopies of a newspaper page. The newspaper's title is not legible but is written with pencil at the top of one of the photocopied pages [*Voice of East London*]. The main title of the article is 'At Whitechapel Art Gallery - Spanish Painter's *Guernica*'. The first paragraph starts by describing the event as 'outstanding': 'The outstanding attraction at the exhibition in the Whitechapel Art Gallery in connection with the Stepney Trades Council's Spanish foodship campaign will be the showing of

¹²⁵ This must have been produced during the period that Jon Newman was archivist at the Whitechapel Gallery.

¹²⁶ Marion King, a retired teacher, had been politically active in the Communist Party as a young woman in the 1940's. She was married to Norman King, political activist and photographer and founder of the Propaganda Art Courses.

Picasso's *Guernica*.' The article continues by providing the necessary conceptual and historical tools for the reader to better understand the painting:

Because the picture is so advanced, because it is painted in a peculiarly Spanish way and because the East End of London has had so little opportunity of seeing and becoming accustomed to modern art, it is natural that this picture should, at first, be found difficult to understand. I think it will be easier to understand, however, when I have explained the circumstances under which it was painted.

The text concludes with a description of *Guernica*'s production and is divided into six sections, entitled: 'Lover of Freedom', 'Horrible Crime Against Humanity', 'Picture Inspired', 'Analogous Meaning', 'Unquestionable Spirit', 'Starvation the New Peril'. On the right column, which occupies a third of the newspaper page, an exhibition announcement gives the opening hours, capped by the slogan 'One million pennies will send a food ship from East London'.

IV. An A4 page with typewritten notes.¹²⁷ The document is unsigned and undated; it is typed with vague handwritten comments. The person who

¹²⁷ I have referred to this record in footnote 115 of Chapter Three, p. 115.

wrote the notes seems to have been searching for information on *Guernica's* presentation at the Whitechapel. The author mentions that they have been in touch with Julian Trevelyan and according to Trevelyan's testimony Tom Driberg, James Cant and F.E. William all spoke about the painting at the opening ceremony at the Whitechapel. The author continues by mentioning that Trevelyan provided Williams' telephone number (which he or she discloses). The person spoke to Williams, who said he was never involved with the Whitechapel presentation, and had seen the work when it was shown at the New Burlington Galleries.

- V. Two A4 pages, photocopies from Penrose's book *Picasso: His Life and Work* (1958). The photocopies are of pages 286 and 287, from the chapter entitled '*Guernica*'.
- VI. An A4 typewritten letter to Penrose, dated 18 April 1980, and signed by Serota. The letter starts with the phrase 'Picasso is in everyone's minds at the moment, not simply because of the large exhibition, but also because so much of his work, especially the late work, quite suddenly seems particularly relevant for younger painters'. Serota continues by acknowledging the fact that *Guernica* will be returning to Europe after four decades in the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA). He wonders whether one could repeat 'the tour of European capitals that was made in

1938–39 and in which London involved showing the paintings both in the West End and, of course, at the Whitechapel'. He concludes that he will be in New York at the time of the opening 'of their show' and that he will speak to MoMA curator, William Rubin. Finally, he asks if Penrose approves of the idea and if he is willing to suggest anyone else that Serota should contact about this matter.

- VII. A slightly smaller than A4 letter dated 1 May 1980, from Penrose to Serota. The letter is very brief. Penrose acknowledges Serota's letter of 18 April 1980 and remarks that the notion to return *Guernica* to London is 'a bright idea', but he fears the fragile condition of the painting may prevent the MoMA officials from giving permission. He adds 'so I am afraid for that reason alone the idea is unlikely to be workable', and concludes with the hope that they will both meet in New York in mid-May for 'the opening'.
- VIII. An A4 typewritten letter dated 15 May 1980 from Serota to Penrose. The letter is brief. Serota thanks Penrose for his 'note on *Guernica*'. He continues by saying that there has been a meeting in Madrid between Margaret McLeod, British Council exhibition organiser, and 'the man responsible for the return of *Guernica* [sic] to Spain'. Serota informs Penrose that in the meeting it was decided that the painting was too fragile to travel anywhere else between New York and Madrid. He

finishes by saying that 'his disappointment is tempered by hearing that Joanna [Drew] has almost obtained final agreement for a major showing of the Picasso estate at the Hayward next summer'.

- IX. An A4 photocopy of the *Voice of East London* as described in III.
- X. An A4 typewritten letter dated 29 April 1980. The letter is written by Martin Rewcastle and is addressed to Max Levitas, London, E1. Rewcastle is asking for Levitas's help in the preparation of a strong proposal for bringing *Guernica* back to East London, on its way from MoMA to Madrid. Rewcastle says that he is writing to him after 'Dan Jones' suggestion' and because Rewcastle had recollections of the meetings held by the Trade Council in late 1938 (the year that *Guernica* was exhibited in London). He finishes with the hope that Rewcastle will call him as soon as possible; in his own words 'there is very little time left to put together a strong case for the exhibition'.
- XI. Two A4 pages with typewritten text stapled together and dated 6 February 1980. The announcement is from MoMA and the headed paper is especially designed with the logo: *Fiftieth Anniversary Exhibition - Picasso*. The letter begins 'Dear Museum Director' and is not personally addressed to Serota. It announces the availability of 'special group ticket

arrangements for art museums and college and university art departments for its forthcoming exhibition 'PABLO PICASSO: A RETROSPECTIVE', and continues 'This offer is available only to art museum and university art department groups, and tickets can be ordered through the Museum's Education department'. What follows are details of the exhibition and analytic reference to the exact number of works and their medium. Booking procedure and prices follow (the group ticket was \$4.50). The announcement is signed 'Richard E. Oldenburg, Director'.

WAG/EAR/4/62A (i) - The file contains early documents related to the exhibition of *Guernica*, Norman King's papers as well recent research that Jon Newman conducted to trace more archive material from the 1939 event.

XII. Three items held together with a paper clip: Two press cuttings, one from *News Chronicle*, 9 January 1939 and the other from *New English W...* (the third word of the title is illegible), 12 January 1939, and a card from Piccadilly Rare Books Ltd.¹²⁸ The press cuttings are very small (one three-and-a-half lines, the other seven-and-a-half lines of a newspaper column). Both cuttings have been distributed by the 'General Press Cutting Association Ltd' and are glued onto a small green piece of paper. The cutting from *News Chronicle* is reproduced over the page:

¹²⁸ Extensive research on possible newspaper titles starting with 'New English' published circa 1930s has not brought any results.

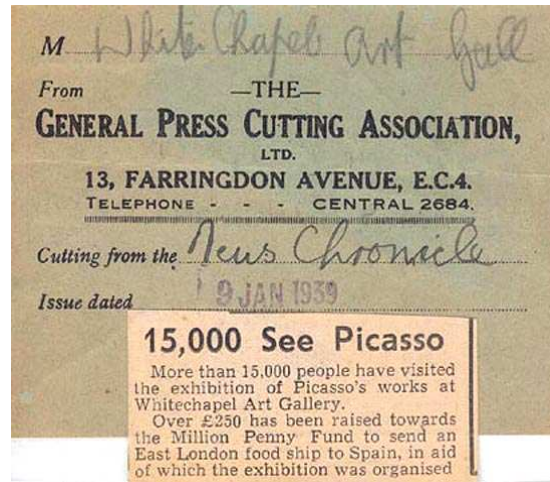


Figure 12: *News Chronicle* press cutting, 9 January 1939, Whitechapel Gallery Archive.

The other cutting, from *New English W...* reads:

GO TO THE WHITECHAPEL AND SEE [sic] “Guernica,” Picasso’s latest hit staged in London’s theatre of war. A big banner of truce between the pinks and the duns.

The card is A6 in size with brief handwritten notes on *Guernica*’s exhibition at the New Burlington Gallery. It includes the date, the title of the exhibition and mentions the fact that the exhibition was held under the auspices of the ‘Spanish Relief’. A figure of £20 is also noted on the card.

XIII. Three identical black-and-white photographs, each 20 x 25 cm, depicting a small group of protesters who are holding two banners which read:

‘FRANCO “MURDERER” - FREE CARABANCHEL “10” - P.C.E.’ (sign of hammer and sickle) and ‘FREEDOM FOR THE CARABANCHEL!’

The clothing indicates this photograph was most likely taken in the 1970s. Some of the figures appear to be covering their faces with scarves or their collars. At the back of one photograph, which is of better quality and is possibly it is the original, there is a logo and a copyright note: 'Morning Star Photograph. 75 Farringdon Road, London E.C.1. 01-405 9242. Copyright'.

XIV. A horizontal black-and-white photograph, 20 x 15cm, depicting the official opening of *Guernica* at the Whitechapel Gallery. Eleven people are seated in front of *Guernica*. Clement Attlee is standing and appears to be speaking into a microphone. Three men with their backs turned to the camera are seated in the audience. The back of the photograph is imprinted with a logo and a copyright note: 'Copyright, Illustrated Press. 29, Water Lane, London, E.C.4.'



Figure 13: Clement Attlee, speaking at the official opening of *Guernica*, 31 December 1938, Whitechapel Gallery Archive, Roland Penrose Archives.

XV. A vertical black-and-white photograph, 20 x 15cm, depicting the official opening of *Guernica* at the Whitechapel Gallery (photographed from a different angle). Seven people are seated in front of *Guernica*. Attlee is standing and appears to be speaking into a microphone. The back of the photograph is imprinted with a logo and a copyright note: 'Copyright, Illustrated Press. 29, Water Lane, London, E.C.4.'

XVI. A horizontal black-and-white photograph, 23 x 16cm, depicting the official opening of *Guernica* at the Whitechapel Gallery (photographed, once again, from a different angle). Nine people are seated in front of *Guernica*. Attlee is standing and appears to be speaking into a microphone. Seven people, men and women, with their backs turned to the camera are seated in the audience.



Figure 14: Clement Attlee, official opening of *Guernica*, 31 December 1938, Whitechapel Gallery Archive, Roland Penrose Archives.

XVII. Two horizontal black-and-white photographs showing Attlee in conversation with two men. Attlee is flanked by the men and is greeting the man on his left with a handshake. A third man in the background is looking directly at the lens, and he is positioned at the far right of the image. Posters and a banner are visible in the background. The banners bear the slogan 'Major Attlee Battalion'. The back of the photograph is imprinted with a logo and a copyright note: 'Copyright, Illustrated Press. 29, Water Lane, London, E.C.4.'



Figure 15: Clement Attlee (middle) with two unnamed men at the official opening of *Guernica*, 31 December 1938, Whitechapel Gallery Archive, Roland Penrose Archives.

XVIII. An A4 page, a photocopy from a typewritten text. The main heading is 'City and East London Observer, Saturday 7 January 1939, p. 7'. This seems to be a press release. The second heading is 'Spain Exhibition at Whitechapel, Opened by Major Attlee'. A short text follows:

On Saturday afternoon, Major C.R. Attlee, MP for Limehouse, and Leader of the Opposition, opened an exhibition of Spanish art at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, organised by the Stepney Trades Council, in connection with a campaign to raise 1,000,000 pennies to send a foodship to Spain from East London. Councillor R. Silkoff presided at the ceremony, which was attended by members of the International Brigade.

The Exhibition is open until January 14th, and every evening a programme of talking films is given. In the entrance hall is the flag of 'Major Attlee' Battallion [sic], and among the pictures exhibited is the famous painting 'Guernica' by Picasso.

The campaign is being supported by the Mayor of Stepney, (Councillor J. Johnson JP) who is a patron of the East London Aid Spain Committee.

XIX. An A5 handwritten note on headed paper from Marx Memorial Library, 11 May 1986. The note reads: 'Hope this is what you want' and is signed A.D. Atienza (International Brigade Archive). Nothing else is attached to this document.

XX. An A5 handwritten note on headed paper from Marx Memorial Library, 11 May 1986. This is very similar to the preceding record. The note reads: 'Hope this is what you want. Thanks for photos' and is signed A.D. Atienza (International Brigade Archive).

XXI. Three pages from an A5 notebook with handwritten notes. The notes are written both horizontally and diagonally: 'Get copy for archive and Norman King', 'The Voice of E. London January 1939 article by Wm. Busby (helping with exhibition - Spanish Art AIA)', 'Moxhouse Library Andrew Davies (Lib) - called will send a copy', 'Norman King (and his address)'. The third page reads: 'Isabelle, This is important [sic] Norman King has photographs of exhibitions of *Guernica* in Whitechapel in 1935 [sic] showing opening by Attlee - could you obtain prints please [sic].'

XXII. An A4 page with the title *East London Advertiser*, Saturday 7 January 1939. The subtitle is 'Aid Spain, Exhibition, Paintings for Picasso, Major Attlee and a Crucial Struggle'. The text focuses on Attlee's speech at the opening of *Guernica's* display at the Whitechapel. Included are quotes from the speech:

If once Fascism gets hold, the people who will suffer most will be the young. Fascism tries to make the younger generation in its own image, to make every boy into the image of Hitler or Mussolini.

A parenthesis further down reads: 'article continues to outline speech, about defeating Fascism, etc.' The article continues:

The exhibition comprised the *Guernica* Exhibition and paintings and drawings, by the great Spanish painter, Picasso. The exhibition which will be open for a fortnight is being held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, to raise funds for the Spanish Republican People, and is part of a drive for a Million Penny Fund, organised by the East London Aid Spain Committee. Cllr. Silkoff, Secretary of the Trades Council welcomed visitors, and also members of the International Brigade, who were presented to Major Attlee. Apart from the artistic value of the paintings, the exhibition is unique, in that it is the first time that the work of a master of the standing of Picasso has been brought to the East End of London. In view of the interest aroused, a very large attendance is anticipated. Well-known artists and critics including Mr Eric Newton, Mr Herbert Read and Mr William Penrose will be at the Art Gallery to explain the paintings and to answer questions.

The material listed below belonged to Norman King and was included in the same file; although these items are not directly relevant to the presentation of *Guernica* at the Whitechapel, they reflect the involvement of political activists in the organisation of the exhibition. This must be the material that Newman refers to in his thank you letter to King's widow, Marion in item XLVII.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ See Item XLVII, pp. 143-44.

- XXIII. An A5 Arts Council headed letter, 28 October 1985, with the handwritten note: From Norman King (address), Received Five Photographs of the Whitechapel A/G of *Guernica*, 1939 – for ‘Homage to Barcelona’.¹³⁰
- XXIV. A season ticket for the exhibition ‘Homage to Barcelona’ in Norman King’s name. Issued by the Arts Council, the ticket is attached to a compliment slip, which reads: ‘Season ticket enclosed. Catalogue dispatched under separate cover. Marianne Ryan, Exhibition Organiser.’
- XXV. An A4 loan form from the Arts Council with Norman King’s details and the credits of the five photographs which were lent to the exhibition.
- XXVI. An A4 Arts Council headed typewritten letter, 11 October 1985, (attached to the preceding loan form) explaining the form to King and asking for confirmation of his agreement to send the photographs. Andrew Dempsey, Assistant Director in charge of London exhibitions, signs the letter.¹³¹
- XXVII. An A4 Arts Council headed typewritten letter, 8 April 1986, addressed to Mr King from Joanna Drew, Arts Council. The letter begins: ‘I am, writing on behalf of the Arts Council to say how grateful we are for your

¹³⁰ ‘Homage to Barcelona’ was the title of an exhibition which was organised by the Arts Council and which took place at the Hayward Gallery (14 November 1985 – 23 February 1986). It appears that King had given some of his *Guernica* photographs for this exhibition.

¹³¹ Coincidentally, Andrew Dempsey is a curator and partner of Catherine Lampert, who was director at Whitechapel Gallery (1988–2001).

generosity in lending to the “Homage to Barcelona” exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London’, and it finishes with the paragraph ‘It has been a great privilege for the Arts Council to have had the opportunity of presenting such an exhibition in London in collaboration with the Ajuntament of Barcelona and the Generalitat of Catalunya. Please accept this expression of thanks on behalf of the three organising bodies.’ Joanna Drew, Director of Arts, signs the letter.

XXVIII. A black-and-white photograph, 15 x 20cm, showing a group of people protesting. They hold large effigies of men and big banners. In one of the banners the following text is clearly visible: ‘Spain 1937, Basque Catholic, Here fight for Democracy’. There is no indication of when the photograph was taken or of the identity of the photographer.



Figure 16: Demonstrations in protest of the Spanish Civil War, 1937, Whitechapel Gallery Archive.

- XXIX. A black-and-white photograph, 20 x 25cm, showing a monument. The monument is rectangular and stands on a stone base. Within the large frame stands a smaller frame housing a bust of Lenin. There is a plaque with the following text: 'Lenin Lived in the House Opposite This Site 1902-1903'. A broken chain is visible at the base of the monument, although it is unclear from the photograph if the chain is part of the construction, a security device, or unconnected to the monument. At the back of the photograph there is a sticker with Norman and Marion King's address.
- XXX. A cutting from a magazine featuring details of a television programme, from 9 November 1985. 'Saturday Review', to be broadcast on Saturday evening, will cover, amongst other events, the exhibition 'Homage to Barcelona' at the Hayward Gallery. The programme was presented by Russell Davies and other subjects covered in the programme include, Catherine Deneuve's nomination as 'the new face of the French Republic', Marina Warner's quest to find a 1985 'Britannia', and Kurt Schwitters' major retrospective at Tate.
- XXXI. Two copies of the left-wing journal *Finsbury Clarion*, issue no. 63, April 1949, priced twopence [sic]. The journal is slightly smaller than A4 and has only 8 pages. One of the copies is marked at the top with the phrase 'See

pages 4 and 7'. Page four features a small article by Kath King (Communist candidacy for St. Philip's Ward), titled 'Schools Meal Scandal', referring to her proposals for improved school meals. Page seven features a small article by Norman King (Communist candidacy for St. Philip's Ward), titled 'Don't Be Fooled', alerting readers to looming anticommunist propaganda, expected due to the forthcoming elections: 'You will, no doubt, hear a lot of this sort of thing from the loudspeakers during the election period. A red scare makes an afficient [sic] red herring.'

XXXII. A preview invitation card for the Arts Council exhibition 'Homage to Barcelona', Tuesday 12 November from 6-8pm. The invitation features Francesc Xavier Nogués's work, *Two Cloaked Men with a Large Glass of Wine* (1915), and it bears the logo of the exhibition sponsor, SEAT (Sociedad Española de Automoviles de Turismo).¹³²

XXXIII. An A5 private view invitation card for two people, for the Arts Council exhibition 'Homage to Barcelona', Wednesday 13 November 1-8pm at the Hayward Gallery. The card has information on the opening hours of the exhibition and the admission price (£2.50).

¹³² SEAT (Sociedad Española de Automoviles de Turismo), automobile manufacturer established in Spain since 1950.

- XXXIV. Four fold-out brochures from the exhibition 'Homage to Barcelona' with general information about the exhibition, images of the exhibited works and a list of events taking place throughout the duration of the show.
- XXXV. An A6 invitation to the '1939 Exhibition', an exhibition organised by the Artists International Association which took place at the Whitechapel Art Gallery (9 February - 7 March 1939). At the top, with red ink, the invitation reads: 'The exhibition will be opened by THE MAN IN THE STREET'. Below this line there is an explanation of the exhibition concept and content, 'A cross-section of every form of contemporary art in Great Britain exhibited as a demonstration of the Unity of Artists for Peace, Democracy and Cultural Progress'. There is no list of exhibiting artists, but rather a list of the advisory committee: James Bateman, A.R.A., Vanessa Bell, Misha Black, Sir Muirhead Bone, LL.D., D.Litt, Eric Gill, Duncan Grant, Augustus John, E. McKnight Kauffer, Hon. R.D.I., Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Lucien Pissarro. At the back of the invitation there are printed details of two events organised to coincide with the exhibition. The events are: Thursday 16 February, 8pm, 'They Know What They Like', Criticisms of the Present Exhibition. Speaker: Frederick Laws (Art Critic for *News Chronicle*). In the Chair: Quentin Bell; Thursday 2 March, 8pm, 'The Artist - What does he do; what could he do; what he can't do'.

Speaker: Eric Newton (Art critic for *Sunday Times* and *Manchester Guardian*). In the Chair: Robert Medley. The final line reads: 'A discussion will follow each lecture. Admission is free'.¹³³

XXXVI. A small colour photograph, 8x 11cm, depicting a banner in support of the republicans in the Spanish Civil War. It features a clenched fist and reads: 'International Brigade, British Battalion Volunteers. Spain 1936-38.' In two columns, written inside a ribbon shaped design, are the names of Spanish cities: Cordova, Jarama, Brunetem, Belchite, Saragossa, Teruel, Gandesa Road, The Ebro.

XXXVII. One enlarged photocopy on A3 paper from a press cutting about the 'Homage to Barcelona' exhibition. The cutting is from the *Daily Telegraph*, 23 November 1985.

¹³³ The Artists International Association (AIA) was an exhibiting society founded in London in 1933 and active until 1971. It was principally a left-of-centre political organisation that embraced all styles of art both modernist and traditional. Its aim was the 'Unity of Artists for Peace, Democracy and Cultural Development'. It held a series of large group exhibitions on political and social themes beginning in 1935 with the exhibition 'Artists against Fascism and War'. The AIA supported the left-wing republican side in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) through exhibitions and other fundraising activities. It tried to promote wider access to art through travelling exhibitions and public mural paintings. In 1940 it published a series of art lithographs titled *Everyman Prints* in large and therefore cheap editions. Tate Archive houses documents related to the AIA.

- XXXVIII. One enlarged photocopy on A3 paper from a press cutting about the 'Homage to Barcelona' exhibition. The cutting is from the *Guardian*, 19 November 1985.
- XXXIX. One enlarged photocopy on A3 paper from a press cutting about the 'Homage to Barcelona' exhibition. The cutting is from the *Financial Times*, 19 November 1985.
- XL. One enlarged photocopy on A3 paper from a press cutting about the 'Homage to Barcelona' exhibition.. The cutting is from the *Sunday Times*, 17 November 1985.
- XLI. One enlarged photocopy on A3 paper from a press cutting about the 'Homage to Barcelona' exhibition. The cutting is from the *Observer*, 17 November 1985. The photocopies XXXVII-XLI have been stapled together.
- XLII. An issue of *Finsbury's Future*, a small, eight-page journal published by the Finsbury Communist Party. On page three, and continued on page eight, there is an article by Kath King titled 'Finsbury Schools, as they are and as they could be'. This is very similar to item XXXI above.
- XLIII. A promotional flyer from a candidate for the Shetland Islands Council local elections of 7 May 1974. The candidate's name is A.I.Tulloch but there is no reference to a specific party.

XLIV. An A4 promotional brochure featuring the communist candidates for the Finsbury Council elections on Thursday 12 May 1949. The brochure has four pages. On the first page, a short presentation with photographs of the three candidates: Kath King, Norman King and Ray Meager. On the second page, the proposals of the candidates in regards to the following: Homes, Rents, Repairs, Open Spaces, Community Centre, Old People, Schools and Day Nurseries, Rates and Peace. On the third page, an article prompting voters to 'Think hard before you vote', and on the final page, a summary of the achievements of the departing councillor Kay Beauchamp.

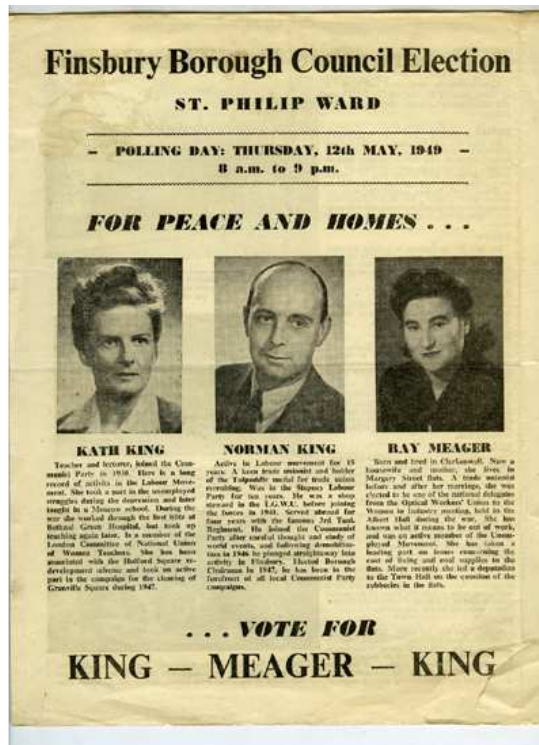


Figure 17: Finsbury Borough Council Election brochure, featuring the Communist candidates for the Finsbury Council elections, 12 May 1949, Whitechapel Gallery Archive.

XLV. One A6 carte-de-visite from Marion King with her address and telephone number. The card has a handwritten note which reads: '6pm Thursday'.

XLVI. An A4 letter written on word processor and printed on Whitechapel Gallery headed paper. It is addressed to Marion King and dated 17 January 1998. It is a 'thank you' letter for Marion King's 'kind donation of a selection of your husband's photographs and papers'. The letter is signed by Jon Newman:

It is terribly exciting for us to finally have some images of the 1939 *Guernica* exhibition. In retrospect, this was one of the most important exhibitions at the gallery and until now we held no material on it beyond a couple of press cuttings. Norman King's other photographs and papers on his 'Propaganda and Art' courses and anti-fascist marches in the East London are obviously related to the *Guernica* exhibition and the political mood in the East End on the eve of World War II; I intend to keep all the material together at the archive and I hope that we may have the occasion to use it within a future exhibition.

XLVII. One A6 carte-de-visite from Marion King, received by the Whitechapel Gallery on 20 June 1998 (as indicated by the internal mail stamp). The card has the following handwritten note:

Thank you very much for your kind letter. I am pleased to know that Norman's photographs & other material will be stored in the Whitechapel archive. I am sure that this is exactly what Norman would have wanted. I shall be grateful if you could let Susanna and me know if you will them [sic] in a future exhibition. Best wishes from Wiholz [sic].

Marion King

P.S. I do hope you enjoyed 'The Wasteland' at Wilton's

XLVIII. Nine numbered brochures from the Propaganda Art Course, each covering a different subject (way of demonstrating political activism): Poster Design (1), Banners (2), Typography (4), Lettering (5), Pictorial Banners (6), Script Writing (7), Reproduction (9), Silk Screen (11).



Figure 18: Student handbooks from the Propaganda Art Course run by Norman King, Whitechapel Gallery Archive.

The file *WAG/DIR/2/3* is drawn from a separate section of the archive and contains correspondence between former Whitechapel Gallery director Bryan Robertson and other individuals or institutions in relation to a Picasso exhibition, which was going to take place at the Whitechapel in 1953. The vast majority of letters are requests for borrowing works, as well as pleas to organisations and museums for their support. These letters have been written between May 1952 and December 1952.

This material has been scanned and presented in the thesis as a separate body consisting of letters and replies. Two particularly revealing letters, as an example of the correspondence, follow. The remaining documents are on a CD attached to the thesis, Appendix XXXII. By scanning them I could present them to the reader as facsimiles of the originals. Presented as a whole it is more immediate and revealing of the personalities and the politics involved in the negotiations for this exhibition.



GROSVENOR 9000

UNITED STATES INFORMATION SERVICE

AMERICAN EMBASSY - LONDON
41, Grosvenor Square, W.1.

December 18, 1952.

Dear Mr. Robertson,

I am very sorry to be the bearer of ill-tidings, but exploration of possibilities suggest that I ought to write to you immediately.

Unfortunately there is no way in which the American Embassy can be of assistance to the Whitechapel Art Gallery with regard to providing transportation facilities.

I think, perhaps, it would be wise, sometime after the first of the year, to make an appointment to come along here to see Mrs. Phoebe B. Stanton.

Sincerely,

Richard P. Taylor,
Cultural Officer.

Mr. Bryan Robertson,
Whitechapel Art Gallery,
High Street,
London, E.1.

Handwritten initials: J.H.

Figure 19: Letter from Richard Taylor, Cultural Officer, American Embassy, to Bryan Robertson, Director, Whitechapel Gallery, 18 December 1952, Whitechapel Gallery Archive.

30th December, 1952.

Dear Mr. Taylor,

Many thanks for your letter of December 18th. It was decided at a very recent Trustees' Meeting to abandon plans for the Picasso exhibition. The reason for this is the rather subtle and difficult political question - we are a public Gallery, dependent upon various bodies and institutions for our income and even if, at the lowest and most trivial level, the "Daily Worker" is sold outside our doors, our motives might be misinterpreted by these bodies. The Communist Party is active in this part of London and it is possible that they might try to make capital out of the Picasso exhibition.

It was kind of you to find out about transport for us, and I am very sorry that you have gone to so much trouble for nothing.

One day, if you are at all interested, I should much like to discuss with you the possibility of a really carefully chosen and reasonably comprehensive exhibition of modern American painting - with the possibility of it being shown in this Gallery. It is not known in this country as it should be, and such an exhibition would in every way be a most desirable thing.

With good wishes for the New Year,

Yours sincerely,

Director.

Mr. Richard P. Taylor,
Cultural Officer,
American Embassy,
41 Grosvenor Square, W.1.

*reply from
Mrs Stanton on
Exhib. Prop. Policy.*

Figure 20: Letter from Bryan Robertson, Director, Whitechapel Gallery, to Richard Taylor, Cultural Officer, American Embassy, 30 December 1952, Whitechapel Gallery Archive.

Facts and facts

This archive material offers direct, nevertheless disparate, information in relation to *Guernica*'s presentation at the Whitechapel in 1939, as well about the subsequent attempts by directors Robertson and Serota to organise a re-presentation of *Guernica* in the 1950s and 1980s.¹³⁴ The information provided opens up various platforms for discussion and puts *Guernica* under scrutiny. The painting was a political instrument in the 1930s, and in the 1950s, both Picasso and *Guernica* were inextricably associated with the Communist party).¹³⁵ The archive material also reflects the importance of *Guernica* for the Whitechapel and how significant the painting has been for the gallery's history and its association with left-wing politics. Every file presented here gives a wealth of information which, if pieced together and seen as a whole, can provide a narrative that merges two main axes: politics and art. For instance, some material illustrates the exuberant response of the press to the 1939 Whitechapel exhibition, giving us a characteristic example of the terminology used to refer to modern art and artists – see item XII, in which the description of *Guernica* as 'Picasso's latest hit' reflects the artist's reputation and consequently how his work's value was perceived in

¹³⁴ Robertson was organising a Picasso exhibition which would include *Guernica*, scheduled to take place in 1953; Serota's idea was solely focused on *Guernica*; he made a plea to MoMA to permit *Guernica* to travel to London in 1980.

¹³⁵ See Robertson's correspondence with the American Embassy, pp. 146–47 and Appendix XXXII, attached CD.

relation to the art market.¹³⁶ Other material gives us a view of the private correspondence between art professionals in different decades, the 1950s, 1970s and 1980s. Some letters reveal the diplomatic negotiations and sensitive dealings deployed between art institutions for borrowing valuable artworks such as *Guernica*. Loan requests for borrowing precious works, for example, benefit from letters of support and recommendations from other museum directors, well-known art historians or critics. In their own right, these letters stand as an invaluable learning resource for future curators and exhibition organisers. Apart from the assumptions one can make about the producers of these documents (journalists, artists, curators or museum directors), one can also draw conclusions about how these events were perceived by the Whitechapel. The questions are raised: What was their importance for the gallery? How significant was *Guernica*, for example, for both audiences and the Whitechapel itself? There is evidence that in the 1990s, one or more individuals were zealously investigating the pre-war exhibition of *Guernica*. They were actively searching for material and evidence of *Guernica*'s presentation, such as images and press cuttings (as illustrated in items I and XXII, pp. 121 and 127–28). The ongoing search for relevant records to fill the archival gaps, continued fifty years after *Guernica*'s first presentation, is indicative of how important the event is in the

¹³⁶ The word 'hit' is mostly associated with success; a successful stroke, performance, or production; according to the Compact Oxford English Dictionary: 'a successful and popular film, pop record, person, etc.' <http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/hit?view=uk>, [accessed on 30 September 2009]

gallery's history. Initially, the archive did not contain material related to the 1939 exhibition, apart from one or two small press cuttings. The event had certainly occurred but the records were never deposited in the Whitechapel's archive. This was a *lacuna in the manuscript*, a gap that needed to be filled. In spite of the long and vital history of major modern and contemporary art exhibitions organised by the Whitechapel Gallery in his 1998 letter to Marion King, Jon Newman refers to *Guernica's* presentation 'one of the most important exhibitions at the gallery...' (item XLVII, pp. 143–44). How we interpret such an affirmative position is open to the reader. Did it derive from a general admiration for Picasso, for *Guernica* in particular, for the exhibition's political significance or its centrality to the gallery's reputation?

The press cuttings also reflect positive reactions from the local and national press with regard to *Guernica's* journey to London and its presentation at the Whitechapel in particular. A 1939 press cutting (item III, pp. 122–23) refers to the event as 'outstanding' and to the painting as 'advanced'. In the same item, the journalist compiles an aid for readers to better understand *Guernica*. The article provides information about its production, with many references to Picasso's style of work, as well as the political background of the period. On this occasion, 'advanced' equals 'incomprehensible'. It is not clear from the article whether the journalist made this assumption with the East End audiences in mind or if it was

a general comment on abstraction and cubism which they did not consider a straightforward visual language.

In the late 1930s, *Guernica*'s status as a powerful symbol of struggle was already well established. This was the reason this particular work was selected to promote the cause of Spanish Relief.

The presentation of *Guernica* and its studies was a decision taken for a clear and specific political purpose. It was not driven by a curatorial interest in Picasso; possibly this was a moment where the Whitechapel's main programming was flexible and could easily accommodate external proposals as well as exhibitions which had a broader socio-political benefit.¹³⁷ Without doubt, the painting had, due to its subject, the bombing of Gernika, a strong anti-war significance of its own; in the particular display it was removed from its art context and instrumentalised for a fundraising purpose. In the few existing photographs of the official opening, the work stands in the space as a backdrop for the political speeches taking place in front of it. In a 1939 press cutting (item XXII, p. 133) segments of Attlee's speech from the opening are quoted. Attlee denounced fascism and the European dictators Mussolini, Franco and Hitler and praised Picasso and *Guernica*. He spoke about the threat of fascism overshadowing Europe and of the importance of young people becoming aware of this danger.

¹³⁷ The exhibition preceding *Guernica* was by Toynbee Art Club (9 November – 23 December 1938) and the one that followed was by the Artists International Association (9 February – 7 March 1939).

Through Attlee's speech, *Guernica*, or to be more precise the mere act of visiting it at the Whitechapel, becomes an antidote to a threatening political inertia.

Serota's correspondence in the 1980s illustrates his attempts to exhibit *Guernica* once again at the Whitechapel. The timing of Serota's project cannot be seen in isolation from the gallery's situation at the time. The Whitechapel had overcome trying times and had been close to bankruptcy; in spite the gloomy financial condition, under Serota's directorship it was steadily securing funds for the first big expansion, which took place in 1985.¹³⁸ Serota's idea of bringing *Guernica* back to the gallery was going to return the Whitechapel to the public eye and verify its pivotal role as an international art institution; a positive outcome in light of the forthcoming expansion.

A presentation of *Guernica* during the 1980s would not have served a wider political role but rather a specific micro-political one. In contrast to pre-war exhibition, it would not be Picasso's privilege to exhibit *Guernica* at the Whitechapel Gallery; but instead an honour for the Whitechapel to be the hosting venue. Since 1939, *Guernica* has shifted from being a controversial, political work of art, to also being regarded as a renowned example of modernism, one considered a representative cubist work, symbolic of civil struggle all over the

¹³⁸ 'What followed (1973) was an incredibly difficult period for the Whitechapel. A number of changes in personnel took place. The gallery depended almost entirely on public money largely from the Arts Council and the Greater London Council (G.L.C.). By 1975 annual subscriptions to the Whitechapel Gallery Society had dropped to a mere £68.' The quote is from Janeen Haythornthwaite, 'Roller-Coasters and Helter Skelters, Missionaries and Philanthropists: A History of Patronage and Funding at the Whitechapel Art Gallery', *Centenary Review* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2001), pp. 18-22.

world. *Guernica* also increased in value. Picasso's canvases accrued a high market value shortly after he painted them; but in the span of forty-three years (between *Guernica*'s production in 1937 and Serota's proposal for a second presentation in 1980), *Guernica*'s value had risen significantly.¹³⁹ *Guernica*'s evolution in art and intellectual status and in economic value – transformed from as political instrument in the 1930s to a certified masterpiece safeguarded by MoMA's security, is reflected in the growing difficulties and barriers that both Robertson and Serota faced.¹⁴⁰

The museums which owned Picasso works turned down the requests of both directors, despite of the Whitechapel's reputation as a highly prestigious London venue which could guarantee safe handling of the painting and publicity. As evident in the letters in Appendix XXXII, MoMA's director and staff were reluctant to lend, and this position did not waiver throughout the correspondence. There were many negotiations, making use of contacts and active networking to find supporters for the idea and consequently to influence MoMA's director. This was a very different and more formal climate than the one in which the pre-war exhibition was organised; at which time Penrose, passionate about a non-fascist Europe, and in collaboration with Mesens and other artists from the Artists International Association, directly sought Picasso's

¹³⁹ According to *New York Gallery* magazine (1995), the value of *Guernica* in 1995 was 1.6 million USD dollars.

¹⁴⁰*Guernica*, whilst at MoMA, had been the site of occasional anti-war vigils, especially during the years of the Vietnam War. These protests were in general peaceful; nevertheless security measures had been intensified for this reason.

permission to arrange *Guernica's* showing at the Whitechapel. In the 1980s more formal language and procedures were deployed.

The material discussed in this chapter and found in the Whitechapel Gallery Archive constitutes independent stories that sustain the Whitechapel's history and are far from being publicly known.

From a curatorial perspective, this material can be read very differently; these records clearly refer to the past of the Whitechapel and to three eras in the gallery's history. Seemingly their only linking point is *Guernica* and/or Picasso.

A curatorial reading (initially) and further use of this material (potentially) will unwrap the records in question, and open them to numerous reinterpretations.

The association and re-composition of archival material will give the curator the opportunity to discuss issues that arise from the readings.

Guided by their particular interest, the curator will select documents which they wish to use further. As discussed in Chapter One, the reading of archives is in itself an interpretative activity. The archive lends itself to the user and opens up for analysis. Every researcher using it enters into an exchange with it; they withdraw information and deposit personal interpretation.

To connect to the hypothesis above, if archival material becomes a primary source for a curator, it is expected that the files and documents will in turn become components of a curatorial project, and will form a dialogue with the viewer, initiated by the ideas and questions posed by the curator. The curator

here acts like the re-interpreter of known historical accounts, and the concept of the project is dependent on their positioning. Perhaps they will use the material as a reaffirmation of a purely historical account or to challenge and give another version of the known history by combining elements of the archive. The archive here becomes a malleable and flexible body, receptive to curatorial intervention. Paul Ricoeur's writings have been fundamental in defining the historiographical operation, a process through which historical accounts are read and understood. Ricoeur states that because 'action' is always 'interaction', there is no uniquely privileged model for historical accounts; the historian must be attentive to multiple meanings that are relevant in making action intelligible.¹⁴¹

In Chapter Four, I will discuss the concept of historiography in relation to Ricoeur's work, in order to define the archive and the curator's role in the re-reading, re-interpretation and re-use of the archive. My suggestion is that if we use the archive to curate exhibitions and events and consequently deposit the outcome of the intervention back into the archive, we potentially create critical platforms and enable the archive material not only to function as items for display but to incorporate critique. Thus, a curatorial intervention in the archive will ultimately become part of the archive itself.

¹⁴¹ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 178

Chapter Four: *The Curatorial Intervention*