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## MAKING IMAGES TALK: PICASSO'S MINOTAUROMACHY

### ABSTRACT

We can say that Picasso's images speak to us, and, as writing, speak to us from that space in which any text – far from being reduced to a single sense – “disseminates” its “truths”. Using the figure and the story of the Minotaur, Picasso devoted himself to one of the great themes of his pictorial work. The word “labyrinth” connotes, to the European mind, Greece, Knossos, Dedalus, Ariadne and the Minotaur. However, the Greek formula already represents a mythic and poetic outcome thoroughly developed from an imagery forged in the remotest eras of our evolution. The relationship between the image, the spiral, and the word, labyrinth is also linked to the perception of a drilled earth, excavated, with numberless tortuous tunnels which, in our imagination, provoke concern because they lead to the world of the *inferi*, the unknown depths of the realms of the dead. Juan Larrea, a little-known essayist in the sphere of philosophical studies, although, from the outset of international renown for Picasso's work, he gives what is perhaps the best interpretation of *Guernica* and consequently also sheds much light on the engravings immediately preceding the execution of this painting, the *Minotauromachy* among them. The artist is not a prophet. He is not foreseeing what the future holds for humanity, but he does possess a heightened sensitivity that drives him to minutely scrutinise the conditions of the time that he has had to live, and he has a transforming eye for the symbols that constitute the deepest threads in the fabric of his culture.

### KEYWORDS

Labyrinth, Archetypes, Spanish Civil War, *Minotauromachy*, *Guernica*, Aesthetics.

In Plato, the images and writing are silent. They do not answer our questions. But we now know that the images and writing can talk, and that an approach to them consists above all in “allowing for a reading”. This border area which, in Plato, makes artistic images and writing a *phármakon*, simultaneously a toxin and a cure, in these latter days enjoys its own ontological status: the image remains just an image and its effectiveness does not lie in representing something or somebody. As a result, the image has to be taken and assessed on its own basis. It is in this sense we can say that Picasso's images speak to us, and, as writing speaks to us from that space in which any text – far from being reduced to a single sense – “disseminates” its “truths”, what is shown by means of images likewise gives rise to multiple possibilities of sense and interpretation. Our purpose consequently consists of giving voice to one of the most interesting series of engravings in Picasso's iconography, the *Minotauromachy*, and delving deeper into the meaning that the mythical image

of the Minotaur held – not only for the painter, but also for his era, the first half of the century elapsed, as well as for European culture down to our days.

When Picasso made his first engraving in Barcelona in 1899, he was nineteen years old. The engraving is a small print depicting the figure of a *picador*, the man charged with executing one of the lances in a bullfight. The image depicts his outline carrying an implement, the pike held in his left hand, by which he is known as “*El zurdo*” (the left-handed one). This name is printed on the only proof of his figure known and has been said to have been placed there by Picasso himself. In some cases, it has been thought that the reason for the name related to the way the image appears, holding the pike in his left hand, but majority of art critics presume it more likely that the picador was indeed left-handed and that Picasso drew him as he was. Picasso began his career as an engraver at the onset of the twentieth century and would continue to produce engravings up to some months before his death, when he exhibited a series of a hundred and fifty-seven of them at the Leiris gallery.

His interest in the figure of the Minotaur began in Picasso when Skira founded the magazine, *Minotaure*, in the circle of surrealists. In this context, and given these relationships, Picasso created a Minotaur for the first magazine cover, plus eleven engravings between 17 May and 18 June 1933. In all these drawings, the formal language is classical. After 1933 he continued to be interested in making works with mythological figures: centaurs, minotaurs, fauns. Spanish art critic and scholar Palau i Fabre defines them as products of his imagination because, as in Greece, they fulfilled a need to express intimate aspects of the human being, in this case the Picasso human being (Palau i Fabre 1968: 53). In 1933, Picasso was fifty-two, at a complicated time in his life. He met Marie Thérèse Walter, who gave him a daughter, Maya, in 1935. This was the period of the *Sculptor and Model* engravings and he had been doing works commissioned by Vollard, the collector with whom he worked. The entire set would come to be known as the *Vollard Suite*. The works chosen by Vollard number a hundred; a part of them revolves around the *Sculptor and Model* theme and another part around the theme of bulls and the Minotaur... blind, beaten, winged, dying, playing or raping. Using the figure and the story of the Minotaur, Picasso devoted himself to one of the great themes of his pictorial work. A drawing from as early as 27 March 1928 represents a bull-man, and we have fifteen engravings of the Minotaur and the blind minotaur. One of the last aquatints included in the series by Vollard is the *Faun Unveiling a Woman*. In 1935, he executed an etching, the *Minotauromachy*, of which we know five proofs serving to track the development of the creative process, throughout which the artist progressively introduces nuances. In studying the history of engraving, we find no artist as prolific in number, technical richness and theme as Picasso. Over two thousand prints of his have been catalogued and, in the opinion of experts, we can rate them as high as to degree of perfection as those of Dürer, Rembrandt, Piranesi or Goya. It may thus be concluded that Picasso is undeniably the artist of greatest importance in twentieth-century engraving.

He also illustrated texts, but the value of his works and achievements are at the same level in text illustrations such as Ovid's *Metamorphosis* or Balzac's *Unknown Masterpiece* as in his stand-alone prints, the themes of which correspond to given moments in his own personal interests and inspiration. He keeps investigating,

experimenting, although he may not have considered his works as results of experimentation because he always said, *when the things I wanted to represent required another form of expression, I never hesitated to appropriate it. I have never rehearsed or experimented. Whenever I wanted to say something, I have done so in the manner I felt it should be said* (Pablo Picasso 1974). Picasso was always open to new trials using new textures and new elements; the process of searching was of more interest to him than what he might find in the end.

The engravings he made commissioned by Vollard represent a decisive step in his pictorial iconography. His interests progress from the image of the *Painter and Model* to that of the *Sculptor and Model*. Picasso learned with every step he took. Sometimes he worked with lines; at others, he used more pictorial techniques, such as black etching or the sugar-lift aquatint process he was taught by Roger Lacourrière, one of the most outstanding French engravers at the time. Lacourrière went to both Picasso's studio in Paris and to his home on the Côte d'Azur. While working on the *Minotauromachy*, Picasso practically stopped painting. This is a large etching with scrapings, the existence of which we know from five artist's proofs, on the basis of which we are able to study the changes he introduced into the artwork. In the first proofs, the space is divided into two halves, and in the last proofs the final result is the unification of the space. The blacks heighten the night-time atmosphere of the work. The outcome of all the work on the *Minotauromachy* is that it practically enables us to follow the entire creative process step by step up to the final state. However, the evolution of his techniques is not the aspect that will engage our greatest interest in this work (Balada 1982).

A point of maximum interest in the *Vollard Suite* is represented by four works executed from September to November 1934, in which the character of the Minotaur reappears in the form of the Blind Minotaur. The monster here is a pained creature, much less threatening, even deserving of compassion and support. The novel idea it poses is the relationship between the little girl and the Minotaur, the woman and the horse. As though Picasso's preoccupation at the time lay in the relationship between rationality and irrationality, instinct and sexuality, or the hybrid nature of the human being as beast and man at once. As did the painter Goya, who portrayed the family of Charles IV without a shred of pity as to the plainness of king and court, all the while respecting the beauty and candour of infancy in the children, Picasso, by including children's figures in his series, seems to point at our aspiration to tame those facets where blind and brutal nature bows before innocence and beauty.

Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, Picasso executes two etchings in which he sequentially describes the campaigns of a being, at once monstrous and ridiculous, producing a kind of comic about the Spanish tragedy that combines the grotesque features of a dictatorial figure, Francisco Franco, in his brutality. We perceive in this period that there is a strong influence of engraving on painting; to be specific, of these series in relation to the *Guernica*. From this time onward, Picasso commits himself politically, and after the Second World War, joins the Communist Party and collaborates with his work in international movements. In 1949, the poet Aragón chooses one of his works – the lithograph of a softly-plumed white dove executed in Paris – which becomes the poster announcing the first of several peace conferences.

## Interpreting, Dreaming and Creating: The Figure of the Minotaur in Picasso's Engravings

The name Minotaur was given to a monster with the head of a bull and the body of a man. His real name was Asterio or Asterion. He was the son of Pasiphaë, the wife of Minos, and a handsome bull that Poseidon, god of the sea, had sent as a gift to Minos, as king of Crete. The bull from Poseidon was so princely that Minos did not send it to be sacrificed but kept it among his herds; but Pasiphaë fell in love with it, and from this unnatural union was born the Minotaur. So that the monster's existence would not put him to shame, king Minos ordered a palace to be built, the intricate halls of which would hold the strange creature within. Daedalus, a great architect who lived in court, took charge of constructing a palace, which was called the *Labyrinth*. The word "labyrinth", according to some interpretations, comes from the root *labrys*, the double-axe, and *labyrinth* meant "the palace of the double-axe". It seems that the word and the utensil originate from the works in the mines, from among the instruments that drilled into the earth and filled it with underground galleries, through which it was authentically hard to find one's way. This image of the Labyrinth is contained in the way that the labyrinthine form has been conceived throughout the ages. On another hand, the *labrys* – the two-sided axe – from the most remote ages of prehistory, has been a ritual symbol that mythologies give different interpretations for, one of them being the unified representation of the male and the female as vital principles. As a result, images of the two-sided axe appear in very numerous representations.

Every nine years, the city sent seven youths and seven maidens to the heart of the Labyrinth to be given over to the Minotaur. Theseus, one of the many heroes whose adventures are narrated in the myths, mingled with the youths and, helped by a ball of string that Ariadne had given him, was able to find his way out from the centre of the Labyrinth and return, after defeating and killing the Minotaur.

According to the anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan, we can find traces attesting to the evolution of human imagery in man's vestiges. From his point of view, the decisive factor characterising human action is the domestication of time and space. What, then, do we mean in speaking of domesticating time and space? First of all, that the world is perceived in two ways. One way is dynamic, and consists of exploring space while being aware of it, actively experiencing it through exploration and discovery – this dynamic exploration provides us with an image of the world based on an itinerary. Land animals share this with humans. It involves a route engaging muscular and olfactory capabilities. The other, static way, is what enables us, through immobility, to reconstruct a space of circles using ourselves as a starting point up to the limits of the unknown; to combine the images of two opposing surfaces – heaven and earth, which meet at the horizon – and, moreover, to organise this by means of a vertical line or axis. This vision, produced by the second, static way, is radial, circular; we share it with birds and it is associated to a highly-developed vision (Leroi-Gourhan 1972: II, 157).

These two modalities coexist and are interrelated in human beings. We find their vestiges wherever human evolutionary development has left its imprint. Communities of hunters and food-gatherers created mythologies populated by itinerant routes. This is how the travelling paths of the stars have fed the images of myth,

from the mythography of the travelling sun in Val Camonica to the descriptions of the sun in its nocturnal journey to the realms of the dead. On another hand, the stories of civilising heroes – none other than the commanders and organisers of the world – also show that basic structure, mapping out a path where deeds happen, one after the other.

In analysing prehistoric myth – the oral context of which we have lost and thus cannot fully understand – in the images of Altamira or Lascaux, for instance, we find figures organised in a linear manner, appearing repeatedly. We are thus shown the model of a world-view representing an impression of itinerant space. At first, the images from prehistoric caverns were considered arbitrarily arranged, without logical order. We now know this is not the case, and that such arrangements accord with a path, an itinerary, a layout that establishes a kind of “journey” from the outside of the cave to the inside, through its twists and turns. It was therefore the impression of the nomad that configured all images of paths, wanderings and journeys since the dawn of humanity.

In contrast, radial space yields the typical model originating from the sedentary farmer who constructs a circular world around the walls of his granary. In the world of the origins, Paradise is thus shaped as a space situated at the foot of a mountain, between rivers, where grows a tree of knowledge – the world axis and the link between the two spheres, terrestrial and celestial. In it, things exist after having been named by man, after having been fixed and made stable, subject to space and time, situated between an eminently genesis before and after. This is the space that favours the shaping of the origins. The hunter-nomad has become a farmer, foresighted and sedentary; he has known the future apart from the past without a time and the immediate present. Both linear-erratic nomadic imagery on the one hand and circular-temporal sedentary imagery on the other express the stages of a human spatial and temporal appropriation in relation to the elements. Consequently, we can affirm today that what Jungian terminology would refer to as archetypes were formulated in this way, understanding an archetype to be, not a single image, but a series of images summing up the ancestral experience of human beings in the face of typical situations; i.e., in circumstances not specific to single individuals, but that may come to be imposed on each and every individual, widely shared. It is from this perspective that we propose to remark on some aspects of the spiral form as an archetypal image of the labyrinthine path.

Any catalogue of rock art will provide us with abundant illustrations of a widespread form, the spiral. Prodigally used as an element for ornamentation, the spiral form triggers the type of dynamic association that generally transmits the idea of movement, displacement, along with a sensation of what is tortuous, not straight, and therefore folded inwards or entangled.

Karoly Kérenyi studied these kinds of representations seen in rock art and preserved at later times in European art, both Mediterranean and Nordic, relating them to tablets from the Babylonian culture on which spiral representations appear. Some show inscriptions; others have none at all (Kérenyi 1984: 45). The inscriptions revealed that the spiral forms represented entrails – to be specific, intestines of animals sacrificed for purposes of divination. Archives of entrails were thus discovered, the representation of which took the prototypal form of the spiral. Some of the inscriptions refer to a certain “palace of entrails” *ékal tirani*, alluding

to a mythological realm of the dead, an underworld or world of *inferi*. We are thus confronted by the fact that a form that is, in principle, silent – the simple drawing of a spiral – provokes in the human beings contemplating it an empathic reaction, a projection of emotional contents conferring life to inert forms, and granting them the possibility of conveying several ideas:

- In the first place, the idea of movement. The idea of an itinerary that is not linear, moving from one point to another, but a tortuous path with no exits, moving in spirals and, in principle – albeit not always – moving downwards.
- The idea that this path, like the entrails of an animal or human being, may evoke the passage of food from the mouth up to its transformation into waste may also call up a similarity with life as a passage from birth to death, up to transformation into mortal remains.
- The spiral thus acquires the sense of a schematic image of the labyrinth as a symbol for human existence. The path it represents is a closed map, from birth to death, with a set, implacable origin and destination.

Certainly, the word “labyrinth” connotes, to the European mind, Greece, Knossos, Dedalus, Ariadne and the Minotaur. However, the Greek formula already represents a mythic and poetic outcome thoroughly developed from an imagery forged in the remotest eras of our evolution. The relationship between the image, the spiral, and the word, labyrinth, is also linked to the perception of a drilled earth, excavated, with numberless tortuous tunnels which, in our imagination, provoke concern because they lead to the world of the *inferi*, the unknown depths of the realms of the dead. Thus, we see how the image of the labyrinth, in its most schematic form as a spiral, relates to a type of path associated to distant experiences of anxiety at loss, the feeling of “being lost”, and, finally, the sensation of life as an experience “with no exit” or “with no other exit” than that which death provides towards a “beyond”, “another world”, or however we want to call it, though it be certainly not experienced and therefore unknown.

Theseus defeats the Minotaur thanks to a ball of string that Ariadne gives him, and through this stratagem manages to return and leave the island. From here on, we shall resort to a philosopher-ball-of-string, Gaston Bachelard, to serve as a guide through the twists and turns of Picasso's labyrinth. There is no need to say we agree on the fact that the images Picasso devotes to the figure of the Minotaur, the way he presents it, the different scenarios in which he turns it into a protagonist or a companion, belong to the personal imagery of the painter. Were Picasso before us, we could certainly interrogate him, and perhaps he would answer or perhaps no, because not even he himself would know how to clearly respond to the question about his remotest concerns. The fact that an artist may not explain his work, does not justify that we do not want to question ourselves about it. To ask questions and to try to answer them is, in my opinion, the cornerstone of the communicative element that is the artwork, because the artwork is, above all, communication, the means through which we leave our closed individual world and participate in the world of others, share something in common. This entails acknowledging in this manner the socialising value of art, its power to break the individual's isolation and situate him in relation to others.

It is in this sense that the words of the philosopher Bachelard become revealing. He tells us that he claims “the right to dream”, but what does exercising “the right to dream” mean to us? Bachelard explains this briefly and directly by describing himself not as a busy philosopher but as a dreamer, or even better: as a thinker who grants himself the right to dream. Consequently, this entails acknowledging the exercise of thought, referring in this case to images more as a creative process, in which the creative imagination puts us in touch with an entire universe of collective archetypes, of originary certainties in which myth speaks to us about ourselves, than as a detective’s task in which investigations and, afterwards, incontrovertible proof, can lead to the demonstration of truth. With Picasso’s images and his Minotaur, we venture into an interpretative game in which the artist himself imposes the rules enabling us to enter with him into his innumerable labyrinths in order to share them.

Gaston Bachelard broadly analyses the image of the labyrinth based on what he called images of *la terre et les reveries du repos*. There he characterises the labyrinthine path as a path on which sensations of angst and narrow spaces hard to find a way out from, along with an added and very palpable anxiety on feeling lost, are always provoked. This is not an anxiety about loss, but a reflex angst, an angst directly befalling the trapped and disoriented subject:

In our night-time dreams [he says] we unconsciously represent the life of our travelling ancestors. It has been said that, in man, “everything is a road”; if referring to the most distant of the archetypes, we must add: in man, everything is a lost road. Systematically applying the feeling of being lost to all unconscious wandering is rediscovering the labyrinth as an archetype. (Bachelard 1948: 213)

Backtracking to the ancestral inception of our imagery, the images and metaphors with which art peoples its most diverse manifestations find in the labyrinthine the most straightforward model for expressing the emotional atmosphere of angst in the face of total disorientation. There is no road less known than the mysterious path of our existence, and at the same time, no certainty more frightening than the known end of the path, death, and the unknown beyond that awaits us.

Who is this character, half-human, half-beast, who evokes his lair, his house, his labyrinths in the images of Picasso? It is in that Minotaur, lubricious, pleasure-loving, threatening at times and helpless at others, that the artist portrays himself, and us along with him. We are all, in moments of contemplation, at once weak beings and threatening beasts. We all feel lost and seek someone to guide us, who can lavish sweetness and consolation upon us when we are as lost along the way as Picasso’s Minotaur. We are all alone and at the same time accompanied and observed from windows as in the *Minotauromachy*. And that sinuous, labyrinthine road on which the Minotaur, lost and blind, seeks guidance, assistance, is shown to us as a climb, an ascent, a human effort – here and there are men and women. Loss also leads us to a universal aspiration: towards ascent, the rising movement, the climb by means of the ladder. Night and the stars shape the background in which this aspiration appears.

There are, in addition, a series of drawings in which Picasso shows us the figure of the blind Minotaur being led by a little girl. Sometimes his figure is silhouetted against a starry night sky to which he turns, as though trying to see them. A blind

Minotaur seeing the stars? We could not be more concise; this could not be stated more directly. The *Blind Minotaur* dates from 1934. A few years later, in 1939, the great Spanish playwright and Cervantes Awardee, Buero Vallejo, wrote his play *In the Burning Darkness*, where he expresses a similar desire in words. The action takes place in an inpatient facility for the blind, where we find the quotation:

And now the stars are shining, [...] Those distant worlds [...] within reach of our sight, if we had it. (Buero Vallejo 1994:126)

For Buero Vallejo, the finite human being aspires for the impossible. For Picasso, the *Blind Minotaur* series and the *Minotauromachy* itself also express a painful reality: they show the limitations of the human being as well as an impossible aspiration: to reach the light, despite blindness, and here the little girl carries a light, a guide for the weak and monstrous Minotaur. The times set the stage for both minds, since the war of Spain marked both artists: Picasso, exiled in France, and Buero Vallejo, sentenced to die in a Spanish prison. It is not a coincidence that a similar aspiration is couched in terms that are also similar; in Buero Vallejo, a playwright who wanted to be a painter, and in Picasso, a painter who was so and had always wanted to be so, as in both of them reappears the ancestral motif of the human tragedy that the myth of Oedipus Rex illustrates. Oedipus also wants to know, wants to see and be seen, desires the light of knowledge; he who sees that he is blind and that only on blinding himself can he come to see himself and perceive the human being. This Oedipus, a conqueror of monsters like the Sphinx, from the beginnings of our western culture, has been the embodiment of our intimate conflicts as human beings. Violence, the light of knowledge, the desire to see and to know... And Picasso perceives this all too well: in that last engraving, the Minotaur is the Sphinx; it is the mystery, it is time, it is the threat of time that we delude ourselves into believing we have defeated. The Sphinx in Greece was a monster attributed the face of a woman, the body of a lion and the wings of a bird of prey. The Oedipus story recounts that it asked all wayfarers for the animal that walked on four feet first, then on two, and lastly on three. When the person asked did not know the answer, it cast him into a ravine. Only Oedipus on his way to Thebes knew the answer: man. The monster symbolically represented time. But on this occasion, in the image of that Minotaur-Sphinx recreated, what Picasso shows us is a mirror-image: the face of the Sphinx is now no longer a woman's face, but has been substituted here by a humanised Minotaur turned into a new archetype, at once beast and human. The painter portrays himself and represents everybody. The mystery now continues to be time, but not just time; the mystery on this occasion is, in addition, man himself. The eyes of the Minotaur see through time.

### Juan Larrea: *Guernica* and Picasso's Dove

We have been establishing an entire series of relationships between the images that appear in the *Minotauromachy* and the constellations of symbols that, in some way, can help us understand the depth and projection of the work of this exceptional artist. Our attempt is, to a certain point, legitimised when we approach works about Picasso's *Guernica* as fascinating as those done by his friend and compatriot,



Juan Larrea (Bilbao 1895 – Cordoba, Argentina 1980). A poet and essayist, Larrea was one of the many intellectuals forced into exile after the dramatic event of the Spanish Civil War and the long period of dictatorship that followed it. Very early in 1921 onward, he participated in cultural tasks as Secretary of the National Historical Archive of Madrid, Secretary to a cultural relations delegation under the Spanish Embassy in Paris, and, in 1937, creator of the Indies Museum and Library in the University City of Madrid. Once he was established in Paris, the city to which he had travelled in 1926 to join the poets Vicente Huidobro and César Vallejo, in 1937 he began a close friendship with Pablo Picasso, to the point of publishing an album of etchings, *The Dream and Lie of Franco*, and accompanying Picasso from day to day as he painted *Guernica*. Juan Larrea is a little-known essayist in the sphere of philosophical studies, although, from the outset of international renown for Picasso's work, he gives what is perhaps the best interpretation of *Guernica* and consequently also sheds much light on the engravings immediately preceding the execution of this painting, the *Minotauromachy* among them.

Only in a restricted sense [Juan Larrea tells us] can the studies for *Guernica* be understood to have begun on 1 May 1937. In a broader sense of the truth, it would be more fitting to sustain that Picasso's entire oeuvre constitutes a succession of trials, diagrams and spectrographs, the general justification for which lies in this portentous enigma. [...] Even in the event that one would wish to see in this painting a premonition of the contemporary cataclysm, it must be admitted that such cataclysm had been in gestation in the painter's innermost self since his younger periods. [...] On another hand, he is credited with works of calmer pathos, albeit extremely close to *Guernica* in their representation, above all that incomparable *Minotauromachy*, where more or less the same elements abound: the convulsive horse; the bull; the four women, one of them bare-breasted; the man; the light; the sword; the dove; and even the flower, here represented by a peaceful olive branch that has sprouted from the hand that wields the broken sword ... The similarity is so profound that *Guernica* could never reasonably be understood as this same painting in black and white without that reference point. (Larrea 1977: 30)

For Juan Larrea, the day on which the small town of Guernica in the Basque Country was bombarded provoked astonishment and shock all over the civilised world, and the appearance of the painting by Picasso turned *Guernica* into the most European of all the paintings that were known. Because what occurred in the town of Guernica in Spain, caused by the Nazi Luftwaffe, was the prelude to the horror and devastation that was to take place very soon after in Europe, with the entire extent of the European continent a desert of ruins. Still, the painting does not only speak of Spain; it not only expresses feeling for the ruins and the pain of war, firstly in Spain and afterwards in Europe. According to Larrea's interpretation, *Guernica* is a picture of crisis, a deep spiritual and social crisis, in the images of which the painter portrays the end of a cycle, the end of a time, and glimpses in its background an Apocalypse by which the European cultural universe – that which, since its origins, had laid the foundations for its symbols – disappears. If, at a remote moment in history, Europe had stood up to Asia in sphere of influence and as a land of aspirations, the appearance of *Guernica* points to a new land and to the end of a bleeding Europe, auguring the beginnings of a time when the west, open to an ocean leading to new lands and new continents, had already signalled the beginning of a new cycle.

One last symbol remains for analysis. This is the dove, a symbol we find in many of Picasso's works. When remarking on the frequent appearance of the dove in the works of the painter, Larrea provides us with an interpretation full of spirituality:

the statement "I am the Alpha and the Omega" alludes mystically to the Spirit. [...] The reason, doubtless taken from certain Gnostics, is that in the Greek numeration system, the letters alpha and omega add up to eight hundred and one, which is the same that the letters of the word *peristerá*, meaning "dove" in Greek. (Larrea 1977: 94)

The dove, which is present in the *Minotauromachy* and in *Guernica*, the painting that the former precedes the closest according to Larrea, is not merely a symbol of peace in times of war, but also becomes a symbol in which a cycle ends, in which a crisis becomes explicit through the images that the painter's sentiment selects to embody the effects that the events of an era of political, social and anthropological transformation have provoked in him. The artist is not a prophet. He is not foreseeing what the future holds for humanity, but he does possess a heightened sensitivity that drives him to minutely scrutinise the conditions of the time that he has had to live, and he has a transforming eye for the symbols that constitute the deepest threads in the fabric of his culture. Let us once more relate the experience of the painter Picasso to that Sphinx-Minotaur we analysed previously, whereby the humanised face of the beast, the Minotaur, belongs to the body of a mythical animal, the Sphinx, a calendar symbol: an image of time in Mediterranean cultures, now expressing – due to the transformation that the artist performed – the image of a humanised time, of a view in which mythic past and artistic fantasy "talk" to the viewer about a future, which, although unknown, is intuited.

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## Učiniti da slike govore: Pikasova *Minotauromahija*

### Apstrakt

Možemo reći da nam Pikasove slike govore i, kao pismo, da nam govore iz prostora u kome bilo koji tekst – daleko od toga da bude sveden na jedan smisao – “diseminira” svoje “istine”. Koristeći figuru i priču o Minotauru, Pikaso se posvetio jednoj od velikih tema svog slikovnog dela. Reč „lavirint“ konotira, evropskom duhu, Grčku, Knosos, Dedala, Arijadnu i Minotaura. Međutim, ta grčka formula već predstavlja mitski i poetski ishod temeljno izveden iz imaginarijuma stvorenog u najdavnijem dobu našeg našeg razvoja. Odnos između slike, spirale i reči, lavirint je takođe povezan sa izbušenom zemljom, prokopanom, sa bezbrojnim vijugavim tunelima koji u našoj imaginaciji izazivaju nelagodnost, jer vode u svet koji čine *inferi*, nepoznate dubine carstva mrtvih. Huan Larea, malo poznati esejist u oblasti filozofskih studija, iako, od samog početka, međunarodnog ugleda za Pikasovo delo, daje verovatno najbolje tumačenje *Gernike* i posledično u velikoj meri rasvetljava grafike koje neposredno prethode izradi ove slike, među njima i *Minotauromahiju*. Umetnik nije prorok. On ne predviđa šta budućnost donosi čovečanstvu, ali ipak poseduje pojačanu osetljivost da detaljno sagleda stanja vremena u kome mora da živi i ima preobražavalački pogled za simbole koji čine najdublje niti od kojih je satkana njegova kultura.

Ključne reči: lavirint, arhetipovi, Španski građanski rat, *Minotauromahija*, *Gernika*, estetika

