



On 26 April 1937, the air force of Nazi Germany bombed the Basque town of Guernica. The attack was carried out in support of General Franco's Nationalist forces. It was one of the worst atrocities of the Spanish Civil War. Picasso responded to the massacre by painting a large anti-war mural called *Guernica*. He also made a number of additional paintings of a figure from the mural, a woman holding her dead child. *Weeping Woman* is the last of this series. The model for the painting was Dora Maar, who was working as a professional photographer when Picasso met her in 1936; she was the only photographer allowed to document the successive stages of Guernica while Picasso painted it in 1937. Dora Maar was Picasso's mistress from 1936 until 1944. In the course of their relationship, Picasso painted her in a number of guises, some realistic, some gentle, others tortured or threatening. Picasso explained: "For me she's the weeping woman. For years I've painted her in tortured forms, not through sadism, and not with pleasure, either; just obeying a vision that forced itself on me. It was the deep reality, not the superficial one... Dora, for me, was always a weeping woman....And it's important, because women are suffering machines."

### Subject Matter / Imagery

- This abstract, Cubist close up portrait focuses on the image of a weeping woman suffering due to the devastation of war. Her features are unrealistic and distorted which emphasises the grief shown by her facial expression.
- In the haunted, dark eyes of the woman Luftwaffe bomber planes are shown, symbolising her sorrow. The intense expression of the woman's eyes, wide-open and staring, symbolises the intensity of her grief. A single tear falls from her left eye and pours down her cheek, further signifying her painful emotions.
- The woman's teeth are visible demonstrating her anguish, whilst she holds a handkerchief to her mouth which serves as a metaphor for suffering. The jagged and harsh lines in this area indicate the theme of suffering that the woman has gone through, due to the repeated use of violent and sharp lines.
- The *Weeping Woman* has been painted from different viewpoints as Picasso wanted to present as much information as possible on a 2 dimensional piece of artwork, typical of the Cubist movement. This is evident on her face which seems to show a profile view as well as a front view, and also shows two sets of eyes at different angles. Further evidence of this is the extra thumb which appears on the left side of her face.
- The *Weeping Woman* has been painted in a very aggressive, angry style, due to the bold black outline around the edges and the sharp angles throughout. This further communicates that this is a painting about grief.
- Formally dressed, as though at a funeral or other place of mourning, the *Weeping Woman* represents the harrowing grief experienced following the death of a loved one, especially during wartime. She has a flower in her hat, but this suggestion of hope does not erase the fury of the painting.

## Pablo Picasso, "Weeping Woman", 1937. Oil on Canvas, 60 cm x 49 cm

### Composition & Arrangement, including focal point

- The painting shows an extreme close-up depicting the anguish of the weeping woman. It is tightly framed ensuring all attention is on the woman's face, which takes up the majority of the space on the canvas. This is very powerful as it makes the image of grief more intense.
- The woman's face is depicted in both profile and frontal view, a technique often used in Picasso's portraits and a typical Cubist technique. Many views can be seen from different angles to ensure the horror of her grief is given maximum importance. This technique could also make the woman seem more exposed.
- The centre of the painting is occupied by the angular shape of the open mouth and handkerchief. The central position of this section would suggest it is the focal point of the piece. This area is further enhanced as the focal point of the painting due to Picasso's use of cool colours within the jagged shapes, contrasting with surrounding colours.

### Materials / Media Handling / Techniques

- This painting has been created with oil paint on canvas. The oil paint has allowed Picasso to use very bright, highly pigmented colours which have been applied thickly to give opaque coverage all over the canvas.
- A wide range of brushes has been used throughout this painting. Large and medium brushes have been used to ensure even coverage within segments, whilst small brushes have been used for outlining and capturing smaller details, such as the eyelashes.
- Picasso's media handling is very direct and simplistic as he has made little attempt to create variations in tone, resulting in a very flat painting.
- Picasso uses flat brushes with little evidence of blending colour. This is a further exploration of Cubism with less of a focus on realistic painting.
- Picasso uses broad brushstrokes on areas of colour, which are broken up with the jagged outlines of the black.
- Certain segments have been applied quite thickly and layered up in a crude manner to create harsh and thick textured brushstrokes, which adds to the atrocities experienced by the sitter.
- In areas Picasso has applied the paint in a very textural way. This can be more clearly seen in the background where the surface of the painting is raised. These textural areas contrast with the smooth sections of the painting, which are mostly situated towards the centre.

### Viewpoint / Perspective / Scale

- The *Weeping Woman* has been painted at eye level. This viewpoint helps create a connection with the viewer.
- Different angles of the woman's face are visible as a result of Picasso's Cubist style. These varied viewpoints allow the viewer to see the woman from different sides.
- Perspective is slightly suggested in the background due to the use of diagonal lines on the left side. This creates the suggestion of depth in an otherwise flat painting.
- This painting is fairly small in size, making a more personal piece. This could make the viewer feel like they are intruding on the woman's bereavement.

### Style / Visual Impact

- Highly colourful, Picasso separated the balance of contrasting colours and harmonious colours through dark jagged black line, emphasising the simplistic style of the painting.
- Picasso has been reliant on the use of shape within the painting to create the angular features of the face. Irregular shapes within the piece divide the face into different sections, making the Cubist influence very evident.
- Unrealistic use of form is evident throughout. The features are grotesquely twisted to convey anguish and there is very little tone or texture, except for the use of line and the natural texture created from the brushstrokes.
- This painting is visually striking due to the contrast created by the use of contrasting colours. The cool colours in the foreground contrast greatly with the bright, saturated colours elsewhere in the piece. This ensures all attention is focused on the *Weeping Woman's* face.
- Visual impact is also created by Picasso's use of scale, with the woman taking up the majority of space in the painting.

## Visual Elements

### Shape

- Irregular and bold shapes are used throughout which creates a very fragmented, unconventional and quite disturbing portrait.
- Harsh geometric, jigsaw-like shapes feature very strongly in *Weeping Woman*, which helps communicate to us that this is a painting about grief and sorrow.
- Picasso's use of violent, jagged shapes in the centre create separation within the face, further emphasised by the use of differing colours. The jagged shapes ensure attention is drawn to the centre.
- Aggressive, fractured shapes within the handkerchief resemble shards of glass which further emphasise the theme of grief within the painting, drawing attention to the woman's distress.
- Contrast is created with the rounded shapes of the eyes, fingers and hands, giving the painting a softer, more feminine side.

### Colour

- Vulgar and clashing colours have been used throughout the painting in a very expressive way, which creates an unrealistic representation of a human being due to the colours being very exaggerated and unnatural.
- There is an emphasis on basic primary colours, which gives the painting a very raw and simplistic effect. This is emphasised due to there being very little blending used between colours.
- Heavy use of black features throughout the painting, used to boldly outline shapes on the woman's face, hair, clothing and in the background. This further emphasises the unrealistic appearance and gives it a cartoon-like look.
- Picasso uses cool, receding colours in the handkerchief. This large area of cool blues and lilacs creates the focal point of the piece, which stands out because it contrasts with the surrounding colours, drawing more attention to the most expressive, emotive part of the painting.
- On the face, harmonising greens and yellows contrast with areas of purple. The yellow has been used to show highlights, whereas the opposite colour purple has been used to suggest darker areas. The use of these complimentary colours attract attention to the face, the eyes in particular with her bold, yellow eyelids.
- In the hat, contrasting use of red and blue (both primary colours) ensure attention is drawn to this area. This is further emphasised by the use of the warm yellow in background.
- The darker, more subdued colours of brown and black used in her clothing ensures attention remains on the woman's face.

### Line

- The majority of shapes in the painting feature a black outline which separates and defines certain areas. In particular, the bold black outline draws attention to the facial features, particularly the eyes and the tears.
- Picasso uses strong, dark lines to pull the fragmented image together and to subdue the visual impact of the contrasting colour.
- There heavy use of line helps lead the viewer down the face and to the mouth, which is partially covered by a handkerchief.
- The use of curved flowing lines helps to give a sense of texture to her hair and her clothing. The curved lines also contrast with the harsh lines used elsewhere in the painting, providing the painting with some softer elements.
- The use of jagged lines throughout contribute to the despairing tone of the work, as they give the impression of shards of broken glass around her. The woman's tortured emotions are heightened by the artist's careful balance of bold lines and simplified drawing.

### Atmosphere (Mood)

- Picasso has used a range of simplified yet jagged and angular shapes to portray the woman's features, which communicates the anguish and grief experienced by the woman. Overall, the angular shapes make the painting look 'angry'.
- There is a real sense of despair which comes from the angst of the models pose and her facial expression. The desperation of the woman's plight is seen in the tortured features and within the tears running down her face, caused by the horrors of War.
- Her face appears to be almost disfigured from crying, her teeth are bared, gnashing on the handkerchief which, despite partially covering her mouth, cannot disguise the woman's grief.
- The clashing colours create an unsettling and unpleasant atmosphere, which communicates to the viewer that this is not a happy painting, but one about grief and sorrow.
- The use of cool blues and lilacs in the central part of the painting helps to communicate how the woman is feeling - angry, upset and full of sorrow.

### Texture

- Picasso's approach to visual texture is minimal, with flat use of paint throughout. This emphasises the unrealistic nature of the painting.
- Picasso attempts to create texture in the clothing of the woman using short linear brushstrokes in a very simplistic form to represent the furry texture of the fabric.
- The hair has been represented by long individual strands using thick black lines. This is more of a representational approach than an attempt to create texture in a realistic style. The same could be said for the texture of the eyebrows and eyelashes, which have been captured in a simplified way.
- There is some actual texture created as a result of the application of paint. In the background in particular, there are areas where the paint has been applied thickly using an impasto technique. There are also areas on the hands where the thick texture of paint is visible, which creates some variation in the surface texture.
- Lines on the woman's thumb suggest a wrinkled texture to her skin.

### Tone

- Overall, use of colour in the painting is very flat, with little tonal variation. This makes the painting look very unrealistic.
- There is a little variation of tone in the underside of the hair, this darker section creates slight depth in this area.
- On the hands, darker shades of green have been blended with lighter shades of yellow, which creates some tonal areas, suggesting form.

### Form

- The painting appears quite flat as a result of Picasso's application of paint. He has made little attempt to create implied 3 dimensional form, this further emphasises the unrealistic nature of the piece.
- Picasso uses some lighter hues of yellow to indicate areas of the hand and face highlighted by light.
- The directional form of the hair is created through using lighter colours within the lines. This helps the hair have a sense of layering to contrast with the overall flatness of the face itself.
- The curved shapes of the fingers and fingernails creates the idea of the rounded form of the hands, emphasised by the overlapping of the fingers.

### Pattern

- Picasso creates a sense of pattern within the background of the wall. The vertical yellow stripes are subtle enough to allow the main focal point (the face) to advance whilst creating a sense of depth in the painting as well as helping create an interior setting.
- The repetition of line within the woman's hair creates a linear pattern of sorts, whilst also being a representation of texture in the painting.
- Picasso has used a pattern of small parallel lines on the woman's jacket, to create the idea of texture.

## Social, Cultural and Other Influences

- *Weeping Woman* was painted during Picasso's Cubist period. He was influenced by the new movement of Cubism in the art world to create a piece in-keeping with the movement. He was mainly inspired by Paul Cezanne, the founder of the Cubist movement, who Picasso described as 'the father of us all'. Cubist paintings often featured different views of subjects (usually objects or figures) together in the same picture, resulting in paintings that appear fragmented and abstracted, featuring the use of geometric shapes. This is evident in *Weeping Woman* due to the geometric and fragmented shapes used throughout and the different angles we can see of her face and hands.
- *Weeping Woman* features the face of a woman also seen in Picasso's *Guernica* mural painted around the same time, which depicted the bombing of the town of Guernica and symbolized the grief and suffering of the innocent victims. Picasso was therefore inspired by the happenings of the Spanish Civil War to create a piece that would portray the horrible events that took place. Picasso chose to use a single figure to symbolise the suffering of the people from the horrors of war. By focusing on the image of a woman crying, Picasso was referring to a singular universal image of suffering as a direct result of the bombings. Picasso was a pacifist and wished to create a piece of art work that would help promote peace on earth and for humans to reflect upon the disastrous controversies produced by war. Therefore, by painting this piece Picasso used the painting to support the message of peace throughout the world.
- Picasso was influenced by his mistress at the time, Dora Maar, who the *Weeping Woman* is based on. She was a photographer and was heavily involved with the making of *Guernica*, taking a remarkable series of photographs of it through the stages of its creation. Dora Maar allowed her features to be distorted by Picasso who creates a harsh ugliness to arouse emotions of anguish, compassion and despair. Maar was also outraged by Fascism and was deeply committed to a powerful message condemning war.
- This painting may also have been influenced by Picasso's love of African art. This is evident in many of his art works and clearly links to the primitive and simplistic approaches to drawing and painting often adopted by Picasso. He looked towards African art and artefacts as inspiration for some of his work, and African influences can be seen in *Weeping Woman* in the form of the simplified, geometric and exaggerated shapes used to depict her facial features.