

PICASSO: PEACE AND FREEDOM

More than anyone, the Spaniard Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) stands as the epitome of twentieth-century art; as the father of modern art, one could say. Not only was he a one-man reservoir of innovative artistic energy, a man who constantly challenged not only convention but also himself; as a modern human being and artistic figure he also came to profile a whole century, the greater part of which he lived through. Picasso's popularity is due to his personal history and to the expressive power of his works; but amidst this expressiveness he also had a special talent for embracing the issues of his time, for being universally human in a concrete world. Picasso was both ahead of his time and a man of his time who directed intense attention towards the world outside art, and therefore also became an artist *for* his time.

This exhibition adds new aspects to Picasso's motivations as a maker of images. It is well known that Picasso was socially and politically susceptible; his famous masterpiece *Guernica* from 1937 was a horrified, furious protest against the bombardment of the Basque town and against Fascism's contempt for humanity. Some people will also know that the painter was a Communist; this is often mentioned as a curiosity among the more famous characteristics: his love of women, the life of the Mediterranean, the fashionable homes and the record-high sales prices as well as, not least, his impressive capacity for work.

The party membership may well seem both naive and paradoxical in the light of what we know today and indeed what was known then about the crimes of Communism. But for Picasso himself it is unlikely that there was any dichotomy between communism as a basic attitude and the freedom-seeking, life-enjoying, inquiring energy that typified his whole life. If he found a kind of home in the French Communist Party from 1944 on, we must see this against the background of his native Spain, which was in the grip of Franco's dictatorship; the Party's involvement in the organization of the French Resistance during the German occupation, and afterwards the atmosphere during the Cold War as a whole. Picasso chose sides, but never became comfortable with the party officials' tight-lipped puritanism and rigid view of what art may and must and can do.

Picasso knew what real art can do, and over the years up to his death in 1973 he contributed not only substantial funding to the French Communist Party but also, and especially, his artistic commitment. He made posters for a succession of peace conferences in the fifties and at the beginning of the sixties – this is where the famous dove of peace comes from. But even far into his own ongoing, purely artistic project, we find considerable traces of the impact of world politics. Whole series of paintings are directly associated with his contemporary political impressions and reflections. In the exhibition these are gathered in a hanging at once chronological and thematic, showing with a series of outstanding pictures that Picasso was an artist, not a politician; and yet at the same time an eminently worldly artist who was not only inspired by but committed to the concerns and issues of his time.