

PICASSO

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MINOTAUROMACHY. 1935. Etching and scraper, 19½ x 27¾ inches. (C&N, pp. 230-231)

Whatever reasons may have caused Picasso to stop painting early in 1935—and they seem to have been personal and circumstantial—his creative energies for some twenty months thereafter were to find expression in graphic art and poetry, though the results were meager by comparison with any previous period of similar length.

Picasso's most remarkable composition of 1935—and possibly the most important of all his prints—is the *Minotauromachy*. This large etching is so rich in Picasso's personal symbolism and so involved with the iconography of his previous and subsequent work that it requires some analysis, however brief. The bison-headed Minotaur advances from the right, his huge right arm stretched out toward the candle held high by a little girl who stands confronting the monster fearlessly, flowers in her other hand. Between the two staggers a horse with intestines hanging from a rent in his belly. A female matador collapses across the horse's back, her breasts bared, her *espada* held so that the hilt seems to touch the left hand of the Minotaur while the point lies toward the horse's head and the flower girl. At the left a bearded man in a loin cloth climbs a ladder to safety, looking over his shoulder at the monster. In a window behind and above two girls watch two doves walk on the sill. The sea with a distant sail fills the right half of the background.

The flower girl appears several times in Picasso's earlier work—in 1903 and 1905 (p. 231:126, 127); in the large Grecoesque Composition of 1906 (p. 194:16), and its studies (p. 36; p. 194:15)—but never before in such a crucial role. The ladder, usually on the left-hand side of the composition, occurs in the 1905 paintings and etchings of acrobats; is climbed by a monkey in the curtain for *Parade* (p. 231:128); by a man with a hammer in, significantly, the *Crucifixion* of 1930 (p. 231:129); by an amorous youth in a gouache of 1933 (p. 231:130); by a shrieking woman in a *Study for the Guernica* (p. 231:131).

One of the earliest of the bull ring series of the previous years shows a female matador falling from a horse which is borne, like Europa, on the back of the bull, though her sword has been plunged, ineffectually, into the bull's neck (p. 231:132). The agonized, disemboweled horse bares his teeth in many of these same bull-fights, and in 1937, after dying in *The Dream and Lie of*

Franco (p. 151), revives to become the central figure of *Guernica* (p. 237:151).

Minotaur himself appears as a decorative running figure in 1928 (p. 231:133) but takes on his true character in 1933 when Picasso designed the cover for the first issue of the magazine *Minotaure*, and made numerous etchings and drawings in which the monster holds a dagger like a sceptre (p. 231:134) or makes love (p. 231:135). In a drawing of April 1935 he struts with hairy nakedness across the bull ring toward a frightened horse (p. 231:136).

As a kind of private allegory the *Minotauromachy* tempts the interpreter. But explanation, whether poetic or pseudo-psychoanalytic, would necessarily be subjective. It is clear that the ancient and dreadful myth of the Minotaur which originated, together with the bull ring, on the island of Crete, has here been woven into Picasso's own experience of the modern Spanish *toromachia*. To this he has added certain motives associated with his theatre pictures and his *Crucifixion*.

Apparently the scene is a moral melodramatic charade of the soul, though probably of so highly intuitive a character that Picasso himself could not or would not explain it in words. Of three extraordinary allegories it is the first: it was followed, in 1937, by a nightmare comic strip and a great mural painting. (Reprinted by permission of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.)¹

