

THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM BILBAO

presents on March 16, 2013

# L'ART EN GUERRE FRANCE, 1938-1947: FROM PICASSO TO DUBUFFET



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GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

As a strategic trustee of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao since its inception, the BBVA Group is proud and pleased to continue this historic collaboration, via our foundation, with one of the leading institutions of contemporary artistic culture as well as of our times, renowned and acclaimed around the world and throughout Spain and with strong roots in Basque society. An ambitious exhibition is being presented this season, entitled *L'Art en guerre. France, 1938-1947: From Picasso to Dubuffet* and originally produced in Paris, which reveals how art was used to respond to the dramatic and complex situation in France between 1938 and 1947, with a particular focus on how artists in our neighbor to the north reacted to World War II.

More generally, *L'Art en guerre* can be seen as an exploration of the relationship between art and war carried out through a wide selection of documents and works, whose authors include some of the most famous names of the 20th century. The pieces created over the course of those years reflect very different aspects of the daily reality of those who lived through that period: their dreams, nightmares, and hopes—in short, the cognitive, creative and emotional atmosphere that made life meaningful in different sectors of society. Yet that context of social chaos and spiritual darkness was also a productive and innovative time for art, which survived everywhere and flowed forth in all variety of circumstances, both as an underground trend and within the parameters of official taste. In the face of adversity, many artists continued working until the very end with whatever they could lay their hands on, and there were also gallerists who did not hesitate to support modern art even in those dark and dramatic times. In that spatiotemporal framework, art became even more dynamic, developing a surprising vitality in its multiple forms and, as in so many other historical cases of almost insurmountable odds, serving as an outlet for expression that allowed people to endure an undeniably negative situation.

The theoretical reflection at the heart of *L'Art en guerre* grants art history a more general, almost anthropological dimension or packaging, and the documents uncovered in the process of conducting research for this show shed new light on the turbulent history of that era. We trust that the excellent results of this concentrated effort will allow visitors not only to enjoy singular artistic creations but also to expand and enrich their vision of the complex, dramatic period in which they were created, thus facilitating a more thorough understanding of recent European history from the perspective of art.

We would like to congratulate the excellent team of professionals at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, led by Juan Ignacio Vidarte, and the curators of the exhibition, Jacqueline Munck and Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, who have come up with an innovative vision and approach to a historical period that has been examined on so many occasions and from so many different angles. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris and to all the organizations and individuals who have generously loaned works of art to be included in this singular exhibition.

Francisco González  
Chairman of Fundación BBVA

## *L'Art en guerre, France 1938–1947: From Picasso to Dubuffet*

- Dates: March 16–September 8, 2013
- Curators: Jacqueline Munck (Chief Curator at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris) and Laurence Bertrand Dorléac (art historian and professor at the Centre d'histoire de Sciences-Po (CHSP) in Paris and the Institut Universitaire de France)
- Sponsor: Fundación BBVA

Organized by the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris-Musées and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, [\*L'Art en guerre, France 1938-1947: From Picasso to Dubuffet\*](#) shows how, in the ominous and oppressive context of Nazi-occupied France during World War II, the artists of the day rebelled against official slogans by coming up with novel aesthetic solutions that changed the content of art.

More than 500 works by approximately one hundred artists, including documents, photographs and films brought to light here for the first time, have come together in this singular exhibition, made possible by the remarkable sponsorship of Fundación BBVA, which testifies to how these creators resisted and reacted to adversity, “making war on war” with the only forms and materials available in those times of penury, even in environments of incredible hostility toward any expression of individual freedom.

During those years, the militaristic efforts of the authorities triggered an automatic reaction of unprecedented vigor from artists, persevering creators forced to take up new tools in order to reveal the truth of their situation and defy official rhetoric. Even in the most terrible places of confinement, hostile to any expression of freedom, they continued to create.

Works by renowned masters such as Pierre Bonnard, Victor Brauner, Alexander Calder, Salvador Dalí, Óscar Domínguez, Jean Dubuffet, Marcel Duchamp, Raoul Dufy, Max Ernst, Jean Fautrier, Alberto Giacometti, Julio González, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Fernand Léger, René Magritte, André Masson, Henri Matisse, Henri Michaux, Joan Miró, Francis Picabia, Pablo Picasso, Pierre Soulages, Nicolas de Staël, Joseph Steib, Yves Tanguy, and Wols, among others, are shown alongside works of survival that convey the despair-driven energy of artists whose names are largely unfamiliar to the general public, arranged in twelve sections that occupy the entire second floor of the Museum.

According to Jacqueline Munck and Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, curators of the show, this unique exhibition will serve to reveal “all that remained in the privacy of homes and studios, of the shelters, internment and concentration camps, prisons, and psychiatric hospitals, in the shadows of history”.

### **History**

The exhibition *L'Art en guerre* opens with a section documenting the historical events that unfolded after France was defeated by the German armed forces (Wehrmacht) in 1940 and after the armistice was signed at Rethondes on June 22 of that same year, when a double dictatorship was set up in

France: that of the Nazis, who occupied two-thirds of the country, and that of the collaborationist, totalitarian Vichy regime, which primarily controlled southern France.

The omnipotence of the Third Reich was revealed in an aggressive policy of persecution of Jews, foreigners, communists, Freemasons, and anyone else that might serve as a scapegoat for the Nazis. This tragic period affected every sector of society, particularly young people and the media which were dominated by overt Nazi and Vichy regime propaganda. Trapped on this dead-end street, “The French Resistance”, which started out as just a handful of citizens, used clandestine channels and movements to organize its network both abroad and within occupied France. Their activities continued to escalate until Paris was liberated in 1944.

### **The Official Taste**

The official taste in art that dominated the period of Nazi occupation is reflected in a section dedicated to the art that was showcased at the Musée National d'Art moderne, which opened in August 1942 at the Palais de Tokyo, built in 1937.

Under its new director, Pierre Ladoué (who took over after the Bilbao-born Jean Cassou was removed from his post for political reasons), the reality of an occupation dominated by censorship and self-censorship became all too evident in the museum, given over to a timorous, state-sanctioned and strictly “French” art that deliberately ostracized artists of the stature of Jean Arp, Constantin Brancusi, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Joan Miró, Pierre Mondrian, and Pablo Picasso. Pivotal trends such as Fauvism, Cubism, Dada, Expressionism, Surrealism and abstract art were also very poorly represented.

Instead, pride of place was given to representations of women (inversely proportional to the number of female artists present), nudes and portraits, athletes, and religious themes by artists like Paul Belmondo, Charles Despiau, Raoul Dufy, Kees van Dongen, and Henry de Waroquier, which were deemed edifying for a regime that demanded a new order.

### **The Surrealists**

The Parisian art world, now cleansed of “undesirables”, was every bit as dark and dismal as the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme had predicted. This event, held at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts in January 1938, is the subject of another section in *L'Art en guerre*.

Organized in Paris by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp, this show featuring 314 works by 63 artists—including Breton himself as well as André Masson, Salvador Dalí, and René Magritte, among others—offered irrefutable proof of the growing strength of the Surrealist movement, but the exhibition's disconcerting atmosphere also turned out to be an uncanny premonition of the horrors of war.

After France was overrun, some of the artists who had participated in the show went into hiding or exile; other less fortunate colleagues, like Hans Bellmer and Max Ernst, were sent to the prison camps. Even so, none of them ever really stopped creating; instead, they used art to resist the reality that had been imposed on them.

## The Camps

Art continued to be produced in France even in the most hostile conditions where individuals were deprived of both their freedom and their dignity. Nowhere was this more evident than in the French internment camps, originally created by the French authorities to contain refugees fleeing from Franco's Spain, where 600,000 men, women, and children were confined between 1938 and 1946.

When the war broke out, the French government authorized the use of these camps to hold anti-Nazi and pro-Nazi Germans, people from countries sympathetic to Hitler's Germany, French communists and even common criminals. The artists Hans Bellmer, Max Ernst, and Wols were among the "foreign undesirables" who were locked up. After the Germans occupied France, Jews were also sent to these camps, and many of them were subsequently deported and exterminated at Auschwitz.

The works of art and objects created in these camps, using discarded materials such as packaging paper, cans, matches, bits of wood, iron, or bone, live on as eternal, inimitable testaments to the horrors of that era.

## Exile, Refugees, and Concealment

The show also reserves a special space for the art produced by creators who, when war broke out, were forced to go into exile or live in the region of southern France governed by the Vichy regime, incorrectly called the "free zone". Even today, cities, towns, and neighborhoods like Dieulefit, Sanary-sur-Mer, Grasse, and Air-Bel (Marseille) are still famous for the artist communities that flourished there.

A key figure in this context was Varian Fry, an American journalist sent to France by the United States government as a representative of the Emergency Rescue Committee with the mission of getting foreign intellectuals and artists, anti-fascists, and Jews suffering from Nazi persecution out of the country. Joan Miró, Marc Chagall, Salvador Dalí, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Moïse Kisling, and Fernand Léger were among the approximately 2,000 people who escaped thanks to Fry's heroic efforts.

But other artists were not so lucky; trapped in France, they were forced to hide in order to weave their narratives of the nightmare of war. One of them was the Alsatian Joseph Steib, who managed to go unnoticed and shield his subversive works from probing Nazi eyes. His scathingly critical art reflected the humiliations and atrocities perpetrated by the Nazi regime and its leaders, particularly Hitler himself, whom Steib ridiculed by portraying him as an indecent, miserable antichrist.

## Masters of Reference and the Young Painters in the French Tradition

In an atmosphere of open hostility toward free cultural expression, even established masters like Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Pierre Bonnard scrambled for safety, sequestered in their studios or confined to the southern zone of France, sheltered from the Nazi persecution. The majority of the pieces created by these painters during the occupation were not shown to the public until the end of the war. Meanwhile, the equally revered painter André Derain lost credibility when he agreed to accompany other artists on an official visit to Germany in 1941 organized by Arno Breker, known as Hitler's favorite sculptor.

It was in this context that the lessons of modernity imparted by these great masters were revisited by members of the “Young Painters of the French Tradition” movement, who held their first show at Galerie Braun in 1941. This group, which included artists such as Jean René Bazaine, Francisco Bores, André Fougeron, Charles Lapicque, Jean Le Moal, Édouard Pignon, and Alfred Manessier, among others, strove to symbolically express their “resistance” to the state of affairs by creating brightly colorful, non-figurative works that verged on abstraction, inspired by medieval Romanesque art and the modern tradition of Pierre Bonnard, Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, and Pablo Picasso, in sharp contrast to the “artistic order” of the mainstream art of the day.

### **Picasso in His Studio**

In this climate of hostility and fear, the painter Pablo Picasso, to whom an entire section of this show is dedicated, became a genuine symbol of resistance to the occupation. After he was denied French citizenship in 1940, the artist turned down a chance to go into exile in the United States and returned to the studio on Rue des Grands-Augustins where he had painted *Guernica* in 1937.

Unlike some of his contemporaries who continued to exhibit and receive commissions, the Málaga-born painter was hounded by the Gestapo and shunned, while his work, which the Vichy, and Nazi regimes denounced as “degenerate” art, was forced to pass through the filter of the official Paris art world’s self-censorship.

In June 1942, Maurice de Vlaminck, a painter with pro-German leanings, accused Picasso of having “dragged French painting into the most fatal dead end, into indescribable confusion”. The artist’s response was a new burst of creative energy that produced a large number of splendid masterpieces: portraits of women writhing in pain, dark still lifes, crucifixions, and dramatized nudes that spoke of the horror of war; sculptures improvised using the limited resources at his disposal, such as *Bull’s Head*; and magnificent portraits of the women who played a part in his intense love life, like Marie-Thérèse Walter, Dora Maar, and Françoise Gilot.

After France was liberated from the German occupiers in 1944, Picasso’s work was hailed as a symbol of the resistance.

### **Galerie Jeanne Bucher**

In the turbulent Paris art world, thrown into disarray when the Nazi occupation and the Vichy regime forced the Jewish art dealers into exile or hiding, few galleries were courageous enough to go against the flow and show an unswerving commitment to the cause of art.

With hardly any financial resources, Jeanne Bucher, an Alsatian woman born in 1872, opened the doors of her discreet gallery on the lower two floors of a small building on Boulevard Montparnasse to the art that had been rejected by the regime, providing an outlet for a variety of artists such as André Bauchant, Francisco Bores, Louis-Auguste Déchelette, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Henri Laurens, André Lansky, Louis Marcoussis, Max Ernst, Maria-Elena Vieira da Silva, Anton Prinner, and Nicolas de Staël.

With the same altruistic spirit, throughout the occupation Jeanne continued to support artists whom she considered talented, and she also helped the children of Spaniards who had been exiled in 1939 and foreigners detained in internment camps by sending them books and food supplies.



## Camps and Prisons

As the years passed and the number of detainees in French camps continued to swell, living conditions became increasingly harsh. For these prisoners, creating works of art was the only way to make sense of a cruel and absurd existence, fashioning surprising objects from the scant resources and materials at hand.

Some of these works, which speak eloquently of a longing for freedom and the human being's natural aversion to confinement, were the last sparks of creativity produced by their authors before they were deported and ultimately exterminated in death camps. This was the case of artists like Felix Nussbaum, Horst Rosenthal, and Charlotte Salomon, whose artwork lives on in this section of the exhibition.

## The Liberation

After Paris was liberated in August 1944, French society was torn between enthusiastic joy, as four years of subjugation and suffering came to an end, and stupefaction as the true extent of the atrocities perpetrated during the war became known thanks to the publication of shocking snapshots, such as the photographs taken in 1945 at the Hôtel Lutetia of deportees who had returned to Paris.

Starting in the fall of 1944, the French Communist Party, legitimized by its active resistance to the German occupation and the Vichy regime, oversaw a purging of the cultural scene, with Pablo Picasso at the fore. Artists who had collaborated with the Nazis were judged leniently as their actions had not been motivated by strong political convictions, but they were publicly shamed, scorned and banned from exhibiting for a time.

After four years of restrictions, the spirit of liberation was palpable at the 1944 Salon d'Automne, which paid tribute to all art of the modern tradition with nearly one hundred works produced in or after 1939, works which confirmed that a world of free, uncompromising creativity had indeed existed during the Nazi occupation. The work of Picasso had a special place in this exhibition, where he was presented as a hero of the French Resistance.

## Decompressions

This show also features a space which examines how artists shook off the dust of years of seclusion by pouring the trauma of war into their creations.

The dark, gloomy works of Bernard Buffet, Olivier Debré, Hans Hartung, Pierre Soulages, Nicolas de Staël, and Jean-Paul Riopelle, the informalist paintings of Camille Bryen, Wols' desperate scratches, and André Masson's *The Burrow (Le Terrier, 1946)* are just some examples of the diversity of artistic expressions and responses that constituted an attempt to awaken from the "sinister, frigid nightmare" of that period, when the norm had been abused in a context of barbarity.

## The Anartists

The show concludes with a section dedicated to the Anartists, a term coined by Marcel Duchamp which encompasses all those artists whose creations rebelled against the established order, embracing a total poetry and a new artistic praxis and writing a history parallel to the history of Western art: the history of primitivisms, the quest for self and for original thought in legends, dreams, and an interest in the savage and untamed, play, and science. In 1945, Jean Dubuffet's exhibition *Mirobolus, Macadam et*

*Cie, hautes pâtes* caused the first major scandal of the postwar period by reflecting the commonplace in all its brutality and triviality in works such as *Will to Power* (*Volonté de puissance*, 1946) and *Grease Portrait* (*Portrait cambouis*), 1945.

This section also documents the output of individuals living in psychiatric hospitals who created works of art from whatever materials they had at hand, impervious to the academic canons of the fine arts academies. After the liberation, in 1946 Professor Gaston Ferdière organized an exhibition in Paris featuring drawings made by patients at the Hospital de Sainte-Anne. The modern artists who visited the show saw these creations, unfortunately presented as the work of anonymous authors, as examples of a virginal expression of culture which had much in common with the unexplored corners of the subconscious mind and the oneiric universe.

### The Art of the Day and Its Context

*L'Art en guerre* is accompanied by a didactic space which fleshes out the historical, political, artistic, and cultural backdrop against which events in France unfolded between 1938 and 1947—events that affected different artistic practices both negatively and positively—and puts the works featured in the show into context.

### Catalogue

The exhibition catalogue, richly illustrated and edited by the curators Laurence Bertrand Dorléac and Jacqueline Munck, includes several essays on the different sections in the show as well as an alphabetical sequence of 200 brief entries on issues related to the artistic and cultural context of the period, written by over one hundred authors from around the globe.

### Cover image:

#### Pablo Picasso

*Woman Sitting in an Armchair* (*Femme assise dans un fauteuil*), 1941.

Oil on canvas

73 x 60 cm

Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Norway

© Henie Onstad Art Centre, Norvège/Photo Øystein Thorvaldsen

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### For further information:

To watch the spot of the exhibition, please, press [spot](#)

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**André Masson (1896–1987)**

*Deep Down the Sea (Le Fond de la mer)*, 1937

Sand, seashells, and algae on board

27 x 35 cm

Private collection

© VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013



**Joseph Steib (1898–1957)**

*The Conqueror (Le Conquérant)*, 1942

Oil on fake leather glued on cardboard

89 x 59.5 cm

Private collection, France

© Joseph Steib Photo © Klaus Stoeber



**Charlotte Salomon (1917–Auschwitz concentration camp, Poland, 1943)**

*Untitled (4917)*, 1940–42

Gouache on paper

32.5 x 25 cm

Charlotte Salomon Foundation, Joods Historisch Museum, Amsterdam

© Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam

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**Domela-Nieuwenhuis [César Domela] (1900–1992)**

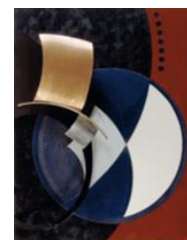
*Relief n° 14*, 1937

Painted wood, brass, red copper, Plexiglas, and steel

78,5 x 61 x 12 cm Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris

© Musée d'Art Moderne / Roger-Viollet

© VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013



**Jean Fautrier (1898–1964)**

*The Jewish Woman (La Juive)*, 1943

Oil on canvas

65 x 73 cm

Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris

Gift of the artist, 1964

© Musée d'Art Moderne / Roger-Viollet

© VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013



**Hans Hartung (1904–1989)**

*T 1946–16*, 1946

Oil on canvas

145 x 96 cm

Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris

Estate of Dr. Maurice Girardin, 1953

© Musée d'Art Moderne / Roger-Viollet

© VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013



**Germaine Richier (1904–1959)**

*The Mantis (La Mante)*, 1946

Base by Eugène Dodeigne

Bronze

158 x 56 x 78 cm

Courtesy Galerie Jacques de la Béraudière, Geneva

© Galerie Jacques de la Béraudière, Genève

© VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013



**Victor Brauner (1903–1966)**

*The Encounter on 2 bis rue Perrel (La Rencontre du 2 bis rue Perrel)*, 1946

Oil on canvas

85 x 105 cm

Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris

Gift Société des amis du Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1988

© Musée d'Art Moderne / Roger-Viollet

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**Jacques Villeglé (1926)**

*The Road of the Corsairs, Saint-Malo (Fils d'acier-Chaussée des Corsaires, Saint-Malo)*, August 1947

Steel wire (2-element sculpture)

63 x 49 x 9 cm

Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris

© Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI, Dist. RMN / Georges Meguerditchian

© VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013



**Otto Freundlich (1878–Majdanek concentration camp, Poland, 1943)**

*Rose Window II (Rosace II)*, 1941

Gouache on cardboard

65 x 50 cm

Musées de Pontoise – Gift Freundlich, Pontoise, France

© Musées de Pontoise

© Imec Images

Otto Freundlich



**Anton Räederscheidt (1892–1970)**

*Women's Camp (Gurs) [Camp de femmes (Gurs)]*, 1940

Gouache on paper

65 x 46 cm

Private collection, Cologne

© DR

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**Victor Brauner (1903–1966) and others**

*Collective drawings*, 1941

Crayon and ink on paper

32.4 x 49.7 cm

Collection David & Marcel Fleiss, Galerie 1900–2000, Paris

© Galerie 1900-2000, Paris

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**Victor Brauner (1903–1966)**

*Suffering, Suffering (Souffrance, souffrance)*, 1941

Oil on canvas

46 x 38 cm

Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris

Estate of Ms Jacqueline Victor Brauner, 1988

© Musée d'Art Moderne / Roger – Viollet

© VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013



**Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)**

*Woman Sitting in an Armchair (Femme assise dans un fauteuil)*, 1941

Oil on canvas

73 x 60 cm

Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Norway

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