

Two works by Luis Fernández at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

Tête de taureau mort and
Course de taureaux



Alfonso Palacio Álvarez

**BILBOKO ARTE
EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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Housed in the contemporary art galleries at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum is one of the leading collections of any museum in Spain outside Madrid. Overtly cosmopolitan since its foundation, the Museum collection is a mine of information for students and scholars of Basque, Spanish and international contemporary art history¹.

In the person of painter Luis Fernández (Oviedo, 1900-Paris, 1973) the latter two strands of art history come together. Born in Asturias, he was obliged to move to Madrid in 1909, the year of his father's death, his mother having died a few years earlier, in 1906. Shortly after, in late 1911, he moved on to Barcelona, where he attended the Escuela de Artes y Oficios y Bellas Artes (School of Arts and Crafts & Fine Arts). Disheartened by an utterly uninspiring art scene, in 1924 Fernández decided to go to Paris, where he would live for the rest of his life. Once settled there, between 1928 and 1936, he was in contact with the abstract avant-garde; from 1936 and throughout the 1940s, he was involved in Surrealism, Picasso-style Expressionism and post-Cubism. In 1952, in his mature period, he produced several series of works of highly restricted, lean and increasingly refined motifs, as he strived towards a sort of transcendental realism. In light of his highly original artistic development, coupled with the rigour, quality and intensity of his creative output, Luis Fernández may undoubtedly be described as one of the great Spanish artists of the 20th century —this despite his having spent many years out of the artistic limelight².

1 See Segovia 1999.

2 The bibliography on Luis Fernández continues to grow. For a complete overview of his life and work, see: Bozal 2005, Palacio 2007 and Palacio 2008a.

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1. Luis Fernández (1900-1973)
Tête de taureau mort, 1939
Oil on paper stuck to tablex, 76.2 x 107.5 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 82/259



2. Luis Fernández (1900-1973)
Course de taureaux, 1940
Oil on canvas, 195 x 130 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 02/154

The Bilbao Fine Arts Museum has four works by Fernández. One, a burin engraving of a horse, was printed in 1971 in Alain Controu and Christian Guérin's press. There is also a lithograph showing a skull, executed in 1972 to mark that year's retrospective exhibition at the CNAC in Paris. The museum also has two oil paintings entitled *Tête de taureau mort* [fig. 1] and *Course de taureaux* [fig. 2], both of which are discussed in the present article. To understand these two paintings by Fernández, one needs to remember the artist's stance over the Spanish Civil War and his close artistic and personal links at the time with Pablo Picasso.

July 18th, 1936, the day on which the Spanish Civil War began in earnest, found Luis Fernández on the point of closing a group exhibition with Picasso, Julio González and Joan Miró at the Cahiers d'Art gallery³. The painter quite likely exhibited some of his most recent Surrealist works and, in particular, his anamorphosis, which he wrote about in an article entitled "Intentions"⁴. Fernández was quick to react to events in Spain: like most artists and intellectuals in Paris at the time, he instinctively supported the Republican cause, which he considered the legitimate champion of the liberal and democratic ideals he had always favoured.

This commitment led to a journey to Spain undertaken in the early months of the war with a group of friends, including husband and wife Christian and Yvonne Zervos, owners of the Cahiers d'Art gallery and publishers of the journal of the same name, in which Fernández had already published three essays⁵; all of them went as members of an international commission sent to safeguard the country's artistic heritage, endangered by the disorder and chaos then affecting the entire nation. The expedition took Fernández to Catalonia, where he is known to have spent August and December 1936⁶. Among other places, he visited Barcelona and Gerona. In Barcelona, Fernández visited Picasso's family, then living at number 48 on the Paseo de Gracia. He is also known to have played a direct role, with the other members of the commission, in rescuing and protecting art objects and works housed at the monastery of Pedralbes, which they had to defend from attacks by groups of violent marauders and militiamen who, considering the monastery a symbol of the rebels, saw it as a legitimate target for pillaging. Indeed, Fernández and the Zervos, accompanied by Monxa Sert, Lee Penrose, Català Pic, Roland Penrose, Torres Clavé, Mercé Torres and David Gascoyne, are featured in two photographs taken at the monastery, providing visual evidence of their being there at the time. Finally, there is record of a third picture showing Luis Fernández with Christian and Yvonne Zervos inspecting some of the rescued works⁷.

Back in France, and as the Civil War unfolded, the works of Luis Fernández became increasingly tragic and gloomy in tone. His production gradually became impregnated with a dramatic quality similar to the sort appreciable in much of what the Spanish artists living in Paris at the time were producing, including Picasso, Miró and González, and others like Salvador Dalí and Óscar Domínguez. With almost all of them on the Republic's side, these Paris-based artists watched from a distance the horror unleashed in their home country, trying their best to give it some form and reflect the awful, brutal nature of the situation. Their works from the time could be seen either as a sort of personal exorcism or as a condemnation of the outrages being committed against the civilian population in general as a result of the conflict, or even as a desperate cry against the aggression Republican Spain was suffering. This is clear from the themes of and the formal

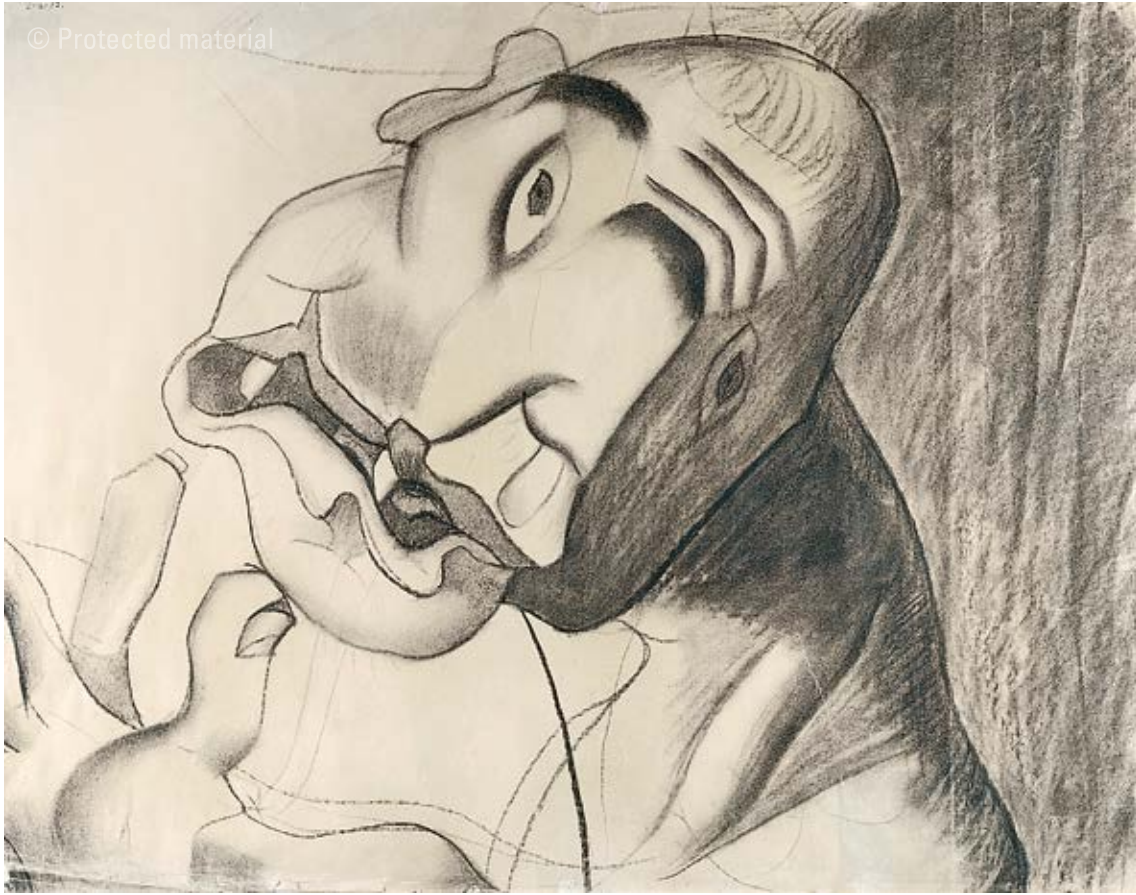
3 Inaugurated on 26 June 1936, the exhibition closed on 20 July. As the card printed for the occasion states, Picasso exhibited paintings and sculptures, González sculptures, Miró paintings and objects and Fernández paintings.

4 Fernández 1936, p. 200.

5 Other articles published in the journal, apart from "Intentions", were: "Réponse à l'enquête sur l'art d'aujourd'hui" (year 10, nos. 1-4, Paris, 1935) and "Art sur-descriptif et art non-figuratif" (year 10, nos. 7-10, Paris, 1935).

6 A postcard Fernández sent Picasso from Barcelona early in August 1936 survives. (Archive, Musée Picasso, Paris, box 23, document no. 2). There is another postcard, dated from 2 December that year, written and sent by Christian Zervos to Picasso from Barcelona. Fernández's signature figures on the card (Archives of the Fundación Zervos, Vézelay, France).

7 For more information, see Palacio 2003, pp. 633 and 644.



3. Luis Fernández (1900-1973)
1-4-39, 1939
Charcoal on paper, 485 x 625 mm
Private collection

approaches to their works, and is especially visible in the two works by Fernández in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum. Here the artist draws with thick broad strokes and a rather sordid colour range that combines dense tones of ochre, brown, black, yellow and red. His brushwork in these paintings is coarser, more energetic and awkward than in his previous, more geometric phase, in which subtlety and visual discretion predominated. Finally, a note common to most of the Spanish painters and sculptors in Paris is the precision with which they dated their works during the war, often recording on them the day, month and year of execution, usually in an angle of the work or on the back. Many of these dates are specific allusions to outstanding moments in the conflict, as if the artists intended to sign a sort of notary's deed of their reaction to such events. One highly significant example in Fernández's case is his drawing 1-4-39 [fig. 3], the date the Civil War came to an end, which has a monstrous character, a sort of *Ubu Roi*, as an image of what Franco's victory signified for him.

Another precisely dated work, in this case to be found at the lower right of the composition, is in fact one of the two at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, *Tête de taureau* or *Tête de taureau mort* which was executed on 11 November 1939, after the war in Spain had ended. The first title is the original one given to the work, which was number 94 in the exhibition at the *Salon de Mai* held from 7 June to 7 July 1946 at the Galeries Lafayette, Paris, where Fernández also presented the works *Nature morte* and *Le petit veau*. The second title is the one given to the work in a retrospective on the artist held at the CNAC in Paris in 1972, which travelled to Charleroi the same year. The work once belonged to Ramón Esparza and to Cristóbal Balenciaga;

the latter was introduced to the artist in the 1960s by a friend of Esparza, Spanish composer Pascual Aldave. At the time Ramón Esparza was working as the great Spanish fashion designer's secretary. Both became avid collectors of the artist's work.

This 76 x 105 cm oil work on paper stuck to board and signed on the lower right hand side, is part of a series of paintings Fernández produced showing the severed heads of animals occupying the entire canvas, leaving virtually no breathing space and conveying a sensation, apart from its size, of a powerfully monumental nature. These heads, mostly of horses, bulls, or cows, are always placed in an undefined interior, the eyes, still humid, straining out of their sockets, and the often blood-soaked mouth open, tongue poking out and the teeth bared. Here, the bull's nose, nostrils flaring and the eye above damp, gives way to horns shown here askew, enhancing the sensation of twistedness and dislocation. The neck, where the cut has been made, shows the animal's bloody flesh around the whitish circle of the spinal cord. Thin, short black brush strokes portray the hair on the animal's head in highly synthetic mode.

Like most of its counterparts, this abruptly foreshortened bull's head is set on a crude, sharp-edged, horizontal surface, as a vivid demonstration of the cruelty and horror of its slaughter, which could be associated with the Republican side, defeated by Franco. Although they are dead, one has the sensation that these animals are still twisting about in pain. The heading used for these works in the 1972 retrospective, *Meurtres et viols*, would seem to reinforce this apocalyptic meaning⁸.

Apart from the work in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, there are other examples of all this to be found in *Tête de cheval mort* [fig. 4], *L'immense bouche* (Private Collection, Bilbao), *L'immense bouche* [fig. 5], *Animal Head with Apples* [fig. 6] and *Tête d'animal* (private collection), all from 1939.

If we were to look for potential similarities between these works and others from the same period by other Spanish artists living in Paris, we would do particularly well to refer to some of Picasso's paintings from 1939, including *Trois crânes* [fig. 7] and *Crâne de mouton* (Vicky and Marcos Micha Collection), which might in turn be associated with several paintings by Goya, such as *Bodegón con costillas, lomo y cabeza de cordero* (Louvre Museum, Paris) and *Cabeza de novillo* (Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen), from 1808-1812 and 1810 respectively⁹. The friendship between Picasso and Fernández had begun a few years before and, as noted above, is a key factor in understanding what Fernández was doing at this time. Furthermore, what is known as Fernández's "Picasso period" took off in 1939 and lasted until 1944.

Luis Fernández began to look for ways of approaching Picasso in 1933, when the latter was already *the* painter in Paris. When members of the community of Spanish artists in the French capital needed artistic, moral or economic support, it was Picasso they turned to. A letter of presentation given to him some time before by sculptor Mateo Soto, who Fernández must have met during his time as a student at the Escuela de Artes y Oficios y Bellas Artes de Barcelona, seems likely to have got him through to Picasso very quickly¹⁰. However, after the first contact, from what Fernández himself said on several occasions, Picasso refused to even come to the phone when Fernández called, which understandably irritated his fellow artist intensely, to the point of sending him the following letter:

Cher Monsieur (now I shall say the rest to you in Spanish), I quite understand that you are very busy and that there are many people who want to see you and that you don't have time to receive everybody, but I have plenty of work too, I'm also very busy and I don't have the time to spend hanging on the telephone all day long. So it's "au revoir", Monsieur Picasso¹¹.

8 This heading was given on the sheets published with the list of works included in the 1972 retrospective exhibition on Fernández, a number of which have been kept in the collection of the Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias.

9 Goya was another of Fernández's artistic touchstones, and both he and his works are mentioned regularly in Fernández's hand-written notes.

10 Solsona 1950.

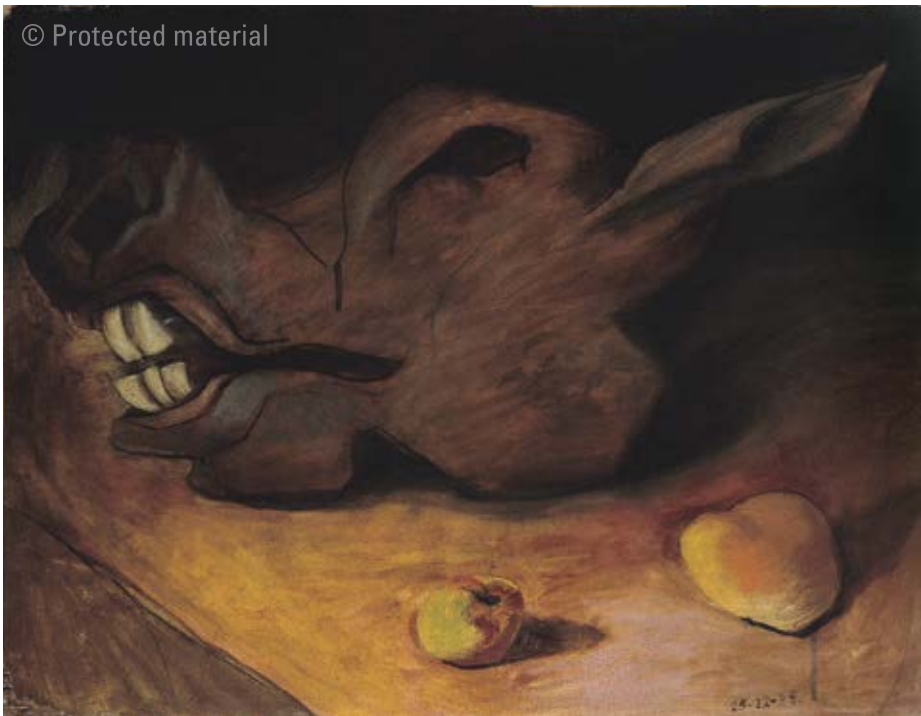
11 Chao 1972, p. 36.



4. Luis Fernández (1900-1973)
Tête de cheval mort, c. 1939
Tempera on paper, 760 x 1060 mm
Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris



5. Luis Fernández (1900-1973)
L'immense bouche, c. 1939
Oil on canvas, 19 x 32.5 cm
Telefónica Contemporary Art Collection, Madrid
On loan to Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid



6. Luis Fernández (1900-1973)
Animal Head with Apples, 1939
Oil on paper stuck to panel, 50 x 65 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
Inv. no. DE00503



7. Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)
Trois crânes, 1939
Oil on canvas, 65 x 89 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid

Fernández always assumed that the words of farewell at the end accounted for the speed with which Picasso reacted: on 5 January 1934 Picasso wrote another letter asking Fernández to come to his house at 2.30 p.m. the following day. Fernández himself described this second encounter:

So I turned up at his place at two, and he said: "Look, the maid's got no idea what to say when she answers the phone, she simply doesn't know what she's supposed to say." So I said: "Don't try to kid me. The maid knows perfectly well she has to say M. Picasso is not at home." And then he started to laugh, and said: "Drop by whenever you want, don't bother to phone. Come in the morning, because I don't work then"¹².

So began a period of roughly ten years when Picasso and Fernández saw each other in Paris regularly, either in Picasso's studio in rue de la Boétie, or at his home in rue des Grands Augustins, or at the long artists' get-togethers at the Café Flore. When Luis Fernández went to either of the two places, he usually took one or two paintings for Picasso to pass an opinion¹³. Picasso liked to keep them for a few days before saying what he thought of them. Fernández often had to wait a good while without hearing anything at all and he once mentioned this to Picasso:

Voilà six mois que vous gardez mes tableaux sans m'en parler. Est-ce qu'ils ne vous plaisent pas?¹⁴

To which Picasso answered:

Ils me passionent, je les regarde sans cesse mais ils me dépassent! Plus que je les observe moins je comprends comment ils sont faits¹⁵.

On other occasions he would say:

Ta peinture, je ne la comprends pas la première fois. Je dois attendre, pour la voir. Tu me dis: je peins d'après nature. Mais on voit bien que c'est transformé...¹⁶

When they met the conversation would touch on many topics and here too Picasso's influence on Fernández was strong. They also embarked on several projects together. From his written notes, we know that Fernández admired, above all else, Picasso's Cubist period, and the paintings executed between 1928 and 1930, which tended most towards Surrealism and Expressionism. He also valued the speed with which Picasso resolved his work, the combination of inspiration, lucidity and the search for perfection, and the remarkable plasticity, expressiveness, emotional charge and spontaneity with which Picasso imbued his art. The latter qualities derived above all from his mastery of drawing, an element that, in Fernández's view, had turned him into one of the great geniuses in the history of art. The expressive tension with which Picasso deployed the lines of his paintings, done once for all with no variations, was something Fernández always attempted to imitate, at least in the period he was under Picasso's influence.

Two projects they worked on together are of particular interest. The first was the front curtain they produced for the staging of Romain Rolland's play, *14 Juillet*, to mark France's national holiday, at the Théâtre de l'Alhambra in Paris. Picasso was commissioned personally by Jean Zay, Minister of National Education,

¹² Fernández 1985, p. 47.

¹³ A photograph taken in 1944 by Brassai in the hall of Picasso's studio in rue des Grands Augustins, shows, among others, Picasso and François Gillot surrounded by works, including three by Luis Fernández. See Paris 1987, p. 93.

¹⁴ Barotte 1972.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Michel 1968, p. 19.

Jean Cassou, a leading member of Zay's government office and Leon Moussinac, director of the recently instituted Popular Front government's Maison de la Culture. With little time available, and in the midst of a complex and worrying personal situation, including his separation from Olga Koklova, the birth of his daughter Maya to Marie Thérèse Walter and the irruption of Dora Maar in his life, Picasso decided the best thing to do was to ask Fernández to help him. Picasso gave him a drawing he had done on 28 May showing a dead Minotaur, dressed as a harlequin and in the arms of a winged giant with an eagle's head. Opposite them a bearded man, in horse skin, moves towards the first group threatening them with throwing a stone held in his right hand. He is also carrying a young adolescent on his shoulders. Fernández's task was to convert this gouache by Picasso into a curtain measuring 13.25 x 8.30 metres. To that end the artist had to find somewhere big enough to enable him to spread the curtain on the floor, which is precisely what he did, as several photographs taken by Dora Maar in June 1936 testify¹⁷. According to Jacques Michel, this is the only work by Picasso to be accompanied by an inscription that runs:

Executé par le peintre espagnol L. Fernández (...). Il n'y a que lui qui peut faire ça...¹⁸

However, neither Romain Rolland nor the drama critics found the work appropriate for the play.

The second time the two artists worked together was in 1938, when they executed a drawing together of a sea shore, with a male and a female character in a pose similar to a *Pietà*, represented in an idiom halfway between Surrealism and Expressionism. More specifically, Picasso began the work and Fernández finished it off. That the work itself could be interpreted within the context of condemnation and suffering associated with the Spanish Civil War is a possibility that cannot be ruled out¹⁹. Later, Picasso apparently suggested to Fernández that they each produce a painting modelled on the finished drawing²⁰. Fernández produced *Pêcheurs*, which may perhaps have some relation to the one in the Masaveu Collection in Oviedo today.

Despite their first meetings dating from late 1933 and early 1934, the direct influence of Picasso's work on Fernández's own artistic output was concentrated largely from 1939 to 1944, independently of the fact that in 1935 Fernández had published an article in the *Cahiers d'Art* journal called "Art sur-descriptif et art non-figuratif", to all intents and purposes a paean of praise to Picasso's Cubist works.²¹ The text was also read on EAJ1 Radio Barcelona on 13 January 1936 to mark the inauguration at the Sala Esteva gallery in Barcelona of an exhibition of Picasso's work promoted by the ADLAN group. Luis Fernández played a central role in organizing the exhibition, so much so that he has been attributed with selecting the works for inclusion.²² In any case, Fernández himself called the five-year period between 1939 and 1944 "*picassism*", a quality that might be defined, from the artistic viewpoint, as a unique mixture of Surrealism and Expressionism, which brought forth a formula of great visual power and, occasionally, a certain sensationalism. Regarding the degree of identification of much of what he was doing with Picasso's work since 1928, of which the two works in Bilbao are a prime example, Fernández said:

I worked with him, but in the end I did things à la Picasso and I remember one day Picasso came to my house and I showed him a picture of a bullfight, and I said: "See how I imitate you? And he said: "When you come into the world, everyone has a father and mother"²³.

17 One of these photographs is included in Derouet 2006, p. 271.

18 Michel 1968, p. 19.

19 Hochtin 1957, p. 38.

20 Letter from María Fortunata Prieto-Barral to Luis Fernández on 6 January 1971. The letter was reproduced in Prieto-Barral 1993, p. 78.

21 Fernández 1935, p. 240.

22 The inauguration of the exhibition, marked by readings of brief texts about Picasso written by González, Miró, Dalí, Sabartés and Fernández, was followed on the radio at Julio González's studio by Picasso, Sabartés and his wife, André Breton and his wife, Christian and Yvonne Zervos, Dalí, Gala and Luis Fernández and his first wife Esther. Madrid 2008, p. 126.

23 Chao 1972, pp. 35 and 36.

And although, at the end of his life, the artist disowned all his paintings from his Surrealist (1936-1939) and Picasso periods, because of the ease, speed and lack of self-discipline with which they were produced, it is true that on one occasion at least he also said about them: "I know they're not bad. Picasso congratulated me"²⁴.

The painting Fernández mentions in the quote above as having presented to Picasso is in fact the *Course de taureaux* (*Bull fight*) now owned by the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum. In 1971, Fernández's attempt to sell the picture to the Spanish authorities for 40,000 francs in 1971, using María Fortunata Prieto-Barral as an intermediary, failed²⁵. Apparently, Spanish composer Pascual Aldave, a firm friend of Fernández since the 1950s, was also aware of the negotiations, conducted with Luis González Robles and Juan García Lomas as intermediaries from the Spanish government (García Lomas being the Spanish consul general in Paris at the time). Aldave was introduced to the artist by José Bergamín and María Zambrano, and writer José Miguel Ullán, who had contacted Fernández via the exiled philosopher Zambrano in the late 1960s²⁶. The title is the one used for the *Salon des Surindépendants* exhibition held in Paris from 20 October to 13 November 1945, in a show designed to pay tribute to Christian and Yvonne Zervos. It was staged at the Grand Palais in Paris from 11 December 1970 to 18 January 1971 and the Luis Fernández retrospective exhibition at the CNAC in the French capital between 28 April and 26 May 1972, as well as in the artist's own preliminary list for the same venue covering all his works²⁷. Finally, in the catalogue for an exhibition held at Dum Umeni (Arts Centre) at Brno from 23 March to 14 April 1946, entitled *Umení Republikánského Španelska* (*Art of Republican Spain*), the picture, number 83 in the exhibition, was given the title *Corrida*, directly in Spanish²⁸.

As the inscription on the back says, the work was painted on 1 March 1940, independently of the fact that in the *Surindépendants 1945. Documents I Vrille* brochure the work, which is reproduced, is erroneously dated 1941²⁹. Next to the reproduction, Fernández added the following text:

Quand j'aime ceci ou cela dans la peinture (par exemple la représentation de la profondeur ou l'aspect de certains êtres vivants) je ne cherche pas à savoir si je "dois" l'aimer, je constate que je l'aime et cela supprime toutes questions; car, au nom de quoi peut-on juger du bien fondé de l'amour?

Although with some differences, Fernández had already tackled the theme of this work three years earlier in an oil-on-canvas painting called *Tauromachie* [fig. 8]. Apart from size (195 x 130 cm the former and 61 x 38 cm the latter), the variations between the two, from the iconographic angle, are to be found particularly in the creature that attacks the horse: in the Bilbao painting it is a bull, while the work in the Madrid collection features a monster, similar to many that sprang from the artist's visual imagination during his Surrealist phase.

24 Prieto-Barral 1972, p. 29.

25 Ibid., pp. 20 and 87.

26 Ullán 1973, p. 67.

27 This list is now in the Asturias Fine Arts Museum.

28 Organized by the Czech authorities as a token of support for Republican Spain, the exhibition had previously been inaugurated at the Manes Gallery, Prague, where it was open to the public from 30 January to 23 February. Some of the leading Spanish artists of the moment showed there: Francisco Bores, Óscar Domínguez, Antonio Clavé, Honorio G. Condoy, Baltasar Lobo, Joaquín Peinado, Pablo Picasso, Hernando Viñes, etc. Another example of Fernández's commitment to Republican ideals after 1939 is the fact that in 1944 he joined the Unión de Intelectuales Españoles (Union of Spanish Intellectuals). Divided in three sections, the artists' section was organized around, among others, Pablo Picasso, Joaquín Peinado, Pedro Flores, Hernando Viñes, Baltasar Lobo, Ginés Parra, Antoni Clavé, Óscar Domínguez, Apelles Fenosa, Honorio G. Condoy, José Palmeiro, Emilio Grau Sala and Luis Fernández.

29 Edited by Evard de Rouvre, the brochure was announced as the first of a series designed to publicize the spectrum of tendencies in contemporary painting.

In the Bilbao picture, a horse is being gored in the neck by the bull's left horn. The horse has already been wounded in the chest. Behind the architectural structure of round arches that frames the horrific scene is a small strip of stormy sky, very much in tune with the violence happening in the foreground.

The monumental nature of the two animals adds to the angst the image creates, particularly as there are virtually no free or open spaces to relieve the work. This sensation of oppression is common to the majority of the pictures Fernández produced in those years. The horse twists in pain; here there's no trace of the smooth colouring and delicate rhythms the painter used to synthesize this motif during his abstract phase. Also missing is the serenity, robustness and majesty with which Fernández would paint it in his maturity. The horse's legs are bent and ungainly and the eyes seem on the point of bursting. The animal's open jaw lets the blood, flowing freely from the right ear, the neck and chest, seep into the mouth. This is the "victim" of this *fiesta*, to use an expression connecting with the vision that, years before, painters like Darío de Regoyos (*Victims of the fiesta*, 1894) and Ignacio Zuloaga (*The victim of the fiesta*, 1910) had brought to this particular theme. Meanwhile, the powerful bull seems more like an executioner, the sheer violence of the beast's movements coming close to dislocating its jaw, distorting its normal gait and bending its body into a quite unreal shape.

One of the finest formal features of the work is the perfectly complementary relation between drawing and colour. The drawing is most expressive, the brushwork long and powerful. Typical of this phase of the artist's career, the palette consists of yellows, reds, ochres, blacks and greys. Permeating the work is a cold light that might best be described as spectral.

Beyond the obvious link of the symbolic confrontation of the two animals with what is portrayed in *Guernica*, Fernández's admitted urge to imitate Picasso at this time leads to an even closer bond between the composition of Fernández's work and a painting of the same title executed by Picasso on 22 July 1934 in Boisgeloup [fig. 9]. Apart from the different historical coordinates, only a few small differences separate them, such as the spectators' faces in the Picasso painting (there are none in Fernández's picture), and Picasso's use of the horizontal format, as opposed to the vertical, strangulated arrangement preferred here by Fernández. Fernández also opted for a more austere palette to render his forms. Finally, other works by Picasso similar to ones produced by Fernández, and which strengthen the bond, include *Course de taureaux: la mort du torero* (Musée Picasso, Paris), painted at the same place on 19 September 1933, and *Course de taureaux* (Private Collection), executed on 27 July 1934.

Here one needs to remember Luis Fernández and Pablo Picasso's shared passion for the spectacle of bullfighting. Fernández's love of the bullfight may well have begun in his childhood in Oviedo, as his father seems to have been a most knowledgeable and well-connected fan, bullfighters being regular visitors to the Fernández family home. What both artists liked best about the bullfight went beyond its plasticity and aesthetic nature as a spectacle. In the combat between bull, bullfighter and horse, both artists saw something sacred, which on one occasion prompted Fernández to declare that, in his opinion, the fighting bull was the earthly incarnation of the divinity³⁰. Man fought against divinity in the bullfight in a sort of highly emotive and intensely poetic sacrificial rite³¹.

This passion for bullfighting accounts for the motif in both paintings by Luis Fernández in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, each one, as noted, with its own dimension or significance. In the painting of the severed head, this might be interpreted as a symbol of what was for Fernández the real, authentic Spain, defeated in the

30 Interview with Yvonne Fernández, the artist's second wife, in Paris, 24 January 2000.

31 Bernadac, 1993, pp. 47-59.



8. Luis Fernández (1900-1973)
Tauromachie, c. 1936
Oil on canvas, 61 x 38 cm
Fundación Azcona, Madrid



9. Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)
Course de taureaux, 1934
Oil on canvas, 97 x 130 cm
Private collection

recent war. In the second work, the animal becomes an image of destructive barbarism, identified with the Franco regime in particular, but also of universal significance. We should remember that when he painted the work, the Second World War had only recently begun, a war Luis Fernández would live through in occupied Paris³². In other works from the same years, this evil role would also be represented by the figure of the cock, usually shown threatening a kind of defenceless chick individualized by the white colour [fig. 10]. In any case, both visions would differ from the more solemn view Luis Fernández gives of the bull in a series of sketches produced in the 1950s.

However, as an image of Spain, the bull is by no means exclusive to the first of the paintings mentioned, as it also appears in a series of drawings by Fernández during the Civil War, in which the fighting bull is shown in a number of postures. In some of these brief sketches, the most numerous, the bull, shown half figure in rough outline, makes as if to get out through a sort of hole in the ground made by the pressure of one of its legs. A sun, at the back of the composition, would seem to announce the arrival of a new day for martyred Spain and with it the rekindling of a future filled with promises [fig. 11]. At other times, the bull is shown full body, upright or lying down, one leg standing on shackles or a swastika. The room usually used as a setting for these pictures, not unlike a prison cell, often has a crucifix, functioning as a kind of symbol of oppression [fig. 12]. Other examples, in the context of these compositions, show the

³² About this aspect of his life, see Palacio 2008b.



10. Luis Fernández (1900-1973)
Allegorie du bien et du mal, 1939
Oil on canvas, 81 x 100 cm
Zorrilla-Lequerica Collection, Bilbao

bull strangely changed to resemble a lion, or a sort of four-legged animal with as many heads, all similar to a bull's head and inscribed within a circle.

The message they convey is reinforced by the, in most cases, accompanying inscriptions, written in the artist's hand:

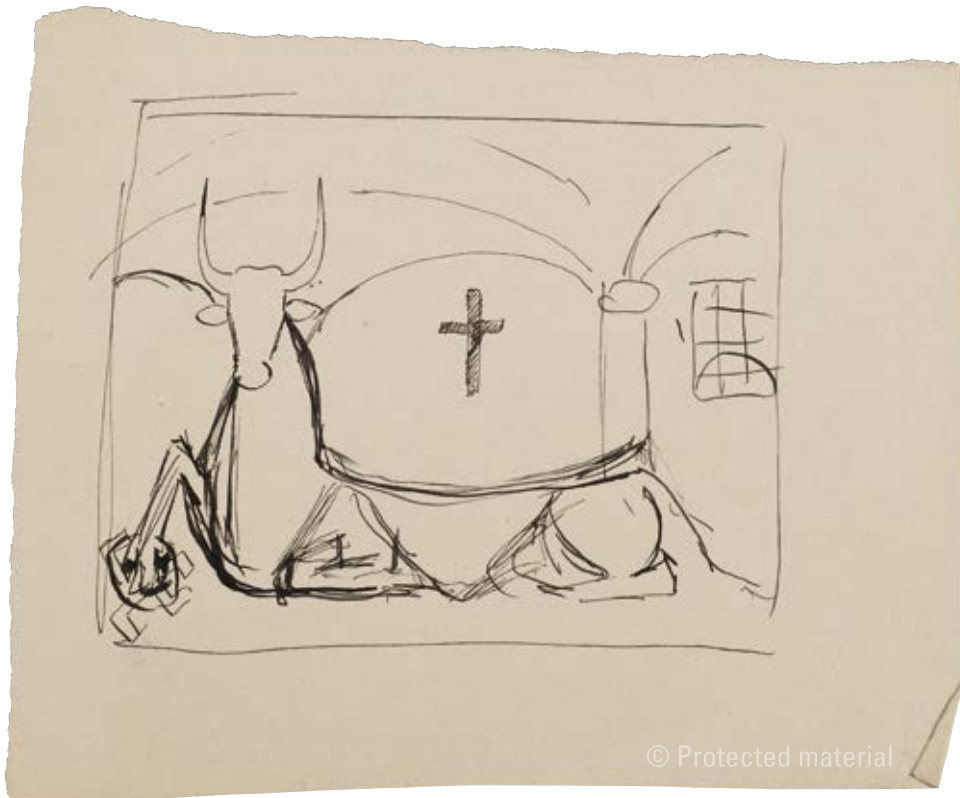
Le peuple espagnol sortira de prison.

Cheveux=flames (couleurs de la republique) au secours du peuple espagnol. Nous nous sommes battus pour vous.

Le franquisme est un danger pour la paix. À bas le franquisme.

Finally, this same idea of the bull as an image of Republican Spain is also to be found in two works in which the animal completely overshadows any other feature and whose titles are fairly representative of the artist's interest in this motif: *Resurrection du peuple espagnol* (private collection, Oviedo) and *Libération du peuple espagnol* [fig. 13]. The first, like the rest, was also executed in 1939, while the second actually took from 1939 to 1946 to complete, confirming the artist's custom of taking his time over his works, to which he would return time and time again. Fernández liked to be photographed with this last work, one of the largest he ever painted, with his painter's utensils³³.

33 A number of photographs in the Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias shows Luis Fernández with this work. On 11 October 1947 *Combat* published another photograph of Fernández putting the finishing touches to the painting.



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11. Luis Fernández (1900-1973)
Taureau, c. 1939
Charcoal on paper, 155 x 250 mm
Asturias Fine Arts Museum, Oviedo



© Protected material

12. Luis Fernández (1900-1973)
Taureau, 1939
Indian ink on paper, 128 x 155 mm
Private collection



13. Luis Fernández (1900-1973)
Libération du peuple espagnol, 1939-1946
Tempera on canvas, 180 x 251 cm
Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

World War II and, above all, the occupation of Paris by the German army on 14 June 1940 brought Luis Fernández into contact with war for the second time in his life. Despite the potential threat to his safety, since he was a mason and his first wife, Esther Chicurel, was of Jewish descent, Fernández decided to stay in the French capital, rejecting an invitation from the Museum of Modern Art in New York to cross the Atlantic and take up residence in the United States. During the occupation Fernández scarcely exhibited, although he continued to create powerfully expressive works, concentrating largely on the still life and monstrous heads. It was his way of continuing to express his revulsion and indignation against any conflict that might endanger the defence of the noblest causes, independently of whether the violence was directed against his native country or his country of adoption. As we have seen, the two works in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum are good examples of this prolonged capacity of reaction.

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