

English
Student winner – Matthew Mogulescu Ross

Guernica in Banksy's Shredder

Although the avant-garde may believe otherwise, science is marching on as art stands still. The best proof of this is that we continue to confuse value with price. Indeed, in modern times we have witnessed two artistic episodes featuring the driving force behind the contemporary aesthetic movement: money. The first was the sum which Picasso earned from the Spanish Republic in exchange for painting *Guernica*. The second was the moment when Banksy doubled the price of his *Girl with Balloon* by shredding it during an auction in order to demonstrate that, like denim jeans, some things are more expensive in pieces than intact.

Two decades ago, the influential art critic Rosalind Krauss published *The Picasso Papers*. Although the book is an analysis of the Malagueño artist's collages, Krauss begins with the premise that during the same period in which the monetary system was gradually abandoning the gold standard in favor of a return to a more abstract system, art – from abstraction to abstraction – was simultaneously breaking the bonds between an object's representation and its real-life referent. The last time that the Reina Sofía issued a new edition of Antonio Saura's short book *Contra el Guernica*, Félix de Azua was asked to write the book's preface and he dedicated three pages to summarizing the conflicting interpretations among experts of the mural's symbolism. The bull could thus just as easily represent Spain as it could fascism, brute force as Picasso himself, the protection of the weak as “primal and sexual energy.”

Art's rupture from reality and its alignment with the economy have produced significant benefits for auction houses and libraries alike. Lawrence Weschler, a staff writer for the *New Yorker*, contributed to the latter with a book published in 1999, one year after Krauss's publication. Weschler's book is entitled *Boggs: A Comedy of Values* and relates the trials and tribulations of Stephen Boggs, whose artwork consisted of sketching banknotes and, most notably, employing them successfully as legal tender. As a result, he was fined by the U.S. Treasury Department and, true to form, tried to pay the fine with money he had produced himself. Boggs, who passed away a few months ago, was fond of recalling how the phrase “In God We Trust” was added to the dollar at the very same moment that U.S. currency lost the backing of gold.

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The true power of the modern creator – be it God or an artist – does not consist in the ability to give life to a work but rather to take it away. It is relatively easy to paint a canvas – museums are filled with them – but it takes a certain kind of person to destroy one, let alone create something new by shredding one in half. With a supreme gesture of speculation, Banksy – whose pseudonym is a play on the word “bank” – managed to do just that. The attacks that icons have had to endure have always played a decisive role in their prestige. Iconoclasm is a form of fetishism. Ever since the bulletproof glass was removed, *Guernica* has never been the same. On that day, for better or for worse, its price increased and its value diminished. It became a *picasso*.

Javier Rodríguez Marcos, El País, 10 October 2018