

20 artists write about a work of art that has influenced them



## Kyungah Ham

**Pablo Picasso, *Massacre en Corée*  
(*Massacre in Korea*), 1951**

*Massacre en Corée* is a work that protests the atrocity that occurred during the Korean War in 1950 in Sinchon, Hwanghae Province, North Korea, when American troops carried out a mass killing.

For those on the Left, including those in the French Communist Party, the abstract ambiguity of Pablo Picasso's painting was not

welcome, even for the purposes of propaganda; and in 'free' countries, such as the US, the work was subject to criticism and was absurdly listed on a FBI blacklist for 25 years. In South Korea, the painting was censored for a long time because Picasso was considered an agitator, or worse. At the same time, there was a popular brand of crayon in the country called

'Picasso' — named for the same artist the authorities referred to as a Leftist. Indeed, Picasso was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize by the Soviet Union in 1962 and was well-known for his contributions to communist propaganda. The use of Picasso's name and a label or praise of his work were considered violations of South Korea's anti-communist law and,



121

ultimately, the crayon company had to change its name to 'Phoenix'. Ironically, *Massacre en Corée* was later widely used in Poland as a poster protesting the Soviet invasion of Hungary.

*Massacre en Corée*, like Picasso's better-known anti-war painting *Guernica* (1937), powerfully illustrates the artist's criticism of military force and it had a huge social impact,

catalyzing an important social discourse around a grim subject. Unfortunately, the political violence shown in the painting remains a part of life on the Korean Peninsula, where I live. The ongoing stand-off between North and South Korea makes this work a powerful reminder of the past, showing how a painting can be topical, stimulate critical interpretation, and have historical relevance.

*Kyungah Ham lives in Seoul, Korea. In 2015, she had a solo show at Kukje Gallery, Seoul, and her work was included in the Guangzhou Triennial, China. Her work is currently on show at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, as part of the 2016 Korea Art Prize.*

Pablo Picasso *Massacre en Corée* (Massacre in Korea) 1951. Oil on plywood, 1 × 2 m. Courtesy: Musée National Picasso, and RNM, Paris