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SPEAKEASY

Artist To Unveil Picasso-Inspired Video Piece ‘A Cry for Peace’ at United Nations

Kelly Crow



“A Cry for Peace” ©Succession Picasso, 2014 / ©Denise De La Rue, 2014

Pablo Picasso’s 1937 masterpiece, “Guernica,” was meant to stoke peace in a time of war. On Friday, a Mexican artist with similar intentions will unveil a video piece she created using the 11-foot-tall canvas as a backdrop.

Denise De La Rue’s three-minute film, “A Cry for Peace,” will be shown at the United Nations headquarters in New York during its General Assembly meeting on Friday.

Ms. De La Rue’s film depicts a bloodied matador twirling a muleta, or red flannel cape, in a slow, dance-like motion in front of Picasso’s painting, which now hangs in Madrid’s Reina Sofia Museum. An eerie score by Academy Award-winning composer Gustavo Santaolalla accompanies the film.

Ms. De La Rue, who is based in New York and known for photographing matadors, spent several years convincing Picasso’s estate and the museum to let her film in front of “Guernica.” A lawyer for Picasso’s estate said the work represents the first time it has allowed a contemporary artist to use the painting’s image in order to create a new, blended piece of art.

“Guernica” still stands on its own, of course. Picasso painted the roiling, black-and-white scene of carnage and chaos in Paris after he learned that the Spanish village of Guernica had been bombed during the Spanish Civil War. In the mural, people’s arms strain against rubble, and candles are painted to evoke all-seeing eyeballs—a comment on the tragedies of war.

Ms. De La Rue said she's always been fascinated by the poignant message of the painting. At the same time, she's spent years photographing the macabre elements of Spanish bullfighting, in which a matador and bull duel in an arena until the animal dies of repeated stab wounds. "A Cry for Peace" allowed her to juxtapose these explorations in a single work.