

André Masson (1896-1987)



When André Masson left France for Spain in 1934, his reasons for doing so were largely connected with the current political situation in his country. When he returned to France in 1936, his departure was motivated in a similar way by the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain. Nevertheless, the political part of his production has been willfully overlooked both by the artist himself and by the readings that have been proposed for his work at that time, which have focused mainly on the artist's cultural and mystical relationship with this country.

But there is one part of his production where he showed an interest, even if not a very overt or explicit one, in conjugating the Spanish political situation with the language of myth, violence and ritual. That the latter formed the basis of all his work is clearly seen in the images of bulls and bullfighting which inundate his output of those years.

In July 1936, finding it impossible to remain indifferent to the conflict, he offered his services to the committee of the anti-Fascist militias in Barcelona, designing several insignias for the International Brigades, and making a set of grotesque satirical drawings whose relationship with Francisco de Goya's *Disasters of War* he fully acknowledged. In them, he directly attacks the Fascists by ridiculing their commander-in-chief and his henchmen. At the same time, in connection with his work for the journal *Acéphale*, he produced *Barcelona, July 1936*, a plate for an engraving that was never printed, in which he mingled the symbols of the Communist party and those of *Acéphale*'s subversive anti-rationalism. The plate is an attempt to move beyond a straightforward attack on the enemy, and demonstrates the artist's concern with establishing another type of visual language for the contemporary political scene. Back in Paris, he continued along this path with the staging of *Numance* at the Théâtre Antoine. Seen as a metaphor for the siege of Madrid, the play was interpreted by some critics and spectators as a display of support for the Republic, and its image of a bull's head holding a skull between its horns was seen as summarizing the artist's relationship with Spain.