

KIDNAPPED

I am a pigeon. I don't know if I am white, grey or coloured because, as you all know, I can't recognise myself in the mirror.

An aged man called Noah, chose me out of all the animals on his arch to see if the Earth was still flooded. I flew a short distance and got back, the flood did not stop. Seven years later, he gave me the same mission again. When I returned by his side, I was carrying an olive branch in my beak and, as a result the water level had dropped considerably. This man seemed to have a kind of fixation with the number seven because after that same period of time I had to leave again to check on the situation, but I did not come back. The truth is I was a bit tired of the subject, of the number seven and of the boss. Besides, as there were many trees and lots of fruit, it was better for my health to stay in the fields and mountains by myself. This decision of mine was considered a symbol of peace and freedom. Don't ask me why, I am only a bird and cannot understand abstract concepts.

However, it is to a well-known painter, a very famous one, that I owe my popularity. Does Picasso ring a bell? Well, that's the one I am talking about. He loved painting since an early age. As there were many of us living in the dovecote of his house and we were used to moving constantly, it was quite a challenge for him to draw us. But the little boy was very skilful and was not bad at using a pencil. He became so fond of us that we appeared in several of his sketches and paintings. Well, let's get on with it. At the end of the second Great War, the first one finished so badly that no one wanted to know anything about cordiality, peace, concord.. In short, you choose the word you consider most pertinent. As I was saying, at the end of the second Great War, Pablo Picasso was asked to compose a work for the First World Peace Congress to be held in Paris. So, without hesitation, he painted me in a lithography dressed in white on a black background. I was beautiful, my plumage was eye-catching, magnificent. It was said to be "one of the most beautiful pieces of work ever made'. He became so enthusiastic about it that he named his daughter Paloma and later his granddaughter Paz. For a long time this lithographic version of me remained on display at the Tate Gallery, but nowadays you will have to go to the museum in the artist's birthplace if you want to see me like this. In successive years he represented me in different forms, I liked all of them, of course, although if I could only choose one, I would prefer the first one. As you can see, I am somewhat conservative, I like the traditional, the usual.

The hippies, those who wore long hair, flared trousers, pendants, wristbands and long dresses when they watched the sunsets, made me fashionable. I appeared flying with an olive branch in my beak. According to them, the fact that I was flying meant the desire for peace. It was logical, wars were still raging in different parts of the world, with Vietnam standing out in those early years of the movement. In short, it was still a *trompe l'oeil*, an illusion, a chimera.

Years later, in the eighties of the twentieth century, a Biscayan sculptor, Nestor Basterretxea, the same one who decorated the crypt of the Sanctuary of Aránzazu, exiled with his family in France because of the Spanish Civil War, sculpted me as an iron animal seven metres high, nine metres wide and one metre deep, and later he covered me with white polyester. At that time there were frequent kidnappings and deaths by point-blank shots, limpet bombs and car bombs in the Basque Country. These actions also extended to other Spanish autonomous communities. In this context, the democratic authorities of San Sebastián City Council commissioned this artist to create a monumental work symbolizing the city's commitment to peace, freedom and coexistence. Once again, I as an emblem of "the power of man to act in one way or another, taking responsibility of his actions." or of "the right that ensures the free determination of people", as well as an image of "the harmonious relationship between people, without confrontation or conflict" or of "the situation in which armed struggle in a country or between countries is not acceptable". I beg your pardon, I thought it necessary to turn to the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy to clarify, as far as possible, the concepts of freedom and peace, even though my brain still does not understand a single word. In Basque, this sculptural representation of mine was called *Bakearen Usoa*, which was not at all original, it means *Paloma de la Paz* in Spanish (Pigeon of Peace in English). As I was so big, not in vain he had been asked for a monumental piece of art, they first placed me on Zurriola beach, opposite the Bay of Biscay, then I was taken to Aita Donostia Square, opposite the Anoeta Stadium, where Real Sociedad was playing, and later they put me back on Zurriola beach. I ended up a bit dizzy, but they always had to watch me from the front, otherwise, if they looked at me from the side, all they could see was a jumble of tightly woven iron sheets. It would be twenty-two years after my inauguration before the armed organisation ETA declared the definitive end of its struggle.

Six years ago, another artist of great international stature, Fernando Botero, incarnated me with a bronze body which he would later paint white. In this case, the sculpture was much smaller in size, only about seventy centimetres, but of course Botero

is not from Bilbao itself, but from a little further down, from Colombia. As you may have noticed, dear readers, absolutely all of them agree in giving me the colour white. And I say to myself, 'is there no such thing as a black or perhaps grey pigeon?' This gentleman said in a public act of great importance: "I wanted to give this gift to my country to express my support and solidarity with the peace process which will bring a future of hope and illusion to all Colombians" To give you a better understanding of this process, I have consulted the newspaper archives and it states the armed conflict started in 1960 and ended up, after four years of negotiations, with the peace agreement signed between the State and the main guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia- People's Army (FARC-EP) in November, 2016. But I must tell you that violence was not over, since some smaller guerrilla groups did not support the conciliation and there were also some breaches by the government and the legislature.

In conclusion to all that has been said above and what has been left unsaid, I must tell you, dear readers, that throughout my life, for a long time, I did not received good news to hold on to. Furthermore, I think I rarely felt absolutely loved and on quite occasions I did not even feel welcome.

Is spite of feeling rejected and neglected, hope always weighed more heavily on my conscience than disappointment. Thus, determined as I was to not give up, I stopped flying towards the mortuary and, making a sharp 180-degree turn, decided to give myself another chance. But someone very powerful thought I had had enough of the nagging and decided to abduct me without a blush or a care in the world.

Now, I live in a high-security glass cabinet with my wings open and an olive little branch in my beak so that others can dream.

"Stories without Mufflers" (2006 -)