

Kerr, Merrily. "Anne-Lise Coste," *Time Out New York*, 2 August 2013.



Anne-Lise Coste

Merrily Kerr



How do you create a contemporary antiwar painting? Anne-Lise Coste, a French artist who lives and works in New York, poses this provocative question with a series sourced from Picasso's cri de coeur *Guernica* (1937). Using spray paint, Coste reworks elements from one of modern art's true masterpieces, hoping to channel the original's impact. But she quotes Picasso too closely to really get there.

The problem stems mainly from Coste's dispassionate approach. In a gallery handout, she wonders whether it's necessary to suffer the consequences of war in order to effectively inveigh against it; well, judging from the results here, it couldn't hurt. For instance, a pair of canvases isolate the figure of the howling mother found on the left side of *Guernica*. One shows the woman cradling her dead child (as Picasso depicts her), while in the other, the child has been elided. Neither image amplifies the woman's grief. Things improve when Coste multiplies, say, an upturned, screaming head into a sketchy, chaotic mass. Only then does she begin to use *Guernica* as an inspiration for something different.

What set Picasso's original apart is that it was a contemporary response to the bombing of an undefended city during the Spanish Civil War. In contrast, Coste refuses to address current events, choosing, instead, to delve into the art-historical past. At a time when conflict abounds, Coste's project is hardly irrelevant. But it would have been better served by being planted in the present. —*Merrily Kerr*