

MUSEO THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA

# CARMEN

CARMEN IN SPANISH COLLECTIONS

7

OCTOBER

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9

NOVEMBER

2014

CARMEN IN SPANISH  
COLLECTIONS

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza  
Paseo del Prado, 8  
28014 Madrid

Dates  
7 October – 9 November 2014

Venue  
Contextos exhibition galleries.  
First floor. Direct access from  
the main hall

Free admission

Information  
mtb@museothyssen.org  
www.museothyssen.org

Visitor Information Service  
Tel.: +34 902 760 511

Explanation of the exhibition  
by a group of volunteers:

- Timetable  
Monday at 12:30  
Friday at 17:00
- Maximum attendance: 20.  
Previous enrolment  
not required

FILM SEASON

Every Saturday from 11 October  
to 8 November 2014 at 19:30

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza  
auditorium

Free admission after picking  
up a ticket

Consult the programme at:  
[www.museothyssen.org](http://www.museothyssen.org)

Pablo Picasso  
*Femme de profil à l'éventail*, 1964,  
illustration for the book *Le Carmen  
des Carmen* by Prosper Mérimée  
and Louis Aragon, 1964  
Colección Fundación Bancaja



# CARMEN

IN SPANISH COLLECTIONS

MUSEO  
THYSSEN-  
BORNEMISZA

With the collaboration of

FERRERO  
GOLDEN GALLERY  
THE ART OF VALETY

TEATRO DE  
LA ZARZUELA

COMANDO DE BARRIO  
INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE LAS CAYAS  
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PAOLO PINAMONTI

Director of the Teatro de la Zarzuela

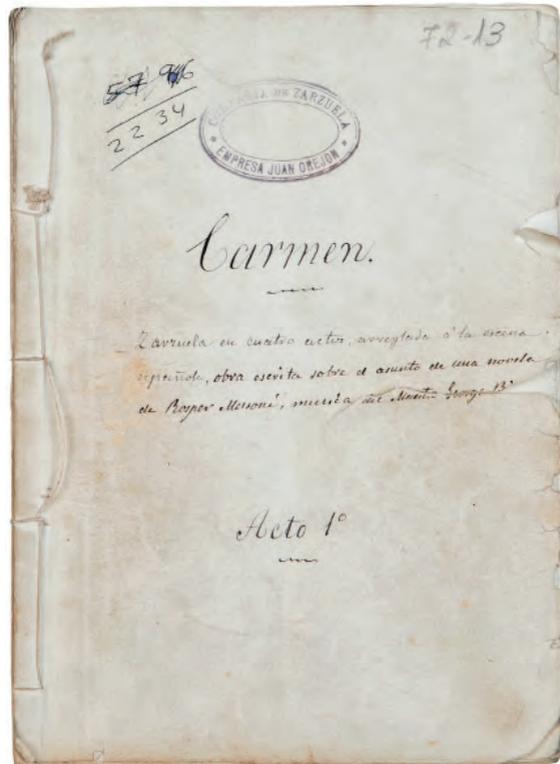
“From Mérimée’s novel to Bizet’s opera, those conditions were no longer the same. From the opera to our own time more than a century has gone by. How can you not take that into account?”

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Jean-Claude Carrière, 1981

This was the question posed by Jean-Claude Carrière, who, along with Marius Constant and Peter Brook, was working on the preparation of *La Tragedie de Carmen* for the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris in 1981. A few years later, almost at the same time, Carlos Saura and Antonio Gades won the Superior Technical Commission Grand Prize at the Cannes Film Festival (May 1983) for their *Carmen*, Jean-Luc Godard won the Golden Lion at that year’s Venice Film Festival for *Prénom Carmen* and, again at the Venice Film Festival one year later, Francesco Rosi presented, to great international acclaim, his film-opera *Carmen*.

Over the course of four consecutive years, from 1981 to 1984, Brook, Saura and Gades, Godard and Rosi continually revisited the figure of Carmen, a character who had become one of the great myths in the arts of the 20th century, with mutually antagonistic visions and interpretations that extended from the rigorous theatrical essentiality of Brook to the controversial cinematic deconstruction of Godard, by way of an act of reappropriation on the part of the world of flamenco in the fascinating play of mirrors of the film by Saura and Gades, to arrive at the operatic super-production by Rosi, with musical direction by Lorin Maazel.



This interpretative variety demonstrated the richness of a myth that had begun its journey, without much success, thanks to the insistence with which Bizet had managed to mount his *Carmen* in the Salle Favart in Place Boieldieu. And so, when Gerónimo Giménez and the impresario Felipe Ducazcal decided, on 2 November 1887, to present *Carmen*, arranged for the Spanish stage as a *zarzuela* in four acts, based on the plot of a novel by Prosper Mérimé and with music by maestro Georges Bizet at the Teatro de la Zarzuela they made a very brave decision for the time, performing an act of reappropriation of a figure, that of Carmen, which before long would go on from being the simple search after *couleur locale* typical of mid-19th-century French exoticism to become not only one of the great musical myths, but a myth of the art of the 20th century *tout court*.

On the occasion of the inauguration of the 2014-2015 season at the Teatro de la Zarzuela with the revival of Bizet's *Carmen* in the version in Spanish, and in collaboration with the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, we have planned a series of parallel activities in order to give an account of the polysemy intrinsic to the figure of Carmen in the art of the 20th century. These activities will centre on an important exhibition of paintings about this figure, *Carmen in Spanish Collections*, curated with tremendous rigour and imagination by Juan Ángel López-Manzanares, and on a film season which will include some of the movies that, from 1914 until now, have been devoted to the immortal figure of Carmen.

This will be one more step in a fascinating and infinite artistic journey, one that for more than a century and a half has attempted to come to grips with and to decipher a figure, enigmatic and eternal, about whom may a chapter remains to be written.

To end, I wish to express my profoundest thanks to Guillermo Solana, artistic director of the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, and to his associates who, from our first contact almost two years ago, enthusiastically supported this project and helped make it happen.



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JUAN ÁNGEL LÓPEZ-MANZANARES

## CARMEN IN SPANISH COLLECTIONS

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Pablo Picasso  
*Torero y señorita*, 1960, illustration for the  
book *Le Carmen des Carmen* by Prosper  
Mérimée and Louis Aragon, 1964  
Lithograph in colour, 34.2 x 23 cm  
Colección Fundación Bancaja

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A transgressive, independent woman, Carmen is much more than a character from opera. In her are subsumed many of the fantasies and tensions of European society. Perhaps this is why she has gone on fascinating musicians, artists, filmmakers and even thinkers like Nietzsche since the 19th century. The present exhibition provides an opportunity to delve deeper into her rich symbolism.

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The fame of the character of Carmen is due to the famous opera by Georges Bizet, premiered on 3 March 1875 at the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique in Paris. However, while the French composer made her popular, her enabler was in fact the French writer Prosper Mérimée, author of the novel of the same name published in 1845. Though well known, the story is worth retelling insofar as it differs from the opera version with which some of its passages are sometimes confused.

Mérimée opens his novel with a quote from the Alexandrian poet Pallas (4th century AD) in which we read: "Every woman is as bitter as gall, but she has two good moments: one in bed, the other in the tomb." From the first, the Pallas quote, published in Greek—a language that was only studied by men in the mid-19th century—conditions the response of the reader at whom Mérimée's text was aimed, as do its main concerns: love and death. The story itself is recounted in the first person by a French archaeologist—like Mérimée himself—who visits Andalusia in 1830 with the intention of studying the Battle of Munda (45 BC), in which Julius Caesar finally defeated the army of the Roman Republic.

Events follow one another in rapid succession in a little over a hundred pages. One day, on entering a wood in the hill country of Cordoba, the archaeologist runs into the famous bandit Don José. The two fraternize and go off to eat in an inn, where the Frenchman saves Don José from being denounced. In the second chapter the researches of the archaeologist take him to Cordoba. There he meets the gypsy woman Carmen, who offers to read his fortune. After a scene of wooing Don José appears and throws the Frenchman out of the gypsy's room. Arriving at his lodgings, the archaeologist discovers that Carmen has stolen his watch but decides not to report her to the authorities. Several months go by and when he returns to the city of the Caliphs he discovers that his watch has been found in the possession of Don José, who is awaiting capital punishment in prison. He visits him on the eve of his execution and the bandit tells him the story of his life.

In the third chapter—narrated in the first person by the bandit himself—we hear of Don José's Navarre origins, of his duel with a fellow countryman and of his flight south, where he enlisted in the army's regiment of dragoons. Dispatched to Seville, it is there that the more familiar part of the story unfolds: the meeting with Carmen, the quarrel of the women in the cigarette factory, Carmen's flight, the rendezvous at Lillas Pastia's inn and in the house of the aged Dorothee, Don José's run-in with his lieutenant, his joining up with the gypsy smugglers, a duel with the bandit García—Carmen's husband—Carmen's romance with the picador Lucas, and her death at the hands of Don José.

Thus far, this is the novel as originally published on 1 October 1845 in *La Revue des Deux Mondes*. However, Mérimée added a fourth chapter to the

edition published by Michel Lévy in 1847, consisting of a short essay—also in the first person—on the history, customs and language of the gypsies. Its purpose has been the subject of controversy, although it may be understood as an attempt by the French author to provide the novel with an erudite framework.

Bizet's opera, with a libretto by Ludovic Halévy and Henri Meilhac, makes various important changes to the text by Mérimée, most of them aimed at adapting the story to the format of comic opera, which was the house style at the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique in Paris. As is typical of operatic representation there is no narrator, which enables the characters to express themselves directly, without mediation. Moreover, the action is centred exclusively on the third chapter, thus achieving greater dramatic intensity. The ending is also different. In the opera the killing of Carmen coincides with the holding of a bullfight at which the torero Escamillo (a character standing in for Lucas) triumphs, through which it acquires a new symbolism. In the opera version a new character also makes an appearance, Micaela, Don José's fiancée and the messenger of his mother, who acts as Carmen's foil. But perhaps the major change is the one experienced by the latter who, from resignedly accepting her fate in the novel by Mérimée, becomes aware of her own freedom in the opera by Bizet.<sup>1</sup>

Both novel and opera have been the object of multifarious readings. Traditionally, they have been interpreted as an expression of the tragedy implicit in the relations between men and women, of their fatal attraction which leads to the destruction of them both. More recently, however, analyses deriving from gender studies by the likes of Catherine Clément,<sup>2</sup> Nelly Furman,<sup>3</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen<sup>4</sup> and Susan McClary<sup>5</sup> have pointed out how both are the reflection of the 19th century's bourgeois, masculine and Eurocentric vision of "the other"—namely the lower classes, women and racial minorities—an "other" that does not find a place within the framework of the rigid customs of Western society. In light of this, the death of Carmen would have a sacrificial value through which society gives symbolic form—literary or operatic—to the intangible, changing and perturbing aspects which threaten to destabilize it.

1. In relation to this important change of nuance, see Jean Lacouture: *Carmen. La révoltée*. Paris, Seuil, 2011. • 2. See Catherine Clément: *L'opéra ou la défaite des femmes*, Paris, Grasset, 1979. • 3. See Nelly Furman: "The Languages of Love in *Carmen*". In Arthur Gross and Roger Parker (eds.): *Reading Opera*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 168-183. • 4. See Elisabeth Bronfen: *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. 181-204. • 5. See Susan McClary: *Georges Bizet: Carmen*, Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 29-43.



Manuscript score with the musical arrangement of *Carmen* as a zarzuela in 4 acts for the Teatro de la Zarzuela in Madrid, c. 1887. 21.5 x 31.5 cm. SGAE-Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, Madrid. Inv.: MMO/2234

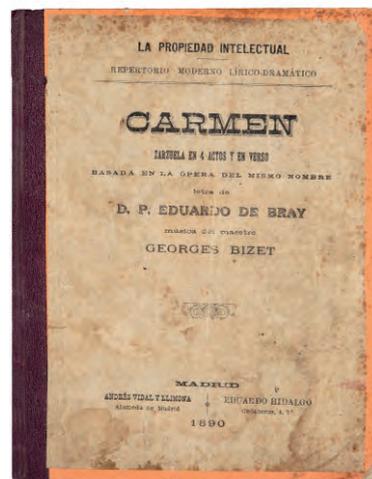
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In Spain the reception of *Carmen* was somewhat late. The first translation of Mérimée's novel into Spanish dates from 1891; the work of Cristóbal Litrán, it was published by the Librería Española López in Barcelona. By that time, however, *Carmen* was already known through the opera version and, more specifically, through its adaptation as a zarzuela.

Four versions of Bizet's opera arrived in our country between 1881 and 1890.<sup>6</sup> The first was the French version and only four performances were given of it at the beginning of August at the Teatro Lírico in Barcelona, although it relied on the distinguished participation of Célestine Galli-Marié, mezzo-soprano in the Paris première. On 2 November 1887 the Teatro de la Zarzuela in Madrid provided the venue for a version adapted to the zarzuela format, and a few months later, on 14 March 1888, it was Madrid's Teatro Real that gave the Italian *Carmen*, in line with the tastes of the capital's opera circles. Finally, on 7 April 1890 *Carmen* returned to Barcelona, to the Teatro-Circo Alegría, in a new Spanish adaptation by Eduardo de Bray.

Of all these, the one which received the most publicity was the Teatro de la Zarzuela's of 1887.<sup>7</sup> In charge of the musical direction was Gerónimo Giménez, who had trained in Paris in the 1870s and had possibly been present at the performance of the opera in the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique. That said, the real architect of its adaptation as a zarzuela was the *sainete*

6. See Jean Sentaurens: "Carmen: de la novela de 1845 a la zarzuela de 1887. Cómo nació 'la España de Mérimée'". In *Bulletin Hispanique*, 2002, vol. 104, no. 104-2, pp. 855ff. • 7. In connection with this premiere, the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza is exhibiting a small documentary section whose selection has been undertaken by the director of the Teatro de la Zarzuela, Paolo Pinamonti.



Published libretto of the adaptation of *Carmen* as a zarzuela in 4 acts for the Teatro-Circo Alegría in Barcelona (text by P. Eduardo de Bray), 1890. 19,5 x 15,5 cm SGAE-Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, Madrid. Inv.: LIB/79-18

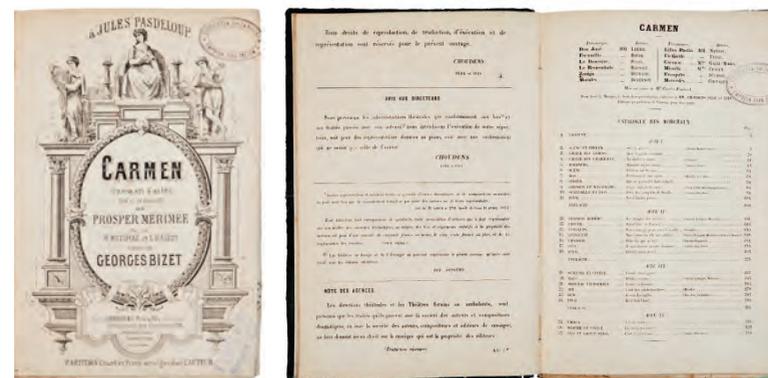
writer Rafael María Liern, who made numerous changes to the studied original libretto.

As for the performance itself, the first act was received with abundant applause and some of the arias, the Habanera for instance, had to be repeated. For all that, as the minutes went by, the enthusiasm gradually cooled. In the following day's press reviews there were repeated allusions to first-night nerves and to the quality of the libretto. In fact, what was taken to be a defect of the opera was largely due to its adaptation as a *zarzuela*: the caricatured image of Spain.

Thus, for example, the columnist of *El País* observed that “Of course [the libretto] is absurd. When reading what the French have to say about Spain, one might think it all but impossible to reach this point, that an immense gulf separates us from the neighbouring Republic, that no railway link existed between the two nations, and that everything that was written about us has to be blindly believed, especially when the knife toted by a woman, the smuggler and his mistress, and the bullfighter are mentioned everywhere. Especially that.”<sup>8</sup>

Stressing the idea of a distorted vision of Spain, the contributor to *El Liberal* also wrote, “The public was engrossed, its astonishment increasing as the performance progressed, without managing to grasp the reason for the enthusiasm *Carmen* has awakened throughout Europe. And the reason for it

8. Allegro: “En el teatro de la Zarzuela: ‘Carmen’”. In *El País*, Madrid, 3-11-1887, p. 3.



Piano and vocal score of *Carmen* published by Choudens, Paris, c. 1874, with manuscript musical deletions for its arrangement as a zarzuela in 4 acts, introduced c. 1887. 29 x 20 cm SGAE-Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, Madrid. Inv.: MMO/2234

is actually very simple. The scenes of the opera correspond perfectly to the fantastic legend that has formed abroad about our country [...].”<sup>9</sup>

While the transformation of the novel into an opera had already led to the inclusion of a number of folkloric features, its adaptation to the *zarzuela* format exacerbated its simplistic picturesqueness. Taken to be a French tic, this led to the rejection and lack of appreciation of the *zarzuela* as a whole. Not only was the novelty of Bizet's music overshadowed, so was the universality of the actual storyline, which goes beyond the narrow limits of Spanish *costumbrismo*.

Spanish intellectuals of the late-19th and early-20th centuries extended their criticisms to Mérimée himself. Thus, for example, did Antonio Machado blame the French writer for having publicized a “Spain of fanfares and tambourines” which had little to do with reality.<sup>10</sup> Jacinto Benavente also wrote, “This disastrous *Carmen*, with its sashaying, its smugglers, its muskets and its clasp knives, has been a major contributor to the depiction of that folkloric Spain for tourists so widespread abroad, which marks us down as a people remote from Europe.”<sup>11</sup>

9. Anon.: “Teatro de la Zarzuela”. In *El Liberal*, Madrid, 3-11-1887, p. 3. Also see Pedro Bofill: “Veladas teatrales”. In *La Época*, Madrid, 3-11-1887, p. 2; Anon.: “Carmen”. In *El Día*, Madrid, 3-11-1887, p. 3; and Anon.: “Carmen en la Zarzuela”. In *La Iberia*, Madrid, 3-11-1887, p. 2. • 10. See Antonio Machado: “El mañana efímero”. In *Campos de Castilla*, CXXXV, and Antonio Machado: “Hacia tierra baja”. In *Nuevas Canciones (1917-1930)*, CLV. Both in Antonio Machado: *Poesías completas*. [Manuel Alvar (ed.)]. Madrid, Austral, 2011, pp. 225-226 and 266-270. • 11. Jacinto Benavente: “De sobremesa”, LXII. In *Obras completas de Jacinto Benavente*. Madrid, Aguilar, 1953, vol. 7, p. 642; see Sentaurens 2002 (op. cit., note 6), p. 854.

\* \* \*



José Domínguez Bécquer  
View of the Giralda from Calle Placentines, c. 1836  
Oil on canvas, 57.4 x 40.2 cm  
Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection on free loan  
to the Museo Carmen Thyssen Málaga. Inv.: CTB.1996.103

The problematic reception of *Carmen* referred to above also determined its limited repercussion in the Spanish visual arts of the time. In our country, as in France,<sup>12</sup> *Carmen* made her appearance in painting thanks to Bizet's opera. However, some of the more famous representations, coinciding with the demand for Hispanic subject matter, were meant for external consumption.<sup>13</sup> If *Carmen* did not enjoy the same sympathy in Spain as beyond its borders, her visual image was also blurred through the use of allusion, more often than not indirect.

¡As a result of this, the present show—in the small Contextos gallery and limited to Spanish collections—intends, in the main, to touch on the world that surrounds the myth of *Carmen* more than on the character herself. The works selected, set out in chronological order, are grouped around the following themes: the image of Andalusia in the era of Mérimée; the “daughters” of Bizet's *Carmen* in Spanish painting at the start of the 20th century; and *Carmen* converted into a universal myth in the oeuvre of Pablo Picasso.

Beginning with Andalusia in Mérimée's day, it is worth remembering that Spain had already awoken the interest of European travellers and intellectuals by the end of the 18th century.<sup>14</sup> In particular, the Englishman Henry Swinburne was the first in publicizing the beauty of the monuments of Moorish Spain in his book *Travels Through Spain in the Years 1775 and 1776*, published in London in 1779 and translated into French in 1787. The number of visits to our country intensified, however, above all after the Napoleonic invasion of 1808 and the subsequent War of Independence.

The interest in all things Spanish did nothing but grow in the years that followed. In 1826 Chateaubriand published *The Adventures of the Last*

12. Mérimée's novel found no echo in the paintings exhibited at the Paris Salon in the mid-19th century. It was after the premiere of the opera in 1875 that we encounter the first depictions of singers who played her role, as in the famous painting by Édouard Manet, *Portrait of Émilie Ambre as Carmen*, 1880 (Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art), or the also well-known portrait of *Célestine Galli-Marié in the Role of Carmen*, 1886, by Lucien Doucet (Paris, Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra). See Dominique Lobstein: “A Dream of Spain: Pictures of Spain at the Paris Salons 1845-1865.” In Peter Pakesch (ed.): *Blicke auf Carmen: Goya, Courbet, Manet, Nadar, Picasso* [exhibition catalogue, Graz, Landesmuseum Joanneum Graz]. Cologne, Walther König, 2005, p. 175. • 13. Such is the case, for example, of the picture by Ignacio Zuloaga, *Lucienne Bréval as Carmen* (1908), acquired by Archer Huntington for the Hispanic Society of America in New York. • 14. See María de los Santos García Felguera: “Sevilla tuvo que ser. Los extranjeros y el nacimiento de la pintura costumbrista andaluza.” In *Pintura andaluza en la Colección Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza* [exhibition catalogue]. Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2004, pp. 11-26, and Robert Irwin: “L'Orient en Europe: La question hispanique.” In *L'Orientalisme en Europe. De Delacroix à Kandinsky* [exhibition catalogue, Brussels, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique]. Paris, Hazan, 2010, pp. 101-113.



Manuel Cabral Aguado Bejarano  
*Scene in a Country Inn*, 1855  
 Oil on canvas, 62 x 52 cm  
 Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza  
 Collection on free loan to the  
 Museo Carmen Thyssen Málaga.  
 Inv.: CTB.1994.52

*Abencerrage* and three years later Victor Hugo wrote, in the prologue to his poetry collection *Orientalia*, “[...] Spain is yet the Orient; Spain is half-African, Africa is half-Asian.”<sup>15</sup> His words helped turn our country into an inspirational motif for French romantic literature, and its influence was not long in being felt by writers like Théophile Gautier, Alexandre Dumas and Mérimée himself, the author making seven visits to our country between 1830 and 1864. In the Anglo-American world something similar occurred with the writings of Washington Irving, *Chronicle of the Conquest of Granada* (1829) and *Tales of the Alhambra* (1832).

In any event, it was not the French but Englishmen like John Frederick Lewis and David Roberts who concocted the first visual images of contemporary Andalusia, which were then continued by Andalusian painters themselves. The painting by José Domínguez Bécquer, *The Giralda Viewed from the Calle Placentines* of c. 1836 reproduces, with slight variations, a view painted three years previously by Roberts. The framing is the same, and even the time of day. The only change are the figures, less numerous and more sketchy in the work of the Sevillian. Moreover, as in Roberts these are on a smaller scale than the real one, which emphasizes the sublime character of the scene.

15. See Victor Hugo: *Les Orientales*. Paris, Charles Gosselin, 1829, p. X.



Ángel María Cortellini Hernández  
*Leaving the Bullring*, 1847  
 Oil on canvas, 40 x 31 cm  
 Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza  
 Collection on free loan to the  
 Museo Carmen Thyssen Málaga.  
 Inv.: CTB.1995.137

Many artworks like the one just mentioned, small in size and hence easily transportable, were intended for foreign consumption. José Domínguez Bécquer, who was an habitué of the English community established in Seville in the 1830s, got himself an agent in Cádiz, José Mesas, who sent his pictures to England by sea. Other artists followed his example. Among them we might mention Manuel Cabral Aguado Bejarano, whose *Scene in a Country Inn* was acquired in Seville by an English collector the same year it was painted.<sup>16</sup>

Cabral Aguado Bejarano's canvas and that of Ángel María Cortellini—*Leaving the Bullring*—introduce us to a quintessentially Andalusian kind of *costumbrismo*. Both evoke two of the central motifs of Mérimée's novel: the holding of a bullfight and banditry. Cortellini's painting is a pendant to the one entitled *Francisco Montes "Paquiro", before a Bullfight. The Bullfighter's Farewell* and possibly represents the aforesaid *torero* leaving after a performance. Although the female figure is the centre of the composition, it is her companion who attracts the gaze in an overwhelmingly masculine atmosphere. In Cabral Aguado Bejarano's painting the male characters are the chief protagonists. Three of them—smugglers—bear muskets, and the one nearest the spectator, a dagger stuck in his sash. The woman, meanwhile, holds a guitar,

16. On the back there is a label that reads, "Scene. A Spanish Fonda / By M.C. Bejarano / Curator of the Seville Museum / Bought at Seville 1855."

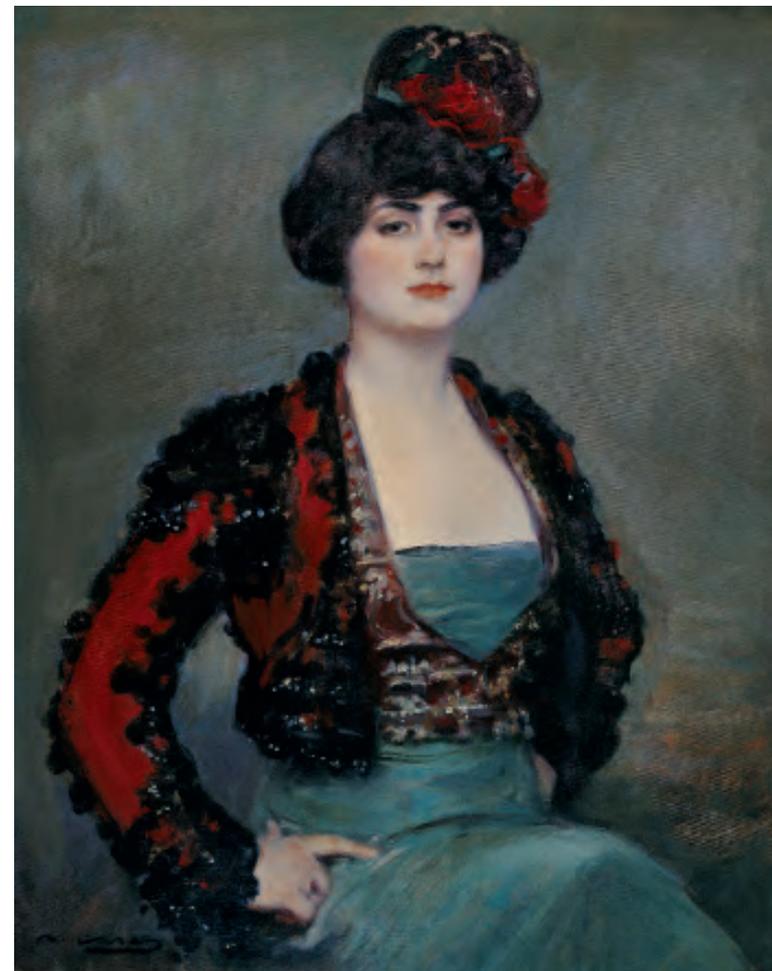


Manuel Barrón y Carrillo  
*Ambushing a Group of Bandits at the Cueva del Gato*, 1869  
 Oil on canvas, 72 x 105 cm  
 Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection on free loan  
 to the Museo Carmen Thyssen Málaga. Inv.: CTB.1998.11

her subsidiary role being underlined by the dog—symbol of faithfulness—which snuggles up to her skirts.

The landscapist Manuel Barrón also devoted many pictures to the theme of smuggling. In *Ambushing a Group of Bandits at the Cueva del Gato*, the figures find an echo in the dramatized landscape. The Sevillian painter created various versions of the same subject. In the one that concerns us, later than that in the Museo de Bellas Artes in Seville, the wild background of the Serranía de Ronda has been replaced by a balanced classical landscape that evokes the contrast between the turbulent world of the smugglers and the order established by the Guardia Civil.

The figures also vary slightly in each version. In any event, what remains constant is the dichotomy between the active role exercised by the smugglers, who repel the intervention of the Guardia Civil, and the more passive and sentimental role of the woman, who protects her son whilst clamouring for an end to the shooting. Such a separation of roles was common coin in post-Enlightenment European painting, starting with the neoclassical David. In that respect it is revealing that the female figure in Barrón's picture is inspired by that of Portia—the wife of Brutus—in *The Lictors Bring to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons* (1789), by the French painter.



Ramon Casas Carbó  
*Julia*, c. 1915  
 Oil on canvas, 85 x 67 cm  
 Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection  
 on free loan to the Museo Carmen Thyssen  
 Málaga. Inv.: CTB 1997.38

While Mérimée's novel and the opera by Bizet were confirming this model with the killing of Carmen, they also placed it in crisis due to the intellectual and ethical superiority of the female protagonist. In the painting of the late-19th and early-20th centuries—jumping forward in the exhibition—the character of Carmen finds her echo in women, some bourgeois and others workers, who were becoming aware of themselves and of their role in society. That said, the representation of these “daughters” of *Carmen* by male artists almost always shows the duality between a confirmation of their growing social importance and their ascription to traditional roles.<sup>17</sup>

This is the case with *Julia*, c. 1915, by Ramon Casas, a portrait of the model with whom the Catalan painter got married in 1922. *Julia* is painted from an unusually low viewpoint, which monumentalizes her figure. Her gaze is defiant and she holds her arms akimbo in a somewhat emboldened manner. But it is mainly her black and red *torera*—the short bolero jacket that Bizet's opera helped make fashionable<sup>18</sup>—that alludes to a reversal of male and female roles. Yet for all that the carnations which adorn her hair and her strongly lit, ample cleavage convert her into a simple object of desire.<sup>19</sup>

Gonzalo Bilbao also depicted the new social ascendancy of women—in his case, working-class women—in canvases like *The Cigarette Makers* in the Museo de Bellas Artes, Seville.<sup>20</sup> The Sevillian painter—who drew inspiration from Bizet's opera for many of his works—moves away in this painting from the anecdotal regionalism of his early work in order to render homage to the women workers of the Royal Tobacco Factory in Seville. In doing so he did not turn his back on placing in the centre of the composition the idyllic image of a young woman who breastfeeds her baby. In the canvas that concerns us, a sketch for that one, any leaning towards social militancy is diluted as a result of the leading role given to a couple of cigarette-makers—professional models perhaps?—who, unlike the other women, are dressed up for a fiesta and neglect their work in order to look in the spectator's direction.

In contrast to this folkloric interpretation of *Carmen*, in Europe—and particularly in Germany—precedence was given to readings of Bizet's opera



Gonzalo Bilbao Martínez  
*The Cigarette Girls in the Factory*, 1910  
 Oil on canvas, 162 x 108 cm  
 Altadis, Madrid

17. See María López Fernández: *La imagen de la mujer en la pintura española (1890-1914)*. Madrid, A. Machado Libros, 2002. • 18. The mezzo-soprano Célestine Galli-Marié, who played the part of Carmen in the Parisian premiere of the opera, was portrayed wearing a *torera* by the photographer Félix Nadar and by the painter Lucien Doucet in his celebrated picture *Célestine Galli-Marié in the Role of Carmen* cited above (see note 12). • 19. A similar duality may also be detected in the painting by Frederic-Armand Beltran i Massés, *Allegory of Carmen*, c. 1916 (private collection), in which the naked corpse of Carmen, mourned by gypsy women and bullfighters, forms the centre of the composition. • 20. See Gerardo Pérez Calero: *Gonzalo Bilbao, el pintor de las cigarreras*. Madrid, Tabacalera, 1989. I thank Gerardo Pérez Calero for his help in locating the Altadis painting included in the exhibition.

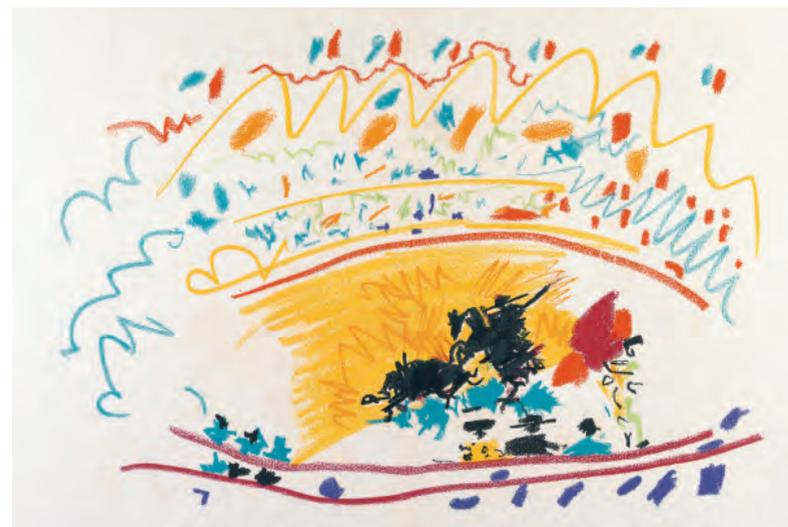
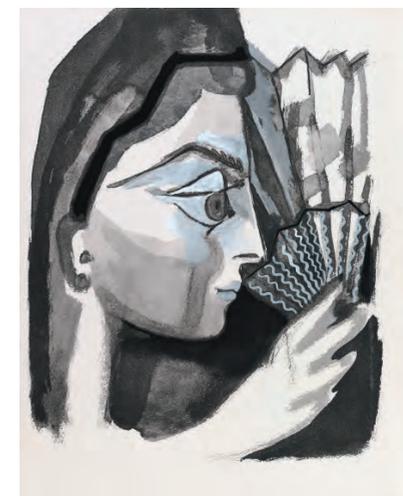
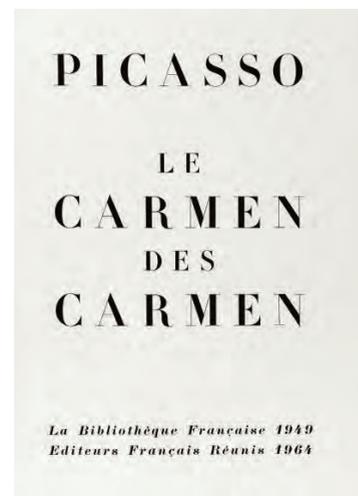
which emphasized the tragic destiny of its main characters. One of Bizet's principal apologists was Friedrich Nietzsche who, distancing himself from the morbid nihilism of Wagner's *Parsifal*, converted *Carmen* into a paradigm of the Dionysian aspect of the tragedy. As he wrote in 1888 apropos of the French composer's opera, which he saw on no less than twenty occasions: "Finally, love—love translated back into nature. Not the love of a 'higher virgin'! No Senta-sentimentality!<sup>21</sup> But love as *fatum*, as fatality, cynical, innocent, cruel—and precisely in this a piece of nature. That love which is war in its means, and at bottom the deadly hatred of the sexes!"<sup>22</sup>

Making a further chronological leap in the exhibition, Picasso will pick up on this Nietzschean interpretation of Bizet's opera in order to raise *Carmen* to the status of a universal myth. Thus, while Meilhac and Halévy had already made the death of Carmen coincide with a *corrida*, Picasso would take a further step in symbolizing the tragic destiny of the main protagonists through the fight to the death between horse—almost always a mare—and bull, typical of the traditional bullfight.

Although the painter from Málaga did not expressly tackle the theme of *Carmen* until late in the day,<sup>23</sup> the echo of Mérimée and Bizet's character is present in much of his output.<sup>24</sup> This is the case, above all, in his tauromachy pictures of the 1930s. Among them, *Bullfight* of 1934, in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, stands out on account of the drama unfolding in the struggle between an anthropomorphic bull and a horse mounted by a picador with a head in the form of a clock, a symbol of death.<sup>25</sup>

After the Second World War, Picasso left Paris and went to live in the south of France. There, at the request of the poet Louis Aragon, he embarked on the illustration of Mérimée's text. To be precise, he made four aquatints representing motifs from the novel, and 38 etchings in which the white page is home to female, male, and bull-like faces. As Aragon himself recounts, Picasso attempted to attune himself to the more folkloric facets of Mérimée's text which had irritated Spanish intellectuals so much and opted for "that white and black Spain, scorched like the stones, that Spain of the gridiron of San Lorenzo in the hills of El Escorial, or of the crossword grid behind

21. Senta is the heroine of Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* (1843). • 22. See Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Case of Wagner*. In Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*. New York, Vintage Books, 1967, pp.158-159. • 23. The sole exception is a small drawing of 5 February 1898 entitled "*Carmen*" and *Other Characters* (Barcelona, Museu Picasso). • 24. Proceeding from such a premise, Anne Baldassari devoted to this issue the exhibition *Picasso Carmen. Sol y sombra*, Paris, Musée national Picasso, 2007, which has formed a basis for our analysis. • 25. Painted in 1934, it is in keeping with a moment of deep crisis for the artist due to the rise of different forms of fascism in Europe, on the one hand, and the failure of his marriage with Olga Khokhlova, on the other.



Pablo Picasso  
*Le Carmen des Carmen* by Prosper  
 Mérimée and Louis Aragon, 1964  
 Illustrated book, 36.5 x 27 cm  
 Colección Fundación Bancaja



Pablo Picasso  
*Picador au repos*, 24-01-1960,  
 illustration for the book  
*Le Carmen des Carmen* by  
 Prosper Mérimée and Louis  
 Aragon, 1964  
 Drypoint, 20 x 14.8 cm  
 Colección Fundación Bancaja

which one did one's courting of an evening without being able to touch one another."<sup>26</sup>

The copy on display corresponds to the second edition of the book, published in 1964. In it the artist included new aquatints, with special attention to the figure of the picador and a double-page in colour devoted to the holding of a bullfight. Likewise, he intercalated small drawings in the margins of the text which underline the importance of certain passages in the novel, in what Aragon took to be the negation of the earlier "Jansenist" edition.<sup>27</sup> In the passage describing the death of the main character, Picasso added a double horse and bull's head in reference to the many-sided, inextinguishable character of Carmen.

26. See Louis Aragon: "Achévé d'imprimer et Justification du tirage". In Prosper Mérimée: *Le Carmen des Carmen*. [Illustrations by Pablo Picasso]. Paris, Éditeurs Français Réunis, 1964, p. 170. My thanks go to Damián Fernández Benlliure for his help in making this text available. • 27. If the negation of traditional Spain had presided over the birth of the book, now juxtaposed to it was a negation of the negation. See *ibid.*, p. 173.



Pablo Picasso  
*Femme à la mantille: Carmen*, 30-04-1949,  
 illustration for the book *Le Carmen des Carmen*  
 by Prosper Mérimée and Louis Aragon, 1964  
 Aquatint, 40.7 x 30.5 cm  
 Colección Fundación Bancaja



Pablo Picasso  
*Torero*, 30-04-1949, illustration for the  
 book *Le Carmen des Carmen* by Prosper  
 Mérimée and Louis Aragon, 1964  
 Aquatint, 40.7 x 30.5 cm  
 Colección Fundación Bancaja



Pablo Picasso  
*Picador et taureau II*, 30-04-1949, illustration  
 for the book *Le Carmen des Carmen* by Prosper  
 Mérimée and Louis Aragon, 1964  
 Aquatint, 40.7 x 30.5 cm  
 Colección Fundación Bancaja



Pablo Picasso  
*Bullfight*, 22-07-1934  
 Oil on canvas, 54 x 73 cm  
 Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.  
 Inv.: 706 (1976.83)

If the linking of woman and animal was a leitmotif present not only in Mérimée's novel but also in much of the painting of the 20th century, Picasso transcended such a simplistic attribution. In his work, though bull and horse interchange their roles of victim and executioner, they symbolize not only the contest between man and woman but also the struggle of life and death, and in the last instance, of painter and painting.

\* \* \*

On the occasion of *Carmen's* first night at the Teatro de la Zarzuela in Madrid in 1887, one of the columnists wrote the following words, words which may be considered the most widespread interpretation of Bizet's opera in the 19th century:

I'm interested in that poor Navarrese (for José is native to Navarre) who suffers, without the strength to resist the spell of a woman who in her heart has naught but impulses of what Stendhal has described as physical love. It's like a little bird fascinated by a snake. People fall headlong over precipices of vice and ignominy without feeling or noticing it. There's the tenderest of girls, poor Micaela, who speaks to José of his mother and who nourishes a fine, delicate love for him. José sees nothing: he's blind; he ignores Micaela, forgets his mother, despises the whole world. There's only one idol for him: Carmen. And a single sentiment: revenge.<sup>28</sup>

Revenge for what? we might ask ourselves today, when we don't feel identified with Don José—or with Micaela—but with Carmen. Why does Carmen have to die? Would it not suffice for Don José to pay for his own sins with the garrotte? The two readings are, to a certain extent, complementary and were possibly already so in the 19th century itself. In the very richness and ambiguity of the character of Carmen, which gives rise to such disparate interpretations, resides much of the fascination that *Carmen* has exerted over the years and will undoubtedly continue to do so in the future.

28. Pedro Bofill: "Veladas teatrales". In *La Época*, Madrid, 3-11-1887, p. 2.



# CARMEN



**DEL 10 AL 31 DE OCTUBRE DE 2014**

ZARZUELA EN CUATRO ACTOS, A PARTIR DE LA OPÉRA-COMIQUE  
DE LUDOVIC HALEVY Y HENRI MEILHAC, BASADA EN LA  
NOVELA CARMEN (1845) DE PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

**MÚSICA DE GEORGES BIZET**

DIRECCIÓN MUSICAL: YI CHEN LIN

DIRECCIÓN DE ESCENA: ANA ZAMORA

NUEVA PRODUCCIÓN DEL TEATRO DE LA ZARZUELA

