

Help Spain – A French Fund-Raising Cinderella That Never Was

by Stan Cronwall

Some have said that the Spanish Civil War was a precursor or dress rehearsal for World War II.

On one side was the embattled Spanish Republican Government supported by funds, men and arms from the Soviet Union and a loose confederation of communists, socialists, anarchists from around the world amalgamated into what became known as the International Brigades. They were supported by a legion of left leaning reporters, authors, newspaper and magazine correspondents and stringers along with the usual gaggle of profiteers, whores, pimps and thrill seekers.

A group of Spanish generals led by Francisco Franco were the rebels or insurgents mounting a coup against the central Government. This group is also called the Nationalists. They were aided and abetted by money, men and arms from the fascist regimes in Germany and Italy. This side had their fair share of the hangers-on as well.

Great Britain, France and the United States remained neutral while at the same time permitting fund raising and people to freely transit in and out of the conflict on both sides.

Most of you have heard of and some may have read Ernest Hemingway's book "For Whom the Bell Tolls" about the Spanish Civil War.

During that bloodbath, there was a much reported bombing raid and destruction of a town named "Guernica" by German and Italian planes. This was immortalized in a mural created by Spanish artist Pablo Picasso. The mural was created as part of the decoration for the Spanish Pavilion in the 1937 Paris Exposition (World's Fair) which opened in July. It was a horizontal mural seven meters long on wall of the Pavilion ground floor. The painting, which uses a palette of gray, black, and white, is regarded by many art critics as one of the most moving and powerful anti-war paintings in history.



Another Spanish artist, Joan Miro and his family were self-imposed exiles in France. Miro was commissioned by the Spanish Republican Government to create another mural – this time vertical 18 feet high by 12 feet wide. For this, Miro created what he titled, "Catalan Peasant in Revolt," also known as "The Reaper."

In Picasso's mural, only the bull and the torchbearer are witnesses to the disaster, all remaining figures are victims.

By contrast Miro's Catalan peasant is enraged, armed and ready to fight. It all began as a stamp design requested by Christian Zervos, collector and founder of "Cahiers d'Art." It was conceived as a design for a French postage stamp in an effort to raise funds for the Spanish Government at war with Franco's fascists. The proposed stamp was entitled "Aidez l'Espagne" (Help Spain).



The proposed stamp design

It was first painted in gouache, then executed as a stencil, but was never produced as a stamp. The stencil served instead as the basis for a limited-edition poster. This was sold at the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris Exposition.

Miró's "Catalan Peasant in Revolt" on the proposed stamp and poster depicts a red-checked Catalan workman wearing a traditional red Catalan barretina cap with his massively enlarged right arm (as thick as his body) raised in Republican (Spanish Government) salute with his clenched fist larger than his head. His face is drawn in



Limited edition poster

profile, and his right eye emphasized with a black circle looks out from the painting wide open and challenging to confront the viewer.

The following text from Miró was added for the poster, "In the present struggle I see the spent forces of fascism on one side and, on the other, those of the people, whose immense creative resources will give Spain a drive that will astonish the world."

There are only B/W photos of the mural which was two stories tall and painted opposite the stairway between the second and third floors of the Pavilion.



Image of Miró on a ladder working on the mural (<http://www.tate.org.uk>)

The mural differs from the "stamp" and poster design in several ways. The arms are outstretched and the man's almost beaked face screaming and contorted in a cry of despair on a narrow starved neck. (On the "stamp"/ poster, the open mouth is an emblem of energy and strength – a rooster crowing or a poet singing.)

On the mural, the left arm is a thin flare, while the right

wields a vicious sickle.



B/W Image of the mural (<http://www.tate.org.uk>)

The sickle is not a symbol of Communism although the Soviet Union was a major supporter and supplier of men and material to the Spanish Government, but rather a peasant's traditional agricultural implement and improvised weapon.

The exhibition was closed in November 1937, and the mural dismantled in early 1938. Miro donated the mural to the Spanish Government and the six panels were to be packed and shipped to the Ministry of Fine Arts in Valencia. The mural was subsequently lost or destroyed as the conflict continued.

For any of those wanting to get into the actual stamps from the Spanish Civil War, the Scott catalogs have handled these in an unusual manner.

The stamps issued by both sides are listed in the front-of-the-book section.

The Spanish Republican (Loyalist) Government stamps are listed first under the heading of "General Issues of the Republic" and they are numbered Scott 478 to Scott 614.

Issues by the Franco insurgents which became the Spanish Nationalist Government are listed under the heading Spanish State and begin at Scott 615. In addition to the general Nationalist stamps, Scott also lists some local Nationalist overprints at the back-of-the-book following the Carlist issues.

Stan Cronwall is a member and his collecting interests include Germany: Third Reich 1933-45 and the areas it occupied (stamps covers & cards). He also collects U.S. World War II Patriotic Covers and Cards; Civil War Patriotic Covers (both U.S. and CSA); U.S Naval Covers; DDR stamps; and, Post WW II Soviet Zone Hitler Head Obliteration stamps, covers & cards.

Editor's comment: After reading Stan's article above, I decided to take a look at some Spanish stamps in my worldwide album – something I have not done in over a decade. To my surprise I saw some interesting stamps and Cinderella local issues from the period of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Below are some samples:



Surtax stamp for the defenders of Madrid, issued April 15, 1938. Scott B106. On the left is the stamp surcharged.



Local overprinted issue – not listed in Scott.

Block of 4 imperf-
orate is probably a
Cinderella S/S. It is
over-printed VIVA
FRANCO. Ayamonte
is a small town at the
extreme south-
western corner of
Spain, on the Atlantic
coast.

