

# Ray Smith's "Unguernica" Pays Homage to Picasso's Startling Anti-War Painting



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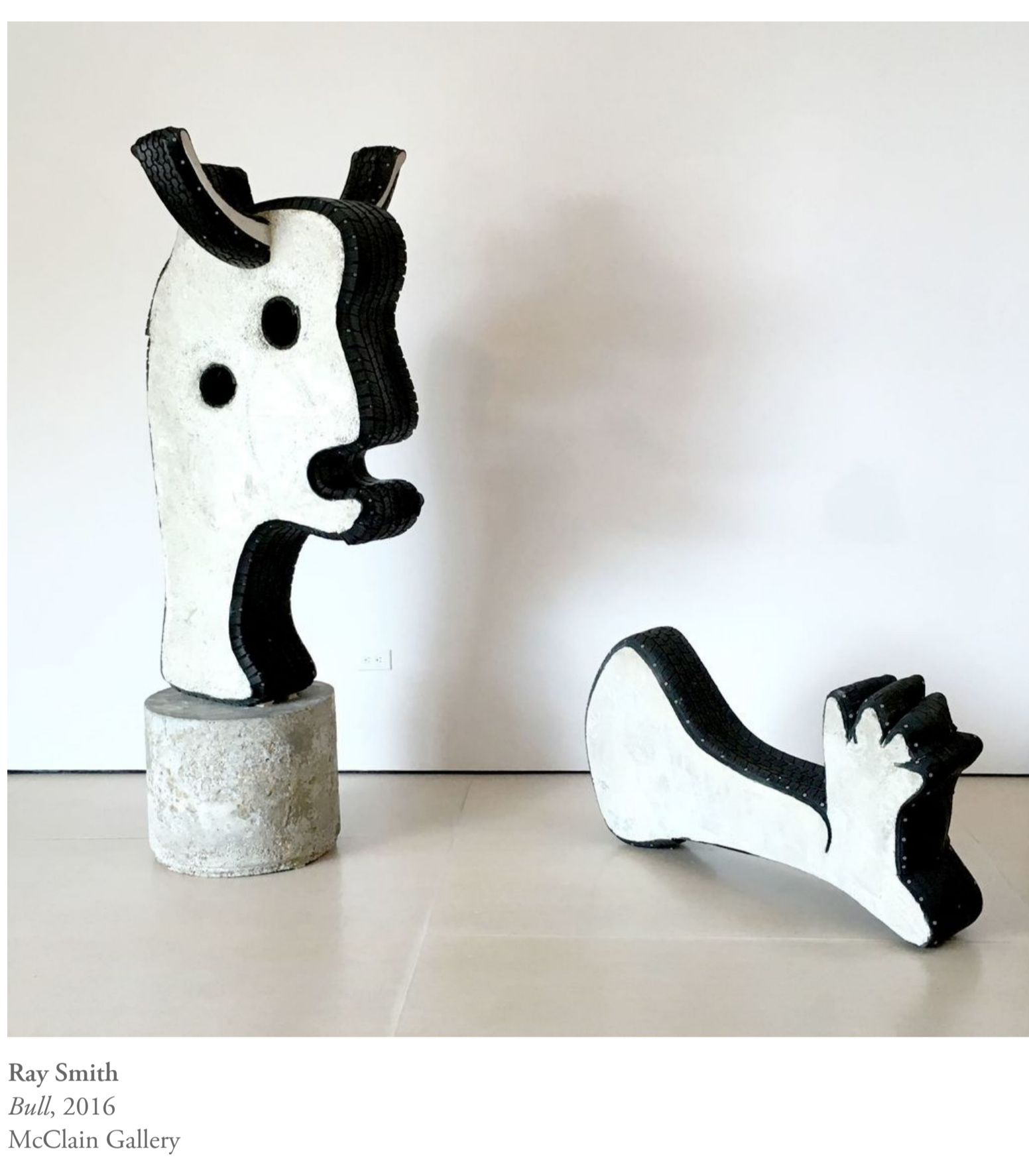
Ray Smith  
*Unguernica III-8, 2010*  
McClain Gallery

For his first solo show at [McClain Gallery](#) in Houston, [Ray Smith](#) displayed a series of expressive paintings and sculptures that reflect his abiding interest in [Picasso](#). The artistic appropriation merged with Smith's own unique vision, one shaped in part by concern over the United States' war in Iraq under President George W. Bush.



Ray Smith  
*Unguernica VI, 2010*  
McClain Gallery

Smith's show, "Unguernica Paintings & Sculptures," was sparked by a cover-up—literally. The artist was disturbed to learn that the Bush administration had ordered a tapestry reproduction of Picasso's famous anti-war painting *Guernica* (1937) to be covered with curtains when former Secretary of State Colin Powell addressed the U.N. and the world about the United States' invasion of Iraq. Evidently, the Bush administration found it unfitting for the secretary to justify war in front of imagery that so powerfully opposed it.

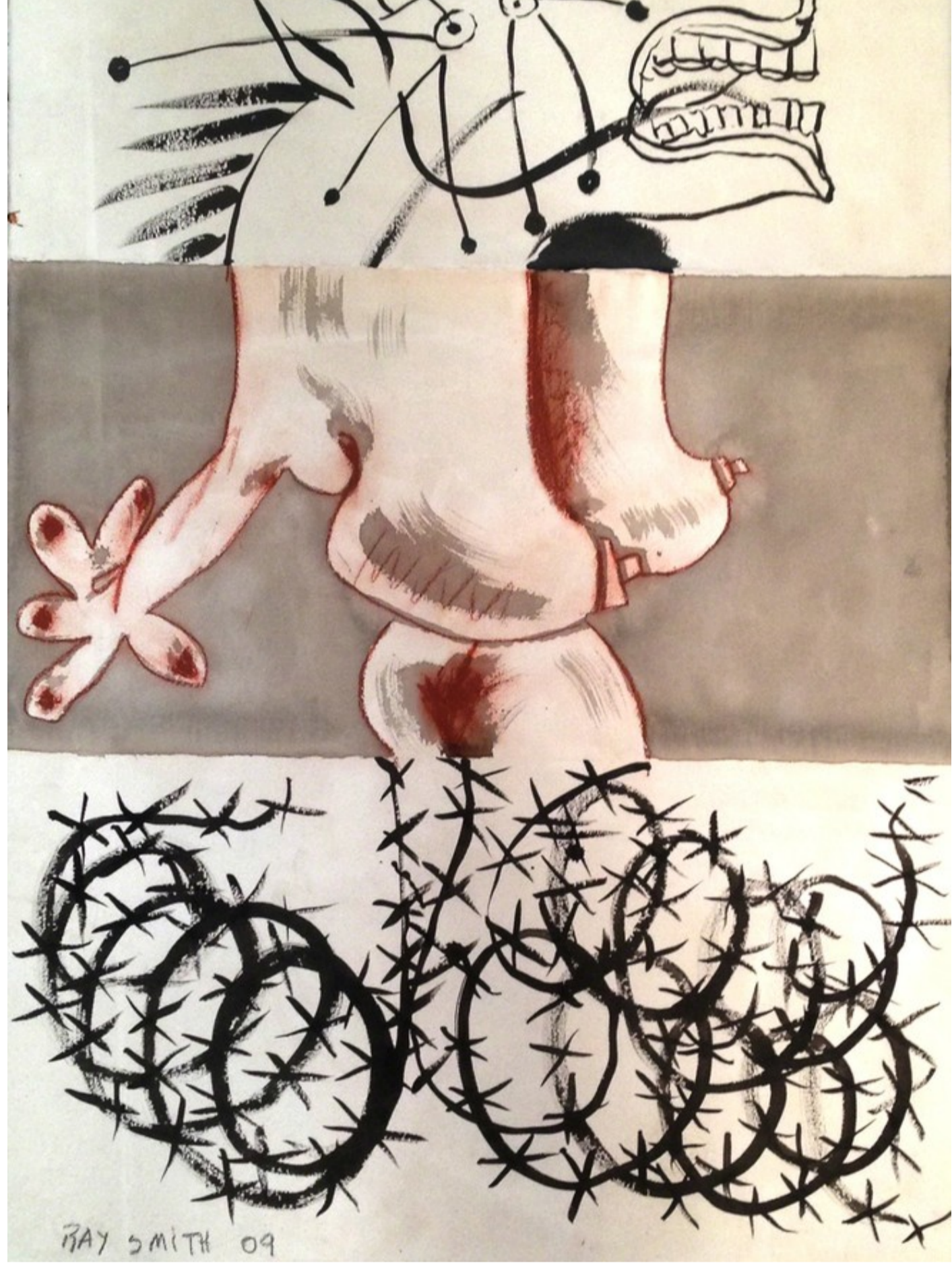


Ray Smith  
*Bull, 2016*  
McClain Gallery



Ray Smith  
*The Weeping Woman, 2016*  
McClain Gallery

Searing, fragmented bodies and faces from Picasso's *Guernica* are re-created in Smith's "Unguernica" series, his response to the government's unsettling and ironic act. Picasso's image of a woman keening over the body of her dead child reappears in Smith's sculpture, *The Weeping Woman* (2016). Made of poured concrete edged in black rubber from reclaimed tires, the woman's thrown-back head and arching torso are balanced on a low, cylindrical pedestal. Her left hand rests nearby, detached from her body, its fingers extended in a further expression of agony. Absent from Smith's sculptural rendering is her right hand, which, in Picasso's painting, cradles her child's lifeless body.



Ray Smith  
*Unguernica II #25, 2009*  
McClain Gallery



Ray Smith  
*Unguernica II #3, 2009*  
McClain Gallery

Faces distorted by anguish also appear atop fragmented bodies composed of unmatched parts. These mismatched stacks of torsos and limbs recall the "exquisite corpse" parlor game embraced by the [Surrealists](#) and, more darkly, the dismemberment and bodily destruction wrought by war.

—[Karen Kedmey](#)

*"Ray Smith: Unguernica Paintings & Sculptures" was on view at McClain Gallery, Houston, Jan. 23–Mar. 5, 2016.*

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