

# Stone Riley

## Statement Re A Certain Painting

December 2012  
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**Pricing Note:** I am offering "Drone Strike In North Waziristan" for sale at a price of One Million Three Thousand One Dollars And Zero Cents (US\$ 1,003,001.00). According to published data, this is \$1 more than the United States pays for each Predator drone aircraft. The painting is worth \$1 more because it is guaranteed to never murder any innocent bystanders.



### Title Note:

North Waziristan is a province of Pakistan where we are killing hundreds of innocent bystanders because a few people there are at war with us. We are using remote controlled **robot bomber planes** called Predator drones to do this. These aircraft glide ~~silently invisibly~~ around the sky of North Waziristan with their robot sensors scanning everything down on the ground, their pilots far away in some safe place, leaning back relaxed in comfy chairs, until the robot vision screens they watch reveal some hint of

possibly warlike movement far below and far away in North Waziristan. So then they lean forward thru the glass, focus their hybrid human robot sensors toward the movement, carefully examine, and carefully judge if human death will now ensue. If so, our pilot takes control of one of the aircraft's rocket bombs, aims it precisely carefully, and lets it fly. The results in North Waziristan, of course, are rage and utmost constant terror.

**Personal Note:** My son and his wife just had a baby, a beautiful new astonishing human child. Last month two women went out to a water well at night and were rendered into bloody pieces. I cannot pretend that these two things are different sorts of things, pretend that they are not the same type and quality of fact, for they are human facts. I cannot say, Oh one is mine and one not mine, for my one human heart strains to encompass both and strains to examine them with the fear and hope and joy and shame and trembling pity that are all alike the province of one heart.

### Thematic Suitability Note:

This painting does not seem to fit the show for which it was made. For this show artists were asked to react, in some meaningful way, to a set of 20th century African art and craft objects. Well, you might easily see forms from those objects in this picture – there are masks in both places, coiling shapes, etc. – but that seems tenuous at best.

Somewhat better: you might feel some sense of ritual in this picture's rhythmic structure and you might have felt your sense of ritual enlivened by the

African pieces too, by their foreignness if nothing else, or by the fact some seem to be costumery for ritualized performance. But this is also pretty vague.

Of course, if you are aware of the politics of 20th century Africa – imperialism in its ever-evolving shapes and the struggle against it – then you might guess the close connection with North Waziristan in the artist's thinking. You might guess I see the Drone

War today as simply one more phase of the worldwide struggle for democracy, and your guess would be correct.

But that political connection in the artist's mind would not be visible. It would not satisfy your wish to see a good painting, nor to see what mite of wisdom Surreal Cubism might yield on this worldwide struggle, or on the whole conversation of human politics.

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### Thematic Suitability Note:

(...Continued from prior page)

And so finally, if I'm to make this little essay satisfactory, I'd better finally talk about painting. I'd better wrestle with an artistic mystery that happened during the work and try to drag at least some hint of wisdom out of it to the open:

A) The reaching hand is perhaps the subtlest class of gestures in our human repertoire, for similar gestures of the reaching hand can range in meaning from mystical to courteous to obscene.

B) One of this show's African objects is a performer's mask in which three wooden model arms obscure the mask wearer's face, all three arms reaching

out from the wearer's face to make a mystifyingly ambiguous gesture of the reaching hand. It might mean "have no fear" or "you are forbidden here" or something else.

C) My painted canvas features three reaching arms posed like in a formal rhythmic mime or miming dance.

D) I did not even notice the African mask consciously while painting, only afterward when the ArtsWorcester director mentioned it to me.

E) Every time my paint brush touched the gesturing hand of the dying victim, she became more a brave woman of her people and less and less an object to be pitied.

### Stylistic Note:

"Drone Strike In North Waziristan" owes a lot to "Guernica" of course. The drawing of the masks here is directly quoted from Picasso's canvas, the architecture here is rearranged from that canvas, and of course the two both treat the theme of aerial bombardment (his revealing a bombed city street and mine a bombed person). And of course they are both fine art political propaganda.

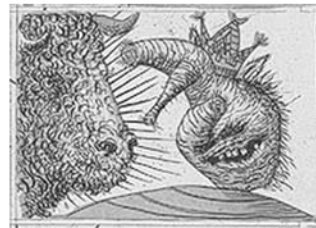
But two lesser known Picasso works of the same Surreal Cubist style were also helpful in my effort.

His "Night Fishing At Antibes" appears in my painting's velvet coloring and in its erotic energy that surprised me so.

Then there is Picasso's "Dream And Lie Of Franco". In that propaganda comic book Generalissimo Francisco Franco – the brutal fascist winner of the Spanish Civil War – is depicted as a grinning rectum. I used this profoundly bland insouciance, the vicious cruelty of the mundane, as a starting point for my portrait of a U.S. soldier's smile.

It is true that I was myself a U.S. soldier. And I am certainly aware that our soldiers who are piloting these bomber robots suffer from traumatic stress. But nonetheless, they are bloody fucking bastards.

But then, how is heroism treated in my picture? Heroism here is glorified in



Picture #15 of Picasso's "Dream And Lie Of Franco"



Stone Riley's "Drone Strike In North Waziristan"



Picasso's "Night Fishing At Antibes"



Picasso's "Guernica" (with circles indicating the faces quoted by Riley)



Frida Kahlo's "Broken Column"

ritual, with quotes from other sources. Indeed, all through the elaboration of the sundered body parts, I seemed to be paraphrasing Frida Kahlo in syllables of devotion spoken in simplicity.

Ritual is the repetition of a pattern. When woven with harmonic rhythms it can lead us to expansion of the mind and even to the glory of the soul come into consciousness. When done in honor of the dead, this makes a funeral proper.

And so, finally, what style is this painting? It is a eulogy.



Mexican popular art: the Virgin of Guadalupe in glory on printed fabric

(End of statement)