

**Guernica / Gernika Historical Memory Platform
Visit by invitation of Lobak 12 – 15 April 2019 of
Manuel Moreno and Simon Martinez on behalf of the BCA'37UK.**

Report by Barbara Coombs



The eighty second anniversary of the bombing of Guernica / Gernika 26 April, 1937.

The Association for the Basque Children of the UK were delighted to be invited to join the commemorative events this year of the bombing of the town of Guernica / Gernika by the Condor Legion acting in support of the Francoist insurgents. The BCA's hosts were Lobak, one of the groups in the town in the Basque Country who make up the Historical Memory Platform. Lobak in the Basque Language euskerra means grandchild. And these grandchildren pictured above are the grandchildren of the last people who remember the tragic events of 26 April 1937. Manuel Moreno and Simon Martinez are pictured back row 4th and 5th from the left. The grandparents of Lobak had not been able to talk about the events during the Franco Dictatorship or the years since he died in 1975. Now eighty plus years after the events a new spirit of discovery of the past is motivating the young people who make up Lobak.

The first part of the BCA's involvement was the exhibition boards in English, Euskerra, and Spanish telling the story of the evacuation from Bilbao on the 21 May 1937 of the Basque Children, and the solidarity shown to them by the people of Britain. One of the members of Lobak was able to recognise his grandmother in a photo on the Hull Colony Board! The exhibition also shared space with the young Basque artist Maite Pinto who is in the picture back row 7th from left. Her art is in the form of engravings taken from original black and white photos of the Children. The BCA has printed greetings cards which will be available for sale at the Association's events and through our online shop. We are very grateful to Maite for giving us permission to use her art in this

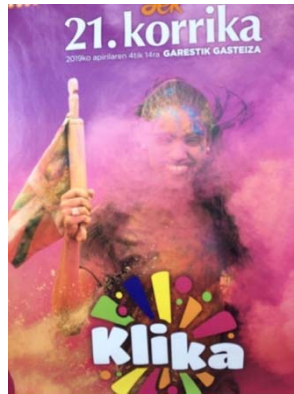


way. An image from one of her engravings appears above. The exhibition continues at the Astra Arts Centre until 30 April.

21.Korrika – the run to promote the Basque Language/ Euskerra.

The Korrika is a very special event for the people of the Basque Country. It is run in a continuous relay both day and night through the villages, towns and cities of Euskadi over a period of two weeks. The people taking part are of every age, gender, runners and non runners. A very inclusive event that has encouraged disabled participants over many years. The lead runner carries a baton decorated in the colours of the flag of Euskadi, the Ekurrina. The baton contains a special message in Euskerra which is read out at the end of this celebration of their language.

This year the Korrika has celebrated the settling in the Basque Country of refugees who are learning the Basque Language / Euskerra. Lobak have been supporting today's refugees from Cameroon and Guinea. The BCA were invited to name a runner for one of the kilometre distances and Simon Martinez ran holding the baton with a refugee from Cameroon. Members of Lobak carried placards from Picasso's Guernica and wore 'refugees welcome here' bandanas.



'los niños de Guernica' Steve Bowles award winning film and talks by Simon Martinez, Manuel Moreno and Maite Pinto, 14 April. At the Astra Art Centre.

The third event of the visit was the showing in the Spanish language version of Steve Bowles' film which was very well received. The audience of forty people watched the film and then listened to talks by Simon Martinez, Manuel Moreno and Maite Pinto followed by questions and discussion.

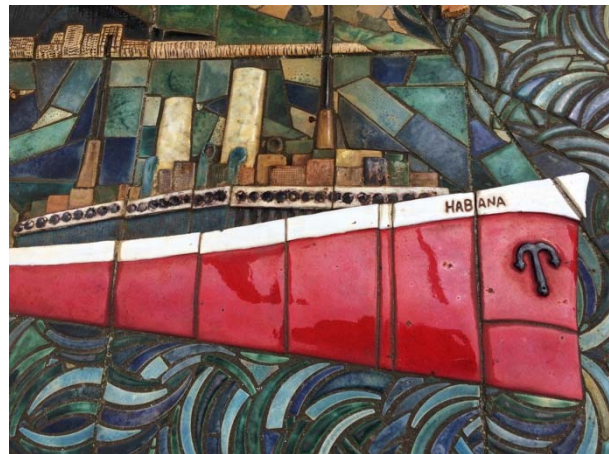
The Astra Arts Centre is a factory building previously used to manufacture small arms and other armaments including poison gas bombs for use in the Spanish Colony of Morocco. The windows are



large for the precision manufacturing the engineers were undertaking. The importance of Historical Memory allowing the light of truth to be shone on the past was referred to by Manuel and Simon. Simon recounted visiting the battle site at Lemoa where the defensive ring of iron protecting Bilbao had been breached by the insurgent army on the 15 June. No permanent memorial fitting to the casualties of both sides exists on the hillsides of the Peña de Lemoa. The day of his visit was typical of any Spring day in Euskadi with low cloud and heavy rain showers. Simon compared the weather to his emotions that day, 'the clouds wept for the dead and injured'. Simon's grandfather Tomás Martínez Gomez was killed in action. He was a member of the Batallon Rosa Luxemburgo of the Basque Army.

Maite Pinto talked about her engravings of the Basque Children and how the iconic black and white photos took on universal characteristics of child refugees in this century. This is a parallel to the artist Clare Hignett who has used the story of the Basque Children to comment on the tragedy of the deaths by drowning in the Mediterranean of refugees and migrants.

A personal visit to Santurce – the point of departure of the *SS Habana* 21 May 1937



In the small town of Santurce on the banks of the estuary on which Bilbao sits is a memorial to the Basque Children. The ceramic tiles tell in pictures the history of their evacuation from the bombing of Guernica / Gernika to the departure of the *SS Habana*. Built around a dock crane on a stone wharf in what is now a fishing and pleasure boat harbour the circular nature of the memorial speaks of the uniqueness of the story of the Basque Children. Chillingly it reminds visitors that history continues to repeat itself with children being casualties in any war.