

The Dark Side.

Graphic work by Francisco de Goya

Caprices, disasters, bullfighting and follies

Francisco de Goya engraved the plates for *Caprichos* (*Caprices*), *Desastres* (*Disasters*), *Tauromaquia* (*Bullfighting*) and *Disparates* (*Follies*) over a span of twenty-two years, at the peak of his artistic career. He began the first series during the reign of Charles IV and continued the subsequent ones amidst the French invasion and the restoration of Ferdinand VII's absolutist monarchy. Serving as court painter to four kings, he witnessed the profound historical, political, and ideological fluctuations that transformed nineteenth-century Spain until the onslaught of despotism forced him into exile in Bordeaux, France. Against this backdrop of change and crisis, Goya boldly moved towards a modern conception of art, characterised by subjectivity and creative freedom. His print series exemplified this new sensibility, showcasing both originality and experimentation in the use of graphic techniques.

The prints vividly capture irrationality, violence, and cruelty, and display a catalogue of weaknesses and vices, conflicts and woes. The darkness and complexity of their meaning have led to a constant revision of their interpretation. On the one hand, his affiliation with Enlightenment ideas has been noted, and his use of satire and irony is understood as a means to moral ends, illuminating the path toward reason, freedom, tolerance, equality, and justice. On the other hand, a pessimistic perspective on human condition has also been recognized: Through grotesque, Goya denounces the decaying system of values and examines the darkness in human behaviour without hinting at any possibility of redemption. What remains certain is that Goya found in caprice, invention, and dreams ways to express his ideas, and in each plate, a space to question human nature—a practice that official commitments and commissions did not allow. He stripped scenes of contingency and reduced themes to universal categories, which remain relevant and timely to this day.

[Biography]

Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (Fuendetodos, España, 1746 - Bordeaux, France, 1828).

Goya was José Luzán's pupil in Zaragoza, but his marriage to Josefa Bayeu settled him in Madrid after traveling to Italy for study purposes. In 1774, his brother-in-law Francisco and Anton Raphael Mengs – both court painters – recommended his admission to the Royal Tapestry Factory of Santa Bárbara, where he created cardboards depicting popular themes that are currently preserved at Prado Museum. The beginning of his career at the court coincided with the spread of the Enlightenment ideas and the favourable social and political changes carried out by Carlos III. Goya became acquainted with the nobility, the enlightened circles and the bourgeoisie, and his reputation as a portrait painter multiplied commissions, which turned him into a chronicler of eighteenth-century Madrid society.

In 1788, Charles IV of Spain was crowned and he distinguished Goya as a court painter. From the early 1790s and amidst a growing political crisis, he received significant commissions, was appointed Director of Painting at the Royal Academy, and became acquainted with the Duchess of Alba and Ceán Bermúdez, an unconditional friend. In this prolific period—in which he also fell ill with a disease that would make him deaf, probably lead poisoning—he painted, among others, “The Clothed Maja” and “The Naked Maja” as requested by Manuel Godoy, the King's favourite. He also painted the frescos at “Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida” as well as the portraits of the king and his wife, María Luisa de Parma. In 1799 he published “Caprices” and, in 1801, he finished “The Family of Charles IV”.

Goya witnessed the conflicts that took place after the French occupation, which led to the War of Independence (1808 - 1814). Around 1810 he began to etch *Desastres de la Guerra* (*Disasters of War*). After his return in 1814, Ferdinand VII targeted Goya because of a decoration that he received from Joseph Bonaparte, but the artist responded with paintings honouring the uprising of Madrilenians

against the French: the events that took place on the 2nd and 3rd of May 1808, the war against the Mamluks, and the shootings in Principe Pío. The tyranny of the absolutist king brought about the restoration of the Inquisition. The king, despite the painter's historical relationship with the court, prosecuted him on the grounds of obscenity for the *majas* painted twenty years before. In 1816 he published *Tauromaquia* (Bullfighting) with little success and in 1819 he confined himself at Quinta del Sordo, where he painted *Disparates* (Follies) and the black paintings that gave rise to complex interpretations. The paintings were called like that because of the darkness of the scenes and the obscure nature of their themes. His illness, the political tension and the persecution of liberals forced him to emigrate to Bordeaux, France, where he died in 1828.

I. Caprices

Goya published *Caprices* in 1799. He used satire and invention as resources to translate the “myriad extravagances and blunders that are common in any civil society” and to point out the deceit, ignorance, vices and abuse of power. They are compositions in which imagination and the originality of the artist stand out, quite detached from the norms and conditions to which he was subjected by official commissions. The engraved plates -being the only possibility between the XV and XIX century for the creation of serialised images destined for communication- allowed him to innovate the way to pronounce his own ideas and begin the path to modernity. The *Caprices* were up for sale for only two months, and had to be taken down to avoid the Inquisition. In 1803, Goya delivered the works to the crown, in exchange for a scholarship for his son, Javier.

71. When day breaks, we will be off

The printing titled “When day breaks, we will be off”, has been interpreted from an illustrated perspective as a critique of senselessness: daylight is identified with knowledge and truth. Goya points out the ignorance of society personified in the witches, grotesque characters that embody irrationality and superstition. When illuminated, darkness disappears in a concrete, symbolic and intellectual sense, as ignorance dodges the lights of reason. This printing has also been interpreted with a pessimist view, one that suggests the display and triumph of ignorance.

With great technical expertise, Goya emphasizes the issue: he creates shades of gray using aquatint, thus accomplishing a pictorial effect and achieving profound contrasts between darkness and the beam of light that seems to illuminate, from the bottom of the printing, the deformed, caricature-like, characters.

Displayed book covers of *Caprices* series

The covers exhibited correspond to the sixth edition of the series *Caprices* printed by Francisco de Goya and published in Madrid by “Calcografía Nacional” between 1890 and 1900. The book belonged to Juan B. Castagnino and was donated to the museum by his family in 1942. The printings were extracted and framed in 2017.

II. Disasters

The artist's personal feelings towards the War of Independence (1808 - 1814) are portrayed in *Desastres de Guerra* (Disasters of War) and focus on the absurdity of violence. Goya etched the coppers between 1810 and 1820 but the plates never went on sale during his life, and were only shared among his closest circle until they were published by Real Academia de San Fernando in 1863. These images are not concerned with propaganda, patriotism or commemoration. Devoid of ideology, Goya openly condemns tragedy in all its forms, and crudely depicts the torment suffered by both sides, portraying the sufferings of war as universal issues: death, helplessness, abuse, selfishness and cowardice. The 80 series of plates are divided into three chapters: one focused on the brutality of war, another on the scenes about the famine in Madrid - occurred in 1812- and lastly the emphatic caprices, which have been interpreted as allegories of the Absolutist Repression by Fernando VII.

44. I Saw It

In the plate *I Saw It*, Goya posits himself as a spectator of the events. In the series he dedicated to his friend Ceán Bermúdez, the title is written by hand and was then etched in the copper plate by Real Academia. The title of the next work, *And This, too* (no 45)-emphasizes his previous statement.

The scene describes the torment suffered by the people, who are running away as the threatening French troops advance. In the foreground, Goya makes a contrast between the anonymous woman's heroism protecting the helpless ones (her children?) and the cowardice and greed of the two male characters, one of whom is a churchman who is dragging the other on his getaway. The latter, along with the boy, have their eyes fixed with horror at something that cannot be represented, something out of the scene. The lights, the contrasts, the intensity and the rigorous lines etched in aquatint highlight the tragedy of the paradox.

III. Bullfighting

The series Bullfighting was conceived between 1814 and 1816 perhaps as a possible source of income for the artist after the War of Spanish Independence. It was announced in the newspaper *Diario de Madrid* at the same time as bullfights were restored when Ferdinand VII regained the throne, as they were considered an expression of Hispanic character. It has been said that bullfighting was a juvenile interest of Goya's. However, contemporary interpretations point to an enlightened and critical perspective in his treatment of the matter. Goya departs from the usual picturesqueness and delves into the drama, the tension and the brutality of the confrontation between two beings whose aim is death. The series was unsuccessful. The plates remained with the artist and were later inherited by his son Javier and his grandson Mariano, who had them circulated throughout France. The series includes three chapters: the history of bullfighting in Spain since ancient times, 18th century bullfighting leading figures and scenes of tragic outcomes.

21. Misfortunes in the front rows of the bull ring in Madrid, and death of the Mayor of Torrejón

With a bold composition and an impossible point of view, Goya narrates a real event that occurred in 1801, in which a bull leapt into the stands and charged at many people, among them, the mayor of the town *Torrejón de Ardoz*, who is represented skewered in the horns of the animal. The artist barely outlines the context and focuses on conveying the fleeing towards the site of confusion and hoarding, the chaos of the escape, the terror and the tragedy. The motionless bull, in the midst of anarchy, boasts the triumph of death. At the scene and on the other side of the barrier, the artist portrays himself observing the chaos as a witness to the violence that has turned into a spectacle.

Bullfighting Covers exhibited in the showcase

The folder exhibited corresponds to the 199th copy of the series Bullfighting engraved by Francisco de Goya, published by *Círculo de Bellas Artes* of Madrid and printed at *Calcografía Nacional* in 1921. It was donated to the museum by *Castagnino Foundation* in 2008 and framed in 2017.

IV. Follies

In *Los disparates* (*Follies*) or *Proverbios* (*Proverbs*), Goya takes his creative liberty to an extreme. Detached from the canon, he approaches the themes with an extremely personal vision that places this series -like the *Black Paintings*- in the territory of modernity. The distortion of shapes, the incorrectness of the themes, the drama, the imagination and the hermeticism of their meaning create fascina-

ting atmospheres that immerse the spectator in a disturbing and ambiguous space. Thanks to his mastery of aquatint, he was able to create pictorial effects, achieve greater spontaneity and highlight the expression of the sinister and the dark.

Painted between 1815 and 1824, it is the last series engraved by Goya before leaving for Bordeaux. It was never published during the artist's lifetime and the coppers were kept by his heirs in Madrid until they were bought by Real Calcografía, which produced the first edition in 1864 under the title Proverbs, assuming a thematic relationship between the prints and popular sayings. What universalized this denomination was the discovery of printing tests with epigraphs considered to be autographs in which Goya used the word "disparate" (Folly).

5. Disparate volante (Flying folly)

Goya resorts to the mythological theme of abduction, with which Rubens is represented in the royal collections and which Goya must have seen during his years as a chamber painter. The series of paintings depicting the passions of the gods as narrated in classical sources had been commissioned to the Flemish painter by Philip IV.

In this case, the image expresses the domination and violence of a man over a woman who is fighting to free herself. The scene takes place in mid-flight -a frequent image in his repertoire-, and represents a couple riding a hippogriff heading towards the depth of the empty and dark composition. Using aquatint allows him to create an almost black background in which the foreshortening of the figures is cut out. Goya suggests the outburst of passion, the beastly impulse of instinct that leads to confusion and inanity, within a context of oppression and persecution carried out by the politics of Ferdinand VII.

Book Proverbs displayed in showcase

Proverbs series of prints bound and etched by Francisco de Goya and published by Real Academia de Nobles Artes de San Fernando, in Madrid, 1864. Donated by Comisión Municipal de Cultura to the museum's library on unknown date.

[Final Text. Series information]

On display

Caprices

Original collection of 80 plates with sequential numbering created and etched by Francisco de Goya, published by Calcografía Nacional in Madrid, 1890-1900. Sixth edition. Donated by Castagnino family in 1942.

Disasters of War

Collection of 80 plates created and etched in aquatint by Francisco de Goya. Published by Real Academia de Nobles Artes de San Fernando in Madrid, 1863. First edition. Donated by Castagnino family in 1942.

Bullfighting

Collection of 37 plates etched by Francisco de Goya y Lucientes. Published by Círculo de Bellas Artes of Madrid and stamped in Calcografía Nacional in Madrid, 1921. Fifth edition, issue No. 199. Donated by Fundación Castagnino in 2008.

Proverbs

Collection of 18 plates created and etched in aquatint by Francisco de Goya. Published by Real Academia de Nobles Artes de San Fernando in Madrid, 1864. First edition. Donated by Castagnino family in 1942.

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