

EXHIBITS

The 'Fearsome Mirror' of Goya's Art

In September 1995, only six years after it mounted a major loan exhibition entitled "Goya and the Spirit of the Enlightenment," New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art will once again devote a show to Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828), the last of the European "Old Masters."

Differently from the show in 1989, this one is devoted only to the Met's own Goyas. On display, besides a handful of paintings, will be all of the suites of etchings and lithographs, however—the *Caprichos*, *Disparates*, *Disasters of War*, and the *Tauromachia*—plus fifty-four original drawings, the largest collection of Goya's masterful pen sketches anywhere outside the Prado Museum in Madrid. Although Goya's etchings were not widely circulated in his lifetime—suppressed, or withheld by him, for political reasons—the medium, which he took to its highest expressive power,

is intrinsically aimed at a mass audience, since each print produced from the artist's copper plate is both an original artwork and a replica which can be in many places at the same time, at relatively low cost.

Thus, although the show will not expose viewers to the total painted *oeuvre* that Goya produced in a career of some sixty-five years, it will offer a unique occasion to reflect on the mind of the Spanish master, who acted in the momentous era that encompassed the founding of the American republic, with all its hopes for a better world, the French Terror, Napoleon's conquest of Europe, and the Congress of Vienna. With France looming so large in the history of the European continent, Goya, who was very close to the pro-French circles in Spain, then ruled by the French-speaking Bourbon dynasty (which he served as First Painter to the

King), and who died in self-chosen exile in France in 1828, was bound to reflect France's turmoil in his art. Schiller described the French Revolution with the trenchant phrase, "A great moment found a little people."

Duped by the Enlightenment?

Was Goya duped by the "spirit of the Enlightenment"—the British-spawned Freemasonic movement that promised to lift the veil of oppressive Church obscurantism, but instead overthrew Christianity in favor of a "religion of Reason" which, by rejecting the immortal soul, was more irrational than what it proposed to displace? The evidence that Goya favored British and French liberalism is undeniable in his work and circle of chosen friends, which nurtured his sharp anti-clericalism. But there is another side to Goya, which cannot be explained without recourse to his Christian roots. Goya passionately believed that man is created *in the image of God*. When he showed the bestiality to which men and women fall, he invoked the contrast between these depths and the heights of creativity, love, and innocent joy to which the divine potential of human nature beckons.

Thus Goya, like his younger contemporary Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), is an artist of freedom, and he does not shrink from presenting to humanity the horror that results when that freedom is exercised by choosing sin. In his quest for justice, Goya drew, painted, and etched the creatures of the abyss, as the poet Dante had done



No se puede mirar

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Rogers Fund and Jacob H. Schiff Bequest, 1922

"No se puede mirar" ("One Can't Look"), plate 26, *The Disasters of War*, begun 1808?

in his portrayal of the Inferno. And, as in Dante, these are not only hideous, but often, funny beyond description.

Although Goya influenced every important artist who came after him, from Courbet to Manet, to Daumier, to Picasso (to name only a few famous ones), none of those who followed saw human beings as souls to be redeemed. And also, of course, none of them could match his technique as a painter, for Goya paints scenes of horror with exquisite delicacy and sensuousness. The beauty reaches into our hearts and changes us even as the subject matter stirs moral outrage.

The Met's Portraits

The Met's collection of Goya paintings has a checkered history. Many pictures which entered the collection as Goya, were soon revealed to be spurious. Now even the popular "Majas on the Balcony" has been rejected by scholars (it will be exhibited side by side with the painting believed to be Goya's original). This leaves a rather narrow gamut of the painted *oeuvre*—omitting history, genre scenes, and religious works—and focussing on portraits. But the Met's Goya portraits are treasures. One of the first is the famous "Little Boy in Red" of c.1788, actually "Don Manuel Osorio de Zuñiga," the four-year-old son of the Count of Altamira (the Met will also exhibit the Lehman Collection's "Countess of Altamira and her Daughter").

Goya shows Manuel as gentle and innocent, while the cats in the background are clearly waiting for their chance to pounce on the magpie. (The scene has religious overtones: Cats symbolized lust and witchcraft in Eighteenth-century Spain; birds in Christian art have always been a metaphor for the soul.) This depiction inverts the allusions which the British Eighteenth-century satirical artist Hogarth made to children's cruelty to animals. In fact, Goya's portraits of children are invariably tender; the problem for Goya was not an evil innate in man, but the corruption of innocence through ignorance and bestiality.

From 1792 comes another of Goya's greatest portraits: "Sebastián Martínez," a

wealthy merchant and art collector of Cadiz, his intelligent personality presented in a boldly informal pose and simple, radiant colors. This was a critical period of Goya's life. While in Cadiz, he was stricken by a devastating illness. He could not travel home, and he remained there, recovering slowly in Martínez's house. The illness left Goya totally deaf, and for the rest of his life he suffered from tinnitus, which left him not only isolated by his deafness, but tormented by constant noise and ringing in his ears. The personal suffering was matched by the tragedy of the failure of the French Revolution, and its inversion into what Goya later called "the Sleep of Reason," because 1792 marked the outbreak of the Reign of Terror in Paris.

Finally, from Goya's later period, after 1800, comes the Met's portrait of his architect friend "Don Tiburcio Pérez." It has even greater directness than the Sebastián Martínez, and now, the wig of the *Ancien Régime* is off, and we are face to face with a cheerful, vigorous man, with sleeves rolled up for work.

No False Gods

How may we do justice to Goya, an artist who worked as a contemporary to many of the world's greatest cultural optimists? His 82 years paralleled the lifetime of Goethe, and encompassed the entire lifespans of Schiller, Beethoven, and Mozart. Born in 1746, he was thirty



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Bequest of Grace M. Pugh, 1985

"El sueño de la razón produce monstruos" ("The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters"), plate 43, *Los Caprichos*, first edition 1799.

when the U.S. Declaration of Independence proclaimed "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" to be the inalienable right of all human beings. With respect to the great Vienna school of music, he was a generation older than Beethoven, a few years Mozart's senior, and half a generation younger than Haydn, born in 1732.

Was Goya acquainted with any of these men's works? We can say for sure that he knew of Haydn, then the most famous composer in Spain, whose "Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross" had been commissioned by the Cadiz cathedral chapter in 1787, and whose scores appear in at least two Goya portraits.

In painting, Goya's exact contemporary is the French classicist Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), who was successively the painter to the French Rev-

olution, the Terror, and Napoleon, and who also died in exile—David left France after the Restoration, whereas Goya fled there. It is David, the ideologue of the Enlightenment, who most clearly reveals that Goya was not that. Visitors to the Metropolitan should contrast the rhetorical painting by David in that museum, “The Death of Socrates,” with the wickedly foolish mobs (the sort of “democracy” that killed Socrates) shown in Goya’s etchings. The David picture, dating from 1787, was a broadside for the coming Revolution, portraying Socrates as the founder of the “religion of Reason,” substituting for Christ (in the painting, Socrates even has twelve disciples). After beheading the King of France, the epigones of this religion (one which the historical Socrates would not have recognized!) were by 1792–93 merrily executing scientists. After 1800, they brought their atrocities to Spain with the Napoleonic invasion.

A painting exalting the founding of a “religion of Reason” is unthinkable from Goya’s hand. For Goya—one of whose most moving late paintings is the “Last Communion of St. Joseph Calasanzo,” which he donated to a church in Madrid—was seeking a reform of Christianity, purged of folly and violence, and not its replacement by a synthetic cult.

Had Goya died in 1797, we might know him only as a gifted rococo artist of the Venetian school, and a poignantly truthful portraitist. What imprints on future generations his *Socratic* genius, is what he did after the age of fifty, represented in this exhibit particularly by the etchings starting with the *Caprichos* of c.1800. We may ask, how these works, so often dark in mood, match up to challenge of the late Beethoven in his opera *Fidelio*, his late string quartets, his *Missa Solemnis*, or his Ninth Symphony, which celebrated the divine spark of



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Gift of M. Knoedler & Co., 1918

“Asta su abuelo” (“And So Was His Grandfather”), plate 39, *Los Caprichos*, first edition 1799.

joy manifested in the universal brotherhood of mankind?

More Fools Than Villains

Friedrich Schiller, who wrote the “Ode to Joy” set in the Ninth Symphony, offers a guide in his 1784 essay on the “Theater as a Moral Institution.” We need only replace the words “stage” or “theater” by “painting” and “etching,” to cast a bright light on the achievement of Goya’s late prints:

“The jurisdiction of the stage begins where the domain of secular law leaves off. Whenever justice is dazzled by gold and gloats in the pay of infamy; when the crimes of the mighty mock their own impotence, and mortal fear stays the ruler’s arm—then the theater takes up the sword and scales, and hauls infamy before the dreadful tribune of justice. The entire realm of fantasy and history, past and present, stands at its beck and call. Monstrous criminals, long rotted to dust, are summoned by poesy’s

omnipotent call, to relive their shameful lives for the grim edification of later generations. Unconsciously, like empty shadows, the horrors of their own age pass before our eyes while we, horrified yet fascinated, curse their memory. . . . As surely as visual representation is more compelling than the mute word or cold exposition, it is equally certain that the theater wields a more profound, more lasting influence, than either morality or laws. . . .

“In the theater’s fearsome mirror, the vices are shown to be as loathsome as virtue is lovely. . . .

“With each day I grow older, my catalogue of villains grows shorter, and my index of fools longer and more complete. If the entire moral guilt of the one species of person stems from one and the same source; if all the monstrous extremes of vice which have ever branded him, are merely altered forms, higher grades of a quality which, in

the end, we can all laugh about and love—why, then, would nature have taken some different route with the other species? I know of only *one* secret for guarding man against depravity, and that is: to arm his heart against weaknesses. . . .

“The stage holds up a mirror to that most populous class, the fools, and exposes their thousand varieties to relief-bringing ridicule. . . . Man’s pride is more deeply wounded by ridicule and contempt, than his conscience is tormented by abhorrence. . . .

“The stage also teaches us to be more just toward the victim of misfortune, and to judge him more leniently. For, only once we can plumb the depths of his tormented soul, are we entitled to pass judgment on him.”

In fashioning such a “fearsome mirror” for the education of mankind, the Spaniard Francesco de Goya knows no equal.

—Nora Hamerman