



Goya's Mastery in Prints: Los Desastres de la Guerra

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Acknowledgements

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All images created by the artist, Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828)

Cover Detail & Title Panel: Francisco José de Goya (1746-1828), *And There's No Help for It* (*Y no Hai Remedio*), 1810-1814, plate 15 from *Disasters of War*, etching and aquatint; Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas, Algur H. Meadows Collection, MM.67.09.13. Photograph by Michael Bodycomb.

Interior, from Left to Right:

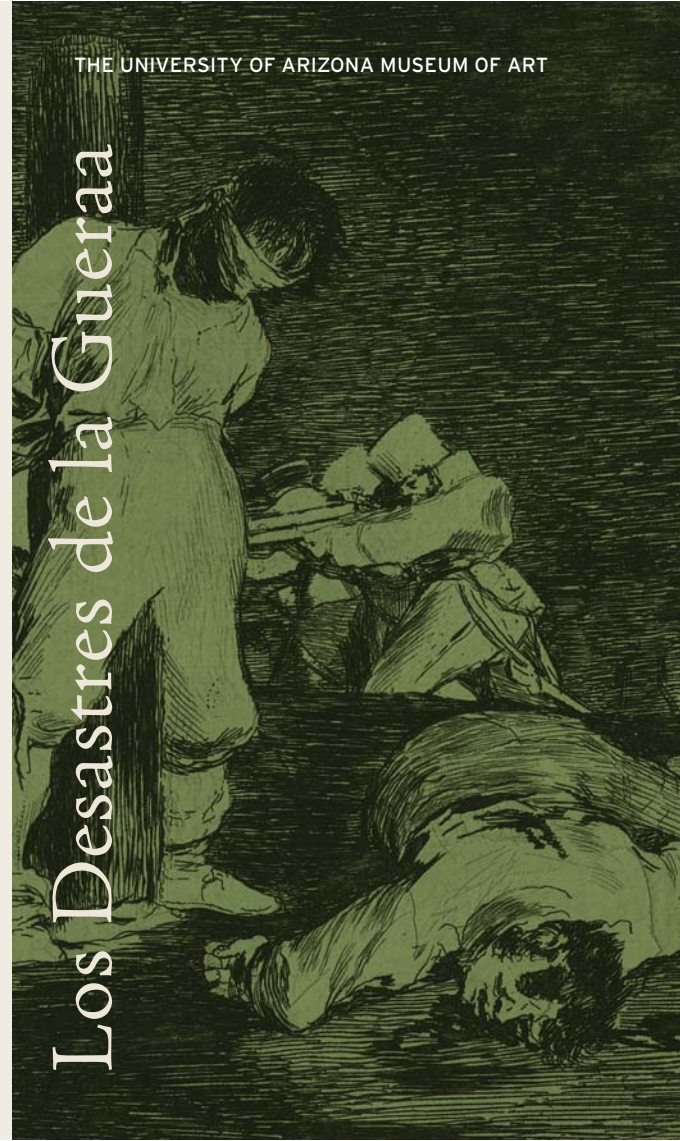
Francisco José de Goya (1746-1828), *No se puede mirar* (*One cannot look*), Plate No. 26 from *Disasters of War*, c. 1810-1820, etching on paper, Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas, Algur H. Meadows Collection, MM.67.08.26. Photograph by Michael Bodycomb.

Francisco José de Goya (1746-1828), *De que sirve una taza?* (*What's the use of a bowl?*), Plate No. 59 from *Disasters of War*, c. 1810-1820, etching on paper, Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas, Algur H. Meadows Collection, MM.67.08.59. Photograph by Michael Bodycomb.

Francisco José de Goya (1746-1828), *Que se rompe la cuerda* (*Let the cord break*), Plate No. 77 from *Disasters of War*, c. 1810-1820, etching on paper, Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas, Algur H. Meadows Collection, MM.67.08.77. Photograph by Michael Bodycomb.

Francisco Goya y Lucientes, *Painter*, 1797-98, etching and aquatint, Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas, Algur H. Meadows Collection.

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Los Desastres de la Guerra

The University of Arizona Museum of Art presents Goya's *Mastery in Prints*, a celebration of the graphic techniques and visionary achievements of Spanish Master Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828). These exhibitions present in succession the artist's four most significant print suites — in first-edition imprints — on loan from the Meadows Museum at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.

This extraordinary cycle of exhibitions continues with *Los Desastres de la Guerra* (The Disasters of War, 1810-1820), inspired by Goya's reaction to the Peninsular War of 1808-1814 — including the French invasion of Spain through brutal attacks on the civilian population, guerrilla retaliations against Napoleon Bonaparte's armies, and the ravaging famine in Madrid — and the enormous impact of these events on the life of the nation.

Organized in numerical sequence, the 80 etchings in this suite emphasize Goya's direct response to the horrific brutalities and human consequences of this war, alongside sharply satirical portrayals of political and religious



corruption in its aftermath. The prints are grouped into three sections: war scenes (plates 2-47), famine scenes (plates 48-64) and the allegorical *caprichos enfáticos* ("emphatic caprices," plates 65-80).

The images in the suite demonstrate Goya's narrative as well as technical mastery.

While they capture the artist's response to a series of almost unthinkable contemporary circumstances, they seem better understood not as documentary reportage but as commentary, layered with metaphorical overtones that invite political, cultural and moral consideration.

As well, although debatably Goya's own, the captions on the prints possess the quality of wild oratory. While they guide the viewer's attention, they also create for the series an internal rhythm, connecting some in sequences of mounting narrative horror while allowing others to howl alone.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag places Goya's *Desastres* in the context of the "iconography of suffering." As she points out, Goya eschews, with startling originality, numerous longstanding pictorial conventions — common in religious and mythic depictions, or in heroic battlefield scenes — that offer up suffering as a spectacle for viewing pleasure.

Instead, as Sontag writes:

The ghoulish cruelties in *The Disasters of War* are meant to awaken, shock, wound the viewer. Goya's art, like Dostoyevsky's, seems a turning point in the history of moral feelings and of sorrow — as deep, as original, as demanding. With Goya, a new standard for responsiveness to suffering enters art. The account of war's cruelties

is fashioned as an assault on the sensibility of the viewer. The expressive phrases in script below each image comment on the provocation. While the image, like every image, is an invitation to look, the caption, more often than not, insists on the difficulty of doing just that. A voice, presumably the artist's, badgers the viewer: can you bear to look at this? One caption declares: One can't look (*No se puede mirar*). Another says: This is bad (*Esto es malo*). Another retorts: This is worse (*Esto es peor*). Another shouts: This is the



worst! (*Esto es lo peor!*). Another declaims: Barbarians! (*Bárbaros!*). What madness! (*Que locura!*), cries another. And another: This is too much! (*Fuerte cosa es!*). And another: Why? (*Por que?*).

Through the difficult, terrible images of *Los Desastres de la Guerra*, Goya offers us both the historically specific and the timelessly universal: a vision of humanity compromised, complicit



in senseless atrocity; and of war as a ruinous proposition for humanity — no victors, no heroes, no redemption — just one faceless body pitted against the other, in futility.

Although Goya printed several early proofs during his lifetime, the complete suite of *Los Desastres de la Guerra* was first published in 1863, 35 years after his death, by the Royal Academy of San Fernando.

Dr. Lisa Fischman
Chief Curator, The University of Arizona Museum of Art
October, 2007

Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes

Born on March 30, 1746 in the Spanish village of Fuendetodos, Francisco de Goya would prove to be one of the most innovative and provocative artists of all time.

Although he came of artistic age surprisingly late in life, Goya produced a revolutionary and unforgettable oeuvre.

The young Goya sought education through studio apprenticeships and travel, yet it was not until 1773 that he was formally engaged as an artist. By painting tapestry cartoons for the Royal Tapestry Workshop in Madrid, he garnered the attention of the Spanish royal court. In the years following, Goya found increasing favor among noble society and received many distinguished portrait commissions.



In 1777 and 1778, Goya executed his first etchings, copies of paintings by the highly regarded 17th-century Spanish court painter, Diego Velázquez (1599-1660).

Scholars posit Goya's deafness, the result of illness in 1792, as a turning point in his subject and style. In 1794, he wrote: "In order to occupy my imagination which was troubled by the consideration of my ills... I dedicated myself to painting a set of cabinet pictures in which I have succeeded in making observations for which the commissioned works, in which fantasy and invention had no place, never gave the opportunity."

By 1797, Goya was at work on a suite of satirical etchings, known as *Los Caprichos* (which were published in 1799). In that same year, Goya was appointed First Court Painter and with the enhanced social access of the position produced his greatest aristocratic portraits— those marked by a distinctive and often unflattering realism.

In 1808, amidst the war against Napoléon in Spain, Goya's world of court patronage dissolved; the artist found himself increasingly isolated and gripped by psychological crisis. After the death of his wife, in 1812, the artist produced some of his most politically charged work, including the print suite *Los Desastres de la Guerra*.

Through his last years, Goya was astonishingly prolific— producing portraits, religious paintings and genre scenes, the series known as the Black Paintings, and various drawings and print suites, including *La Tauromaquia* and *Los Disparates*. Threatened by escalating political, social and artistic repression under the regime of Ferdinand VII, Goya chose self-exile in 1824. He settled in Bordeaux where he died, on April 16, 1828, at age 82.