

Goya the Printmaker

by LJ Anthony

Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, other than having an impressive name, had an equally impressive career, for which he is named “The Father of Modern Art.” Goya, born in Fuendetodos, Austria in 1746, he later moved to Saragossa, Spain with his parents. It was there in Spain in which he was regarded most as an artist, which is evident due to the number of artworks that are kept there. “Of approximately five hundred works with any title to authenticity, nearly a third are in Madrid and almost half are preserved in Spain.” [1]

Goya’s life can be seen throughout his artwork. “Over the course of his long career, Goya moved from jolly and lighthearted to deeply pessimistic and searching in his paintings, drawings, etchings, and frescoes.” [2] Goya, at the height of his career, was at the age of 40 and the court painter to Charles IV of France in 1789. Some years after the fall of the French Monarchy, Goya fell prey to a mysterious illness, for over a year in 1792 that nearly ended his life. He emerged victorious in the same year of 1793 completely deaf. It was after this experience a few years later in 1799, that he completed and published a group of eighty aquatint etchings called the *Caprichos*. The *Caprichos* are, bluntly put, weird. They include etchings such as *The Sleep and Reason of Monsters*, which depicts Goya asleep while demonic beings haunt him in the background. They also include *One Hunting For Teeth*, which pictures a woman pulling out the front teeth of a hanged dead man. The *Caprichos* served as “the outlet for torturing hallucinations that he suffered from.” These eighty etchings were more than just mere artworks for Goya, they were a sort of public diary, a confession to the world that he was suffering, and suffering hard. The *Caprichos* offer a bit of irony in addition to odd imagery. The irony embedded in these strange artworks are found in the captions underneath them. One would think that these captions would help the viewer understand the etchings better, but instead they make the etchings more obscure than they already are. Perhaps that was all in Goya’s plan, a bit of personal humor at the expense of confusion and misinterpretation for everyone else. Whatever the case may be, the *Caprichos* showcased Goya at the most important stage in his development as an artist.

In 1807, France invaded Portugal and the next year invaded Spain, thus began the Peninsular War. The Peninsular War, often referred to as the Napoleonic War, would prove to be a period of sorrow for Goya, as represented in his series of eighty-five etchings during that time called, *The Disasters of War*. Goya literally saw firsthand the catastrophic events war had on the society he once knew and had great success in. Goya’s realistically horrifying etchings show just how bad the war was. This series of prints depict hangings, children being torn away from their families, women in the danger of getting raped, and many more horrifying images difficult to imagine. Goya told the truth, the pure unadulterated truth he created the etchings for the sake of truth. “They were created because his art is the only defense and the only sustenance left to an artist in the face of what Goya witnessed.” [4] Goya was negatively flabbergasted towards mankind and did the only thing he knew how to do in the face of hopelessness; create. Goya’s diary was opened up once again with the *Disasters of War*, but this time it was not made public until seventy years after he first engraved them. Goya never intended for them to be published while he was alive. Perhaps that is because their purpose was to solely provide Goya therapy during a difficult time in his life, like the *Caprichos* seemed to do. Once the etchings were

released however, the world got a huge dose of reality about the Napoleonic War that maybe, it had not received before, and probably would have never received.

After the war ceased, Goya spent his final years in France, dissatisfied with the political outcome of Spain. He continued to paint, draw, and etch until his death in 1828. He lived a painful life, but never let that get the best of him, for out of his pain came his greatest ambition to create masterpieces that catapulted him to the top.

Bibliography

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