

Disaster 30



*Ravages of war*  
Soot ink wash with pen and brush, and black pencil  
Museo del Prado, Madrid

Disaster 30



*Ravages of war*  
Copper plate with nickel electrolytic coat  
Calcografía Nacional, Madrid

Disaster 30



*Ravages of war*  
Print of the 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1863  
Etching, dry point, burin and burnisher  
Museo del Prado, Madrid

Exhibitions calendar

*I. Creative process: from drawing to engraving*

18<sup>th</sup> December 2000 to 11<sup>th</sup> March 2001

*II. Horror of nonsense*

19<sup>th</sup> March 2001 to 17<sup>th</sup> June 2001

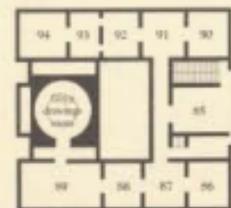
*III. Los Caprichos enérgicos*

25<sup>th</sup> June 2001 to 17<sup>th</sup> September 2001

Production and realization: Museo Nacional del Prado  
[Taller de restauración de papel, Brigada de movimiento de obras de arte, Brigada de mantenimiento, Unidad de exposiciones temporales, Unidad de apoyo a Dirección]

On the occasion of these exhibitions, Museo del Prado has edited *El libro de los Desastres de la Guerra* where is large graphical and textual information on this series.

Second floor  
Goya drawings room



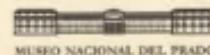
Mutillo's gate

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*The Disasters of the War*



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**Goya:**  
**The Disasters of the War**

An outstanding aspect in Goya's oeuvre is violence in its different manifestations as expression of nonsense. The events that took place during the Independence War (1808-1814) provoked that Goya made a very critical and innovating reflection on war, its causes, its brutal demonstrations and its consequences. The impressive series of the *Desastres*, as well as the paintings he made on this subject during those years and the subsequent on the events of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of May in Madrid, show a view radically different from the rest of his contemporaries'. The later sided with one or another of the opposing factions and their works had clear propagandistic and commemorative purposes.

*Misera humanidad. La culpa es tuya (Miserable humanity. The fault is thine!)* writes a wolf in *Desastre 74. Esto es lo peor (That is the worst of it)*. The source for this sentence is the poem *Gli animali parlanti - "The talking animals"* by Giambattista Casti, Goya's contemporary. It reflects quite accurately the artist's spirits during the Independence War -that entailed Spain's material and moral ruin- and during the years that followed led by Ferdinand VII's absolutist reaction -that brought about the lost of great part of the progresses attained, with great effort, by the liberals who drew 1812 Constitution up.

Goya's sensitivity to these events resulted in his best print series and furthermore in a monumental scream against different forms of violence which does not acknowledge any kind of justification. The masterful technical, formal and conceptual handling of the work allows the viewer to contemplate images inherent in every war.

The genius of Goya's oeuvre, so long repeated, lies not only in its evident quality but in the enormous distance that keeps it away from the rest of the artistic production of the moment. If there is someone who thinks about the use of technical resources, composition and ethical importance of the figures, this is Goya. Opposed to heroic and flattering images, Goya presents violence and death in their purest expressions. His war themes do not depict military or popular heroes who fought against French troops, well known through publications and prints of their portraits.

They nor present particular events that took place in specific places. Starting from true events Goya depicts the very core of them, the universal representation of heroism, brutality, hunger, despair, destruction and, above all, death. And the main characters of this play are anonymous common people, real war victims; people who attack the mamlukes in the painting *The 2<sup>nd</sup> of May in Madrid*, or who die victims of French repression during the executions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> of May of 1808 the people of Madrid, instigated by some sectors of aristocracy and church, rose up in arms against Napoleonic army that, since the beginning of the year, was occupying the main Spanish cities. As a consequence of it, the French troops carried out a brutal repression that caused the generalization of popular uprising to the rest of peninsular cities; but these were soon submitted to the imperial army. Saragossa endured one of the fiercest sieges and carried out the most heroic of resistances. Between the 14<sup>th</sup> of June and the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1808 the town, commanded by General Palafox, endured the first siege, bloody and perhaps unnecessary judging from its terrible consequences for population.



*Desastre 1. Sad forebodings of what is going to happen. Sanguine*  
Museo del Prado, Madrid



*Desastre 64. Carthago in the cemetery. Sanguine*  
Museo del Prado, Madrid

In October of the same year Palafox called for Goya with other artists and asked them "to see and examine the ruins of that city, with the aim of painting the glories of its inhabitants". Ruin and grief that Goya perceived during his stay in Saragossa made a deep impression on the painter.

Many of the first *Desastres* show a subject coincidence with the printed accounts of the episode as well as with prints inspired at the same events; this states Goya's interest on the disaster not so much in recording actual facts as in capturing the core of them. It happens that the first plates of the *Desastres* are dated 1810, as engraved in three of them; that was only one year after his visit to Saragossa.

We must not look for actual facts as the source of each plate of the series. What these prints show were usual scenes in every point of Spain during the conflict. The first print *Tristes presentimientos de lo que ha de acontecer (Sad forebodings of what is going to happen)* is the prophetic introduction to the load of horrors and misfortunes reported by the images.

The first part of the series depicts different aspects of war violence: the hand to hand combats between the French and the Spaniards; the gratuitous violence of Napoleonic troops on civil population; the brutal repression on Spanish guerrilla; the barbarism of invaders; the unnecessary violence of Spanish people on French and *afrancesados* (their sympathizers); the flight of the population abandoning the towns; the sacking of churches and the murder of monks; and above all, death, present in every print and the sole protagonist in some of them.

While Goya was in Madrid engraving the first plates of the series, the population of the town underwent a notable increase. Sacking, fire and violence victims will come to the capital for shelter. But, basically from 1812 on, Madrid is unfit to feed all this people. Shortage of food and the disproportionate increase of prices because of speculation will deprive the city of supplies; hunger becomes its inhabitants' usual companion and after it, illness and death. This would be the thread leading to the second part of the *Desastres*. The artist shows here the beggars, those who hardly survive from charity; the speculators; the moribunds; and again, present as always, death.

The last part of the series, known as *Caprichos enfáticos*, was probably engraved as soon as the war finished, between 1814 and 1815, because it turns around the different aspects of repression and comeback to absolutism entailed by Ferdinand VII's return to Spain. The Royal Decree of 4<sup>th</sup> May 1814 abolishing 1812 Constitution brought back monarchical absolutism and liberals' fierce repression. Unlike more narrative precedent prints, Goya uses in the latest a symbolic language that he had already used in the *Caprichos* and that from this moment on will be a constant in his oeuvre leading to *Disparates* and *Pinturas Negras*. The topicality of the subjects -the struggle between the serviles (name given to the conservatives) and the liberals and the repression exercised by the latest, the re-establishment of Inquisition and the abolition of 1812 liberal Constitution- caused the natural disappointment of the artist, evident in the sombre images, and the use of a cryptic and ambiguous visual language, in which the critics to the absolutist government had not to be too explicit and therefore compromising for the artist.

Goya began the *Desastres* creative process with preparatory drawings, usually in sanguine, though occasionally he used washes where the compositions were already almost determined.

Nevertheless he made important modifications while engraving them on the copper plate, excluding superfluous elements. Goya made this series with great thoroughness printing numerous trial proofs, which allowed him to check the engraving process and introduce subtle expressive alterations.

From a technical point of view the *Desastres* reveal an important novelty with regard to the *Caprichos*, where he profusely used aquatint in the backgrounds as a complement to etching. In the *Desastres* wash replaces aquatint as a means to create tonal gradations in the background. Thus, using etching almost solely, he achieves the lines of the figures outstanding forcefully from almost empty backgrounds, with scarce tonal nuances, accentuating the drama of horror and death of the scenes. Anonymous figures are thus emphasized located in undetermined, non-existent we should say, spaces. As far as the composition is concerned he often has recourse to pyramidal outlines where the confrontation of black and white reach dramatic and symbolic qualities, leading the viewer's eye to the most outstanding aspects of the depicted subject.

Goya finished the series but he never edited it, most probably because of the politic situation of the moment that was not at all suitable for such a critical content. Only his very close friends could see it. One of them, Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez -who had already received bound volumes of the *Caprichos* and *Taurromaquia*- was offered a complete album with the manuscript title of "Fatal consequences of the bloody war in Spain with Buonaparte. And other emphatic caprices, in 85 prints. Invented, drawn and engraved by the original painter D. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes. In Madrid", that nowadays belongs to the British Museum collections. The prints remained in the "Quinta del Sordo" that, when Goya left for Bordeaux, came to his son Javier, who kept them in cases until his death in 1854. After different vicissitudes, the Real Academia de San Fernando bought in 1862 eighty copper plates that were first edited in 1863 under the title of *Los Desastres de la Guerra*. Following the printing artistic criteria of the moment the composition was made uniform, covering it with a veil of ink to suppress dramatic black and white contrasts. In 1870 the Academy collection was increased with the two last prints that, together with the eighty of the first edition, are kept nowadays in Calcografía Nacional de Madrid.

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