

Reason and Follies, Majas and Bulls

Looking at Goya's Drawings

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Goya. Drawings. "Only my Strength of Will Remains." Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. November 20, 2019 to February 16, 2020.

José Manuel Matilla and Manuela Mena, *Goya Drawings*. Thames and Hudson, 360pp., 250 ill., \$35 cloth.

"ONLY MY STRENGTH OF WILL REMAINS" WAS THE FIRST retrospective of Francisco Goya's drawings, mounted at the Prado as the dramatic conclusion to the museum's 200th anniversary jubilee. A year of exhibitions ending in February catered to the Prado's many audiences, in Spain and internationally, explored its unique history as the country's cultural flagship, and developed much new scholarship. Over the last few years, Prado has gone from being a grand though sleepy dowager to one of Europe's most dynamic museums. There's much to celebrate.

Goya (1746-1828) is certainly a big beast—arguably Spain's biggest, at least in art. He was a master and genius in most media, over a career of fifty of his country's most tumultuous years. He depicted a swath of subjects from kings and queens to peasants. Whether or not he is the "last Old Master" is a topic for debate. We know he's a pivot between an old world of absolutism, whether of kings or church, and a free-for-all, modern world. Visually, he conveyed a vast range of human nature. His work—pungent, insightful, poignant—speaks to us today.

About a thousand of Goya's drawings survive. The Prado owns more than five hundred, so it's the go-to place for their study. The show's a feast, drawing heavily from the Prado's collection but also from many others, public and private. Many of the drawings leading to the *Caprichos* and the *Disasters of War* are in the show. *The Beds of Death*, from the *Disasters of War*, a red chalk drawing he pressed on the plate before he etched, is powerful on its own, its dense, heavy lines creating the sense of a grim dream (Figure 1). *Group of Maja on the Stroll* is a lighter scene (Figure 2). It's playful but has the same great linear economy. Goya is nothing if not various.



Figure 1 Francisco de Goya, *The Beds of Death*, 1812-14. Preparatory drawing for *Disasters of War 62*. Red chalk on laid paper, 148 x 206 mm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

Beautifully displayed and interpreted, the exhibition was a long-standing project of Jose Manuel Matilla and Manuela B. Mena Marqués, two of the Prada's star curators. The title of the show, "Only My Strength of Will Remains," comes from a letter Goya wrote in 1825 to Joaquin Maria Ferrer, an old friend, politician, and publisher, like Goya, an exile. Goya, a physical wreck and living in Bordeaux, was still working, planning, and dreaming, even though all that was left to propel him was his "strength of will."

The show explores a few fundamental themes. Drawing was essential to Goya's practice, especially in the last half of his career. This late work is an amalgam of his painting, print making, and drawing styles, with drawing seeming to rule his vision's roost. Through his drawings, we see an inner Goya with his more precious passions in relief. His drawings comprise the stage, and on it he plays himself.

Goya was still living and working when the Prado opened. His work was among the 300 or so paintings displayed on November 19, 1819, but he was both of the present and very much of the past.

He'd been Charles IV's and Maria Luisa's favorite artist. There is much new evidence and thinking to suggest that he was fond of them, too, undermining the old scholarly consensus that his court paintings subtly ridiculed the royals. Both Charles and Maria Luisa had died earlier that year, though. Ferdinand VII and the aristocracy had moved to younger, newer artists.

Starting in the 1810s, Goya's health went from crisis to crisis. By 1819, he lived in the outskirts of Madrid in the House of the Deaf Man, which he decorated, if we could use so shallow a word, with the primal, expressionistic Black Paintings. In 1824, during Ferdinand's crackdown on troublemakers, Goya left Spain for Bordeaux. He wasn't particularly targeted—he merely got out while the getting was good.

Very few of Goya's preparatory works from before the Peninsular War (1807-1814) survive, but that's not surprising. Preparatory drawing has an odd history in Spain. While most artists developed finished studio oils through drawings, these drawings weren't considered marketable or even worth keeping. Mostly, they were trashed. This seems to have been Goya's practice when he was working for the Crown and when he had a busy studio churning out commissions. Almost all the drawings existing today, and the vast majority in the exhibition, come from the time Goya was on his own.

"Only My Strength of Will Remains" is a full-throttle retrospective, but an unusual one. It develops our concept of Goya, not through this big opus or that one, but through the themes that occupied his mind best seen in the drawings. "Obsession" is a word the catalogue and exhibition use but that suggests a mania. I'd prefer to define them as issues or types of people Goya found fascinating, so much so that they recur. A big chunk of the show organizes the issues and types as follows: mob psychology, brutal violence, exploitation of women, vanity, lust, and old age.

The exhibition is a logistical and strategic feat. The curators made sense of a mountain of material, devising a storyline meaningful to art appreciators, scholars, and connoisseurs. About 300 drawings are on view. Whittling so big a corpus was tough, but the curators chose well. The selection has both depth and breadth. It reaches Goya through an entirely different path from the painting-centered conventional wisdom. Paintings tell certain facets of his story, prints another, but drawings yet another. These facets overlap, but the drawings allow us to see different, new things and old points with new clarity.

Surprisingly, it's the first expansive, serious survey of his drawings, which weren't deeply studied until the 1950s. Their internal ordering, dating, and interpretation are topics for a five-volume catalogue raisonné in the works. The exhibition is a great springboard for this project.



Figure 2 Francisco de Goya, *Group of Maja on the Stroll*, 1794-95. Madrid Album or Album B, 28. Wash, brush, bistre on laid paper, 236 x 146 mm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

There's a method to the seeming madness called Goya's drawings. Once we absorb the inside baseball, their organization and trajectory, style-wise and subject-wise, is clear. For this article, first, I'll start with the loose drawings that were never organized into sketchbooks. These drawings are mostly minor, and date from the early 1770s to mid-1790s.

There are also eight sketchbooks, and the show has a selection from each. The exhibition is smartly organized in two basic ways: Some rooms focus on individual sketchbooks or groups of drawings closely related to a specific portfolio, while other galleries treat Goya's broad cultural themes like old age, gratuitous brutality, or the abuse of women.

Second, I'll dive into the early sketchbooks to develop the private Goya and to present Goya's technique and themes. Sometimes the sheets follow a narrative, sometimes they wander. Sometimes they develop into a next step, a print, for example. Sometimes they don't. For better or worse, they're a sequence only because Goya did them one after another. They're good indicators of Goya's style as it changed.

Third, after I've habituated the reader to the Goya's sketchbook system, however much he had one, I'll examine sets of drawings—separate sheets and not part of any sketchbooks—that correspond directly to a specific print portfolio. Finally, I'll return to the late sketchbooks, which are fascinating and free ranging but illustrate an end-of-career style. Personally, I looked at the show as a major study of connoisseurship, demonstrating the range of Goya's techniques—he had many—and how drawing was uniquely suited to developing his themes. For Goya, the medium was the message.

Goya was a master draughtsman, and would choose the most suitable way to draw to attain his goals. In the preparatory drawings for most of his print series (and most of those survive), he used black and red chalk. He drew to accommodate the technology, simply transferring the composition to the copperplate by dampening the drawing, placing it on a plate, and running both through the press. Once the drawing's lines were sufficiently impressed on the plate, he could etch to his content.

In the *Caprichos* drawings, the earliest ones we have in bulk, he used mostly chalk but some ink. This isn't surprising. The *Caprichos* prints are far more linear, while later prints are expressive and impressionistic. By the time he produced the *Follies* in the early 1820s, his drawings were freer and more like a statement of aspiration realized as he etched.

The sketchbooks are different. He often wasn't drawing to accommodate some other process aiming at a final result. Usually the sketchbook drawings were chalk, pen, or wash or a combination (or later, just wash). There are almost no corrections or changes anywhere among Goya's drawings, a measure of his facility and confidence as an artist. The concepts in his head flowed easily through his hands.

So, let's start at the beginning and then visit drawings that are directly related to prints or paintings well known to us. A savant in the late 1770s, new to Madrid, ambitious to become an establishment artist, Goya looked to Velázquez, who in the 17th century had created the gold standard for court portraiture in Spain. A handful of drawings after Velázquez were on view in this show; these evolved into Goya's earliest etchings. From 1783 to 1802, Goya had a pen pal, exchanging 147 letters with the businessman Martin Zapeter. These letters include some fun drawings, among them a flaming heart and a kneeling nude man, his bottom facing us. It's locker room humor.

Sketchbooks A and B are the meatiest and earliest drawing groups. The Sanlucar Sketchbook, also called Sketchbook A, gets its name from Sanlucar de Barameda in Cadiz, the home base of the Duchess of Alba. Scholars dated them to 1796 and 1797, when Goya was most intertwined.

Sketchbook A has only nine sheets. The subjects are women, and the exhibition posits that Goya overall thought about women a lot, and not only for thrills. He was fascinated by what we would today call gender roles. Technically, Goya started the drawings in Sketchbook A and B with a faint red chalk outline. He then used the tip of his brush to achieve a precise image. Washes are delicately handled. Backgrounds are minimal. The exhibition finds a sequential, narrative feel, but that's a stretch. They seem like drawings of random women to me. *There They Go, Plucked* evolved into plate 20 of the *Caprichos* (Figure 3). Others went nowhere.

If the exhibition ever irritates, it's in attributing narrative to drawings that are best savored just as luscious objects. *Mama on a Stroll* is beautiful and technically attractive since Goya used a single ink but diluted it here and there to get the tones he wanted. There's no chalk. The ghostly figures of two women compose a backdrop. "The woman's sad, lost expression marks her as a victim," we read. That's far fetched. The curators find "atmospheres of tension" where I prefer to see Goya contemplating a compositional challenge. In *Three Washerwomen* from the Madrid Sketchbook, one woman drawing water is said to look optimistic, another hopeless, doleful, and morose to boot. With such observations, the exhibition and book try to find relevance to issues of gender inequality in our lifetimes. Sometimes, the look of the drawing demands the investment of psychology or mood in the figure. Other times, I'd leave psychoanalysis out.

The Madrid Sketchbook, or Sketchbook B, which might have started earlier, in 1795, but probably overlapped the Sanlucar sketchbook, is filled with women, too. This sketchbook dived into fashion, with lots of mantillas and flapping fans. We see well dressed women but also a bevy of hookers, madams, and clients. The sketchbook has a narrative feel, too, as sex becomes more and more



Figure 3 Francisco de Goya, *There They Go Plucked*. c. 1797. Caprichos, 20. Red wash on silk paper, 205 x 145 mm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.



Figure 4 Francisco de Goya, *Out Hunting for Teeth*, c. 1797. Caprichos, 12. Black chalk and red chalk on laid paper, 236 x 166 mm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

exploitive with each sheet. Goya's palette darkens. Witches and monks appear. Good humored caricature turns ugly. This sketchbook contains a pool of scenes that made it into the *Caprichos*.

This sketchbook is much bigger size-wise, about 9 by 6 inches, versus 6 1/2 by 4 inches for the Sanlucar Sketchbook. Goya used the extra space to incorporate architecture or to include more figures. The beautiful *Group of Maja On the Stroll* arranges five women in a circle (Figure 2). They're not distinct individuals but mannequins dressed in mantillas, flounces, lace shawls, and high heels. We're seeing, in effect, a single rotating figure to deliver different points of view. Goya's garments are elegant: they're light and fluttery when they need to be, mostly for accessories, and weighty when required for dresses. Goya conveys each range of materiality with a few passages of wash.

Not part of a sketchbook but, rather, a set of loose sheets has come to be called collectively the *Dreams*. Done in 1797, they're forerunners of the *Caprichos* prints. Some sheets started as black chalk drawings that Goya transferred to the copperplate. He then reworked the drawings in precise ink lines. The reworked drawings became the visual guide for the etching Goya then did on the plate. Some of the drawings directly evolved into a print. In other drawings, sometimes only a passage would make it to the press.

Another set of drawings, dated to 1797 to 1799, are usually in red chalk alone, which Goya found made a clearer, more detailed image when transferred to the plate. These bear the most direct correspondence to the *Caprichos*. Goya probably made many drawings for this set but only about twenty survive, though Goya drawings continue to be found.

This is the most thematic part of the show—it treats Goya's big ideas. Interpretation of the objects focuses on hypocrisy of the religious orders, ignorance, superstition, and exploitation of the poor. This is a good choice, since it's based on social history rather than technique, and makes the exhibition accessible to audiences looking at Goya as chronicler of his day's mores (Figure 4). Still, there are some nice moments for connoisseurs. *Love and Death*, plate 10 in the *Caprichos*, emerged from two drawings, one made of red ink wash over red chalk to develop basic forms, and the other of red and black chalk alone, where Goya focused on facial expression.

Goya prepared exacting drawings for *The Disasters of a War*, *Tauromaquia*, and the *Follies* portfolios. All the drawings were executed in red chalk and transferred to the copperplates with fidelity. They're precise and detailed, and were the final step before the finished work. Whereas the sketchbooks have a rambling quality, in these three projects Goya was a man on a mission. The compositions, however, are essentially the same.

Goya is a pivot between an old world of absolutism, whether of kings or church, and a free-for-all, modern world.

Unlike *Los Caprichos*, Goya's portfolio from 1797, *The Disasters of War* are light on aquatint. Like the drawings, Goya's war series have mostly empty backgrounds. His whites are not just for backgrounds, though. The drawings mix darks and lights in his figures to give them volume. The chalk drawings are unfussy; this use of the print's cream paper is the best example of Goya's sense that less was indeed more. Vampires are little more than silhouettes in *The Consequences*— anonymous killers, while the dead are mostly contour and white space. Goya used a minimum of line to convey a gruesome moment. The monster's face is all bulging eyes and lips sucking blood from a puckered torso, which is mostly contour with a few interior lines for modeling.

The etching techniques for *Beds of Death* includes lavis (i.e. brush), drypoint, and burnishing—it's a technical marvel. Goya's red chalk drawing, the most striking in the series, is an expanse of lines where rough paper and the nature of chalk develop a murky, evocative backdrop of architecture. Chalk makes for the ghostliness, and Goya pushed his talent to further translate the effect via ink and lavis.

Goya's *Tauromaquia* series of 33 etchings was published in 1816. Visually, the look of his drawings and the print seem to merge in a radically new way showing that drawing—with its economy, and its capacity to convey spontaneity—created effects that a highly finished, detailed etching couldn't. The series has lots of gruesome scenes, to be sure. They're not static, though; there's plenty of movement. Spears get thrust, crowds stampede, animals charge, mad with pain and fear. Goya was after spectacle. There's nothing of the still life in them. The *Caprichos* often feel like *tableaux vivants*. Figures, some deformed, pose while dressed outrageously. Aside from some flying objects, they're still. The drawings envision the cinematic quality Goya sought for this project.

Drawing served a subtle purpose for the *Follies* prints. In these, Goya went heavy on the aquatint for background: some, like *A Way Men Can Fly with Wings* with dark, slightly varied aquatint backgrounds, and others with contrasted bands. Goya had certainly evolved in his art. The drawings for the *Follies* series are done in thick brushstrokes for the figures and washes for the shadows. Goya was by that time a master printmaker and didn't have to rely on what had been, in effect, tracing; now he was as facile on the plate as he was on paper.

Sketchbook C has a narrative quality, too, moving from an ensemble of marginalized characters—beggars, invalids, and the insane—to what the show calls “allegorical visions.” It’s a day by day graphic diary. We can imagine Goya carrying the sketchbook with him as he moved through his day, recording the freak shows that appealed to him.

Technique best conveys subject in *What Horror, for a Revenge* from Sketchbook C (Figure 5). Goya used expressive brushwork, without the distraction of color, to convey his most extreme states. Against a dark, murky background defined by intense brushstrokes, a bound man is hopelessly trapped, and he knows it. It’s all wash, so lines are thick, but there’s nothing languid about it. Short stabs of the brush and layers of wash make a blur of an image. We can’t believe our eyes—it’s a gruesome scene—and he’s berserk with pain. A crisper, more linear image wouldn’t be as horrifying.

The plotchy quality of wash is perfect for conveying not only violence but physical ugliness. Goya’s drawings, especially in Sketchbook C, aren’t conventionally beautiful. Faces and forms aren’t elegant lines, straight or serpentine, but blotches, large and small, and uneven pools of wash. Goya worships reason, and reason means not only logic but clarity. The insane, but also the superstitious, beggars, and the ignorant, get the blotchiest treatment (Figure 6). They distort reason, or their lifestyles shouldn’t “be” in a rational, enlightened society.

These are Goya’s most minimalist scenes. Most of the drawings in Sketchbook C are isolated single figure studies, like *Strange Penance* or *The Faggot, Auntie Gila*. They’re both bizarre. *The Faggot, Auntie Gila* is, as far as I know, Goya’s single stab at gay subject matter. Auntie Gila was a Spanish epithet for impoverished, ugly old women. The catalogue described him as a man “caught in the act of pulling up his undergarments after a sexual encounter.” Goya’s isolation of the figure, who looks so strange, has a practical effect: such figures become specimens.

Sketchbook C is prophetic, too. Here are a half dozen or so sheets depicting dream figures. They suggest what Goya developed more fully in the Black Paintings painted between 1819 and 1823. These figures are part animal, part human, with disjointed bodies, gaping mouths, and wild eyes. It’s the one instance in Goya’s sketchbooks where he draws a sequential series, identifying the drawings with titles like *Third, the Same Night or Another One*.

Sketchbooks C and F were probably filled concurrently, between 1820 and 1822. The paper in Sketchbook F is cheaper and subjects are more various, though most concern violence, poverty, and tragedy. Most don’t have inscriptions, and while some of the drawings in Sketchbook C evolved into etchings for *The Disasters of War*, Sketchbook F’s imaged have a randomness—they’re basically ideas.



Figure 5 Francisco de Goya. *What Horror for Revenge*, 1808-1814. Album C, 32. Wash, brush, and bistre on laid paper, 206 x 142 mm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.



Figure 6 Francisco de Goya. *¿Cuántas baras?* 1812-1814. Album C, 125. Wash, brush, bistre, grey-brown ink, iron gall ink, and black chalk lines on laid paper, 205 x 145 mm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

Sketchbook C has its share of violence, but Sketchbook F is chock-a-block with murder, revenge, and violence against women. *Man Carrying A Corpse* could have been in Sketchbook C. It's an isolated figure study—the two figures are really a unit—with no background and minimalist wash. The body of the dead woman is mostly contour.

The Black Border Sketchbook is dated between 1816 and 1820 and is different from both Sketchbooks C and F. The figures are bigger, most have borders, and the paper is higher quality than Sketchbook F. The scenes are light on the grotesque and gruesome. Goya titles them, though almost none went anywhere in terms of developing into a finished work of art. He tackles mythology. The catalogue and exhibition describes the sketches as philosophical ruminations. They're handsome.

The drawings convey emotions, through the vehicles of a peasant looking directly at us or a reclining woman in a forest. "You Are Having a Bad Time," Goya supposes of the peasant, or "Resignation," Goya's take on the young woman. They're cryptic, though. The titles only give us hints on what, if anything, these vignettes mean. Some depict old people unwisely and improbably doing somersaults, others of women doing tasks. They're more states of being than anything else. They're experiments in scraping, which Goya used to create a greater tonal range and to model form.

The Old Women and Witches Sketchbook, also called Sketchbook D, from 1819 to 1823, seems to develop and darken the mood of the Black Border Sketchbook. In looking at the drawings for *Los Caprichos*, done twenty years earlier, I couldn't help thinking of Goya as a creature of the Rococo for big parts of his career. Hardly playful, *Los Caprichos'* figures have extreme, grotesque distortions that, on the one hand, convey evil, but, on the other, sometimes seem too fanciful and over the top.

Here, I'd call the figures more earthly, if so many of them weren't falling in space. Goya scrapes the paper more aggressively to create texture, but also body parts and garments careening in space. In the older sketchbooks, Goya often used deformity or pose to suggest insanity or other outsider conditions. By contrast, in this sketchbook, Goya sought extreme figure shapes in a spirit of compositional challenge. *She Won't Get Up Till She's Finished Her Prayers* is a bent over old woman. It's extraordinarily difficult to convey a human figure that is so distorted, and yet still has human proportions.

Goya's drawing style has a destination, and that's lithography. Sketchbooks G and H, the Bordeaux Sketchbooks, take us to the end of his career, between 1824 and 1828, when he was living in Bordeaux. His also-exiled friend Ferrer, to whom he confided that all he had left was willpower, suggested he republish *Los Caprichos* to make money. Goya responded that he had "better ideas." He's started making lithographs of bullfighting scenes, and in his opinion they were "closer to Velazquez's brushstrokes than those of Mengs."



Figure 7 Francisco de Goya, *I Am Still Learning*. 1824-28. Bordeaux Album [G], sheet 154. Black crayon on laid paper, 192 x 145 mm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado

That idea, lithography, was new, and was Goya's godsend. Technically, lithographs were easier to conceive since Goya could draw directly on the stone. Now in his 80s, he welcomed a new, work-saving technology. He also had a partner in his printer, Cyprien Gaulon. Lithographs might be mass produced, but they look like drawings, suggesting the direct hand of the artist, proposing a fleeting moment and the swoosh of movement.

Most of the sheets in a Sketchbook H are untitled, while most in Sketchbook G are. They're the most expressionist things he did. He'd more or less stopped using wash and chalk, drawing now in greasy lithographic crayon (Figure 7). Done at the end of his life, they coincide with his last print series, *The Bulls of Bordeaux*, which is only four sheets and his only set of lithographs.

Sketchbooks G and H don't include any scenes that made it into the *Bulls of Bordeaux* set. For that project, he didn't need preliminary drawings on paper. He drew directly on the stone, propping it on an easel, treating the crayon like a paintbrush, pacing backward and forward to survey his work. He used his scraper directly on the stone. The lithographs are filled with the kind of staccato strokes and touches he achieved years earlier in drawings through dabs of wash.

In terms of subjects, the subjects in Sketchbooks G and H run the gamut. Making appearances are flying dogs, people traveling in weird conveyances, all sorts of raging lunatics, defecating monks, acrobats, gluttons, murderers in the act, and phantoms dancing. Goya was looking back at themes that had started to obsess him in the 1790s, when he was working on *Los Caprichos*.

This isn't exceptional. Great artists often return to older themes at the end of their lives. That said, the curators see a change in Goya's spirit. In the *Caprichos*, there's hope for better days, the triumph of reason over madness. In the late drawings, poverty, insanity, violence, opportunism, abuse of power, and deceit are aplenty, and they're unstoppable. ♪