Goya's private albums: A unique exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London

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Pablo Picasso once described Francisco Goya (1746-1828) as the most successful artist in poetically combining art with politics. This exhibition, the first of its kind, confirms this assessment and the depiction of Goya as a "painter philosopher".

Goya was a well-known and successful artist at the Spanish court. In 1789, he was nominated as King's painter to the new monarch, Charles IV, becoming First Court Painter ten years later. He was also Director of Painting at the Academy of San Fernando in Madrid. However in 1796, at the age of fifty, he began an entirely original and private artistic practice.

For the next thirty years, he created a series of personal albums of drawings in a variety of media, looking critically at Spanish society. This was not in abstract or suffocating symbolic imagery—a predominant tendency in his British contemporary William Blake (1757-1827)—but in images and characters existing in all their life-affirming contradictions, like the characters in a Shakespeare play, or in the novels of Balzac.

Soon after the artist's death in 1828, the albums were split up between disparate collections all over the world. The Hayward Gallery show is the product of systematic work since 1903 by Goya scholars to bring the albums back together. Out of 550 known drawings, 117 from all eight albums have been assembled. They are not preparatory sketches for bigger projects, but are unique works of art. The exhibition offers a major step in understanding their place in Goya's overall work.

The albums are unlike the usual artist's sketchbook. There are no practice drawings or half finished ideas. They are described as the equivalent of "literary journals". Perhaps they can be more accurately described not as direct depictions of what Goya saw, but as incarnations of what he thought about what he saw.

In his most famous work, the series of etchings Los Caprichos (1799), which began as *Suenos* (dreams), Goya tried to create what he described as a "universal language" that "would encourage men and women to reflect on the world and their roles and actions within it". He wanted to provoke deeper thought on the fundamental problems of the revolutionary epoch in which he lived. The album drawings are Goya's personal reflections.

This exhibition shows very clearly the influence of the ideas of the Enlightenment on Goya's work. He expressed this relationship in a unique fashion. His flights of pessimism, cynicism and despair were partly the result of a life threatening illness in 1792, which left him profoundly deaf. But he was also deeply affected by the decline of Spain and the reaction against the French Revolution.

Goya's albums were created during a tumultuous period in Spanish history. It spans the aftermath of the French Revolution (1789-93), Napoleon's invasion of Spain (1808), followed by a patriotic rebellion that led to the collapse of the monarchy and the formation of a liberal monarchist government in Cadiz (1812). Two years later, Ferdinand VII overthrew the government, tore up the constitution, re-established all the prerogatives of absolute monarchy and brought the Inquisition back to Spain. The turbulence continued, and in 1820 a military uprising led by a group of officers forced the king to revive the democratic constitution of 1812. These events are reflected in a myriad different ways in Goya's albums. He recognised how subversive they were and only showed them to close friends and co-thinkers.

Even before Goya began working on the albums, the paintings and drawings he made of his blue-blooded patrons were less than flattering. His realist approach, which showed the monarchy as ordinary people, reflected the fear and panic felt by his royal subjects about the events across the border in France.

When analysing this aspect of the portraits, one historian questioned why the Spanish monarchy tolerated him. Part of the answer lies in the attempt of the king to ride out the shock waves of the French Revolution by posing as an enlightened monarch, whilst he used repressive measures to crush support for the revolution in Spain.

While Goya continued to paint portraits of the monarchy and members of the aristocracy, he also painted leading figures of the Spanish Enlightenment, such as Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos. Jovellanos was an important thinker and poet and a great admirer of Goya's work. They met around the turn of the century and remained life-long friends.

Jovellanos is said to have had a huge influence on artists at the time, suggesting ideas for plays, subjects for paintings and generally influencing the direction of their art with the concepts of the Enlightenment. His influence can be seen in the subjects of many of Goya's drawings and paintings—the indolent aristocrat, the greedy and parasitic friar, the terrors of the Inquisition, the farce of marriage and social inequality.

The visual impact of the drawings needs little explanation; a change of clothes could place many of these characters on contemporary London streets. Goya creates a language that can be understood. His album drawings emerge as his own unique contribution to the critical ideas of the Enlightenment.

The Sanlucar Album (A) it is the smallest of the series. Goya accompanied the Duchess of Alba, Dona Maria Teresa de Silva, to Andalusia. In the port of Cadiz, he made drawings of prostitutes on the street and in brothels. The album has been described as a "paean" to woman. According to the catalogue notes, whilst the drawings "include elements of mockery and sly humour, there is as yet no sign of the critical moralising to come. At Sanlucar in 1796 no storm clouds threatened."

In Young woman pulling up her stockings, you cannot see the young woman's face, which is in shadow. There is no furniture, only a bowl and towel. It is characteristic of the majority of Goya's drawings at this time—intricate studies of the intimate lives of solitary women. Later, Renoir and Degas observed similar situations, but the blunt simplicity of Goya's drawings makes them more humane, less burdened by a predominating style.

Young woman sweeping is an exception in the album. Unlike the other drawings, which concentrate exclusively on the women, there is a strange intrusion. Behind her, out of the shade, comes a bull's skull. Instead of a bell hanging round its neck, it has what looks like a small birdcage, but

there is no bird! The skull is perched as though it is alive. Its eyes are fixed on the young woman who has her back to the apparition. Is this a prediction of her fate?

What characterises this album is its switch from erotic encounters to harsh criticism of Spanish society—particularly of the clergy and the aristocracy. Here for the first time Goya introduces written commentary beneath the drawings. This album influenced much of the imagery of his famous *Los Caprichos* etchings. Under the influence of the Enlightenment, he had come to the conclusion that artists, as well as poets and writers, could influence the progressive development of society.

Lovers reclining together in the dark is a sensitive portrait of love, shrouded in an overwhelmingly dark shadow. Its intimacy comes from the swaths of dark wash, in contrast to the intricate detail of the reclining female's face, back to the black shade of her lover's face. The simple background and grey strokes appearing over the hill are characteristic of the almost abstract drawings of the albums.

Maja and Celestina near a stone arch depicts Celestina as a procuress—a haggard and bitter old women. She is drawn in a faint, faded line as if she is slowly disappearing from life into the thinly drawn landscape. (This method of two states of drawing in one would be explored later by Picasso in such paintings as *The Charnel House*, 1945). Maja is nearby, playing with her hair. She is drawn in dark and bold lines and is aggressively alive. Is she looking over her shoulder beyond her difficult situation, or with sadness straight at it?

In *Lovers sitting on a rock*, the man's face is depicted from the front, while his beloved's face and body are in profile. The two faces become sides of the same countenance. Their hands are hidden, his in his pockets, hers beneath her dress. It is a first encounter, and Goya treats the sensual interplay with great delicacy. The man stares at her because she is looking straight ahead. She dare not look at him, fearing that if she does he will turn away.

In *Every word is a lie*, the charlatan who pulls out a jaw and they believe in it", there is a long line of patients. At the back are desperate toothache sufferers, then terrified victims with dentist's pliers in their mouths and finally a group of the cured—in agony with blood gushing from their mouths. In the middle of all this the dentist, with a sarcastic look, begins wrenching.

In *Poor things, how many others deserve this more. What's going on! Its clear that they are being taken off to San Fernando workhouse*, two soldiers with indifferent expressions escort two women away. The women, in shame or to hide their fear, cover their heads with their shawls. The overall scene is of an encounter that happens so often that each knows what is expected of the other.

Masquerading Asses. They are very pleased that thanks to their dress they are taken for people of real standing. These are the funniest of Goya's drawings. Three asses in human dress are standing on hind legs in different states of self-satisfaction. They are thrilled when a boy, looking at their clothes, mistakes them for members of the social elite. He doffs his hat and bows before them. With hooves sticking out of their cuffs and donkeys' heads out of their collars, Goya has given his asses very recognisably human expressions.

The oil vendor recognises them and asks, 'What's going on?' and sets about the Masqueradors with his stick. They make off protesting at the injustice of such lack of respect for their performance (http://www.hayward.org.uk/goya_brassai/goya37.html). The next drawing shows asses again, but the expressions have changed from a moment before. One ass admonishes the oil vendor, another tries one last masquerade that fails, and the last one with his back to us is feeling the full force of the oil vendor's beating.

The catalogue makes an important point about the technique used by Goya in these drawings: "Far more noticeable in this album than the first is Goya's masterly use of scraping. Caderera remarked that the English water colourists had used the technique to great effect. Goya used scraping not only to introduce halftones and highlights into his washes but also to alter his compositions in radical ways. The variety of compositions in the Madrid Album is remarkable, and Goya's command both of the medium and of his often complex messages is impressive."

This album covers the period from the outbreak of Spain's war against Napoleon Bonaparte in 1808 to the promulgation of the Constitution of Cadiz by the liberal Spanish government in 1812. The most significant group of drawings in this album depicts the Spanish Inquisition.

Juan Antonio Llorente, the secretary of the Inquisition in Madrid from 1789 to 1791, denounced the organisation in 1810, and in 1812 he published two books exposing its history and practices. These events may have spurred Goya to produce a visual counterpart of Llorente's criticisms—drawings of innocent victims, imprisonment, torture and even redemption to come.

In For having Jewish ancestry, a cavalcade of victims emerges out of a tunnel. Their faces are hidden, they are wearing tall hats and are manacled and humiliated. Vicious black-eyed figures in long dark cloaks with white neck collars and black horsewhips marshal the procession. Conspiring monks and priests whisper to the overseer and control the procession. Goya challenges a central concept of the Inquisition in this image. The Inquisition judged people by their bloodline, Goya wanted to overturn this and to judge a persons value by his contribution to the progressive development of society.

In *Divine reason. Don't miss one of them*, Goya presents a call to political action. An angelic looking female in a long dress and garland is kneeling down. In one of her strong hands she holds the scales of justice. In the other, she wields a horsewhip that she uses to lash out at black crows that does not seem able to fly away. Fattened and weakened by corruption, the crows represent the clergy and aristocracy and the enemies of reason.

After the restoration of the absolute monarchy in 1814, Goya narrowly survived a purge. He was brought before the reconstituted Inquisition in 1815 for indecency in his paintings, "Nude Maja" and "Clothed Maja". He escaped punishment, but the experience increased his resolve that his albums and other uncommissioned works would, for the foreseeable future, remain hidden from the general public.

I found this Album the most interesting. In it Goya's unique form of social criticism reaches its most inventive forms. The sequence of duels and outmoded social habits he portrays has an unusual visual strength. Another aspect of the album is the crowd scenes, in which Goya masters the intricate images of large numbers of people and how they behave toward one another.

In *The duel*, two men are fighting near a derelict building—upholding honour and stupidity in equal measure amidst the ruins of Spain. Unwashed and unshaven, each desperate figure is a symbol of death. According to the catalogue, the first series of drawings has six duels and in five of these the characters wear seventeenth-century costumes "to stress that their ethos and activities are outdated..."

In *Man hunting lice near a shack*, an ordinary man is naked except for a black felt hat sagging over his eyes. He sits on the ground rummaging through his clothes searching for lice. Behind him, an exhausted woman (I assume his partner) in rags carries out another equally soul-destroying task. She has her back to the scene. They are both having a hard time maintaining a level of decency during times of war.

In *Construction in progress*, men are at work on a huge building, whilst an overseer in a large hat and a heavy coat looks on. Figures are shown fading into the distance, but are seen to be still working. Despite their faintness, Goya's lines retain everywhere a sense of hard physical toil. Two figures are pushing a heavy load. They watch the overseer questioning a terrified child.

Lunatics in front of a door is dominated by a whitewashed wall

drenched with sunlight. A door has opened and a number of lunatics pour out from the darkness into the light. The first one out is dazzled, but begins to settle on the ground. Noise dominates the scene—the noise of humanity freed from its darkened imprisoned trauma. To indicate a head twisting from side to side, Goya has drawn two profiles in one face. It creates a sense of rapid movement.

Goya's portrayal of labour is complicated. On the one hand, he shared the enlightened notion that work was good and beneficial to the whole of society. At the same time, he did not see it as morally uplifting or bestowing moral superiority on those who engaged in it. He looked upon all classes in society critically.

Man carrying a huge load is one of the most striking images in the albums. A solitary figure is bent double carrying a sack three times his size. No facial agony can be seen because his head is completely buried beneath the load. Nothing detracts from the scene—no distant landscapes or ruined buildings, just the man's shadow on the floor. It is as powerful an image of unbearable social relations as the Crucifixion is to Christianity.

Hunter shooting at birds bares the unmistakable influence of Rembrandt in its mannerism, but its unity of body and gun is entirely modern. In *Hunter taking aim with his dog watching*, a small hunting dog stands by his master. Every sense is almost painfully alert, waiting for something to drop from the sky. This is a unique depiction of a union between man and animal.

Goya has drawn thick black borders around each of the pictures in this album, it is said because he was preparing them for display. A new set of drawings criticising Spanish society, it was completed during the period of the restored monarchy and a series of failed military officers uprisings, until 1820 when the king was forced to restore the Cadiz Constitution.

In these drawings Goya eliminates all backgrounds and concentrates solely on his subjects. They have an abstract quality: all his creative energy is concentrated on depicting these individuals and their actions and emotions. Goya shows a complete indifference to the classical concept of a finished drawing. He leaves in scrapping marks, and other alterations can still be seen.

Showing off? Remember your age immediately follows a depiction of an old woman enjoying herself dancing. In this one the old woman is tumbling backwards down a flight of stairs, her underwear showing as her dress lifts over her. The pain in her face is not only because of the bumps and bruises she is receiving. It hurts more because she is reminded that she is not what she used to be. This is poignant humour, the comedy of tragedy.

In *They'll take care of the donkey*, a poor family looks after their donkey, which is carrying the weaker family members and all their possessions. They share their fate with that of the donkey and treat it with understanding and respect, just as they treat each other. It is a sensitive portrayal of family relations under obvious strain and dwells on the goodness in humanity under adverse conditions. The drawing suggests that it is these sentiments that would guide human progress out of the nightmare that was Spain.

The Industrious blind man is working with children around, helping him to cobble. He sits on the floor with a sleeping child bound to his body. His face expresses as much sacrifice and generates as much sympathy as a Bosch or Rembrandt portrait of the fallen Christ. The attempt to portray the suffering of the poor using religious imagery would be returned to time and again by future generations of artists.

God save us from such a bitter fate is the most terrifying and helpless image in the album. A vagabond with a knife raised aloft has a mother by the hair. A child is buried in her dress. Is the man about to plunge his knife into her? If she struggles he will. She is completely helpless, as a mass of black clouds roll across the scene. Her pale white face, out of context with the scene, is said to represent liberty.

In 1823 the absolutist monarchy was re-established with the support of the French army and Goya was forced into hiding for a short time. Many of his colleagues were shot, imprisoned or fled to France. When an amnesty was declared, he was allowed to travel to France, where he spent the last years of his life. This album was completed prior to Goya's departure. Its imagery is similar to the series of canvases known as "the Black Paintings". It is here that Goya's nightmarish visions reach hallucinatory proportions.

In *Singing and dancing*, an old women is playing the guitar and bawling out a song. She is wearing garish clothes. Beneath her sits an old woman who has abandoned her dinner to listen. She is caught up in the music. She holds both sides of her face in surprise, as if she recognises a tune she enjoyed as a child. She does not seem able to stand up but tries to dance while remaining seated.

Covetous old hag depicts a bare room. On a table, there are bags of money. An old woman in rags clasps the money in her arms. She has a terrified look on her face. Is it an unexpected knock on the door, or an expected one? In Goya's work the old women turns up in countless situations.

This is one of two albums completed whilst Goya was living in Bordeaux. The drawings are in black chalk or crayon, and lack none of the inventiveness of his earlier work. In a letter to his friend Ferrer in Paris, Goya described them as a set of "new Caprichos". On April 16 1828 Goya dies after completing the second Bordeaux album. In the last album Goya all but abandoned his use of titles, replacing them with his signature.

Goya responded to events during his lifetime as an imaginative artist. His lasting progressive effect has been to turn the artist's imagination towards the mass of oppressed society, not in a strictly realistic fashion, and not uncritically, but in a poetic manner that enables his drawings to live and breathe some two hundred years after they were executed. Today his insights are still surprisingly fresh.

Goya's albums attest to the depth of the influence of the Enlightenment on the direction of his work. That relationship is still being unravelled to this day. It proves, however, that revolutionary ideals do not have to come into conflict with the "individuality" of the artist but can give a profound release to that individuality in images of lasting universal appeal.

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The Goya exhibition at the Hayward Gallery runs until May 13, 2001. For further details see:

http://www.hayward-gallery.org.uk/hg/

The catalogue to the exhibition:

Goya: Drawings From His Private Albums

by Juliet Wilson-Bareau, Hayward Gallery Publishing, ISBN 1853322164, £24.95

http://www.cornerhouse.org/publications/

Info-96-Goya

A comprehensive site by the University of Zaragoza:

http://goya.unizar.es/