

THE COLOSSUS (EL COLOSO)

CLASIFICACIÓN: EASEL PAINTING. VARIOUS SUBJECTS



DATOS GENERALES

CRONOLOGÍA

Ca. 1808 - 1812

UBICACIÓN

The Prado National Museum. Madrid, Madrid, Spain

DIMENSIONES

116 x 105 cm

TÉCNICA Y SOPORTE

Oil on canvas

RECONOCIMIENTO DE LA AUTORÍA DE GOYA

Attributed work

TITULAR

El Prado National Museum

FICHA: REALIZACIÓN/REVISIÓN

26 May 2010 / 15 Jun 2023

INVENTARIO

383 (P02785)

HISTORIA

This canvas went to Goya's son, Javier, when the estate of the painter's wife, Josefa Bayeu, was divided up following her death in 1812. It later became the property of Miguel Fernández Durán Fernández de Pinedo y Bizarrón, Marquis of Perales, who died in 1833. His great-grandson Pedro Durán inherited this painting and bequeathed it in his will to the Prado Museum, which it entered in 1931.

ANÁLISIS ARTÍSTICO

In an outdoor landscape, a terrified crowd flees before an apparition of a giant. This monstrous figure has one arm raised, the hand closed into a fist, and one eye closed, as he advances across the width of the canvas.

In most of the interpretations put forward for this painting, and especially with regard the figure of the giant, there prevails the idea, with certain variations, that the work is a reference to the Spanish War of Independence.

López Vázquez and González Zárate believe that the figure of the giant could be a reference to Ferdinand VII - the proud, ignorant, princely figure responsible for the country's War of Independence. Nigel Glendinning, on the other hand, proposed back in 1963 that this painting could be an illustration of the poem by Juan Bautista Arraiza (Madrid, 1770-Madrid, 1837) entitled *The Prophecy of the Pyrenees (La profecía del Pirineo)* (1808). This poem tells how a giant rose up from the mountains of the Pyrenees to defend Spain from the Napoleonic invasion. The figure of the giant is a relatively common one in Spanish literature and is used by Manuel José Quintana y Lorenzo (Madrid, 1772-Madrid, 1857), by Cristóbal de Breña (Madrid, 1777-Madrid, 1833) and by Francisco Martínez de la Rosa (Granada, 1787-Madrid, 1862).

Alternatively, the colossus has been interpreted as personifying Napoleon's armies, menacing the terrified natives as they flee from the French invaders.

One of the formal sources of inspiration for the figure of the colossus could have been the Farnese Hercules which Francisco de Goya had earlier depicted on pages 139a, 141a, 143a and 145a of his *Italian Sketchbook*, drawn from a number of different angles. Goya must have seen this classical sculpture during his stay in Rome, between 1769 and 1771, since copying from the *Farnese Hercules* was a common exercise at the city's academies. The Aragonese artist could also have carried on working with this sculpture once back in Spain by referring to printed reproductions of it, particularly those by Hendrick Goltzius (Bracht, 1558-Haarlem, 1617), which were widely available all over Europe.

Thanks to the x-rays made of *The Colossus* at the Prado Museum, we have learnt that Goya made a number of changes to this figure. These x-ray images reveal that the painter had originally placed the giant looking out at the viewer, with his left arm resting on his hip in a pose similar to that of the *Farnese Hercules*. This pose also brings to mind the *Hispanic Hercules (Hércules hispano)* which Francisco de Zurbarán (Fuente de Cantos, 1598-Madrid, 1664) painted for the Hall of Kingdoms of Madrid's Buen Retiro Palace.

The painting also has ties to Goya's etching and aquatint *Seated Giant*, dated to between 1808 and 1818, in which the same figure appears with his back to the viewer and, in this case, sitting down. A similar figure was depicted by Henry Fuseli (*Polyphemus Tricked by Ulysses*, 1803, private collection, Zurich), although said work shows the character after he has been defeated.

The composition of *The Colossus* shows some similarities with another work by Goya, entitled *The Hot Air Balloon*. In both pictures, the canvas has been divided lengthways, with the lower section containing a number of people running. In the case of *The Hot Air Balloon*, these people could be soldiers, whilst in *The Colossus* they are civilians.

In 2008, to mark the presence of *The Colossus* in the exhibition *Goya in Times of War* (15 April-13 June 2008, Prado Museum, Madrid), Manuela Mena, Head Conservator for 18th-century Painting at the Prado Museum, embarked on a renewed investigation of this painting. Her work led to the subsequent publication of the conclusion that the painting belongs not to Francisco de Goya but rather to his disciple, Asensio Julià (Valencia, 1760-Madrid?, 1832). This hypothesis is based on several different pieces of data, perhaps one of the most significant of which is that this

painting makes use of a different shade of black from the transparent, more delicate one usually employed by Goya, and which the artist tended to use especially in those paintings where the colour black predominated. Furthermore, thanks to the x-rays made of this painting, we have discovered the constant changes and hesitations which its creator made whilst painting it, behaviour which was not at all usual for Goya, who worked in a far more decided, confident manner.

Finally, this investigation by Mena also makes reference to the initials "AJ" which appeared in the x-ray images of 2008, which could be those of Goya's Valencian disciple, Asensio Julià.

This study of *The Colossus* has reignited the debate surrounding the work's authorship, in turn prompting responses from some scholars, including Nigel Glendinning, who maintain that this painting should be attributed to Goya.

EXPOSICIONES

Goya

Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen Mauritshuis
The Hague 1970

organized by Ministerio de Estado
y Asuntos Culturales and Réunion
des Musées Nationaux, July 4th
to September 13th 1970.

Exhibited also at the Musée de
l'Orangerie des Tuileries, Paris,
October 25th to December 7th
1970, consultant editors Jeannine
Baticle and A. B. de Vries

cat. 40

Von Greco bis Goya

Haus der Kunst Munich 1982

From February 20th to April 25th
1982. Exhibited also at the
Künstlerhaus, Viena

cat. 24

Goya y el espíritu de la Ilustración

Museo Nacional del Prado Madrid 1988

from October 6th to December
18th 1988. Exhibited also at
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,
January 18th to March 26th 1989;
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Nueva York, May 9th to July 16th
1989, Madrid curator Manuela B.
Mena Marqués, scientific
directors Alfonso E. Pérez
Sánchez and Eleanor A. Sayre

cat. 69

Goya

Palacio de Pedralbes Barcelona 1977

from April 12th to June 30th 1977

cat. 40

Goya

Koninklijke Musea Voor Schone Kunsten Van
België Brussels 1985

consultant editor Luis González
Seara. From October 26th to
December 22nd 1985

cat. 31

Goya

Nationalmuseum Stockholm 1994

consultant editors Juan J. Luna
and Görel Cavalli-Björkman. From
October 7th 1994 to January 8th
1995

cat. 30

De El Greco a Goya

Palacio de Bellas Artes Mexico D.F. 1978

November-December 1978

cat. 40

Spanish paintings of 18th and 19th Century. Goya and his time

Seibu Museum of Art Tokyo 1987

exhibited also at Seibu
Tsukashin, Amagasaki; Iwaki City
Museum Fukushima, Fukushima

cat. 94

Goya: Prophet der Moderne

Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin 2005

from July 13th to October 3th
2005. Exhibited also at the
Kunsthistorischemuseum, Vienna,
October 18th 2005 to January 8th
2006, consultant editor Manuela
B. Mena Marqués

cat. 78

BIBLIOGRAFÍA

Goya and Arrizia's Profecía del Pirineo

Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes
GLENDDINNING, Nigel

pp. 363-366

16

1963

Vie et ouvre de Francisco de Goya

GASSIER, Pierre y WILSON, Juliet

p. 265, cat. 946

1970

Office du livre

GUDIOL RICART, José

vol. I, p. 355, cat. 610

t. I

1970

Polígrafa

Francisco de Goya, 4 vols.

“El Coloso de Goya”

**Goya y el espíritu de la
Ilustración**

CAMÓN AZNAR, José
vol. III, p. 182
1980-1982
Caja de Ahorros de Zaragoza, Aragón y Rioja

Goya
BOZAL, Valeriano
pp. 239-245
184
1985

PÉREZ SÁNCHEZ, Alfonso E. y SAYRE,
Eleanor A. (directores) and MENA, Manuela B.
(comisaria)
pp. 263, 264, 265 (il.) y 266, cat. 69
1988
Museo del Prado

Goya. Arte e condizione umana

PAZ, Alfredo de
pp. 151-153, il. 131
1990
Liguori editore

La técnica artística como método de conocimiento, a propósito del Coloso de Goya

Goya
VEGA, Jesusa
pp. 229-244.
324
2008

En torno al Coloso atribuido a Goya una vez más

Goya
GLENDINNING, Nigel
pp. 294-299
329
2009

“¿Un fracasado intento de descatalogar El Coloso por el Museo del Prado?”

Goya
GLENDINNING, Nigel
pp. 61-68
326
2009

La dimensión inconsciente en la obra de carácter fantástico de Goya y su repercusión en la atribución del Coloso

Goya
PRADA, Javier de
pp. 146-157
331
2010

www.museodelprado.es

ENLACES EXTERNOS