Welcome to TimesPeople
Get Started

TimesPeople recommended: First Comes Fear 12:03 PM

Recommend

HOME PAGE | TODAY'S PAPER | VIDEO | MOST POPULAR | TIMES TOPICS

Try Times Reader today | Log In | Register Now | Help

The New York Times

Art & Design

Search All NYTimes.com
Go

WORLD | U.S. | N.Y. / REGION | BUSINESS | TECHNOLOGY | SCIENCE | HEALTH | SPORTS | OPINION | ARTS | STYLE | TRAVEL | JOBS | REAL ESTATE | AUTOS

ART & DESIGN | BOOKS | DANCE | MOVIES | MUSIC | TELEVISION | THEATER

ART REVIEW

Spanish Draftsmanship That Leaps Off the Page

By KAREN ROSENBERG
Published: October 14, 2010

In between Velázquez and Picasso there was Goya, and then there was everyone else. That's exactly the way the Frick Collection has sensibly chosen to organize its thrilling exhibition "The Spanish Manner: Drawings From Ribera to Goya."

RECOMMEND
TWITTER
SIGN IN TO E-MAIL
PRINT
REPRINTS
SHARE

4 GOLDEN GLOBE NOMINATIONS INCLUDING BEST PICTURE DRAMA

Enlarge This Image

Hispanic Society of America

"The Spanish Manner: Drawings From Ribera to Goya" at the Frick Collection includes Goya's "Mirth."

Blog

ArtsBeat
The latest on the arts, coverage of live events, critical reviews, multimedia extravaganzas and much more. Join the discussion.

More Arts News

Enlarge This Image

Really, it's two shows in one: a gallery of diverting studies and sketches by Jusepe de Ribera, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo and other, lesser lights, and then a scintillating room of 23 drawings by Goya.

The works, 55 in all, are largely from New York-area institutions — the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Morgan Library and the Hispanic Society of America, as well as Philadelphia and Princeton art museums. They're extraordinarily diverse in style and subject, and include naturalistic figure studies, anguished martyrdom scenes and mischievous grotesques.

All of which raises the question: What, exactly, is the "Spanish manner"? Conventional wisdom holds that Spanish draftsmanship, in comparison to the French or Netherlandish varietals, bloomed late — around the time of the Enlightenment. El Greco, Velázquez and other golden age masters worked out their visions "alla prima": right on the canvas.

Yet drawing was important to many other artists of the 17th and 18th centuries, according to Jonathan Brown, the New York University professor who organized the show with the Frick senior curator Susan Grace Galassi and the independent scholar Lisa A. Banner. The problem was that works on paper weren't properly conserved.

As Professor Brown writes in his catalog introduction, the drawings typically wound up in lots at estate sales. They were purchased by other artists who saw them as raw material and handled them accordingly. Collectors, for the most part, were indifferent. Looking closely at the first part of the show, you may pick up on a few distinguishing characteristics of Spanish drawing: a frenetic pen line, a

Log in to see what your friends are sharing on nytimes.com.
Privacy Policy | What's This?
Log In With Facebook

What's Popular Now

Why Not Regulate Guns as Seriously as Toys?

Obama's Remarks in Tucson

Books Update E-Mail

Sign up for the latest book reviews, sent every Friday.
Sign Up
See Sample | Privacy Policy

MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED | BLOGGED | SEARCHED | VIEWED

1. Is Law School a Losing Game?
2. The Temporary Vegetarian: Cabbage's Sweet Side
3. United Tastes: How the Microplane Grater Escaped the Garage
4. Recipe: Bess Feigenbaum's Cabbage Soup
5. Robert Wright: First Comes Fear
6. The Pour: A Cult Winemaker Tinkers With Success
7. Navigating the Airfare Maze Online Gets Tougher
8. Op-Ed Contributor: When Congress Was Armed And Dangerous
9. The 41 Places to Go in 2011
10. 60 First Graders, 4 Teachers, One Loud New Way to Learn

Go to Complete List »

Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, New York

Ribera's "Head of a Satyr."

liberated attitude toward the figure and a general resistance to the strictures of Italian classicism. Regional symbolism comes into play, too, as in Ribera's marvelous study of a bat; the creature is said to represent Valencia (near the artist's birthplace).

Ribera is the standout in this gallery. Though an unoriginal and possibly corrupt painter (he is thought to have signed works by other artists), he was a playful and inventive draftsman. His drawings shown at the Frick, done mainly in red chalk, revel in fantastic and unconventional figuration.

He envisioned a braying satyr, with pointy ears and a tufted chin, and an otherwise normal-looking man under attack from Lilliputian figures. Even routine head studies look creepy when several of them are squeezed onto the same page; one exquisitely modeled profile seems to sprout an extra ear.

The drawings of Murillo, another well-known artist, eschew fantasy but dazzle with virtuosity. An ethereal "Christ on the Cross" transports with its clouds of wash over gossamer pen strokes; a sketch of a standing man holding his hat has a swaggering presence that belies its lightning-quick execution.

The lesser-known Antonio del Castillo y Saavedra makes an equally strong impression with four sketches of peasant men, done with a reed pen made from an Andalusian plant. Also in reed pen, Francisco de Herrera the Younger's design for a processional float envelops John the Evangelist in a froth of clouds.

Also shown is a late-18th-century work by Goya's brother-in-law, Francisco Bayeu, a sketch of the dove of the Holy Spirit made in preparation for a ceiling fresco. (Done with white and black chalk on blue paper, it has a bright orange thumbprint where Bayeu held it up to his painting).

But there is little to prepare you for the experience of Goya's drawings in the next gallery. Among these, the idea of a "Spanish Manner" seems less pertinent than the "great man" theory of art history. The works assembled here come from eight different albums and were made during the last 30 or so years of Goya's life (1796 to 1828), after illness had left him deaf. Each one is a swift blow to the solar plexus.

Working mostly in brush and ink, Goya made these drawings for his own amusement. Some of them have a clear anticlerical bent, reinforced by the artist's acerbic captions; others sympathize with, and humanize, victims of violence and poverty. A few are improvisations or flights of fancy, like the grotto with fishermen that appears to have evolved from an ink-covered area of handwriting.

Most powerful are the groups of figures fighting, floating, or falling. Sometimes they seem to be doing all of these things at once, as in "Mirth," a wickedly exuberant image of an elderly man and woman leaping, entwined, into midair. If they look like sky divers, that's probably because Goya and other artists were aware of early-19th-century experiments with balloons and parachutes.

In many of these works Goya pays particular attention to legs and feet, as load-bearers and as dead weight. Consider two of the figures in "Torture of a Man." One kicks helplessly as he dangles from a horrendous contraption. The other, calves straining, turns the crank.

Ceci n'est pas un Birkin

ALSO IN T MAGAZINE »

- T Exclusive Video | 'Dorothea'
- Is there anything Garrett Hedlund can't do?

nytimes.com

ADVERTISEMENTS

Find your dream home with The New York Times Real Estate

Follow The New York Times on Twitter

The new issue of T is here

See the news in the making. Watch TimesCast, a daily news video.

Ads by Google what's this?

Spanish IHT and Tax

Pay no Spanish IHT

Pay no Spanish Tax

www.winchamiht.com

And then there’s the show’s final image, “He Appeared Like This, Mutilated, in Zaragoza, Early in 1700.” With quick strokes of a lithographic crayon, Goya limns a head and a pair of stockinged feet that poke out from a tacked-up bundle of cloth.

Manner, or man? This show has both.

“The Spanish Manner: Drawings From Ribera to Goya” continues through Jan. 9 at the Frick Collection, 1 East 70th Street, Manhattan; (212) 288-0700, frick.org.

A version of this review appeared in print on October 15, 2010, on page C27 of the New York edition.

Connect with The New York Times on Facebook.

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL
PRINT
REPRINTS

Ads by Google what's this?

Spanish IHT and Tax
Pay no Spanish IHT
Pay no Spanish Tax
www.winchamiht.com

Get Free E-mail Alerts on These Topics

Art

Frick Collection

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM

FASHION & STYLE »

American Fashion’s Coming-Out Party

HOME & GARDEN »

Preventing the Heat From Sneaking Out

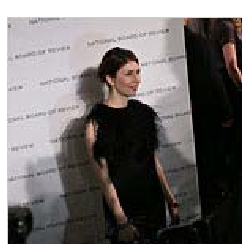
SPORTS »

Using Time, and Timeouts, Wisely

OPINION »

What did the Crittenden Compromise promise, and why did it fail?

MOVIES »



A Swirl of Back Patting on the Statuette Circuit

OPINION »

Op-Ed: Save Energy, Save Our Troops

Home | World | U.S. | N.Y. / Region | Business | Technology | Science | Health | Sports | Opinion | Arts | Style | Travel | Jobs | Real Estate | Autos | Back to Top

Copyright 2010 The New York Times Company | Privacy | Terms of Service | Search | Corrections | RSS | First Look | Help | Contact Us | Work for Us | Advertise | Site Map