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# Ceán Bermúdez: Historiador del arte y coleccionista ilustrado

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**Ceán Bermúdez: Historiador del arte y coleccionista ilustrado.** Edited by Elena María Santiago Páez. Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional de España, Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2016. Pp. 543 + 276 colour illustrations. 50€ (hardcover). ISBN: 9788415245520

Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez, **Historia del arte de la pintura en España.** Edited by David García López and Daniel Crespo Delgado. Oviedo: KRK Ediciones, 2016. Pp. 829 + 10 b&w illustrations. 29.95€ (hardcover). ISBN: 9788483675342

Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez (1749–1829) might just have been the single most important figure in the historiography of Spanish art. Yet, until now, little has been done to celebrate this father of our profession. Certainly, we take him for granted as we continue to cite the extremely useful volumes of his *Diccionario histórico de los más ilustres profesores de las bellas artes en España* (1800) — so useful, in fact, that they were said to have been the essential guide for plunderers during the Peninsular War a few years later. Perhaps inevitably, as the foundation for generations of scholarship to come, Ceán has all too often been seen as the mere — though indefatigable — compiler or archivist who provided the raw materials for the later ‘real’ art historians. He was even damned by faint praise in the only substantial study of him of the recent past, a doctoral thesis by José Clisson Aldama published in 1982 (Oviedo: Instituto de Estudios Asturianos) which, though a valuable survey of Ceán as a writer and critic of art, insisted on his ‘mentalidad cerradamente neoclásica’ (p. 355).

The 2016 exhibition at the Biblioteca Nacional de España in Madrid (20 May–11 September) and its catalogue set out to provide a more rounded and nuanced assessment of Ceán Bermúdez and his significance, which was long overdue. The team of curators and editors was made up of notable scholars of Enlightenment Spain and historiography of Spanish art, including specialists on Ceán. It was led by Elena Santiago Páez, Librarian Emerita at the Biblioteca Nacional de España, who introduces the publication. Also part of the preliminary material is a useful chronology by Javier González Santos of the Asturian scholar, his works and his times, from his beginnings in Gijón and as protégé of the Liberal minister and man of letters Gaspar Melchior Jovellanos through to recent reception. In the studies that follow, the ‘biografía intelectual’ by the same author fittingly opens with a quote from the tribute at the end of Stirling Maxwell’s *Annals of the Artists of Spain* (1848), which provided the first critique of Ceán’s life and work by a later scholar in the field. Daniel Crespo Delgado’s thoughtful essay ‘Sin título’ seeks to define and contextualize the nature of Ceán’s writings on art at a time when ‘tal labor no estaba sancionado ni profesional ni institucionalmente’ (p. 71). Ceán’s working method, described by his friend José Vargas Ponce as ‘más parece hecha por una sociedad de laboriosos yndividuos, que por uno solo’ (p. 89), is analyzed by David García López, who emphasizes its triple principles of the study

of documents, provision of bibliographical information, and direct observation of artworks. The essay on Ceán as a collector of drawings by Beatriz Hidalgo Caldas is complemented by another, by Elena Santiago Páez, on the history of printmaking through Ceán's collecting and scholarship in this field. The catalogue itself reflects the exhibition in its arrangement according to different aspects or phases of the Asturian scholar's life and work, each preceded by an overview. The bibliography and indexes also provide helpful tools for further scholarship on Ceán. Altogether, the publication is a handsome and substantial tome, of a type now rare in times of austerity and increasing emphasis on online resources. It works well as an aide-mémoire for those who saw the exhibition but in its own right it also makes a major contribution to our understanding of the man and the significance of his work.

The exhibition and catalogue covered several categories of material. The core, and the impetus for the exhibition, was Ceán's own collection of prints and drawings of outstanding quality, much of which came to the Biblioteca Nacional de España in 1867 via Valentín Carderera and became the genesis of the Library's impressive Sala de Estampas. Ceán's collection is probably most famous for its works by Goya, and the relationship between these two men, so different yet so similar in the span of their lives through such troubled times, remains one of the most intriguing in the history of art. Not surprisingly, Goya almost steals the show. His portrait of Ceán c. 1786–88 (Cat. 1.1; private collection) presents his faithful promoter and collector resplendent in a fashionable, rich fur coat in a pose reminiscent of George Romney's portrait of Lord Grantham, the British diplomat and enthusiastic early collector of Goya prints. The portrait welcomed the visitor to the exhibition — and looks out at us from the cover of the catalogue — inviting us into his *gabinete* to peruse its contents (Figure 1).

A few of these (could they even be early proofs for *Caprichos*, as the cataloguers and others have been tempted to wonder?) are depicted at his elbow in the portrait. Undoubtedly one of the unique experiences of the show was the opportunity to compare the beautiful Goya drawing of Velázquez's *Las meninas* (Cat. 8.12; private collection) and the etching and aquatint based on it (Cat. 9.64; Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid), the rarest and strangest of Goya's etchings after the Sevillian master. But exceptional prints by Dürer, Rembrandt and other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century masters also command attention here, both in the show and the fine catalogue reproductions. Highlights such as Dürer's *Adam and Eve* (Cat. 9.10; Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid) are almost impossible to choose, and an engraving of the *Combat between Reason and the Passions* by Nicolas Béatrizet after Baccio Bandinelli (Cat. 9.24; Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid) seems particularly appropriate in this Enlightenment context. The collection not only demonstrates its owner's interest in printmaking techniques but is also a vivid reminder that for many art lovers like Ceán, who never travelled outside their native land, connoisseurship of prints provided their key source of instruction on the Old Masters. Of the drawings, a sensitive and fragile *Pietà* (Cat. 8.2; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid), famed as a Michelangelo in Ceán's day and now identified as by Taddeo Zuccaro, remains a haunting work.

A different kind of insight into Ceán's working methods is provided by the manuscript versions of Ceán's work in the Biblioteca Nacional de España, such as his extraordinary diagrammatic trees tracing artistic relationships within schools. These and other contextual material reveal the astonishing extent and range of Ceán's work across art, architecture, and archaeology, in addition to the *Diccionario*. For historians of Spanish art, one of the most tantalizing exhibits was the manuscript copy of Pacheco's *Arte de la pintura* (Cat. 3.3; Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid), which Ceán consulted during preparation of his *Diccionario* — and later authenticated. Viewing Pacheco's manuscript in the context of the red chalk drawings of artists (Cat. 3.14–17; Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid) and of Ceán himself by Goya (Cat. 3.18; private collection), which were intended to illustrate the *Diccionario* (sadly, this was

never realized), in addition to Ceán's own album of portrait drawings (Cat. 3.11; Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid) purporting to be of artists in Vasari's *Lives*, the exhibition and its catalogue vividly convey the sense of the continuum that Ceán must have felt with these scholar-artists of the past.

The exhibition also coincided with publication of Ceán's *Historia del arte de la pintura en España*, which formed volumes VI and VII of the author's chronological survey *Historia del arte de la pintura*, on whose indexes he was still working when he died. The manuscript for this



**Figure 1.** Francisco de Goya y Lucientes. *Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez*. c. 1786–88. Oil on canvas, 122 × 88 cm. Private Collection.

unpublished work passed to the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, the institution to which he dedicated so much of his life. The *Historia*, which covers the history of art in Europe from the Greeks up to the Spanish school at the beginning of the eighteenth century, has never been published in its entirety, though the sections on painting in Spain were previously published in *Academia* (1951: I) with an article by Enrique Lafuente Ferrari. The present pocket-sized edition makes these sections more widely available to modern scholars.

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