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Mark P. McDonald, *Renaissance to Goya: Prints and Drawings from Spain*

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Exhibition schedule: [British Museum](#), London, September 20, 2012–January 6, 2013; [Museo Nacional del Prado](#), Madrid, March 20–June 16, 2013 (under the title *Spanish Drawings from the British Museum: Renaissance to Goya*); [Art Gallery of New South Wales](#), Sydney, August 31–November 24, 2013; [New Mexico Museum of Art](#), Santa Fe, December 14, 2013–March 9, 2014

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Alonso Berruguete. *Assumption of the Virgin* (ca. 1555–61). Ink and wash heightened with white over black chalk. Courtesy British Museum.

For more than fifty years, studies of Spanish art have disproved the myth that peninsular artists did not draw. While some Spaniards drew very little—most notably El Greco, Francisco de Zurbarán, and Diego Velázquez—others drew a great deal. Francisco de Goya, for example, was a remarkably prolific draftsman. Nevertheless, curators and historians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to assume that the scarcity of Spanish drawings in European collections compared to those by Italian or Dutch Old Masters evinced a national dislike for draftsmanship or, worse yet, an essential Spanish passion that did not lend itself to *disegno*. The opinion held despite the well-known promotion of drawing by Spanish early modern theorists Vicente Carducho, Francisco Pacheco, and Antonio Palomino.

Old assumptions have been put to rest over the last century. Extant objects, more numerous than

previously known, have been catalogued and analyzed for their attributions, form, technique, materials, and content, and they have been exhibited at venues in Europe and the United States. The 1970s and 1980s proved a particularly fertile time. Diego Angulo and Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez published four volumes on Spanish Golden Age drawings, Jonathan Brown brought his keen eye to the drawings of Bartolomé Esteban Murillo and José de Ribera, and Pierre Gassier and Juliet Wilson-Bareau catalogued drawings by Goya. As for the supposed lack of Spanish graphic works, Pérez Sánchez argued that early Spanish drawings largely remained in artists' studios, where constant use eventually took its toll, while Lisa Banner and Zahira Véliz have more recently revealed that Spanish art collections regularly included drawings even if these collections are no longer intact.¹

The exhibition *Renaissance to Goya: Prints and Drawings from Spain* organized by the British Museum adds to this historiography with the goal of disproving Spain as a “nation of improvisers.” It highlights through 132 objects the breadth of drawings and prints made

by artists in Spain from the sixteenth century to the early nineteenth. It additionally makes known a major collection to an international audience, allowing the British Museum's Spanish prints and drawings to take their place alongside the holdings of the Prado, the Metropolitan, the Hispanic Society of America, and the Courtauld, to mention just a few of the international collections that have recently published catalogues.

The exhibition, visited for this review at the New Mexico Museum of Art, moves well beyond simply confirming that Spanish artists drew. Curator Mark McDonald states in the excellent companion catalogue that the principles governing the selection of objects were "to show the variety in form and function of prints and drawings made in Spain" and "to dispel the myth that drawing was a fringe activity and printmaking even more so" (8). The exhibition thus takes upon itself to teach about drawing in a very broad way, and those visitors who take the time to read the labels learn a great deal about, in particular, the function and perception of drawings beyond the objects' immediate aesthetic experience. Careful observers—those patient enough for the special demands of an exhibition of small works on paper—will enjoy preliminary sketches, plans, cartoons, recordings of finished paintings, and drawn translations of printed models both at the preliminary and final stages of artistic production. Not found in the exhibition are the new attributions that are frequently debuted in drawing exhibitions, as McDonald's goal was not to speak to a specialist audience, but instead to a broader public.

The formal variety of Spanish drawing is represented in the exhibition's organization by geographic region, which divides the Spanish peninsula into four regions in overlapping periods: Castile, 1550–1600; Valencia, 1500–1700 (including Naples, as a Spanish viceroyalty); Andalusia, 1550–1700; and Madrid, first in 1600–1700, and then in the eighteenth century. The capital figures prominently again in the exhibition's final section addressing Goya and his contemporaries. The goal of such divisions, according to McDonald, is to allow the exhibition to delineate regional schools. The opening section on Castile in the sixteenth century, for example, gathers the artists responsible for El Escorial and its decoration. Viewers are here introduced to the Spanish court's new Italianate taste through two drawings by Pellegrino Tibaldi (*Study for the Decoration of the El Escorial Library* [1588–92] and *Christ Presented to the People* [1570–90]), a point reinforced by Alonso Berruguete's *Assumption of the Virgin* (1555–61), with its Michelangelesque figure born of the Spanish artist's Italian sojourn. Likewise, the prints and drawings selected for Madrid in the eighteenth century handily illustrate the change in taste heralded by the arrival of the Bourbon dynasty. From the pomposity of Teodoro Ardemans's *Design for the Exaltation of Saint Francis of Assisi* (ca. 1700–26) and Matías Irala Yuso's *A Design with Musical Putti* (ca. 1730–39) to the quaint vignettes and naturalism of two anonymous views from Toledo (both ca. 1750–60) and Miguel Jacinto Meléndez's intimate drawing of *Isabel de Farnesio* (ca. 1714–20), this section beautifully demonstrates the changes brought since the previous century.

Similarly, the section devoted to Andalusia privileges the drawings by Murillo among its post-1650 selections. Rather than gaining a connoisseur's appreciation of a Murillo drawing style and technique from the seven works hung together in the exhibition, the visitor instead sees the artist varying his approach: the confident, sketchy bravura of the late *Penitent Saint Peter* (ca. 1670–80) looking little like the painterly translucence and delicate line of *Saint Isidore of Seville* (1655). Nevertheless, the impact of Murillo's

approach on his peers is clearly visible in the drawing *Saint Joseph Kneeling before the Virgin and the Christ Child* (ca. 1655–1700) attributed to Francisco Meneses Osorio.

Yet, while achieving its goal of demonstrating formal variety among regional schools and periods (and even within these), the exhibition also teaches about the full life of drawings. To return to Castile, 1550–1600, the selection of objects not only pictured the Roman Mannerist style newly brought to the Iberian Peninsula, but also plumbed the use of drawings and prints at El Escorial. Most appealing is Tibaldi's library study (1588–92), which bears handwritten glosses in both Italian and Spanish, faithfully recording the interaction of artist, builder, and patron. Likewise, it is not hard to imagine that the hand-colored sheet of woodcut playing cards included alongside Tibaldi's squared drawing of *Christ Presented to the People* might have been used during a resting period by those who would soon transfer the painter's design to the palace's walls. Likewise, the section on Andalusia, 1550–1700 includes the drawn design for an altarpiece by Alonso Cano (ca. 1660–65), Juan Valdés Leal's etched illustration for a festival book (1671), Cornelio Schut's *A Seated Ecclesiastic* (ca. 1660–80) created for students to copy, and Murillo's *Saint Francis of Paola* (ca. 1665–70) recording a finished composition. The section on Valencia and Naples even treats visitors to a 1734 design for a lady's fan, while Madrid in the seventeenth century has a watercolor sketch for a fireplace mantle (ca. 1670–80). Careful consideration of these works and their accompanying texts will leave the viewer with a quite full appreciation of the function of drawing in this era.

One aspect of Spanish drawing history that would have enriched the exhibition is analysis of the new rhetoric surrounding drawing in the second half of the eighteenth century. The exhibition handily addresses the international influences, homogenizing effect, and classical tastes of the new academy through works such as Antonio Villanueva's *Design for an Altar Wall Dedicated to Saint John the Baptist* (ca. 1780) and Ramón Bayeu's *The Attributes of the Virgin* (after 1780). It is silent, however, on the royal promotion of drawing as a means to improve Spanish industry and to restore Spain's status on the European stage. This type of drawing, perhaps now more properly called industrial design, pursued radically different ends than artistic draftsmanship, but for Spanish *ilustrados* of the mid-eighteenth century, they were two branches of the same tree. Drawing schools were founded throughout the Spanish empire to help men and women engaged in trades from needlework to carpentry improve their wares. This rhetoric of utility would have made the ample selection of drawings by Goya—who, of course, participated in drawing in support of national industry with his tapestry designs—all the more meaningful and would have more fully contextualized the exhibition's five reproductive engravings of paintings in the royal collection (1778–1800) as well as the *True Portrait of a She Ant-Bear (Anteater)* after Goya (1776). The reproductions after Velázquez and Murillo, as well as the scientific illustration, shared the purpose of championing Spanish achievement.

Thus far, this review has said little about the prints in the exhibition because, unlike the companion text, the bulk of the show itself is dedicated to drawings. The exhibition at the New Mexico venue includes fifty-three prints, but thirty-nine of these come from the final sections addressing Goya and his contemporaries. This both points to the scope of the British Museum's print collection and reflects the history of Spanish printmaking. Spain had no print publishing firms to compete with the likes of Hieronymous Cock's Four Winds and, with the exception of Ribera, no *peintre-graveurs* to compare to Rembrandt van Rijn. Only with the foundation of the Royal Academy of San Fernando in 1752 and the

promotion of printmaking to record Spanish cultural and scientific achievement in the late eighteenth century did the nation finally develop a robust single-leaf print industry. As McDonald points out in the catalogue, high-quality book illustration had a long history in Spain, even if it was smaller and narrower in scope than contemporary Antwerp or Rome. Likewise, Valencia, Barcelona, Seville, and Madrid had healthy markets for popular printmakers, something he explores more fully in the catalogue, which is not limited to the British Museum holdings for its illustrations.

As they appear in the exhibition, prints play a supporting role. With the exception of the playing cards mentioned earlier, the exhibition's prints prior to 1780 are principally either sources for drawings or reproductions of other works of art. An engraving by Hendrick Goltzius (1594), for example, appears as a model for a drawing by Eugenio Cajes (ca. 1600–15); a print by Berruguete (ca. 1530–50) reproduces one of his earlier paintings; and a pair of figure studies by José García Hidalgo (1693) appears as a training device. Ribera's powerful etchings and Goya's prints are exceptions, discussed for their strength independent of other works. In light of the richness with which the exhibition treats drawings, visitors would have been served by an expanded scope of information about prints. For example, the two striking festival prints included in the show—the Giralda tower by Matías de Arteaga y Alfaro (1672) and the catafalque for Ferdinand III by Juan de Valdés Leal (1671)—for which no explanatory text appeared, presented the opportunity to address the printmakers' linear vocabularies and style, or the role of these types of works in the political arena.

This unequal treatment of drawings and prints is no fault of the exhibition's and is instead born of the differences between the two arts. Although prints and drawings frequently occupy a single museum curatorial department, radically different things are sought from them. Drawing has historically been viewed as the purest expression of the authorial role. Printmaking, as McDonald states in the catalogue, is rarely understood as “expressive of the maker's soul” in the same way (17). The relationship between the artist and the object that is so central to drawing's appeal is always tempered by the facts of print production. For every print that behaves like a drawing, such as Rembrandt's etched sketches, thousands of others pursue different ends. Hence the challenge of exhibiting prints and drawings together: while one upholds the notion of the artist as creative genius, the other problematizes that ideal. This conflict stands in particular relief in light of the exhibition's deft handling of the function and context of drawings. Fortunately, however, the catalogue provides a much richer treatment of Spanish print history, leaving the exhibition's handling of the topic at a narrower and manageable scope.

Minor musings aside, *Renaissance to Goya: Prints and Drawings from Spain* provides an impressive array of exemplary drawings and prints exhibited in a thoughtful and informative way. The show handily achieves its goals, and visitors who take the time to view the objects and read the text are rewarded with a wealth of information about the art of Spain.

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¹ Diego Angulo and Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, *A Corpus of Spanish Drawings*, 4 vols., London: Harvey Miller, 1975–1988; Jonathan Brown, *Jusepe de Ribera: Prints and Drawings*, Princeton: Princeton Art Museum, 1973; Jonathan Brown, *Murillo and His*

Drawings, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976; Pierre Gassier, *The Drawings of Goya*, 2 vols., London: Thames and Hudson, 1973; Pierre Gassier and Juliet Wilson-Bareau, *Goya: His Life and Work, with a Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings, Drawings and Engravings*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1971; Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, *Museo del Prado: Catálogo de Dibujos*, 3 vols., Madrid: Museo del Prado, 1972–1977; Lisa Banner, *Spanish Drawings in the Princeton University Art Museum*, Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 2012; and Zahira Véliz, *Spanish Drawings in the Courtauld Gallery: Complete Catalogue*, London: Courtauld Gallery, 2011.