

= Witches ' Sabbath (The Great He @-@ Goat) =

Witches ' Sabbath or The Great He @-@ Goat (Spanish : Aquelarre or El gran cabrón) are names given to an oil mural by the Spanish artist Francisco Goya (1746 ? 1828) , probably completed between 1821 and 1823 . It explores themes of violence , intimidation , aging and death . Satan hulks , in the form of a goat , in moonlit silhouette over a coven of ugly and terrified witches . A withdrawn young girl in black sits to the far right , apart and withdrawn from the other women ; perhaps in defiance . Goya was then around 75 years old , living alone and suffering from acute mental and physical distress .

It is one of the fourteen Black Paintings that Goya applied in oil on the plaster walls of his house , the Quinta del Sordo . The paintings were completed in secret : he did not title any of the works or leave record of his intentions in creating them . Absent of fact , Witches ' Sabbath is generally seen by art historians as a satire on the credulity of the age , a condemnation of superstition and the witch trials of the Spanish Inquisition . As with the other works in the group , Witches ' Sabbath reflects its painter 's disillusionment and can be linked thematically to his earlier etching The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters as well as the Disasters of War print series , another bold political statement published only posthumously .

Around 1874 , some fifty years after his death , the plaster murals were taken down and transferred to canvas supports . Witches ' Sabbath was much wider before transfer ? it was the broadest of the Black Paintings . During the transfer about 140 cm (55 in) of the painting was cut from the right @-@ hand side . At its reduced dimensions of 141 x 436 cm (56 x 172 in) , its framing is unusually tightly cropped , which some critics find adds to its haunted , spectral aura , although others believe it distorts Goya 's intentions by moving the centre of balance and reducing the painting 's impact .

= = Background = =

Goya did not title any of the fourteen Black Paintings ; their modern names came about after his death . They are not inscribed , mentioned in his letters , and there are no records of him speaking of them . The works today are known by a variety of titles , most of which date to around the 1860s : his children were largely responsible for the names , with close friend Bernardo de Iriarte contributing the rest . The title El Gran Cabron (The Great He @-@ Goat) was given by painter Antonio Brugada (1804 ? 63) . The Basque term for a Witches ' Sabbath , akelarre , is the source of the Spanish title Aquelarre and a derivation of akerra , the Basque word for a male goat , which may have been combined with the word larre (" field ") to arrive at akelarre .

The historical record of Goya 's later life is relatively scant ; no accounts of his thoughts from this time survive . He deliberately suppressed a number of his works from this period ? most notably the Disasters of War series ? which are today considered amongst his finest . He was tormented by a dread of old age and fear of madness , the latter possibly from anxiety caused by an undiagnosed illness that left him deaf from the early 1790s . Goya had been a successful and royally placed artist , but withdrew from public life during his final years . From the late 1810s he lived in near @-@ solitude outside Madrid in a farmhouse converted into a studio . The house had become known as " La Quinta del Sordo " (The House of the Deaf Man) , after the nearest farmhouse had coincidentally also belonged to a deaf man . Art historians assume Goya felt alienated from the social and political trends that followed the 1814 restoration of the Bourbon monarchy , and that he viewed these developments as reactionary means of social control . In his unpublished art he seems to have railed against what he saw as a tactical retreat into Medievalism . It is thought that he had hoped for political and religious reform , but like many liberals became disillusioned when the restored Bourbon monarchy and Catholic hierarchy rejected the Spanish Constitution of 1812 .

Goya went to exile in France in 1824 , and ownership of the house passed to his grandson Mariano . An 1830 inventory by Brugada indicates that the work took a full wall between two windows on the first floor , opposite A Pilgrimage to San Isidro . On the wall to the right were Saturn Devouring His Son and Judith and Holofernes . Leocadia , Two Old Men and Two Old Men Eating Soup were on the left wall . Art historian Lawrence Gowing observed that the lower floor was divided thematically ,

with a male side ? Saturn and A Pilgrimage to San Isidro ? and a female side ? Judith and Holofernes , Witches ' Sabbath and Leocadia . The house changed owners a number of times before March 1873 , when it came into the possession of the Belgian Frédéric Émile d 'Erlanger , who speculated that the area would appreciate in value over the coming years . The murals had deteriorated badly after many years on the walls . To preserve them , the new owner of the house had them transferred to canvas under the direction of the art restorer of the Museo del Prado , Salvador Martinez Cubells . Following their exhibition at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1878 , where they were met with little reaction , d 'Erlanger donated them to the Spanish state in 1881 .

= = Description = =

Satan preaches from a raised earth mound and is dressed in clerical clothing that may be a soutane . He has a goat @-@ like beard and horns , and stands in silhouette , accentuating his heavy body and gaping mouth , which is depicted as if he is screaming . His form may be derived from a 1652 illustration of the Canaanite idol Molech , as illustrated by Athanasius Kircher .

He holds court before a circle of crouched and mostly terrified women , accepted by art historians as a coven of witches . Some bow their heads in fear , others look towards him in open @-@ mouthed and rapt awe . Describing the women , art historian Brian McQuade writes that the " sub @-@ humanity of the gathered group is underlined by their bestial features and moronic stares " . Satan 's absolute power over the women has been compared to that of the king in Goya 's 1815 The Junta of the Philippines , where authority is gained not from respect or personal charisma , but through fear and domination . The women are a mixture of old and young , and have similar twisted features ; all but one are scowling , nervous and obsequious . Goya 's use of tone to create atmosphere is reminiscent of both Velázquez and Jusepe de Ribera . The latter was an admirer of Caravaggio and utilised tenebrism and chiaroscuro . Goya learned from these sources , and from Rembrandt , some of whose prints he owned .

An old woman sits to the right of the goat ; her back to the viewer . Her face is half hidden , and she wears a white @-@ hooded headdress resembling a nun 's habit . She sits alongside bottles and vials on the ground to her right . Art critic Robert Hughes wonders if they " contain the drugs and philtres needed for the devilish ceremonies " . The eyes of some figures are lined with white paint . The faces of the two main figures ? the goat and the woman to the far right ? are hidden . The woman is separated from the group , she is perhaps a postulant about to be initiated into the coven . She may represent Goya 's maid and probable lover Leocadia Weiss , whose full @-@ length portrait appears in the same series .

As with the other Black Paintings , Goya began with a black background which he painted over with lighter pigments , then with broad , heavy brushstrokes of grey , blue and brown . The darker areas were achieved by leaving the black under @-@ paint exposed ; this is most obvious in the figure of the Devil . Like the other works in the series , Witches ' Sabbath is worked up through heavy , slashing brushstrokes . The plaster was underlaid with thick carbon black before the paint was applied in hues of white lead , Prussian blue , vermilion of mercury , and crystals of powdered glass , orpiment and iron oxides . He likely worked with mixed materials . Technical analysis indicates that most of the Black Paintings begun with preparatory drawings . Witches ' Sabbath is the exception ; the final composition seems to have been painted directly onto the wall .

Art historian Fred Licht notes that Goya 's brushwork appears " clumsy , ponderous , and rough " and lacking finish compared to his earlier work . Licht believes this was a deliberate ploy to physically convey dismay at human inadequacy and his own feelings of personal doubt . Unique in the series , Witches ' Sabbath was not significantly altered by Goya after his initial work .

= = Interpretation = =

There is no record of Goya 's thoughts during this period . He completed the series during a period recuperating from illness , possibly lead poisoning , when he was in considerable mental and physical pain , and withdrew from public life . Witches ' Sabbath is believed to be a rather bitter , but

silent , protest against the royalists and clergy who had retaken control of Spain after the Peninsular War of 1807 ? 14 . Advocates of the Enlightenment had sought to redistribute land to the peasants , to educate women , publish a vernacular Bible and , by replacing superstition with reason , put an end to the Inquisition . Witch hunting , which occurred during the Logroño Inquisition , was appalling to idealist liberals such as Goya . As court painter Goya was a part of the established order ; surviving evidence indicates he was acquiesced to the wishes of his patrons . Yet numerous paintings and etchings have emerged since , suggesting he had convictions favouring liberalism , enlightenment , and reason . He seems to have kept such beliefs private , only expressing them in his private art ; his more sensitive works were not published at the time , probably for fear of reprisal or persecution . In *Witches ' Sabbath* Goya mocks and ridicules the superstition , fear and irrationality of the ignorant placing their faith in ghouls , quack doctors and tyrants .

Goya had used witchcraft imagery in his 1797 ? 98 *Caprichos* print series , and in his similarly titled 1789 painting *Witches ' Sabbath* . In both the 1789 and 1822 *Sabbath* pictures , the Devil is presented as a goat surrounded by a ring of terrified women . The earlier painting uses witchcraft imagery in a manner that inverts the order of traditional Christian iconography . The goat extends his left rather than right hoof towards the child , the quarter moon faces out at the left hand corner of the canvas . These inversions may be metaphor for the irrational undermining of the liberals who argued for scientific , religious and social progress . Many of the scientific bodies then active were condemned as subversive and their members accused as " agents of the devil " .

Describing the techniques employed in the *Black Paintings* , particularly the visible black ground paint , art historian Barbara Stafford said that " by brusquely inlaying spots of light with prevailing darkness , Goya 's aquatinted and painted visions demonstrated the powerlessness of the unmoored intellect to unify a monstrously hybrid experience according to its own a priori transcendental laws . "

= = Restoration = =

Between 1874 and 1878 restorer Salvador Martinez Cubells was tasked with retouching the goat 's horns and a number of the witches ' faces . He removed more than 140 cm (55 in) of landscape and sky to the right of the postulant witch , where the paint had been badly damaged . This alteration significantly shifted the work 's centre of balance ; the young woman was no longer near the middle of the composition , thus reducing both her prominence and the possibility that she is seen to be the focus of the work .

Some art historians have speculated that the area removed was beyond restoration since it is unlikely that such a large section of painting by an artist of Goya 's stature would be lightly discarded . Still , the removal may have been for aesthetic reasons , with the empty space on the right viewed as unnecessary ; its removal intended to bring balance to a canvas perceived as overlong . If this was Cubells ' reasoning , it was misguided (he was not an accomplished painter and lacked insight into Goya 's intentions) ; Goya had often used empty space to dramatic and evocative effect .

This can be seen in both *The Dog* from the same series , and his print *Unfortunate events in the front seats of the ring of Madrid* , and the death of the Mayor of Torrejón , where he left large empty areas . This seems to have been a reaction against contemporary conventions of balance and harmony , and was a precursor to works by modern artists such as Francis Bacon , who greatly admired Goya 's depiction of what Bacon described as " the void " .

= = Condition = =

The painting is in poor condition . Time and a complicated transfer ? which involved mounting crumbling plaster onto canvas ? have caused extensive damage and significant paint loss . The work seems to have been seriously damaged even before its removal from the walls of Goya 's home ; the base of dry plaster may have contributed to its early deterioration . Frescos completed on dry (rather than wet) plaster cannot survive for a long period on a roughened surface . Evan Connell believes that in applying oil to plaster Goya " made a technical mistake that all but

guaranteed disintegration " .

Many of the Black Paintings were significantly altered during the restoration of the 1870s , and critic Arthur Lubow describes the works hanging in the Prado today as " at best a crude facsimile of what Goya painted " . We know the effect of many of Martinez Cubells ' changes from his accounts , but they inevitably lack objectivity . More reliable are two overlapping photographs taken in preparation for the restoration by Jean Laurent , now in the Courtauld Institute 's Witt Library . They show the painting in situ in the Quinta del Sordo and are the most reliable indicators of its appearance before restoration . But Laurent 's work presents difficulties , not least because some areas of the photographs lack resolution and contain indistinct passages . Photographs from this period tended to darken yellow and red areas while lightening blues and violets .