

= The Third of May 1808 =

The Third of May 1808 ( also known as El tres de mayo de 1808 en Madrid or Los fusilamientos de la montaña del Príncipe Pío , or Los fusilamientos del tres de mayo ) is a painting completed in 1814 by the Spanish painter Francisco Goya , now in the Museo del Prado , Madrid . In the work , Goya sought to commemorate Spanish resistance to Napoleon 's armies during the occupation of 1808 in the Peninsular War . Along with its companion piece of the same size , The Second of May 1808 ( or The Charge of the Mamelukes ) , it was commissioned by the provisional government of Spain at Goya 's suggestion .

The painting 's content , presentation , and emotional force secure its status as a groundbreaking , archetypal image of the horrors of war . Although it draws on many sources from both high and popular art , The Third of May 1808 marks a clear break from convention . Diverging from the traditions of Christian art and traditional depictions of war , it has no distinct precedent , and is acknowledged as one of the first paintings of the modern era . According to the art historian Kenneth Clark , The Third of May 1808 is " the first great picture which can be called revolutionary in every sense of the word , in style , in subject , and in intention " .

The Third of May 1808 has inspired a number of other major paintings , including a series by Édouard Manet , and Pablo Picasso 's Massacre in Korea and Guernica .

= = Background = =

Napoleon I of France declared himself First Consul of the French Republic on February 18 , 1799 , and crowned himself Emperor in 1804 . Because Spain controlled access to the Mediterranean , the country was politically and strategically important to French interests . The reigning Spanish sovereign , Charles IV , was internationally regarded as ineffectual . Even in his own court he was seen as a " half @-@ wit king who renounces cares of state for the satisfaction of hunting " , and a cuckold unable to control his energetic wife , Maria Luisa of Parma . Napoleon took advantage of the weak king by suggesting the two nations conquer and divide Portugal , with France and Spain each taking a third of the spoils , and the final third going to the Spanish Prime Minister Manuel de Godoy , along with the title Prince of the Algarve . Godoy was seduced , and accepted the French offer . He failed , however , to grasp Napoleon 's true intentions , and was unaware that his new ally and co @-@ sovereign , the former king 's son Ferdinand VII of Spain , was using the invasion merely as a ploy to seize the Spanish parliament and throne . Ferdinand intended not only that Godoy be killed during the impending power struggle , but also that the lives of his own parents be sacrificed .

Under the guise of reinforcing the Spanish armies , 23 @,@ 000 French troops entered Spain unopposed in November 1807 . Even when Napoleon 's intentions became clear the following February , the occupying forces found little resistance apart from isolated actions in disconnected areas , including Saragossa . Napoleon 's principal commander , Marshal Joachim Murat , believed that Spain would benefit from rulers more progressive and competent than the Bourbons , and Napoleon 's brother Joseph Bonaparte was to be made king . After Napoleon convinced Ferdinand to return Spanish rule to Charles IV , the latter was left with no choice but to abdicate , on March 19 , 1808 , in favor of Joseph Bonaparte .

Although the Spanish people had accepted foreign monarchs in the past , they deeply resented the new French ruler . On May 2 , 1808 , provoked by news of the planned removal to France of the last members of the Spanish royal family , the people of Madrid rebelled in the Dos de Mayo Uprising . A proclamation issued that day to his troops by Marshal Murat read : " The population of Madrid , led astray , has given itself to revolt and murder . French blood has flowed . It demands vengeance . All those arrested in the uprising , arms in hand , will be shot . " Goya commemorated the uprising in his The Second of May , which depicts a cavalry charge against the rebels in the Puerta del Sol square in the center of Madrid , the site of several hours of fierce combat . Much the better known of the pair , The Third of May illustrates the French reprisals : before dawn the next day hundreds of Spaniards were rounded up and shot , at a number of locations around Madrid . Civilian Spanish

opposition persisted as a feature of the ensuing five @-@ year Peninsular War , the first to be called guerrilla war . Irregular Spanish forces considerably aided the Spanish , Portuguese , and British armies jointly led by Sir Arthur Wellesley , who first landed in Portugal in August 1808 . By the time of the painting 's conception , the public imagination had made the rioters symbols of heroism and patriotism .

Like other Spanish liberals , Goya was personally placed in a difficult position by the French invasion . He had supported the initial aims of the French Revolution , and hoped for a similar development in Spain . Several of his friends , like the poets Juan Meléndez Valdés and Leandro Fernández de Moratín , were overt Afrancesados , the term for the supporters ? collaborators in the view of many ? of Joseph Bonaparte . Goya 's 1798 portrait of the French ambassador @-@ turned @-@ commandant Ferdinand Guillemardet betrays a personal admiration . Although he maintained his position as court painter , for which an oath of loyalty to Joseph was necessary , Goya had by nature an instinctive dislike of authority . He witnessed the subjugation of his countrymen by the French troops . During these years he painted little , although the experiences of the occupation provided inspiration for drawings that would form the basis for his prints *The Disasters of War* ( *Los desastres de la guerra* ) .

In February 1814 , after the final expulsion of the French , Goya approached the provisional government with a request to " perpetuate by means of his brush the most notable and heroic actions of our glorious insurrection against the Tyrant of Europe " . His proposal accepted , Goya began work on *The Third of May* . It is not known whether he had personally witnessed either the rebellion or the reprisals , despite many later attempts to place him at the events of either day .

= = The painting = =

= = = Description = = =

*The Third of May 1808* is set in the early hours of the morning following the uprising and centers on two masses of men : one a rigidly poised firing squad , the other a disorganized group of captives held at gun point . Executioners and victims face each other abruptly across a narrow space ; according to Kenneth Clark , " by a stroke of genius [ Goya ] has contrasted the fierce repetition of the soldiers ' attitudes and the steely line of their rifles , with the crumbling irregularity of their target . " A square lantern situated on the ground between the two groups throws a dramatic light on the scene . The brightest illumination falls on the huddled victims to the left , whose numbers include a monk or friar in prayer . To the immediate right and at the center of the canvas , other condemned figures stand next in line to be shot . The central figure is the brilliantly lit man kneeling amid the bloodied corpses of those already executed , his arms flung wide in either appeal or defiance . His yellow and white clothing repeats the colors of the lantern . His plain white shirt and sun @-@ burnt face show he is a simple laborer .

On the right side stands the firing squad , engulfed in shadow and painted as a monolithic unit . Seen nearly from behind , their bayonets and their shako headgear form a relentless and immutable column . Most of the faces of the figures cannot be seen , but the face of the man to the right of the main victim , peeping fearfully towards the soldiers , acts as a repoussoir at the back of the central group . Without distracting from the intensity of the foreground drama , a townscape with a steeple looms in the nocturnal distance , probably including the barracks used by the French . In the background between the hillside and the shakos is a crowd with torches : perhaps onlookers , perhaps more soldiers or victims .

*The Second and Third of May 1808* are thought to have been intended as parts of a larger series . Written commentary and circumstantial evidence suggest that Goya painted four large canvases memorializing the rebellion of May 1808 . In his memoirs of the Royal Academy in 1867 , José Caveda wrote of four paintings by Goya of the second of May , and Cristóbal Ferriz ? an artist and a collector of Goya ? mentioned two other paintings on the theme : a revolt at the royal palace and a defense of artillery barracks . Contemporary prints stand as precedents for such a series . The

disappearance of two paintings may indicate official displeasure with the depiction of popular insurrection .

### = = = The Disasters of War = = =

Goya 's series of aquatint etchings *The Disasters of War* ( *Los desastres de la guerra* ) was not completed until 1820 , although most of the prints were made in the period 1810 ? 1814 . The album of proofs given by Goya to a friend , however , now in the British Museum , provides many indications of the order in which both the preliminary drawings and the prints themselves were composed . The groups identified as the earliest clearly seem to predate the commission for the two paintings , and include two prints with obviously related compositions ( illustrated ) , as well as *I saw this* , which is presumably a scene witnessed during Goya 's trip to Saragossa . *No se puede mirar* ( One cannot look at this ) is clearly related compositionally and thematically ; the female central figure has her arms outstretched , but pointing down , while another figure has his hands clasped in prayer , and several others shield or hide their faces . This time the soldiers are not visible even from behind ; only the bayonets of their guns are seen .

*Y no hay remedio* ( And it cannot be helped ) is another of the early prints , from a slightly later group apparently produced at the height of the war when materials were unobtainable , so that Goya had to destroy the plate of an earlier landscape print to make this and another piece in the *Disasters* series . It shows a shako @-@ wearing firing squad in the background , this time seen receding in a frontal rather than a rear view .

### = = = Iconography and invention = = =

At first the painting met with mixed reactions from art critics and historians . Artists had previously tended to depict war in the high style of history painting , and Goya 's unheroic description was unusual for the time . According to some early critical opinion the painting was flawed technically : the perspective is flat , or the victims and executioners are standing too close together to be realistic . Although these observations may be strictly correct , the writer Richard Schickel argues that Goya was not striving for academic propriety but rather to strengthen the overall impact of the piece .

*The Third of May* references a number of earlier works of art , but its power comes from its bluntness rather than its adherence to traditional compositional formulas . Pictorial artifice gives way to the epic portrayal of unvarnished brutality . Even the contemporary Romantic painters ? who were also intrigued with subjects of injustice , war , and death ? composed their paintings with greater attention to the conventions of beauty , as is evident in Théodore Géricault 's *Raft of the Medusa* ( 1818 ? 1819 ) and Eugène Delacroix 's 1830 painting *Liberty Leading the People* .

The painting is structurally and thematically tied to traditions of martyrdom in Christian art , as exemplified in the dramatic use of chiaroscuro , and the appeal to life juxtaposed with the inevitability of imminent execution . However , Goya 's painting departs from this tradition . Works that depicted violence , such as those by Jusepe de Ribera , feature an artful technique and harmonious composition which anticipate the " crown of martyrdom " for the victim .

In *The Third of May* the man with raised arms at the focal point of the composition has often been compared to a crucified Christ , and a similar pose is sometimes seen in depictions of Christ 's nocturnal Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane . Goya 's figure displays stigmata @-@ like marks on his right hand , while the lantern at the center of the canvas references a traditional attribute of the Roman soldiers who arrested Christ in the garden . Not only is he posed as if in crucifixion , he wears yellow and white : the heraldic colors of the papacy . In *The Third of May* , however , there is no attempt to find transcendence , and no sense that the sacrifice of life will lead to salvation .

The lantern as a source of illumination in art was widely used by Baroque artists , and perfected by Caravaggio . Traditionally a dramatic light source and the resultant chiaroscuro were used as metaphors for the presence of God . Illumination by torch or candlelight took on religious connotations ; but in *The Third of May* the lantern manifests no such miracle . Rather , it affords light only so that the firing squad may complete its grim work , and provides a stark illumination so that

the viewer may bear witness to wanton violence . The traditional role of light in art as a conduit for the spiritual has been subverted .

The victim , as presented by Goya , is as anonymous as his killers . His entreaty is addressed not to God in the manner of traditional painting , but to an unheeding and impersonal firing squad . He is not granted the heroism of individuality , but is merely part of a continuum of victims . Beneath him lies a bloody and disfigured corpse ; behind and around him are others who will soon share the same fate . Here , for the first time , according to biographer Fred Licht , nobility in individual martyrdom is replaced by futility and irrelevance , the victimization of mass murder , and anonymity as a hallmark of the modern condition .

The way the painting shows the progress of time is also without precedent in Western art . The death of a blameless victim had typically been presented as a conclusive episode , imbued with the virtue of heroism . The Third of May offers no such cathartic message . Instead , there is a continuous procession of the condemned in a mechanical formalization of murder . The inevitable outcome is seen in the corpse of a man , splayed on the ground in the lower left portion of the work . There is no room left for the sublime ; his head and body have been disfigured to a degree that renders resurrection impossible . The victim is portrayed bereft of all aesthetic or spiritual grace . For the rest of the picture the viewer 's eye level is mostly along the central horizontal axis ; only here is the perspectival point of view changed , so that the viewer looks down on the mutilated body .

Finally , there is no attempt by the artist to soften the subject 's brutality through technical skill . Method and subject are indivisible . Goya 's procedure is determined less by the mandates of traditional virtuosity than by his intrinsically morbid theme . The brushwork could not be described as pleasing , and the colors are restricted to earth tones and black , punctuated by bright flashes of white and the red blood of the victims . The quality of the pigment itself foreshadows Goya 's later works : a granular solution producing a matte , sandy finish . Few would admire the work for painterly flourishes , such is its horrific force and its lack of theatricality .

= = Provenance = =

Despite the work 's commemorative value , no details about its first exhibition are known , and it is not mentioned in any surviving contemporaneous accounts . This lack of commentary may be due to Fernando VII 's preference for neoclassical art , and to the fact that popular revolts of any kind were not regarded as suitable subject matter by the restored Bourbons . A monument to the fallen in the uprising , also commissioned in 1814 by the provisional government , " was stopped by Ferdinand VII , in whose eyes the senators and heroes of the war of independence found small favour , on account of their reforming tendencies " .

According to some accounts the painting lay in storage for thirty to forty years before being shown to the public . Its mention in an 1834 Prado inventory shows that the painting remained in the possession of the government or monarchy ; much of the royal collection had been transferred to the museum upon its opening in 1819 . Théophile Gautier mentioned seeing " a massacre " by Goya during a visit to the museum in 1845 , and a visitor in 1858 noted it as well , though both accounts refer to the work as depicting the events of the second of May , perhaps because Dos de Mayo continues to be the Spanish name for the whole episode .

In 1867 , Goya 's biographer Charles Emile Yriarte considered the painting important enough to warrant its own special exhibition , but it was not until 1872 that The Third of May was listed in the Prado 's published catalog , under the title Scene of the Third of May 1808 . Both the Third and Second of May suffered damage in a road accident while being transported by truck to Valencia for safety during the Spanish Civil War , apparently the only time they have left Madrid . Significant paint losses to the left side of the Second of May have been deliberately left unrepaired . Restoration work to both paintings was done in 2008 in time for an exhibition marking the bicentennial of the uprising .

In 2009 , the Prado selected The Third of May 1808 as one of the museum 's fourteen most important paintings , to be displayed in Google Earth at a resolution of 14 @, @ 000 megapixels .

= = Legacy = =

The first paraphrasing of The Third of May was Édouard Manet 's Execution of Emperor Maximilian , painted in several versions between 1867 and 1869 . In recording a current event to which neither he nor the emerging art of photography was witness , Manet seems inspired by Goya 's precedent . He may have seen the work at the Prado in 1865 before beginning his own paintings , which were too sensitive to be exhibited in France in Manet 's lifetime . He undoubtedly did see a print of it which was published in 1867 by an acquaintance . Art critic Arthur Danto compares Goya 's work and Manet 's :

The Third of May also depicts an execution , an early event in the so @-@ called Peninsular War between France and Spain . Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Spain in 1808 , capturing its royal family and replacing them with his brother , Joseph . The French were as unpopular in Spain as they later were in Mexico , and they encountered a fierce insurrection , which ultimately triumphed . The Third of May execution was an indiscriminate killing of civilians by French soldiers in reprisal for a guerrilla attack the previous day . Goya 's painting of the massacre , which shows terrified civilians facing a firing squad , was intended to arouse anger and hatred on the part of Spanish viewers . Goya 's is a highly romantic picture of a deeply emotional episode .

The Third of May is cited as an influence on Pablo Picasso 's 1937 Guernica , which shows the aftermath of the Nazi German bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War . An exhibition in 2006 at the Prado and the Reina Sofía showed The Third of May , Guernica , and the Execution of the Emperor Maximilian in the same room . Also in the room was Picasso 's Massacre in Korea , painted in 1951 during the Korean War ? an even more direct reference to the composition of The Third of May . The perpetrators in this painting were intended to be the United States Army or their United Nations allies .

Aldous Huxley wrote in 1957 that Goya lacked Rubens ' ability to fill the canvas with an ordered composition ; but he considered The Third of May a success because Goya " is speaking in his native language , and he is therefore able to express what he wants to say with maximum force and clarity " .

Kenneth Clark remarked on the painting 's radical departure from history painting , and its singular intensity :

With Goya we do not think of the studio or even of the artist at work . We think only of the event . Does this imply that The Third of May is a kind of superior journalism , the record of an incident in which depth of focus is sacrificed to an immediate effect ? I am ashamed to say that I once thought so ; but the longer I look at this extraordinary picture and at Goya 's other works , the more clearly I recognise that I was mistaken .