THE COLOSSUS (EL COLOSO)

CLASIFICACIÓN: EASEL PAINTING. VARIOUS SUBJECTS



DATOS GENERALES

CRONOLOGÍA	Ca. 1808 - 1812
UBICACIÓN	The Prado National Museum. Madrid, Madrid, Spain
DIMENSIONES	116 x 105 cm
TÉCNICA Y SOPORTE	Oil on canvas
RECONOCIMIENTO DE LA AUTORÍA DE GOYA	Attributed work
TITULAR	El Prado National Museum
FICHA: REALIZACIÓN/REVISIÓN	26 May 2010 / 01 Oct 2026
INVENTARIO	383 (P02785)

HISTORIA

This canvas went to Goya's son, Javier, when the estate of the painter's wife, Josefa Bayeu, was divided up following her death in 1812. It later became the property of Miguel Fernández Durán Fernández de Pinedo y Bizarrón, Marquis of Perales, who died in 1833. His great-grandson Pedro Durán inherited this painting and bequeathed it in his will to the Prado Museum, which it entered in 1931.

ANÁLISIS ARTÍSTICO

In an outdoor landscape, a terrified crowd flees before an apparition of a giant. This monstrous figure has

one arm raised, the hand closed into a fist, and one eye closed, as he advances across the width of the canvas.

In most of the interpretations put forward for this painting, and especially with regard the figure of the giant, there prevails the idea, with certain variations, that the work is a reference to the Spanish War of Independence.

López Vázquez and González Zárate believe that the figure of the giant could be a reference to Ferdinand VII - the proud, ignorant, princely figure responsible for the country's War of Independence. Nigel Glendinning, on the other hand, proposed back in 1963 that this painting could be an illustration of the poem by Juan Bautista Arraiza (Madrid, 1770-Madrid, 1837) entitled *The Prophecy of the Pyrenees (La profecía del Pirineo)* (1808). This poem tells how a giant rose up from the mountains of the Pyrenees to defend Spain from the Napoleonic invasion. The figure of the giant is a relatively common one in Spanish literature and is used by Manuel José Quintana y Lorenzo (Madrid, 1772-Madrid, 1857), by Cristóbal de Breña (Madrid, 1777-Madrid, 1833) and by Francisco Martínez de la Rosa (Granada, 1787-Madrid, 1862).

Alternatively, the colossus has been interpreted as personifying Napoleon's armies, menacing the terrified natives as they flee from the French invaders.

One of the formal sources of inspiration for the figure of the colossus could have been the Farnese Hercules which Francisco de Goya had earlier depicted on pages 139a, 141a, 143a and 145a of his *Italian Sketchbook*, drawn from a number of different angles. Goya must have seen this classical sculpture during his stay in Rome, between 1769 and 1771, since copying from the *Farnese Hercules* was a common exercise at the city's academies. The Aragonese artist could also have carried on working with this sculpture once back in Spain by referring to printed reproductions of it, particularly those by Hendrick Goltzius (Bracht, 1558-Haarlem, 1617), which were widely available all over Europe.

Thanks to the x-rays made of The Colossus at the Prado Museum, we have learnt that Goya made a number of changes to this figure. These x-ray images reveal that the painter had originally placed the giant looking out at the viewer, with his left arm resting on his hip in a pose similar to that of the *Farnese Hercules.* This pose also brings to mind the *Hispanic Hercules (Hércules hispano)* which Francisco de Zurbarán (Fuente de Cantos, 1598-Madrid, 1664) painted for the Hall of Kingdoms of Madrid's Buen Retiro Palace.

The painting also has ties to Goya's etching and aquatint *Seated Giant*, dated to between 1808 and 1818, in which the same figure appears with his back to the viewer and, in this case, sitting down. A similar figure was depicted by Henry Fuseli (*Polyphemus Tricked by Ulysses*, 1803, private collection, Zurich), although said work shows the character after he has been defeated.

The composition of *The Colossus* shows some similarities with another work by Goya, entitled *The Hot Air Balloon*. In both pictures, the canvas has been divided lengthways, with the lower section containing a number of people running. In the case of *The Hot Air Balloon*, these people could be soldiers, whilst in *The Colossus* they are civilians.

In 2008, to mark the presence of *The Colossus* in the exhibition *Goya in Times of War* (15 April-13 June 2008, Prado Museum, Madrid), Manuela Mena, Head Conservator for 18th-century Painting at the Prado Museum, embarked on a renewed investigation of this painting. Her work led to the subsequent publication of the conclusion that the painting belongs not to Francisco de Goya but rather to his disciple, Asensio Julià (Valencia, 1760-Madrid?, 1832). This hypothesis is based on several different pieces of data, perhaps one of the most significant of which is that this painting makes use of a different shade of black from the transparent, more delicate one usually employed by Goya, and which the artist tended to use especially in those paintings where the colour black predominated. Furthermore, thanks to the x-rays made of this painting, we have discovered the constant changes and hesitations which its creator made whilst painting it, behaviour which was not at all usual for Goya, who worked in a far more decided, confident manner.

Finally, this investigation by Mena also makes reference to the initials "AJ" which appeared in the x-ray images of 2008, which could be those of Goya's Valencian disciple, Asensio Julià.

This study of *The Colossus* has reignited the debate surrounding the work's authorship, in turn prompting responses from some scholars, including Nigel Glendinning, who maintain that this painting should be attributed to Goya.

EXPOSICIONES

Goya
Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen Mauritshuis The Hauge 1970
organized by Ministerio de Estado y Asuntos Culturales and Réunion des Musées Nationaux, July 4th to September 13th 1970. Exhibited also at the Musée de l'Orangerie des Tuileries, Paris, October 25th to December 7th 1970, consultant editors Jeannine Baticle and A. B. de Vries
cat. 40

Goya
Palacio de Pedralbes Barcelona 1977
from April 12th to June 30th 1977
cat. 40

De El Greco a Goya
Palacio de Bellas Artes Mexico D.F. 1978
November-December 1978
cat. 40

Von Greco bis Goya
Haus der Kunst Munich 1982
From February 20th to April 25th 1982. Exhibited also at the Künstlerhaus, Viena
cat. 24

Goya
Koninklijke Musea Voor Schone Kunsten Van België Brussels 1985
consultant editor Luis González Seara. From October 26th to December 22nd 1985
cat. 31

Spanish paintings of 18th and 19th Century. Goya and his time
Seibu Museum of Art Tokyo 1987
exhibited also at Seibu Tsukashin, Amagasaki; Iwaki City Museum Fukushima, Fukushima
cat. 94

Goya y el espíritu de la Ilustración
Museo Nacional del Prado Madrid 1988
from October 6th to December 18th 1988. Exhibited also at Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, January 18th to March 26th 1989; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Nueva York, May 9th to July 16th 1989, Madrid curator Manuela B. Mena Marqués, scientific directors Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez and Eleanor A. Sayre
cat. 69

Goya
Nationalmuseum Stockholm 1994
consultant editors Juan J. Luna and Görel Cavalli-Björkman. From October 7th 1994 to January 8th 1995
cat. 30

Realidad e imagen. Goya 1746 – 1828
Museo de Zaragoza Zaragoza 1996
consultant editor Federico Torralba Soriano. From October 3th to December 1st 1996
cat. 52

Goya: Prophet der Moderne
Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin 2005
from July 13th to October 3th 2005. Exhibitied also at the Kunsthistorischemuseum, Vienna, October 18th 2005 to January 8th 2006, consultant editor Manuela B. Mena Marqués
cat. 78

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BOZAL, Valeriano
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pp. 263, 264, 265 (il.) y 266, cat. 69
1988
Museo del Prado

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PAZ, Alfredo de
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Liguori editore

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Goya
VEGA, Jesusa
pp. 229-244.
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En torno al Coloso atribuido a Goya una vez más
Goya
GLENDINNING, Nigel
pp. 294-299
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2009

"¿Un fracasado intento de descatalogar El Coloso por el Museo del Prado?"
Goya
GLENDINNING, Nigel
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2009

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ENLACES EXTERNOS