

Francisco de Goya



The 3rd of May 1808 in Madrid or "The Executions", 1814
oil on canvas, 268 x 347 cm
The Prado Museum, Madrid

The Artist

Francisco de Goya

Born Fuendetodos, Spain 1746; died Bordeaux, France 1828

Francisco de Goya was born in Fuedetodos, Spain, but soon moved to Saragossa with his parents. At age 14, Goya studied with the painter José Luzán Martínez for a number of years. Spain was going through the Age of Enlightenment during Goya's upbringing. The monarchy at this time was sympathetic to change employing ministers who supported radical economic, industrial, and agricultural reform. In 1763, Goya joined brothers, Francisco and Ramón Rayeu y Subías, in their studio and eventually married their sister, Josefa. His first commission came in 1774, Anton Raphael Mengs asked Goya to paint preliminary drawings for tapestries for the Royal Tapestry Factory. He continued to receive royal patronage from the aristocracy. At age 40, Goya was appointed painter to King Charles III, and in 1789, he was promoted to court painter under Charles IV. He survived through the fall of the French monarchy and France's war on Spain; he suffered a period of illness that left him completely deaf. In 1799, Goya was promoted by the crown to first court painter and spent the next two years working on a large-scale portrait of the family of Charles IV. The period of Enlightenment ended with the invasion of Napoleon Bonaparte and his mass executions of Spanish citizens. Goya pledged loyalty to Bonaparte and was awarded the Royal Order of Spain in 1811. When Napoleon fell, King Ferdinand VII came to power, but did not share the views of enlightenment and launched a reign of terror. Goya isolated himself voluntarily from politics and retired to Bordeaux under the guise of seeking medical advice.

Art Movement

Romanticism

Francisco de Goya was the leader of the Romantic art movement in Spain, demonstrating a natural flair for works of irrationality, imagination, fantasy and terror. This style emerged in the wake of the French Revolution as a reaction against the restrained academic art of the arts establishment. The promotion of justice for all, and a strong belief in the senses and emotions, rather than reason and intellect are characteristics of Romanticism. Romantic painters and sculptors tended to express an emotional personal response to life.

The Artwork

The 3rd of May 1808 in Madrid (The Executions)

This painting is a depiction of the execution of patriots from Madrid by a firing squad from Napoleon's army in reprisal for their uprising against the French occupation on the second of May, 1808. The French soldiers are at the right of the composition, with their backs to the viewer. They aim their rifles at the Madrilenian who are to die. The scene's drama and tension are emphasized by the use of light, which strongly illuminates the heroes, making it possible to distinguish their characters and attitudes in a detailed psychological character study.

Discussion Suggestions

Discuss the Painting:

- *What do you think is happening here? Why do you think this man is being executed?*
- *What kind of feeling or mood does this painting create? Emotional, intense, tranquil, or serious?*
- *What kind of colors are used? (Show the color wheel, point out cool/warm colors, vibrant/muted) How do they reinforce the action and mood created in the work? Is there any color or place that stands out, where your eye is drawn to and focuses on? Why do you think the artist has used these colors and emphasis?*
- *Why do you think Goya used white for the central figure's shirt?*
- *What do you see in the background? Why do you think Goya uses it as a background?*
- *How do the French soldiers differ from the Spanish victims? Why do you think that Goya chose to focus on the victims and not show the faces of the executioners?*

Activity Idea

Recreate a Moment:

Pre-Activity Thinking:

- Choose a meaningful moment in your life. Illustrate it in a way that makes it significant (winning a trophy, performing somewhere). Think about how you want to stand out and be the focus of your illustration. How do you want others to see the event? How can you achieve that?

Activity:

- Sketch the outline of the event; include a foreground, middle ground, and a background.
- Show the students Goya's painting, point out the exaggerations. Goya manipulated the figures in his painting to make them more expressive. He elongated the rifles to make them more menacing and shortened the victims' figures to make them seem more weak and vulnerable.
- Go back with your pencil and elongate where necessary to create a more dramatic and expressive piece. Draw arms/legs longer.
- Begin to color it in, use bright colors if it's happy and a more muted color scheme if it's sadder. Make the main part lighter so that the eye is drawn to a specific area.

Materials Needed:

- Pencil
- Heavy white paper
- Choice of colored pencils or crayons