



### **Francisco Goya: Los Disparates (1815-1823)**

When Francisco Goya created "Los Disparates" between 1815 and 1823, he was working in almost complete isolation—deaf, aging, increasingly disillusioned with the Spain that had emerged from war. This series of 22 etchings, also known as "Proverbios" (Proverbs), represents perhaps the most enigmatic work of his entire career. Unlike "Los Caprichos," which satirized recognizable follies, or "The Disasters of War," which documented specific horrors, "Los Disparates" plunges into a realm of pure nightmare where meaning itself seems to dissolve.

The title is telling. "Disparates" translates roughly as "follies," "absurdities," or "nonsense"—suggesting that what we're seeing isn't meant to be entirely rational. These prints emerged during one of the darkest periods of Goya's life. Ferdinand VII's restoration had crushed liberal hopes, the Inquisition had returned, friends and colleagues faced persecution. Goya had retreated to his country house, the Quinta del Sordo—the "House of the Deaf Man"—where he would soon begin painting the terrifying "Black Paintings" directly on the walls.

What makes "Los Disparates" so unsettling is their dreamlike, almost hallucinatory quality. Giant figures loom over tiny ones. Flying men ride wooden horses through the air. Elephants appear in Spanish landscapes. A massive carnival figure seems to devour or give birth to human forms. Bodies contort in impossible positions, faces leer from darkness, and the line between human and animal becomes frighteningly permeable. These aren't illustrations of anything—they're visions.

The technical mastery is extraordinary, perhaps the finest of Goya's entire printmaking career. He pushed aquatint to its limits, creating velvety blacks and subtle gradations of gray

that give the images an almost photographic depth. The compositions are often monumentally scaled within their modest format, with figures pressing against the edges of the frame as if the print itself can barely contain them. There's a physical weight to these images, a sense of oppressive presence that makes them genuinely disturbing to look at.

But what do they mean? Art historians have argued for centuries. Some see political allegory—critiques of Ferdinand's regime disguised in impenetrable symbolism. Others detect references to Spanish proverbs and folk sayings. Still others suggest they're purely personal nightmares, the product of an old man's increasing isolation and despair. The truth is probably that Goya intended multiple meanings, or perhaps by this point had moved beyond caring whether anyone understood.

The series was never published in Goya's lifetime, and he may never have intended it for publication. The plates remained in his possession, passed to his son after his death in 1828, and weren't printed until 1864, when the Spanish Royal Academy acquired them and gave them the title "Proverbios." Even then, scholars couldn't agree on what they depicted or what order they should appear in.

"Los Disparates" represents Goya at his most uncompromising and most modern. These prints abandon narrative clarity, reject easy interpretation, and seem to emerge from the unconscious decades before Freud would give us language for such things. They predict Surrealism, Expressionism, and all the art movements that would embrace the irrational and the nightmarish as legitimate subjects.

There's something almost tragic about an artist creating these images knowing they might never be seen or understood. But perhaps that's precisely what freed Goya to create them. No audience to please, no patrons to satisfy, no officials to avoid offending—just an elderly deaf man in his country house, translating the chaos inside his head onto copper plates with acid and ink.

This is Goya unfiltered and unafraid, armed with a lifetime of technical mastery and nothing left to lose, proving that sometimes an world not as it appears to be, but as it have fallen away—absurd, terrifying..



artist's final gift is to show us the feels when all comforting illusions incomprehensible, and utterly