

ARTICLE

A chamber of horrors: Spanish art and its enemies

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Abstract

This article traces connections between reviews of Spanish art in Britain between the 18th and the 21st centuries and the public pre-judices that seem to have remained constant. Beginning with the famous London exhibition of 2009, *The Sacred Made Real*, the article addresses the origins of the language of reviewers, from the late 17th century to the Age of Enlightenment; to 19th-century debates about Catholic art, and the dislike of waxworks, effigies, and polychrome sculpture. Reviews and critical writings about Spain and its art are often linked by the same exaggerated rhetorical hyperbole with regard to the raw realism of some Roman Catholic imagery from the 16th century onward. Attempts to promote the art in Britain have met with unexpected results. The growing popularity of Spanish artists such as Diego Velázquez, Francisco Goya, and Salvador Dali exercised a long artistic influence in the 20th century. This article suggests that the “enemies” of Spanish art did as much to promote the artistic value of Spain as did its admirers. Reactions and criticisms to Spanish art from the British, which spawned hostility or indifference among Protestant writers, from John Ruskin to Philip Hamerton, were also to create a whole new creative endeavor at the end of the 20th century. Anger, anxiety, and transgression became new artistic promptings and it is here that links to British Surrealism appear. The figure of an artist from the past as a purveyor of horror, whose work summoned up associations with death, deformity, and violence, came to characterize the art shown at the 2009 exhibition in 21st-century London. Works of such importance and influence were also to become unclassifiable but were also broached as a source of new artistic inspiration.

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1. Introduction

Various public reactions to Spanish art have appeared in Britain for several centuries and it is the contention of this article to suggest that, in terms of both opinion and rhetoric, little has changed. The exhibitions referenced in this paper have drawn indifferent or outright hostile critiques about Spanish art from newspaper and periodical reviews, as well as from academic art historians. Over time, from the 18th to the 21st centuries, it is significant that while the details of such critiques may alter, the arguments seem rooted in familiar pre-judice. The aim here is to analyze such pre-judice and suggest

possible causes for this as well as to claim that through the hostile criticisms of Spanish art, British art criticism has itself become a different medium. One unexpected development is how the work of such a famous figure as the Aragonese artist Francisco Goya (1746 – 1828), regarded as a transgressive producer of horrific images as well as a revolutionary in the 19th and 20th centuries, - resulted in the Spanish school inspiring new forms of creativity in the 20th and 21st centuries specifically among young British artists.

2. The Sacred Made Repellent: Confronting images of martyrdom in London (2009)

On October 21, 2009, an exhibition opened at the National Gallery in London, *The Sacred Made Real; Spanish painting and sculpture 1600 – 1700*. It remained on show until January 24, 2010.

The exhibits were drawn mainly from convents and churches throughout Spain, with only a few sourced from private and national collections in other countries. The nature of the artworks was devotional; that is, images and objects originally intended to inspire faith and meditation in the beholders.

Hung in the modern wing of the National Gallery's Sainsbury Centre, the exhibits were spotlit and subjected to shadowy backgrounds. Unable to reproduce original ecclesiastical settings, the curators relied on dramatic lighting that gave the illusion of closed-off spaces. *The Independent's* art critic summed up the effect in a startling allusion: "In the first room...it invites you in, as if to a chamber of horrors..."¹

This reference to "a Chamber of Horrors" does not simply recall the exhibition of waxwork images of French victims of the guillotine which Madame Marie Tussaud (1761 – 1850) opened at the Lyceum Theatre in London in 1802 and which is now one of the most popular exhibitions established permanently in London's Marylebone Road. The reference also derives from a far older source: One which evokes the popular waxwork shows in England and even the controversial English dramas of the 17th century, with their exaggerations of the horrors of Roman Catholicism. The polychrome sculptures of dead Christs and Christian martyrs in 2009 transported the modern spectator back to another age.

The most notorious example of a dramatic involvement with waxworks appears as a climax to what has been called the "glorious cruelties" of the Jacobean theater. The famous Act Four, Scene One of the *Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster (c.1578 – c.1632), generally referred to as the "waxworks scene," is a horrific moment in the play. In this

scene, the doomed duchess, imprisoned by her brothers – one of whom is a cardinal – is shown wax effigies of the corpses of her husband and child, which she assumes to be real. Here is not so much the *Sacred Made Real* as the tragic and forensic in brutal display. Her veneration of these supposed corpses is said to make her "plagu'd in art," a possible reference to sculptural effigies of dead kings and martyrs used in funeral rites, recalling the tradition of making imitation corpses in the 16th and 17th centuries. In this context too, the polychrome wooden figure of the dead tortured Christ, which dominated the 2009 exhibition with shocking immediacy, and seemed to imitate the disturbing illusion of waxen effigies, became the glory of the Spanish school of sculpture in the 17th century. Those exhibits alone retained the power to evoke even in the 21st century, feelings of grief and revulsion.

A late 20th-century critical analysis of *The Duchess of Malfi* has claimed: "Images of the dead—the corpse, the severed body parts, and the skeletal remains—are such notable features of this play as well as of 17th-century theatre and culture in general."^{2(p.277)}

On the Jacobean stage, the reactions of the actors reflect these sensations: The Duchess of Malfi kisses a wax hand, which she believes to be the hand of her dead husband. Severed body parts appeared in the 2009 exhibition, where a truncated head of John the Baptist transfixed viewers with its accurate anatomical details. "This could be sculpture as an object of a salacious curiosity, a kind of gory relic," commented another modern reviewer.³ In Jacobean times, the link between the corpse and belief was strong: "...seventeenth-century Catholic tracts privilege the corpse not only for its ability to contain the sacred but also for its capacity to underwrite cultural and institutional certainty."^{2(p.279)}

The result of divorcing such emotionally expressive and powerful artworks from their ecclesiastical settings and displaying them to the public provoked different reactions from many quarters of the modern society that viewed them. Referring to Webster's play, one historian has written: "In the waxworks scene, it is the corpses that are displayed."^{4(p.23)} The word "displayed" suggests that the scene conjures the illusion of an exhibition. Similar figures of martyrdom, mostly of the tormented and bleeding, dominated the London exhibition of 2009 – 2010, not made in wax but in wood, glass, cork, ivory, and bone. These polychromatic images also enhanced the vividness of the contemporary martyrdom paintings by Francisco de Zurbarán (1598 – 1664) and Diego Velázquez.

The image of bodily torment, thus separated from the mysticism of ecclesiastical purpose and conveyed to the theatre or an exhibition venue, might, in the 17th century,

have been seen as strengthening the effect of Jacobean tragedy. However, the exhibits of 2009 in the London Gallery had been taken out of their original settings and positioned in a modern surround, where atmospheric lighting conferred a surreal illusion on each object, color, and line, as if on a stage. *The Sacred Made Real* was an exhibition regarded as unique and unprecedented in London. It is, therefore, intriguing that the popular journalism of 21st-century reviewers reverted to the language and rhetoric of a past age. Such reviews may be secular but still retain associations with English historical religious confrontations.

The display of Spanish church art from the 16th and 17th centuries seems therefore to have evoked references to theatrical presentations, waxwork shows, and funeral rites from a controversial period of history, traditionally designed to thrill spectators with horror. “Rendering *The Sacred Made Real* is certainly what the dead Christ does. It is disconcertingly, even horribly, lifelike – or rather, deathlike.”⁵

The phrase “horribly lifelike – or rather, deathlike” of this critical comment objectifies the naked body and bloody wounds of a wooden corpse, with cork and pigment arranged like seeping blood. This induced in some spectators a sense of shock, even giving rise to words like “pornographic.” Above all the sallow coloring of the skin – for which such images, both in sculpture and in painting, were famous^{6(p.46)} – suggests that these polychromed devotional figures were not so much sculpture as effigies, similar to waxworks, summoning up the ambiguous status of replicas of human bodies poised between life and death.^{7(p.852)} The exhibition was summarized by one reviewer who referred to it as a “superbly dark gorefest,”⁸ and a more upmarket critique which nevertheless in seeking to praise could not resist commenting that this was “highly emotive art... a form of excess.”^{9(pp.12-13)}

For some, therefore, viewing this exhibition was a moving experience. For others, the emotional content and realistic depictions of martyrdom were repulsive, and that feeling had behind it several centuries of psychological distaste when viewing much of the Catholic art of Southern Europe.

Disapproval of the waxwork museum, which seems to have affected some viewers of the polychrome sculptures in *The Sacred Made Real*, can also be traced back to Enlightenment perceptions of bad or low-class sculpture. This, too, recalls critical comments from the 18th century. Even Shakespeare could not avoid criticism. Scene III, Act V of *The Winter's Tale*, when Queen Hermione, long believed to be dead, is presented as a living statue attributed to Giulio Romano, provoked one 18th-century critic to

claim that Shakespeare’s mistake was not only to attribute sculpture to Giulio Romano, which “makes of this famous painter a statuary... but what is worst of all, a painter of statues.”¹⁰

In the age of neoclassical art theory and monochromatic sculpture, painted statues) – even the tomb effigies of Shakespeare’s day) – were held to be low art. The appearance of a painted statue again evokes memories of effigies of dead royalty made for funerary celebrations and religious votive statues. Their colors and “deathlike” illusions also, however, recall sensations achieved by popular waxwork shows and the theatre. The fact that such rhetoric still exists in the 21st century demonstrates how long it takes for pre-judices to dissipate. “The visibility of the body in pain is systematic rather than personal; not the issue of an aberrant exhibitionism but formed across the whole surface of the social as the locus of the desire, the revenge, the power, and the misery of this world.”^{4(p.23)} This comment from Francis Barker’s writing in the 1980s summarizes the random effects of both theatre and art exhibitions in relation to effigies of the dying and dead.

Other Spanish images, both ecclesiastical and secular, have also drawn their share of critical bile in Britain.

3. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century opinions

The 2009 – 2010 London exhibition, although largely successful, thus encountered negative reviews of a peculiarly historical type. This was not the fault of the curators, but removing religious artworks from their places within ecclesiastical settings also removed their functional role as devotional images and made their significance hard for foreign spectators to understand. This issue was emphasized two centuries earlier by the greatest British 19th-century commentator on Spain, Richard Ford (1796 – 1858), who wrote: “Can it be wondered that such works, now torn from their original shrines and desecrated in lay galleries, should loom gloomily and out of place...?”^{6(p.57)}

The Directors’ Foreword, published in the accompanying 2009 exhibition book, pre-empted much of the possible hostile reactions to the exhibition by referring back to the 18th century, when such works became especially unpopular: ...what has been assembled here... demonstrates that Spanish polychrome wood sculptures are worthy of the same attention as the paintings by Zurbarán, Murillo, and Velázquez that are displayed beside them. The exhibition is designed to address neglect that has its roots in the disdain with which the Enlightenment regarded these devotional works of art as objects of superstitious veneration; a distaste that was often mingled with the Protestant distaste for Mariolatry and martyrs.^{11(p.7)}

Citing the enemies of Spanish Catholic art as coming from the Enlightenment period is a familiar issue in the history of art, but also a limited one. More recent scholarship has laid bare the pre-judices of 18th-century Spain itself with regard to the country's own art history, which could even affect architecture. Writing about Spanish late 18th-century "aversion to what has come to be called the baroque," the expression "time of plague" was used by one major 18th-century architectural treatise when referring to late 17th-century and early 18th-century designs^{12(p.433)} Painted statues of the Virgin were condemned by the Spanish artist and historian Antonio Ponz (1725 – 1792) as "ridiculous,"^{13(p.54)} mainly because the "common people" who loved such things lacked a proper education.

In Enlightenment Britain, however, such censure was less general with regard to the art of Spain. The 1st English edition of the popular work by the artist and art historian Antonio Palomino (1655 – 1726), entitled *El Parnaso español pintoresco laureado* appeared in London in 1739, translated as *An Account of the Lives and Works of the Most Eminent Spanish Painters, Sculptors, and Architects; and Where Their Several Performances Are to Be Seen*. This was followed by two further editions in English.¹⁴ This book became popular reading among the educated British elite, who had begun to travel to Spain more frequently. Here were stories about the Spanish artists that only a few had been able to admire and the Sevillian painter, Diego Velázquez (1599 – 1660) became the hero of the whole book. Nevertheless, Italian and Flemish artists were more popular among British collectors, and these attitudes were succeeded by more controversial, even abusive reviews of Spanish art in 19th-century Britain. The Sevillian painter, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618 – 1682), for example, commanded much respect and competitive prices among British collectors in the 18th century, but his prices and influence declined toward the end of the 19th century.¹⁵

The 19th century was when anti-Catholic pre-judices were strongly debated in Britain. The history of the reception of Spanish works of art at this time is one of highs and lows, and the high points of positive opinion in Britain are found at the beginning of the century, following the British military intervention in Spain during the Peninsular War from 1808 to 1814, when many works attributed to Spanish artists were dispersed, looted, bought, and often lost. British interest in Spanish art, following the growth of tourism, was sometimes positive, but the positive attitudes have been explored far more than the lows of hostility, dislike, and even repulsion. In the 19th century, a profoundly negative image of Spain and the Spanish Catholic Church could also influence the reception of Spanish art in Britain. While much of the reception was

hostile, a few writers published work in defense. One such writer was Sir William Stirling Maxwell (1818 – 1878), the Scottish industrialist and collector who published in 1848 *Annals of the Artists of Spain*, a profoundly influential book that emphasized the importance of religious art in Spanish culture. Such open-mindedness was counterbalanced by a review that appeared in *Fraser's Magazine*, in which the writer J.W. Donaldson (1811 – 1861) asserted the popular criticisms of Spanish art, that it was too dark, too Catholic, and specialized in a raw, repugnant realism. The major art critic of the day, John Ruskin, whose writings on art is still influential, could never bring himself to praise Spanish art and asserted: "Spanish painters" were "a thoroughly irreligious rascally set."^{16(p.150)}

Some of this disgust even existed in the popular travel literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where Spain became inextricably linked to its art. Frances Elliot, author of *Diary of an Idle Woman in Spain*, published in 1884, praised the Museo del Prado in Madrid as a wonderful art gallery but could not admire the Spanish painters on display: "All the horrid dwarfs of Velazquez... Such works degrade art, the realism is overdone."^{17(pp.89-90)} The raw naturalism of polychrome religious sculpture and paintings that monumentalized wounded, dying religious figures, was a constant theme. "Artists in no other country have depicted the sufferings of Christ and the torture of martyrs with the same delight in detail," wrote Mrs. Walter Gallichan (C. Gasquoine Hartley, 1866/7 – 1928) in her 1921 art-historical travel book *Things Seen in Spain*.^{18(p.64)}

Nineteenth-century articles and books in English that attempted to foster appreciation of Hispanic art were often written by those who reacted to public indifference to Hispanic images. Richard Ford asserted in *The Athenaeum* in 1853: "Our Protestant pre-judices and pre-dilections militate against subjects of a legendary, superstitious character."^{19(p.151)} Perhaps because of this historical legacy, the 2009 exhibition and its type of display also drew a few reactions reminiscent of such historical biases. Just before *The Sacred Made Real* opened in October 2009, the Public Relations Department of the National Gallery even suggested limiting visitors to those over the age of 18.^{20(pp.84-86)}

4. A critical turning point in 1879: Goya and his times

The body of literature devoted to promoting the Spanish school of fine art has often been obliged to include references to the critical hostility which artists from Zurbarán to Goya or, from the sculptor Gregorio Fernández to the Surrealist Salvador Dali have drawn from posterity. This hostility may seem no more than political or religious bias toward

the visual artists of a powerful country, with a violent and controversial history often seen as the once tyrannical ruler of a huge empire. However, similar criticisms have survived into the modern world and similar critical attacks are not only directed against the religious sculptors of the Sevillian School but also against Spanish secular art.

In the context of British art historians writing about Spanish art in journals and response to exhibitions, it is ironic that the most hostile and quasi-abusive critique ever written about a Spanish artist – indeed, by association, about Spain itself – appeared in a British journal edited by a distinguished English artist and critic, Philip Gilbert Hamerton (1834 – 1894). His three articles on Goya appeared in the well-respected art journal *The Portfolio* in 1879.²¹

Hamerton lived in Paris, and his articles were partly sparked by the exhibition of Goya's so-called "Black Paintings" at the Universal Exposition held in Paris in 1878. His diatribe on Goya's art was prompted by this first display of the "Black Paintings" after they had been transferred from the walls of Goya's last dwelling in Spain, his villa outside Madrid, known as *The House of the Deaf Man* (*Quinta del Sordo*).

The first of Hamerton's articles, *Goya I*, sets the scene:

If the reader visited the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1878, he will probably not have failed to pass at least some hours in the "Retrospective," which occupied the galleries of the Trocadero, and it is just possible that he may remember a series of paintings by Goya, the property of Baron Erlanger, which were kindly lent by him to give the Parisian public, and foreigners from beyond the sea...an opportunity of deriving moral and esthetic benefit from the works of the successor of Velasquez (sic).^{21(pp.67-69)}

Continuing to portray innocent visitors stopping to look at paintings by Goya, Hamerton claims that the only reason these untutored spectators paused and tried to admire these works was because they had been influenced by critics to regard Goya as a great "celebrity" and that because of this, they felt obliged to scrutinize the paintings and even to admire them. He continues to express some doubts as to whether such images should be shown to untutored visitors, much like 130 years later, the organizers of *The Sacred Made Real* in London wondered if children below the age of 18 should be allowed to see the show.

Hamerton continues, swiftly moving from the Black Paintings to the body of literature concerning Spanish art:

Goya has indeed been so much written up by Continental critics during the past 10 or 20 years,

that it requires certain courage to say the truth about him. The successor of Velasquez has been lifted up to the rank of a great master and since, on the Continent, the great masters are not to be criticized but only worshipped, their position is almost unassailable. what is fame? It is nothing but a noise made by talkers and writers...^{21(pp.67-68)}

Speaking of the Black Paintings, which he derisively calls "frescoes" (although he goes on to explain how these were oils transferred onto the canvas from Goya's own house), he describes how the artist's creative imagination failed to produce anything pure, beautiful, or elevated. In fact, the images painted by Goya are foul in color, disgusting, and "grovel" in a horrible, chaotic region of their own.

Some of this rhetoric brings to mind the language of critical hostility directed against Spanish Church sculpture and painting of the 17th century when Spanish artists searched for the means of conveying to the beholder the suffering of martyrdom as a direct experience. The raw realism of certain kinds of Spanish art had again met the critical legacy of the British critics. Apart from one or two classical and Christian themes Goya used in the Black Paintings, there was arguably little of traditional art in their achievement. However, for Hamerton, the grotesque qualities of such imagery were something he found deeply disturbing.

The fine art exhibits were poorly hung in the 1878 fair, according to contemporary accounts and Hamerton's articles dealt only briefly with the paintings. His main interest, however, was Goya's famous prints. *The Portfolio* was a periodical devoted to analyzing works on paper, with articles published on prints by Rembrandt, Durer, and Whistler, among others.

Pausing his diatribe about Goya's paintings, Hamerton then goes on to give an outline of the artist's life, from a delinquent, moody child to a teenager always in trouble with the authorities, giving examples of how Goya seduced young women and made his way at the Spanish court through flattery, charm, and his influence on women. "He was welcomed for his vices," states Hamerton, with no evidence. "He lived at court in an atmosphere of vice and corruption which suited him exactly. He was the pet of the great ladies who were as destitute of morality as himself..." According to this text, it was through the Duchess of Alba that Goya caught an illness which caused deafness and changed his nature, which "soured" him.^{21(p.72)}

In the second of these articles, Hamerton looks at Goya's later life. It is here that Goya's immorality causes the writer to see the whole of Spain, and not just the Spanish court, as evil and corrupt. Goya reminds Hamerton of

“an infernal force.”^{21(p.82)} This perception was particularly true of Goya’s prints, which showed how he delighted in disgusting subjects. Goya was an unfaithful husband and a violent revolutionary. While none of these claims are true, some of this hyperbole is taken from popular biographies, and some seem to have been invented by Hamerton to support his claim that Goya’s art was as corrupt as the artist and his nation. According to Hamerton, Goya lived in a “thoroughly immoral state of society.”

Hamerton devoted the 1879 articles to Goya’s life and work in general, especially with the major print sets Goya produced in his lifetime, which made him famous far beyond the confines of Spain. Hamerton wrote:

His real delight was horror, as we see quite plainly from his numerous etchings, the Caprices, the Disasters of War, and others, all executed by him in the free energy of private and personal inspiration. ...Moral horror seems to have been as attractive to him as physical...^{21(p.69)}

Written as a direct response to Goya’s work, the articles by Hamerton in *The Portfolio* offered a major esthetic change in how popular art journalism might criticize the art of Spain. According to Hamerton, Goya was a monster of immorality, but “how could he be otherwise, since he lived in an intensely corrupt society?”^{21(pp.100-101)}. This vituperative attack on Spain and its art by a British writer may well have prompted the trend of associating such art with the growth of horror occasionally used in 20th-century novels and films. Similarly, the assumption grew that artistic subject matter reflected the character of the fine artist and held up a mirror to the artist’s society.

The hostile outpourings of this English critic, whose writings are now little known in the 21st century, therefore targeted not just the artist and his work but also his character, the culture, and the society in which he lived and worked, extending to the vilification of the entire Spanish nation. Although Hamerton himself may have faded into obscurity, *The Portfolio* was an influential periodical and an arbiter of taste. It is ironic that, as later researchers have discovered, the reputation of Goya – whose techniques were often at odds with the conventional painting and engraving methods of his time, as well as prevailing tastes – established a spurious posthumous reputation as a revolutionary, adulterer, and violent personality.

Hamerton invented a form of hostile rhetoric through which repellent subject matter is united to the artist’s moral character. The fantastic physiognomies Goya designed in his prints – *Los Caprichos*, the *Disparates*, and the stark realism of the *Disasters of War* – all of which Hamerton

knew well and which many critics considered progressive, valuable, and original, were transformed into the products of a transgressive imagination.

Hamerton distinguishes himself by his public diatribe against both Goya’s art and the man himself:

His personal character was in many ways as repulsive as his art. The fame of Goya has already poisoned art criticism in Spain and France, and it is beginning to spread to England...It is time therefore to show plainly what Goya was.^{21(p.69)}

The condition of Goya’s mind – his continued state of anger and hatred – dominates the rest of Hamerton’s essays. It may be only coincidence that the artist, as a transgressor who chose to portray the macabre and horrific while in a continuous state of anger, was exemplified by Hamerton, who especially referenced Goya’s internationally famous prints, the *Caprichos*. Hamerton was not alone. In fact, his loathing of Goya’s prints was shared by others in Goya’s own day. The professor of engraving and printmaking at the Royal Academy in Madrid, upon receiving a copy of the artist’s *Los Caprichos* published in 1799, recorded his opinion in his diary: “Saw a book of witches and satires by Goya; didn’t like it, it’s very obscene.”^{22(p.162)}

The graphic art of Goya, censured by critics in his own country and abroad, was a secular art lacking any gloss of Catholic extremism. Yet, this censure mirrored the critical hostility directed at Spanish religious sculpture and painting. Victor Hugo described Goya as an artist who drew “hobgoblins” in his art, and John Ruskin actually burned some of Goya’s prints.

5. Twentieth-century redemption

The twentieth century developed more tolerant attitudes toward the fine arts, absorbing and popularizing styles, such as Surrealism and Abstraction. Despite often robust controversies, it managed to support the idea of artistic independence. Biographies of great artists became even more popular than they had been in the 19th century, and Hamerton’s method of portraying an artist’s life as inextricably linked to moral character and the qualities of a specific nation gave new impetus to art historiography. The artist and his country, along with his struggles and triumphs, reflected something intrinsic to that country. In 1934, Ernest Hemingway, writing in support of the New York exhibition of prints and drawings by Luis Quintanilla (1893 – 1978), claimed that “Good Spanish painters are always in trouble.” He went on to describe the difficulties faced by Velazquez, Goya, Picasso, and Juan Gris.^{23(pp.178-179)}

Two British academics, Edgar Allison Peers (1891 – 1952) and Nigel Glendinning (1929 – 2013), devoted their careers to fostering a more tolerant public attitude toward Spanish culture. The first specialist journal, the *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, was founded in 1923 by Allison Peers. This scholarly review, dedicated to research on the language, literature, history, culture, and civilizations of Spain, covered a wide range of topics.

As a Professor of Hispanic Studies at Liverpool University, Peers was well-positioned to influence the taste for Spanish culture. His influence anticipates that of the much later academic Nigel Glendinning at Queen Mary, University of London, who saw the need for a new, slightly more specialized journal dedicated exclusively to the art of the Hispanic world. In 2007, Glendinning was instrumental in founding a visual arts special issue of the already established *Hispanic Research Journal* at Queen Mary, University of London, with the hope that:

A surge in research among scholars working on the visual arts of Iberia and Latin America prompted discussions about how best such research could be published. While many established and emerging art historians and scholars write for discipline-specific journals, there appeared to be a need to create an outlet that would bring together the richness and heterogeneity of work being done in the field of Iberian and Latin American art.^{24(p.387)}

This hope may have contained memories of another London exhibition, the spring show at the Royal Academy that opened in 1976. Entitled *the Golden Age of Spanish Painting*, it consisted of 88 paintings but no sculpture. Written by the director of Madrid's Museo del Prado, Xavier de Salas, the Foreword to the catalog stated that this was the first survey exhibition of Spanish Golden Age painting since the Burlington House exhibition of 1921, *Ancient and Modern Spanish art*, which had established the pivotal position of Goya as a Hispanic art-historical canon. Unlike earlier British opinions of this artist in the 1920s, it was now believed that Goya had produced work, particularly in tune with the modern age. In the post-war years, many more enthusiasts in Britain had come to know and admire Spanish art and the art of Goya. In 1964, the Royal Academy had displayed a major show, *Goya and His Times*, but the 1976 *Golden Age of Spanish Paintings* was not a notable success. In the "Preface" to the catalog, W.T. Monnington, President of the Royal Academy, made the point: "Apart from that magnificent exhibition devoted to 'Goya and His Times' in 1964, there has been no major show of Spanish painting of any kind at the Academy since 1920/21, and comparatively few of major importance in this country at any time in the intervening period."^{25(p.5)}

Nevertheless, Xavier de Salas also insisted that the British had a long tradition of admiring Spanish art. According to him, Richard Ford and Sir William Stirling Maxwell were in many ways responsible for how the "taste for Spanish painting began to be developed in London."^{26(p.7)} However, he also admitted that Spanish art was not broadly or popularly known in England, though he maintained that increasing interest in Spanish art outside Spain had, he asserted, been fueled by the growth of magazine and journal articles, as well as books.

It was through the article and the exhibition that lone voices speaking up for Hispanic art appeared in the 20th century. British Hispanist art historians to promote Spanish art were especially linked to the writing of journal articles. The contribution to British knowledge of Spanish art history by the academic journal was crucial since the foundation of the *Connoisseur* and *The Burlington Magazine* in the early 1900s, and the foundation of the *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* in 1923.

The "Introduction" to the 1976 exhibition catalog was written by Glendinning; in which he stated his aim to put Spanish art into context. This was part of his dedication to promoting the Spanish artistic vision in Britain. "The fortunes of artists are linked to their country's economy," he wrote,^{27(p.11)} and he went on to demonstrate the varied range of subject matter among Spanish painters in the 17th century, matched by the adventurous tastes of collectors and patrons. He continued to display his skills in citing statistical surveys as well as analyzing compositional traits in Spanish art. Always open-minded regarding different types of stylistic developments in Spain, he demonstrated this in many subsequent essays, articles, and books. His aim was to demonstrate that there was no single character of Spanish art, but a wide variety of styles and subjects. However, the response to the 1976 exhibition clearly gave him a challenge he never forgot.

In his last book, published in 2010, 3 years after the foundation of the *Hispanic Research Journal Visual Arts* issue, Glendinning looked back at the trajectory of efforts to make Spanish art more popular in England. In this context, he remembered the exhibition he had helped curate and promote in 1976, *The Golden Age of Spanish Painting*, which had attracted little public attention and some public censure. He wrote:

Yet British resistance to the darker side of Spanish art and its more violent realism, which was apparent in the writings of Richard Ford and, above all, John Ruskin in the nineteenth century, dies hard. It could certainly still be sensed in the response to the Royal Academy's *Golden Age of Spanish Painting* exhibition of 1976.^{19(p.22)}

The mixed reception provoked by Spanish devotional art was not, therefore, confined to the Enlightenment alone. Indeed, at certain times, similar hostility was applied to Spanish art in general. Popular newspaper reviews of the 2009 *The Sacred Made Real* at the National Gallery in London gave the event more coverage and notoriety than they did to the *Golden Age* exhibition 33 years earlier, which garnered few popular reviews. In fact, apart from one or two academic articles in journals such as *The Burlington Magazine*, the reaction to the show seems to have been mainly indifference.

Much of the popular critical rhetoric of the 2009 show was derived from this historical background. While it might seem to revert to long-established traditions, it is also something of an anomaly, given that the huge publishing market for biographies of Spanish artists such as Velázquez, Goya, Picasso, and Dalí never ceases to dominate the art-historical market with different biographies, primers, analyses, and commentaries.

New research also continues to come to light, with films and biopics of the most famous Spanish artists winning many admirers. Nevertheless, the traditional British suspicions about the art of Spain continue to appear among critics and reviewers, particularly about ecclesiastical as well as secular imagery.

The polychrome sculptures of dying martyrs and the atmospheric portraits of Saint Francis or Saint Serapion, commissioned by devout worshippers, were only part of the glories of the Spanish school. As Glendinning had pointed out, there were many other subjects at which Spanish painters excelled and many different types of patrons in Spain. However, even when Spanish art encompassed secular imagery of classical or contemporary subject matter, the images produced in Spain were often regarded as strange and unacceptable.

The most popular and detailed outlining of the history of great art, Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation*, broadcast on BBC television in 1969, was an influential series of six films championing the history of serious art from the Dark Ages onward. It is significant that, in the entire series and the accompanying publication, there are only two brief references to the art of Spain. The 17th-century context of Velázquez and his contemporaries is dismissed as "the superstitious, convention-ridden court of Philip IV."^{28(p.213)}

6. A gift to posterity?

There are still reviewers who reflect the limited taste and outright condemnation of the art of Spain in ways that recall not only the anti-Catholic bias of Jacobean theatre but also the change in art criticism referring back to the

moral criticisms of Enlightenment writers. This also contrasts between Catholic imagery and the more somber Protestant aesthetic. The later Romantic development of the horrific and grotesque, so vividly condemned by Hamerton, anticipates the 20th-century perception of the artist as a transgressor – an increasingly influential role played out in 20th-century exhibitions. With regard to Goya, and, specifically his graphic art, the essays by Hamerton appear to anticipate how Goya would become the inspiration for a new generation of artists and art historians.

Sentimentalizing or making fictional narratives from the qualities of Spanish art that 19th-century writers had deplored signaled a change in academic approaches. In 1977, in his ground-breaking publication *Goya and His Critics*, Nigel Glendinning examined the Aragonese artist's critical legacy from his own day to the 20th century, emphasizing the subtleties of Goya's work and the variety of criticism – from hostility to fictional narratives and poetic tributes. Emphasizing especially the violent reactions to some of Goya's more extreme works, Glendinning chose to make Hamerton's diatribe the longest Appendix in the book.^{29(pp.296-301)} Such emphasis on the violent outpourings of a Victorian critic about a Spanish artist demonstrates how important Glendinning felt Hamerton's contribution was to the historiography, not just of Goya, but of Spanish culture itself. The generalizations about an art that is far more nuanced and varied than such criticism might imply are delicately dissected. Just as Glendinning had tried to introduce Spanish art of the Golden Age to the British public, he established the originality of a national style in all its varied forms.

Nevertheless, the mixed reactions toward Goya as a printmaker are still somewhat reflected in the approach to the graphic arts of Spain in a wider context. Despite the fact that Spain had produced several of the most innovative print artists in the history of graphic design, such as Goya, Pablo Picasso, and Salvador Dalí, even present histories of printmaking reveal suspicion of the Spanish achievements in this specialized discipline. "It must be admitted that Spain's contribution to the history of Western printmaking has been less significant than that of the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, or France." This comment appeared in an exhibition catalog published in 2021.^{30(p.16)}

However, the idea floated by Hamerton that Goya and his art had poisoned the visual culture of Europe and was spreading to England offers a strangely ironic prophecy – one of which Glendinning, in his 1977 book, may well have been contemplating as he concluded his study of Goya critiques with Hamerton's diatribe as the finishing touch.

Yet another significant exhibition opened in London exactly 4 years before *The Sacred Made Real: Jake and Dinos*

Chapman: Like a Dog Returns to its Vomit was displayed in the White Cube Gallery, from October to November 2005. The Chapman Brothers had become obsessed with Spanish art and Goya's prints. In several exhibitions, they drew, painted, sculpted, or printed copies, derivations, and additions to specific works, emphasizing the grotesque and horrific elements. Sword swallows, magicians, knights, pantomimes, and a host of grotesque objects and figures drawn from mime shows, circuses, carnivals, and religious rituals create a teeming esthetic world ranging from *Don Quixote* to Goya prints, displays of corpses and crucifixions, all added to or overlaid on numerous etchings, watercolors, and pieces of sculpture.

In what seems like a deliberate parody of Hamerton, the critical responses of the Chapman brothers, in an interview with Nick Hackworth, responded to the question of why they wanted to "improve" Goya's *Caprichos* in some of their work. They asserted that the prints are "nasty," "unpleasant," but "they needed our help."^{31(p.15)} The *Caprichos* and *Disasters of War*, Goya's most famous sets of prints, so violently condemned by Hamerton, dominate their artistic agenda.

As a forerunner of a new vision, Goya has found his place in the contemporary cultural world, where he is regarded as showing himself to be part of the art of transgression. A wealth of new works, exhibitions, and articles have reaffirmed the artist's influence in Britain and America, and what has been defined as "the rich tradition of art-historical commentary" has spurred on what must be seen as new art movements as well as schools of criticism.^{32(p.480)} Goya is now placed at the vanguard of what the Surrealist French philosopher and art historian, George Bataille (1897 – 1962), called "the cruel practice of art."^{33(pp.3-8)}

How much did not just Goya, but certain aspects of Spanish art, in particular, represent this new image of the art of the past becoming, in many ways, the art of a troubled future?

Referencing the exhibition held in London in 2009, there appears to be even greater evidence that the rebarbative nature of some developments in the arts of Spain, reflecting radical shifts in attitude toward the grotesque. Such critical choices have overshadowed the wealth of different styles and subjects the country has produced over a significant period. The transformation of art criticism, used to analyze Spanish art by Hamerton's diatribe against the art of Goya, ironically appeared in a popular journal. The influence of this kind of writing has continued into the 21st century, where art journalism has become even more popular than it was in the 20th century.

The influence of Goya as a painter of horror has created a separate trajectory from the quite different work the artist also practiced. This has given material to films and crime novels. Two specific examples come to mind. Forensic scientist-turned-thriller writer, Kathy Reichs, brought out her novel *Fatal Voyage* in 2001. An airline crash in the woods, strange, isolated buildings revealing a basement full of murdered victims, and traces of black rituals portray an interior with paintings hung on the walls that are more than mere decoration. Several Chambers of Horrors crop up in modern references:

George moved his light to the next wall, and another monster stared down. Lion's mane, bulging eyes, mouth wide to devour a headless infant gripped between its hands.

"That's a bad copy of one of Goya's Black Paintings," Crowe said. "I've seen it in the Prado in Madrid."^{34(p.284)}

The Black Paintings were removed from the Museo del Prado long after Goya's death before being shown in Paris in 1878. They might well have remained unnoticed were it not for the articles by Hamerton. Now, they have become globally famous and, rightly or wrongly, are used as summations of Goya's entire career and as pointers to the realism of Spanish art in general. The art-historical insertion within a work of modern crime fiction suggests that Spanish painting can be used to reflect the tastes of murderers, thieves, and torturers in their interior decoration. The method of filling the rooms of perpetrators of atrocities with Goya's works goes back to Ira Levin's 1968 film *Rosemary's Baby*. In one of the last scenes, when the heroine finally breaks into the witches' apartment to search for her newborn son, she finds paintings on the wall depicting witchcraft scenes that Goya had painted for one of his most faithful patrons, the Duchess of Osuna, which he delivered to her in 1798. In the same way, some of the most violent films, such as *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (Sergio Leone, 1968) and *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), include images of statues of saints or martyrs, derived from the 17th-century Catholic iconography. In a similar yet unexpected development, wood or wax figures of individuals transfixed in mortal agony have recently come to be identified with images from 19th-century medical research.³⁵

7. Conclusion

The history of the visual arts in Spain has posed a number of issues, all of them problematic, raising tension between the core role of Spain in the broader European sense and the exploitation of Spanish art in its politically limited critical heritage. In Britain, this tension has been particularly acute, fueled by the rise of monographs on individual artists rather than perceptive general surveys. The role of Spanish

art, established by Palomino in the 18th century and Stirling Maxwell in the 19th, offered particular views of a particular artistic style within one particular nation. These views have arguably remained influential over the past two centuries. However, the assumptions about Spanish art established by these two writers are nebulous and imprecise. Dissenting voices and religious and political pre-judices have divided opinions, transforming the limited view of Spanish art through exhibitions, museum displays, and academic courses into a slightly more adventurous discipline.

Francisco Goya has been censured as a purveyor of horror, as were his artistic antecedents from the Golden Age of Spanish painting. In northern Europe, and particularly in Britain, the suspicion of Spanish Catholic art survives, often as an invitation to distaste. This sentiment even accompanies moments when it would seem that the aim is to praise and display the exceptional qualities of the Spanish school.

Art historians have used Goya's art for their own interests in concepts of transgression, and one describes it as a "litany of esthetic outrage."^{32(p.490)} Few would have realized how valuable these concepts of outrage and transgression could have become in England with the rise of the Young British Artists in the 1990s. Occasional references to the art of Goya or sculptural images of saints and martyrs in crime novels or horror films might seem like nothing more than a convenient and essentially commercial exploitation of artistic imagery known for its disturbing subject matter. However, behind this apparently impartial borrowing of an image to accentuate the drama of the moment lies centuries of hostile reactions, counterbalanced by the new developments of contemporary themes.

The pessimism and rebarbative imagery of much recent art in Britain have fueled British admiration for this 18th-century Spaniard, whose work has, in some instances, come to be associated with expressions of the infernal and the mortal. Similar interests also focus on earlier Spanish art, which both attracted and repelled British spectators. Seeking out a transgressive understanding of the modern self, British painters, sculptors, and printmakers, such as the Chapman brothers, investigated the potentially shocking forms of self-awareness and performed a vital function for British society by highlighting aspects of life often masked by taboos, repression, and denial.

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