

ART HUMANITIES: PRIMARY SOURCE READER

Section 8: Goya

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Goya

ADDRESS TO THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF SAN FERNANDO REGARDING THE METHOD OF TEACHING THE VISUAL ARTS, 1792

MOST EXCELLENT SIR

Fulfilling on my behalf Your Excellency's order that each of us explain what he thinks opportune about the Study of the Arts, I say: That the Academies should not be exclusive, or serve more than as an aid to those who freely wish to study in them, banishing all servile subjection of the primary school, mechanical precepts, monthly prizes, financial aid, and other trivialities that degrade, and effeminate an Art as liberal and noble as Painting; nor should a time be predetermined that they study Geometry, or Perspective to overcome difficulties in drawing, for this itself will necessarily demand them in time of those who discover an aptitude, and talent, and the more advanced in it, the more easily they attain knowledge in the other Arts, as seen from the examples of those who have risen highest in this aspect, who I do not cite since they are so well known. I will give a proof to demonstrate with facts, that there are no rules in Painting, and that the oppression, or servile obligation of making all study or follow the same path, is a great impediment for the Young who profess this very difficult art, that approaches the Divine more than any other, since it makes known all that God has created; he who has most closely approached will be able to give few rules concerning the profound operations of the understanding that are needed for it, nor explain why he has been happier perhaps with a work where less care has been taken, than with one of greater finish; What a profound and impenetrable arcanum is encompassed in the imitation of divine nature, without which there is nothing good, not only in Painting (that has no other task than its exact imitation) but in the other sciences.

Annibale Carracci, revived Painting that since the time of Raphael had fallen into decline, with the liberality of his genius, he gave birth to more disciples, and better than as many practitioners as there has been, leaving each to proceed following the inclination of his spirit, without determining for any to follow his style, or method, putting only those corrections intended to attain the imitation of the truth, and thus is seen the different styles, of Guido, Guercino, Andrea, Sacchi, Lanfranco, Albano, etc.

I cannot omit another clearer proof. Of the Painters known to us of greatest ability, and who have taken the greatest pains to teach the method of their tired styles (according to what they have told us). How many students have resulted? Where is the progress? the rules? the method? From what they have written, has any more been attained than to arouse the interest of those that are not, nor cannot be Artists, with the object of more greatly enhancing their own [that is, the Artist's] works, and giving them broad authority to decide even in the presence of those versed in this very sacred Science that demands so much study (even of those who were born for it) to understand and discern what is best.

It is impossible to express the pain that it causes me to see the flow of the perhaps licentious, or eloquent pen (that so attracts the uninitiated) and fall into the weakness of not knowing in depth the material of which he writes; What a scandal to hear nature deprecated in comparison to Greek statues by one who knows neither the one, nor the other, without acknowledging that the smallest part of Nature confounds and amazes those who know most! What statue, or cast of it might there be, that is not copied from Divine Nature? As excellent as the artist may be who copied it, can he not but proclaim that placed at its side, one is the work of God, and the other of our miserable hands? He who wishes to distance himself, to correct it [nature] without seeking the best of it, can he help but fall into a reprehensible [and] monotonous manner,

of paintings, of plaster models, as has happened to all who have done this exactly? It seems that I stray from my original subject, but there is nothing more necessary, if there were to be a remedy for the actual decadence of the Arts but to know that they must not be dragged down by the power or knowledge of other sciences, but rather be governed by their own merit, as has always been the case when talents have flourished: then the despotic enthusiasts cease, and prudent lovers are born, who appreciate, venerate and encourage those who excel, providing them with work that can further advance their talent, helping them with greater force to produce all that their inclination promises: this is the true protection of the Arts, and it has always been shown that the works have made the men great. In conclusion, sir, I do not see any other means of advancing the Arts, nor do I believe there is one, than to reward and protect he who excels in them; to hold in esteem the true Artist, to allow free reign to the genius of students who wish to learn them, without oppression, nor imposition of methods that twist the inclination they show to this or that style, of Painting.

I have given my opinion in response to Your Excellency's charge, but if my hand doesn't govern the pen as I might wish, to explain that which I understand, I hope that your Excellency will excuse it, for my entire life has been spent in attaining the fruit of that of which I am now speaking.

Madrid

14 October 1792.

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Letters from Goya to Vice-Protector Bernardo de Inarte

1794

4 JANUARY, 1794

In order to use my imagination which has been painfully preoccupied with my illness and my misfortunes, and to offset the expenditure I have inevitably incurred, I set out to paint a group of small pictures, in which I have managed to include observations of subjects which would not normally fall within the scope of commissioned work, in which there is no room for the inventive powers and inspiration of the imagination. I thought of sending them to the Academy, knowing, as Your Excellency does, the profitable results I might expect from the criticism of the artists there. But so as not to lose any possible advantage I have decided to send the paintings to Your Excellency first so that you can see them. Your position of authority and exceptional knowledge will ensure that they are looked at seriously and without envy. Take them, Your Excellency, and me too under your protection, for I am at present sorely in need of the favour you have always shown me.

[Iriarte evidently took the group of paintings to the Academy. The minutes of the corporation's meeting on 3 January refers to eleven pictures 'sent in by Goya' consisting of 'various subjects drawn from national pastimes.' The meeting was 'very pleased to see them, praising their qualities and those of Senor Goya.']

7 JANUARY, 1794

I wish I could adequately express to Your Excellency my thanks for the many favours you have done me, and for the esteem which the professors and members of the San Fernando Academy have shown me, not only in their concern for my health, but also in their generous reaction to my works. I have been greatly encouraged, and am fired anew to fulfil my hopes of presenting works more worthy of that august body.

I am also very pleased that the pictures should remain in Your Excellency's house as long as you wish, and when I have finished the one on which I am working at present-depicting a courtyard in a madhouse, with two madmen fighting naked, while the keeper strikes them on the head and others are in their sacks (a sight I have seen in Saragossa)-I shall send it to you so that you have the whole group

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Advertisement for Los Caprichos

FEBRUARY 1799

A collection of prints of imaginary subjects, invented and etched by Don Francisco Goya. The author is convinced that it is as proper for painting to criticize human error and vice as for poetry and prose to do so, although criticism is usually taken to be exclusively the province of literature. He has selected from amongst the innumerable foibles and follies to be found in any civilized society, and from the common prejudices and deceitful practices which custom, ignorance or self-interest have hallowed, those subjects which he feels to be the most suitable material for satire, and which, at the same time, stimulate the artist's imagination.

Since most of the subjects depicted in this work are not real, it is not unreasonable to hope that connoisseurs will readily overlook their defects.

The author has not followed the precedents of any other artist, nor has he been able to copy Nature herself. It is very difficult to imitate Nature, and a successful imitation is worthy of admiration. He who departs entirely from Nature will surely merit high esteem, since he has to put before the eyes of the public forms and poses which have only existed previously in the darkness and confusion of an irrational mind, or one which is beset by uncontrolled passion.

The public is not so ignorant of the Fine Arts that it needs to be told that the author has intended no satire of the personal defects of any specific individual in any of his compositions. Such particularized satire imposes undue limitations on an artist's talents, and also mistakes the way in which perfection is to be achieved through imitation in art.

Painting (like poetry) chooses from universals what is most apposite. It brings together in a single imaginary being, circumstances and characteristics which occur in nature in many different persons. With such an ingeniously arranged combination of properties the artist produces a faithful likeness, but also earns the title of inventor rather than that of servile copyist.

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