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Image Credits
All images created by the artist Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828)

Cover Detail & Title Panel: Francisco José de Goya (1746-1828), And There’s No Help For It (Y no Hais Remedios), 1810-1814, plate 15 from Disasters of War, etching and aquatint. Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas, Alagu H. Meadows Collection, MM.67.09.13. Photograph by Michael Bodycomb.

Interior, from Left to Right:
Francisco José de Goya (1746-1828), No se puede mirar (One cannot look), Plate No. 26 from Disasters of War, c. 1810-1820, etching on paper, Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas, Alagu H. Meadows Collection, MM.67.08.26. Photograph by Michael Bodycomb.
Francisco José de Goya (1746-1828), Que se rompe la cuerda (Let the cord break), Plate No. 77 from Disasters of War, c. 1810-1820, etching on paper, Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas, Alagu H. Meadows Collection, MM.67.08.77. Photograph by Michael Bodycomb.

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In Regard the Pain of Others (2003), Susan Sontag places Goya’s narrative horror while allowing others to howl alone. For the series an internal rhythm, connecting some in sequences of mounting quality of wild oratory. While they guide the viewer’s attention, they also create a senseless atrocity; and of war as a ruinous proposition for humanity — no victors, no heroes, no redemption — just one faceless body pitted against the other, in futility. Although Goya printed several early proofs during his lifetime, the complete suite of Los Desastres de la Guerra was first published in 1863, 35 years after his death, by the Royal Academy of San Fernando.

Dr. Lisa Fischman
Chief Curator, The University of Arizona Museum of Art
October, 2007

Instead, as Sontag writes: ‘The ghoulish cruelties in The Disasters of War are meant to awaken, shock, wound the viewer. Goya’s art, like Dostoyevsky’s, seems a turning point in the history of moral feelings and of sorrow — as deep, as original, as demanding. With Goya, a new standard for responsiveness to suffering enters art. The account of war’s cruelties is fashioned as an assault on the sensibility of the viewer. The expressive phrases in script below each image comment on the provocation. While the image, like every image, is an invitation to look, the captions, more often than not, insist on the difficulty of doing just that. A voice, presumably the artist’s, badgers the viewer: can you bear to look at this? One caption declares: One can’t look (No se puede mirar). Another says: This is bad (Esto es malo). Another retorts: This is worse (Esto es peor). Another shouts: This is the worst! (Esto es lo peor!). Another declares: Barbarians! (Bárbaros!). What madness! (Qué locura!). cries another. And another: This is too much! (¡Fuerte cosa es!). And another: Why? (¿Por qué?). Through the difficult, terrible images of Los Desastres de la Guerra, Goya offers us both the historically specific and the timeless overlay: a vision of humanity compromised, complicit in senseless atrocity; and of war as a ruinous proposition for humanity — no victors, no heroes, no redemption — just one faceless body pitted against the other, in futility.

Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes

Born on March 30, 1746 in the Spanish village of Fuendetodos, Francisco de Goya would prove to be one of the most innovative and provocative artists of all time. Although he came of artistic age surprisingly late in life, Goya produced a revolutionary and unforgettable oeuvre.

The young Goya sought education through studio apprenticeships and travel, yet it was not until 1773 that he was formally engaged as an artist. By painting tapestry cartoons for the Royal Tapestry Workshop in Madrid, he garnered the attention of the Spanish royal court. In the years following, Goya found increasing favor among noble society and received many distinguished portrait commissions. In 1777 and 1778, Goya executed his first etchings, copies of paintings by the highly regarded 17th-century Spanish court painter, Diego Velázquez (1599-1660).

Scholars posit Goya’s deafness, the result of illness in 1792, as a turning point in his subject and style. In 1794, he wrote: ‘In order to occupy my imagination which was troubled by the consideration of my ills… I dedicated myself to painting a set of cabinet pictures in which I have succeeded in making observations for which the commissioned works, in which fantasy and invention had no place, never gave the opportunity.’ By 1797, Goya was at work on a suite of satirical etchings, known as Los Caprichos (which were published in 1799). In that same year, Goya was appointed First Court Painter and with the enhanced social access of the position produced his greatest aristocratic portraits— those marked by a distinctive and often unfaltering realism.

In 1808, amidst the war against Napoléon in Spain, Goya’s world of court patronage dissolved; the artist found himself increasingly isolated and gripped by psychological crisis. After the death of his wife, in 1812, the artist produced some of his most politically charged work, including the print suite Los Desastres de la Guerra.

Through his last years, Goya was astonishingly prolific — producing portraits, religious paintings and genre scenes, the series known as the Black Paintings, and various drawings and print suites, including La Tauromaquia and Los Disparates. Threatened by escalating political, social and artistic repression under the regime of Ferdinand vth, Goya chose self-exile in 1824. He settled in Bordeaux where he died, on April 16, 1828, at age 81.