



Contemptuous of the Insults, Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes

Contemptuous of the Insults

Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes
Spanish, about 1816–1820
Brush and india ink
11 5/8 x 7 3/16 in.
82.GG.96

Questions for Teaching

Take time to look closely at the work of art.
What do you see?

What do you notice about the characters?

What can you tell about them from their
clothing and accessories?

How do the characters feel about one
another? How do you know? (*The dwarfs are
threatening the Spaniard with daggers, but
he doesn't seem afraid. He is dismissive of
them and somewhat amused, and he is
making an obscene gesture toward them.*)

Identify physical features that seem
exaggerated. (*The size and facial
expressions of the French military figures are
exaggerated.*)



If the characters could talk, what do you think they would say to each other?

What was your initial reaction to this drawing? Did you find it funny? Why or why not? Why do you think the work would be humorous to some people but not others? (*Humor has varied over the centuries to fit the tastes of different people and time periods.*)

How is this drawing similar or different to political **cartoons** made today?

Background Information

An urbane Spaniard—probably a **self-portrait** of the artist—makes an obscene gesture at the dwarfs threatening him with daggers. The clothing and short stature of the dwarfs are meant to bring to mind **Napoleon Bonaparte**. The title inscribed below the image, *Despreciar los ynsultos* (Contemptuous of the insults), seems to signify Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes's defiance toward the French military occupation of Spain. The difference of scale between the tall, patronizing Spaniard and his squat, gloomy oppressors reinforces the point.

Contemptuous of the Insults, Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes

Often politically motivated, Goya's art presented private exploits and tragedies with both **satire** and an awareness of the human condition that made his observations timeless and universal. He began to use the more intimate **mediums** of drawings and prints for his purposeful and serious satires after 1792. Goya made this sketch, sixteenth of about fifty drawings in the "Black Border" album, for his own amusement and interest rather than for sale or other purposes.

About the Artist

Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (Spanish, 1746–1828)

Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes welcomed and received official honors and worldly success with enthusiasm. At the same time, he left a ruthlessly penetrating record of his **patrons** and private expressions of introspection, moral objectivity, and caustic commentary on his times. By the 1780s, Goya was Spain's leading painter, specializing in religious pictures and portraits. He acknowledged three masters: the elegant, fluid Diego Velázquez, his predecessor as court painter to the Spanish royal family; the truthful, penetrating Rembrandt van Rijn; and, above all, nature.

A 1792 illness left Goya deaf and mentally broken. He turned inward and began painting dark, disturbing, private works. His etchings *Los Caprichos* (The caprices) expressed his distaste for the corrupt, fanatical establishment, particularly the Church, for whom he worked. The etchings went on sale in 1799, the year he became principal painter to the Spanish king.

During the Napoleonic wars, Goya recorded his reactions to the occupying French army's atrocities in his *Disasters of War* etchings and a painting, *The Third of May 1808*, whose immediate equivalence of paint, flesh, and blood profoundly influenced Édouard Manet. By 1814, the repressive Spanish monarchy was restored, and Goya resumed painting the royals, whom he portrayed at times with unflattering frankness. He died in voluntary exile in France.