

# THE ROPE BREAKS

CLASIFICACIÓN: PRINTS

SERIE: DISASTERS OF WAR (PRINTS Y DRAWINGS, 1810-1815) (77/82)



## DATOS GENERALES

CRONOLOGÍA

Ca. 1820 - 1823

DIMENSIONES

178 x 221 mm

TÉCNICA Y SOPORTE

Agua fuerte, aguafinta bruñida o lavís, punta seca y bruñidor

RECONOCIMIENTO DE LA AUTORÍA DE GOYA

Undisputed work

FICHA: REALIZACIÓN/REVISIÓN

28 Feb 2013 / 05 Jun 2023

INVENTARIO

836 225

## INSCRIPCIONES

77 (in the upper left-hand corner of the plate)

## HISTORIA

See *Sad forebodings of what is to come*.

The title of the print was handwritten by Goya on the first and only series known to us at the time of its production, which the painter gave to his friend Agustín Ceán Bermúdez. Thus the

title was subsequently engraved on the plate without any modification from Ceán Bermúdez's copy for the first edition of the *Disasters of War* published by the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid in 1863.

A preparatory drawing of this engraving is in the Prado Museum

#### ANÁLISIS ARTÍSTICO

An ecclesiastical figure dressed in pompous robes walks with his arms outstretched on a knotted rope. The people watching him show disbelief and suspense on their faces, or simply look on with a certain indifference, waiting for the rope to break.

The study of his preparatory drawing, in which the figure wears a papal tiara on his head, is decisive for the interpretation of this engraving. We therefore conclude that it is quite likely that the figure walking on the tightrope was Pius VII (Cesena, 1742-Rome, 1823) and that Goya subsequently thought that it might be advisable not to make the identification of the figure in the print so obvious with a view to a possible publication of the series of engravings.

Pius VII was well described in his texts by Juan Antonio Llorente (Rincón de Soto, La Rioja, 1756-Madrid, 1823); secretary of the Inquisition during the nineties of the 18th century and ambassador of the second constitutional government to the Vatican between 1820 and 1823. His stay in Rome helped him to write a history of the papacy in which he gave some interesting insights into the opportunistic personality of the supreme pontiff: "Pius VII will be ungrateful if he denies that he owes Napoleon Bonaparte the freedom and power of his electors and the peaceful possession of his chair in Rome". Further on he wrote: "The French wanted to elevate their first consul to the dignity of emperor and Pius VII went from Rome to Paris with great pleasure to crown him, as he did in a great ceremony with incomparable solemnity. Subsequently, political affairs took a different turn, and the Emperor stripped Pius VII of the temporal sovereignty of the Roman states". After the fall of Napoleon, Pius VII removed from office all the bishops who had been placed there by virtue of an agreement between him and Napoleon.

Ferdinand VII asked the Pope to promulgate a bull in which he pardoned the religious who had joined the guerrillas during the War of Independence. In addition, the Spanish monarch asked the Church, with the approval of Pius VII, for priests to demand that the people pay taxes from their pulpits. This commitment on the part of the Church placed it in a position that could be what Goya has captured in this engraving, that of someone walking a tightrope full of knots and patches that presage the fall before the attentive gaze of the people.

Nigel Glendinning makes some interesting observations about this engraving, as he considers the image to be a representation of the saying "to walk on a tightrope", which means to be involved in some dangerous action. In this way Goya refers to the somewhat ambiguous dealings in which the Church found itself at that time with the Spanish monarchy in order to obtain its protection, although accepting conditions of a certain risk.

*The Rope Breaks* continues the compositional scheme employed by Goya in the previous engravings, No. 75, *A Charlatan's Parade* and No. 76, *The Carnivorous Vulture*, in which the centrepiece of the image is a large central figure with its limbs spread out.

#### CONSERVACIÓN

The plate is in the National Chalcography (cat. 328).

#### EXPOSICIONES

**Goya and his times**

**Goya. Das Zeitalter der**

**Goya y el espíritu de la**

The Royal Academy of Arts London 1963  
cat. 66  
cat. 253

**Revolucionen. Kunst um 1800  
(1980 – 1981)**  
Hamburger Kunsthalle Hamburg 1980  
cat. 63

**Ilustración**  
Museo Nacional del Prado Madrid 1988  
from October 6th to December  
18th 1988. Exhibited also at  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,  
January 18th to March 26th  
1989; The Metropolitan Museum  
of Art, Nueva York, May 9th to  
July 16th 1989, Madrid curator  
Manuela B. Mena Marqués,  
scientific directors Alfonso E.  
Pérez Sánchez and Eleanor A.  
Sayre  
cat. 159

**Francisco de Goya**  
Museo d'Arte Moderna Lugano 1996  
exhibition celebrated from  
September 22nd to November  
17th.  
cat. 77

**Francisco Goya. Sein leben im  
spiegel der graphik.  
Fuendetodos 1746-1828  
Bordeaux. 1746-1996**  
Galerie Kornfeld Bern 1996  
from November 21st 1996 to  
January 1997  
cat. 167

**Ydioma universal: Goya en la  
Biblioteca Nacional**  
Biblioteca Nacional Madrid 1996  
from September 19th to  
December 15th 1996  
cat. 232

**Francisco Goya. Capricci, follie  
e disastri della guerra**  
San Donato Milanese 2000  
Opere grafiche della Fondazione  
Antonio Mazzotta  
cat. 157

**Goya: Prophet der Moderne**  
Alte Nationalgalerie Berlin 2005  
from July 13th to October 3th  
2005. Exhibited also at the  
Kunsthistorischemuseum,  
Vienna, October 18th 2005 to  
January 8th 2006, consultant  
editor Manuela B. Mena  
Marqués  
cat. 125

**Goya et la modernité**  
Pinacothèque de Paris Paris 2013  
from October 11st 2013 to March  
16th 2014  
cat. 116

**Goya: Order and disorder**  
Museum of Fine Arts Boston 2014  
cat. 143

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GASSIER, Pierre y WILSON, Juliet  
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65-80 of The Disasters of War**  
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PÉREZ SÁNCHEZ, Alfonso E. y SAYRE, Eleanor  
A. (directores) and MENA, Manuela B.  
(comisaria)  
pp.443-445, cat. 159  
1988  
Museo del Prado

**Catálogo de las estampas de  
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cat. 301  
1996  
Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, Biblioteca  
Nacional

**Goya en tiempos de guerra**  
MENA MARQUÉS, Manuela B.  
p.344, fig. 117.1  
2008  
Museo Nacional del Prado

OROPESA, Marisa and RINCÓN GARCÍA,  
Wilfredo  
p. 158  
2013  
Pinacoteca de París

**Goya: Order & Disorder**  
ILCHMAN, Frederick y STEPANEK, Stephanie  
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p. 225  
2014  
Museum of Fine Arts Boston Publications

**Goya. In the Norton Simon  
Museum**  
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pp. 114-151  
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Norton Simon Museum

