

Francisco Jose de Goya y Lucientes, Spanish, 1746–1828

Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta, 1820

Oil on canvas

H.45 $\frac{1}{8}$ x W.31 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (canvas)

The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 52.14

Theme

Goya's self-portrait is a deeply moving image of human friendship and compassion. Painted at a time when the artist was disturbed by the human capacity for cruelty, it affirms the benevolent relationships that can exist between individuals.

Background

The second half of the 18th century is often referred to as the Age of Enlightenment. It was a period in which many European philosophers and intellectuals, particularly in England and France, believed that the world operated according to natural laws. They thought that the human mind had the power to discover these laws and solve problems through reason and scientific inquiry. During this period, there was an increased interest in education and a growing production of encyclopedias and books. The revolution of thought that was sweeping Europe led some thinkers of the time to proclaim that human affairs should be governed by reason and the common good rather than by tradition and established authority.¹ These ideas led to the American and French revolutions, which were based upon a belief in liberty and equality that would shape the modern era.

One of Spain's greatest and most complex artists, Francisco Goya, was a product of the Age of Enlightenment. The period's values of liberal thought and reason were of underlying importance to his art. Goya has been seen both as a universal visionary who speaks to the modern world through his powerful exploration of fantasy and imagination, and as an artist reflecting his own time and country. In his prolific output, he explores the conflict between reason and the irrational, enlightenment and ignorance, hope and despair, light and darkness.

Goya was deeply affected by the turbulent political events taking place in Spain, particularly during the last 30 years of his life, when he saw the ideals of the Enlightenment eclipsed by chaos and suppression. He witnessed the corruption of the reign of Charles IV, which led to the French occupation of Spain in 1808. The French ruler, Napoleon Bonaparte, established a military dictatorship in Madrid under his brother, Joseph. When Napoleon's armies first occupied Spain, Goya and many other Spaniards hoped they would bring the liberal reforms so direly needed in the country, but they were sorely disappointed by the savage behavior of the French troops. On May 2, 1808, the citizens of Madrid rose up against Napoleon's forces; the insurrection, however, was quelled the following day with a brutal mass execution of the Spanish patriots. With

¹ H. W. Janson. *History of Art*. ed. Anthony F. Janson. 4th Edition (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991) p. 619.

Napoleon's abdication as emperor of France in 1814, Ferdinand VII, the heir of Charles IV, was restored to the throne of Spain, ruling as an absolute monarch and instigating a new wave of repression and tyranny.

Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta

This double portrait was painted in 1820, just after Goya had recovered from a serious illness. It was a token of gratitude and included this inscription at the bottom: "Goya thanks his friend Arrieta for the sureness and care with which he saved his life from the serious and dangerous illness at the end of the year 1819 at the age of seventy-three. Painted in 1820."

In this poignant self-portrait, Goya portrays himself as an aged, dying man being nursed by Dr. Arrieta. Wearing a gray dressing robe, and appearing pale and feverish, Goya clutches the bedsheet with his left hand while his right hand rests limply on it. He is tenderly supported in an upright position by Dr. Arrieta who sits behind him and firmly offers his patient a glassful of medicine. The juxtaposition of the two men creates a striking contrast. Pale and sickly, Goya has a gray complexion, which contrasts with his white nightshirt and the healthy appearance of his doctor. Painted in colors suggestive of life, Arrieta wears a forest green jacket and has a rosy complexion. His demeanor is firm and in control with an expression of resolute calm on his face, while his ashen, pained patient—slumped with his head falling back and his eyes barely opened—seems to struggle for his life. The hands of the two protagonists are particularly expressive; the doctor's are strong and protective while those of his exhausted patient are groping and uncertain, though his left hand grasps the sheet—perhaps a sign of energy and willfulness.

At either side of the doctor and his patient there appear three vague figures that witness the scene, yet seem to vanish into the blackness of the sickroom. Their significance has been the subject of much scholarship. They have been interpreted as being friends or servants, or perhaps a reference to Goya's devoted companion—the woman with whom he lived at the time the work was painted. They are suggestive of the artist's mental state during his illness and have been compared to the nightmarish and menacing figures that populate many of Goya's late paintings.

Whatever their significance, these shadowy figures are superseded by the clearly stated figures in the foreground, who ultimately offer a message of hope and triumph. The doctor has saved Goya's life, and can be seen as the embodiment of science and reason, triumphing over the darkness of impending death.² We have here not only a thankful tribute to a friend's steadfastness, loyalty, and devotion, but also a profound statement about Goya's confrontation with death.

Style and Technique

Goya creates strong contrasts of light and dark to focus our attention on the protagonists in the painting. Set against a dark, murky background, the faces of Dr. Arrieta and his patient

² Alfonso E. Perez Sanchez and Eleanor A. Sayre, *Goya and the Spirit of the Enlightenment* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts 1989), p. 272.

are dramatically presented. Because the dim figures in the background are painted in dark tones, the figures of Goya and Dr. Arrieta, which are depicted in lighter flesh tones, come forth in relief.

These two main characters are solidly defined, while the figures in the background are difficult to read. Their dim presence adds a mysterious quality to the painting.

In contrast with the rosy complexion of the doctor, the artist uses drab, muted grays to suggest the dire illness of the feverish patient. While Goya's ashen face is offset by his white nightshirt, his gray robe reinforces the gray pallor of his face. The doctor, on the other hand, wears a green jacket, which enhances the rosy tone of his skin. The complementary colors red and green appear more vibrant when placed next to one another. The red blanket occupying the foreground reinforces the doctor's healthy glow and enlivens the painting.

Goya's use of oil paint on canvas achieves a variety of effects, including translucent colors, a range of tonal qualities, and the representation of naturalistic details.

Notice how the paint is applied with great variety. Some areas, such as Goya's robe and the red blanket, are painted with a filmy smoothness, while other areas reveal the artist's brushstroke and his vigorous, free handling of paint. This can be seen on the hair of the doctor, the white collar and cuffs of Goya's nightshirt, and the shadowy figures in the background.

Artist

A painter, engraver, and draftsman whose prodigious output defies classification, Francisco Goya was a highly individual artist. A man of paradoxes and contradictions, he was at once a realist and a romantic, a court portraitist and a social critic, a humanitarian and a misanthrope. Born in Fuentetodos, Aragon, in the northeastern region of Spain, Goya was the son of a gilder. Though little is known of his early training, he began his career as a designer for the Royal Spanish Tapestry Works, where he spent six years producing cartoons (drawings) of scenes of popular Spanish life that were used in creating tapestries. His work was so well received in Madrid that in 1789 he became court painter to the Spanish king, Charles IV. Widely renowned by this time, Goya was celebrated by members of the Spanish upper class, whose portraits he painted throughout his career.

Goya's life changed dramatically in 1792 when he contracted a serious illness that caused a complete loss of hearing. This change could be seen in his artwork, which began to show greater psychological insight as well as a sense of despair. Giving free rein to fantasy and imagination, Goya often depicted demonic subjects, particularly in prints and drawing, his more private forms of expression. Between 1796 and 1798, he produced a series of etchings titled *Los Caprichos (The Caprices)*, a brutal satire of the foibles and follies of contemporary society and the Catholic Church.

Despite the nonconformist element in his work, Goya managed to continue his official commissioned work and, in 1799, he was appointed to the prestigious position of First Painter to the King. This was an extremely productive and successful period in his career, during which he produced some of his best-known portraits.

As the political situation in Spain grew more repressive, Goya's disillusionment became more apparent in his work, particularly after 1808 when Napoleon invaded Spain. (See **Background**.) In 1814 Goya commemorated the horror and violence of the invasion and the resulting insurrection, during which 5,000 Spaniards were ruthlessly slaughtered, in his

famous painting *The Third of May, 1808*. Even more scathing in its indictment of human cruelty and depravity is another series of etchings, *The Disasters of War*, executed between 1810 and 1814, which depicts the atrocities committed by both the French and Spanish.

In 1812, Goya's wife of 36 years died. In 1819 he withdrew to the seclusion of his country house, La Quinta del Sordo (House of the Deaf Man), located on the outskirts of Madrid. Here he lived with Leocadia Weiss, a woman he had known for many years and who became his devoted companion until his death. Unofficially removed from the court, Goya was virtually retired from public life after 1815, but continued to produce work for himself and friends.

Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta was executed during these years at La Quinta del Sordo following his recovery from his second serious illness, which occurred in 1819. After painting this self-portrait, Goya created 14 large black murals, known as the "Black Paintings," which covered the walls of his villa with fantastic, grotesque imagery.

In 1824, King Ferdinand unleashed a fresh wave of repression in Spain. Goya, fearing reprisals because of his numerous works depicting the nightmarish world of Ferdinand's Spain, left to settle in France. He died in Bordeaux in 1828 at the age of 82.

In his imaginative and expressive approach to painting, Goya prefigured the later developments of the Romantic Movement in France during the 19th century, as well as modern art beginning with Manet and the Impressionists. He paved "the way for modern art with his freedom of interpretation, his violent technique and his use of distortion."³

Suggested Questions

1. This is a painting of a sick man, Goya, and his doctor, Dr. Arrieta. Which is the sick man? How has the artist shown you that he is sick?
2. Which man is the doctor? How can you tell? What is he doing? What makes him look healthy?
3. Have you ever been very sick? How did you feel physically? Emotionally? Did anyone help you?
4. This painting contains two portraits. One of these is a self-portrait. Which one? Why is it called a self-portrait? Was Goya young or old when he painted it?
5. How do you think Goya felt about his doctor? Is he afraid of him? Does he like him? Trust him? Admire him? How can you tell?
6. How do you think Dr. Arrieta felt about his patient?
7. Are there more than two people in the painting? Why does the artist make the

³ Pierre Gassier and Juliet Wilson. *The Life and Complete Work of Francisco Goya*. (New York: Reynal & Co. in association with William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1971) p. 10.

background figures so shadowy? How do they make you feel? Do you think Goya likes these people?

8. How does Goya get us to notice the hands and faces in this painting? Why are they important?
9. What colors do you see in this painting? Where is green used? What might green represent here? Where is red used? What might red represent?
10. Can you discover when this painting was made? Look for the date someplace on the painting.
11. **Compare this painting with *Peace Concluded*, by Millais:**
 - Which artist is more interested in detail?
 - Which painting seems more naturalistic and why?
 - Which painting arouses your emotions more? What emotions does each arouse?
 - Contrast the pose of the two main figures in each painting. Contrast the representation of the supporting figures.
 - Are both artists trying to paint pleasing pictures? Are both artists trying to evoke the same feelings?
12. **Compare this painting with *The Artist's Daughter, Julie, with Her Nanny*, by Morisot:**
 - How many people do you see in each painting? Count them. Which painting seems more crowded? Why?
 - Which painting gives us more naturalistic detail?
 - Which painting is more emotionally moving to you? Why?
 - Each of these paintings expresses a mood or overall feeling. How are the moods in these two paintings the same? How are they different?
13. Goya painted this picture for Dr. Arrieta as a thank-you. Would you like to receive a thank-you like this from someone you have helped?