



## GOYA AND ANIMALS. THE ANIMALISATION OF THE WORLD IN THE CAPRICHOS

Temporary installation. November 2022 - November 2023  
Casa Botines Gaudí Museum, Picture Gallery, Hall II



Goya's Caprichos are a satirical ode to the defects of 18th-century European society. In them, Goya criticises the ignorance, superstition and vulgarity of the working classes, the clergy, and the nobility, and deals with subjects such as religion, marriage, abortion, and education. He uses a multitude of animals, from donkeys, monkeys, and dogs to bats, owls, and cats, which he endows with symbolic meaning in the service of the message he wishes to convey.



Francisco de Goya, *Asta su abuelo*  
(*And so was his grandfather*)  
(Caprichos, 39) (detail), 1797-1799  
(1970 edition). Aquatint on paper.  
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*pupil know more?*) or mediocre writers - who, being themselves donkeys, can do no less than write "burradas" i.e., Capricho 39, *Asta su abuelo* (*And so was his grandfather*). This last Capricho can be interpreted in a second way in relation to the nobility of the time, who invented great heroic genealogies to reinforce their position of privilege, which is why it has been suggested that it is a reference to Manuel Godoy, Charles IV's Prime Minister, who boasted a long and heroic genealogy. For Goya, it mattered little that they had distinguished ancestors: they were donkeys, and the donkeys were those who preceded them.

### The ignorance and superstition of the working classes. The asneries

Art, literature, and music were constant preoccupations in Goya's life, and during his lifetime he was associated with distinguished literati (such as Leandro Fernández de Moratín), musicians (such as Luigi Boccherini) and, of course, painters. None of them escapes his satirical mockery, which, through his asnerías (Caprichos 37-42), ridicules artists by turning them into donkeys and monkeys, animals traditionally associated with stupidity, ignorance, and unreason. Goya mocks some music lovers who think they know a lot about music, but who flatter monkeys playing the guitar (Capricho 38, *Bravísimo*) (Bravissimo!), or painting enthusiasts who have their portraits painted by monkeys with paintbrushes (Capricho 41, *Ni más ni menos*). Teachers are not spared either (Capricho 37, *Si sabrá mas el discípulo?*) (*Might not the*

### The animalisation of the world. Diurnal animals

Throughout the Caprichos, animals appear in an enormous variety of forms. In Capricho 27, *Quien más rendido?* (*Who more is surrendered?*) two little dogs adopt the same posture and attitude as a lady and the gentleman who is courting her. The fop bows to the lady like a lapdog, unaware that he will most probably end up "plucked", as is shown in Caprichos 19 and 20, *Todos caerán* (*Everyone will fall*) and *Ya van desplumados* (*There they go plucked*). In them, several women from the working classes try to conquer some gentlemen who, like chickens, end up fleeing in terror

and plucked. The defencelessness and lack of opportunities for women in 18th-century Europe led families to try to marry them off to wealthy old men, as Goya criticises in Capricho 57, *La filiación (The filiation)*, where the bride, wearing a fox mask, covers with her hands the horns of the groom, who places her head in her lap. Once again, Goya uses an animal, although not physically present in the scene, to express the problems and consequences of this type of marriage of convenience.

### The animalisation of the world. Nocturnal animals

In the second part of the Caprichos (prints 43-80), Goya unfolds a universe completely outside the rules of reason, populated by animals, monsters, witches, sorcerers, and all kinds of nocturnal, phantasmagorical, and nightmarish motifs. Thus, animals associated with the night and with magic, such as owls, cats, and bats, and also those associated with witchcraft, such as billy goats and monkeys, populate the prints (Caprichos 60, *Ensayos (Trials)*; 62, *Quien lo creyera (Who would have thought it!)* and 66, *Allá va eso (There it goes)*).

To take this idea to the extreme of its symbolic and expressive possibilities, Goya seems to translate into images the science of physiognomy, which was based on studying people's personalities through their facial features, as it was believed that the face revealed the soul. For Goya, morally and intellectually rotten people, such as those in the Caprichos, could have no other face than that of monkeys, donkeys, and bats, and so his pictures are populated by beings halfway between man and animal, between reason and unreason, like beings who have lost all trace of humanity and have become, irremediably, animals.

**Text: Carlos Varela Fernández. Collections and Exhibitions Department.**

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