

# THE WITCHES' SABBATH

CLASIFICACIÓN: EASEL PAINTING. VARIOUS SUBJECTS

SERIE: WITCH AFFAIRS FOR THE ALAMEDA DE OSUNA (PAINTING, 1798) (2/6)



## DATOS GENERALES

CRONOLOGÍA

1797 - 1798

UBICACIÓN

Lázaro Galdiano Museum, Madrid, Spain

DIMENSIONES

43 x 30 cm

TÉCNICA Y SOPORTE

Oil on canvas

RECONOCIMIENTO DE LA AUTORÍA DE GOYA

Undisputed work

TITULAR

Lázaro Galdiano Foundation

FICHA: REALIZACIÓN/REVISIÓN

09 May 2010 / 15 Jun 2023

INVENTARIO

354 (2.006)

## HISTORIA

Goya was commissioned to paint this canvas to decorate the country house of the Duke and Duchess of Osuna. It later belonged to the Duke of Tovar, and was acquired by José Lázaro Galdiano in 1928.

## ANÁLISIS ARTÍSTICO

In the centre of the scene, a demonic ritual is taking place by the light of the moon. The devil,

in the form of a he-goat and wearing a crown of vine leaves, alluding to the iconography of Bacchus, presides over a circle of witches. One of the women is offering him a sacrifice of a new-born baby whilst an old hag presents him with a skeletal child. To one side of the he-goat, another woman has a pole slung over her shoulder, from which several human foetuses hang. Behind the main group, and picked out by a halo of light surrounding each of them, we see another group of female figures dressed in white tunics. Flying in the sky above them are several bats.

It is likely that Goya came across the subject for this painting in the text and humorous commentary which Leandro Fernández de Moratín wrote in 1812 about the auto-da-fé declared in Logroño in 1610. According to the inventory that was made of it in 1823, the Duke and Duchess of Osuna's library included a copy of Fernández de Moratín's text. It tells the story of two women who poisoned their children, after having been told to do so by the devil. Goya's painting also depicts the popular view held at the time that witches would often suck the blood of children, leaving them in such a weakened state that little could be done to save them.

This canvas, which openly criticizes superstition and ignorance, is related to a number of etchings sharing this same objective in the *Caprices* series: no. 47, *A Gift for the Master* and no. 60, *Trials*, in which human foetuses and the figure of the he-goat also appear.

The reclining female figure with her back to the viewer in the foreground of this painting, and under whose blanket another child is hiding, with only his legs visible, bears a strong resemblance to the drawing that appears on page 6r of Goya's *Italian Sketchbook (Cuaderno italiano)* (1771-1793, Prado Museum, Madrid). This drawing, a study in rendering drapery, depicts a completely covered figure and shows the influence of Salvator Rosa (Naples, 1615-Rome, 1673). Goya may have seen the work of this artist, who also regularly dealt with themes of magic and the supernatural, during his stay in Italy (1769-1771).

For more information, see *The Witches' Flight*.

#### EXPOSICIONES

##### **Bosch, Goya et le fantastique**

VII Bordeaux International Exhibition Burdeos 1957

consultant editor Gilberte Martin-Méry. From May 20th to July 31st 1957

cat. 67

##### **Goya**

Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen Mauritshuis The Hague 1970

organized by Ministerio de Estado y Asuntos Culturales and Réunion des Musées Nationaux, July 4th to September 13th 1970.

Exhibited also at the Musée de l'Orangerie des Tuileries, Paris, October 25th to December 7th 1970, consultant editors

Jeannine Baticle and A. B. de Vries

cat. 27

##### **Goya**

Musée Jacquemart-André Paris 1961

consultant editor Jean-Gabriel Domergue. From December 1961 to February 1962

cat. 52

##### **Goya y el espíritu de la 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.

Savre

##### **Goya and his times**

The Royal Academy of Arts London 1963

cat. 66

cat. 79

##### **Goya. El Capricho y la Invención. Cuadros de gabinete, bocetos y miniaturas**

Museo Nacional del Prado Madrid 1993

from November 18th 1993 to February 15th 1994. Exhibited also at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, March 18th to June 12th 1994 and The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, July 16th to October 16th 1994, consultant editors Manuela B. Mena Marqués and Juliet

Wilson-Bareau

**Goya**  
cat. 26

**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. 67

**Goya: Order and disorder**  
Museum of Fine Arts Boston 2014  
cat. 160

**Wilson Barreau**  
cat. 46

**Goya**  
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#### ENLACES EXTERNOS