Goya’s lost snuffbox

by MERCEDES CERÓN

On 17th June 1793, the following advertisement appeared in the ‘Lost property’ section of the Diario de Madrid:

Lost in the afternoon of the 5th of this month, a rectangular gold box, engraved all over [with decoration], and with six paintings whose author is David Teniers [sic]. It went missing between the Convent of the Incarnation and the Prado: anyone finding it should hand it in to Don Francisco de Goya, painter to His Majesty the King, who lives in the Calle del Desengaño, on the left-hand side coming from Fuencarral, No. 1, flat 2, where they will be generously rewarded.¹

What works by Teniers were lost by Goya on the way to the Prado? The ambiguity of the advertisement renders the identification of the paintings problematic. Despite the confusing phrasing, emphasis seems to be placed on the box, rather than on its contents. It seems therefore likely that the six pictures were not inside the case, but rather attached to the sides and to the lid as part of its decoration. Genre scenes loosely derived from Teniers’s works were an ornamental motif favoured by Parisian goldsmiths such as Eloy Brichard (1756–62) and Jean Ducrollay (c.1708–after 1776), and they often embellished their gold and enamel snuffboxes with such scenes.

A rectangular gold snuffbox in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, set with six small enameled plaques showing a portrait and five tavern scenes in the style of Teniers provides an idea of what the missing box might have looked like (Fig.24).² This piece, created by Jean Ducrollay, was presented in 1764 as a gift to the actor David Garrick by Philip, Duke of Parma.³ The following year, the Duke’s daughter, the future Queen of Spain, María Luisa of Parma, was portrayed by Laurent Pécheux ‘holding a snuffbox’, its lid open to display a painted miniature of her fiancé, the Prince of Asturias [sic], later Charles IV of Spain,⁴ which James Parker describes as French (Figs.23 and 26).⁵

Although a box with these characteristics would probably have been beyond Goya’s means, it could have been a present to him. It is possible, for instance, that María Luisa considered a snuffbox by Ducrollay, or by an equally prestigious French goldsmith, a suitable gift for an artist in her service with whose work she was particularly pleased, as her father had done before her.⁶ The 24. Box decorated with enameled peasant interiors in the manner of David Teniers, by Jean Ducrollay. Paris, 1759–60. Gold and enamel, 4.1 by 8.1 by 5.9 cm. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

coronation of Charles IV and María Luisa as King and Queen of Spain had taken place in January 1789 and on that occasion Goya, who had already served as royal painter to Charles III, was commissioned to paint the first official portraits of the new monarchs.⁶ Among the number of versions and copies of these pictures that have survived, two fine examples of Goya’s work for the new King are the Portrait of Queen María Luisa with a bustle (P2862; Fig.27) and the Portrait of Charles IV (P1324), both now in the Museo del Prado.⁷ In his portrait of the Queen, Goya has recourse to a composition that recalls Pécheux’s, although he replaces the snuffbox with the royal crown and ermine. The outcome must have pleased the sitters, since Goya’s appointment as court painter was announced shortly afterwards, in April 1789.⁸

During these months, his letters to Martín Zapater contain frequent references to the particularity with which he was often treated by the King and Queen.⁹

All the circumstances mentioned above suggest that what Goya lost on 5th May may have been an elaborate French snuffbox, possibly given to him by Charles IV, by María Luisa or cited in P. Walch: ‘David Garrick in Italy’, Eighteenth-Century Studies 3 (1970), p.528.
⁶ Tomlinson, op. cit. (note 6), p.23.
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25. María Luisa of Parma (1731–1809), later Queen of Spain, by Laurent Pécheux. 1765. Canvas, 230.8 by 164.5 cm. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

26. Detail of Fig.25.

out for comment by Pérez Sánchez. It was not shared, however, by other patrons of Goya, such as Sebastián Martínez and the Duchess of Osuna. Teniers’s name does not appear in the inventory of Goya’s possessions in 1812.

Paintings by Teniers may on the other hand have been part of the collection bought from Goya’s brother-in-law, Francisco Bayeu, by the royal goldsmith, Leonardo Chopinot, who had been born in Paris but worked in Madrid from 1763. Chopinot supplied ‘a number of boxes and diamonds’ to the Spanish Court in 1786, and the description of one of the boxes as ‘made of gold and enamelled with a medallion in its centre’ suggests that his works followed the French taste exemplified by Dacresly’s snuff-boxes. However, most of the commissions that Chopinot received from the court were for jewellery. Enamelled boxes of the type described in the advertisement could be acquired more easily from one of the many Spanish firms that imported French goods.

The ambiguous phrasing in the description of the box in the Diario de Madrid indicates a blurred, or even non-existent, distinction between the artist’s conception of the work and the craftsman’s responsibility for making it. Paradoxically, this was one of Goya’s main concerns when producing cartoons for the Royal Tapestry Factory and emphasising on his bills that his designs were ‘of his own invention’. Besides a similar status as luxury commodities, the enamels after Teniers’s paintings and the tapestries after Goya’s cartoons also shared an original approach to popular imagery. Only after being turned into ornaments could the figures that populated these genre scenes gain access to the palatial settings for which such objects were created.

In the past, connections between Goya and Teniers have been established on the basis of the subjects depicted by the former in his tapestry cartoons. As Janice Tomlinson noticed, a growing preference for genre scenes derived from seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish models can be perceived in the tapestries commissioned by the King, some of which would have been based on prints after Teniers’s paintings. This was the tradition within which Goya’s career as Court Painter began in the 1770s. In the late eighteenth century, technical similarities between Goya and Teniers were also remarked upon.

by them both. Some details, however, preclude the unreserved acceptance of such an interpretation. The reference to the ‘author’ of the paintings seems odd when considering that the enamelled plaques were only genre scenes in the manner of Teniers. Moreover, the text describes the missing object as a box without specifying of what kind, although a number of snuff-boxes were identified as such in the same section of the newspaper. Finally, the royal gift is not mentioned in any of the surviving letters from Goya to Zapater.

The identification of the ‘author’ of the pictures as Teniers suggests that the advertiser took for granted the familiarity of the average reader of the Diario de Madrid with the work of the Flemish painter. As in France and Britain, in eighteenth-century Spain, Dutch and Flemish genre paintings were dismissed as unworthy of the attention of the enlightened collector. Nevertheless, Charles IV, his brother the Infante Don Luis, and the Queen’s favourite, Manuel Godoy, were all admirers of Teniers’s works. At least fifteen pictures, two sets of prints and three porcelain figures after Teniers were listed in the Infante’s inventory. Antonio Ponz mentions several works by Teniers in the collection that Charles IV kept in his country house, the Casita del Príncipe, in El Escorial, when he was still Prince of Asturias. Some of them were inherited by the Prince from his mother, Isabel Farnese, whose taste for Teniers has been singled out for comment by Pérez Sánchez. It was not shared, however, by other patrons of Goya, such as Sebastián Martínez and the Duchess of Osuna. Teniers’s name does not appear in the inventory of Goya’s possessions in 1812.

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11 D. Solkin: ‘Spain, Dutch and Flemish genre paintings were dismissed as

12 I am very grateful to Nigel Glendinning for pointing out the Infante Don Luis’s

13 J. Jordán de Urríes: ‘La Casita del Príncipe de El Escorial’,


15 For works by Teniers in other private collections in Madrid, see N. Glendinning: Goya: La década de los ‘Caprichos’. Retratos, 1792–1804, Madrid 1992, pp.54–64.


19 Ibid., p.9.

20 Eugenio Lucas was commissioned by Marcial Torres Adalid to paint some works in the style of both painters; see N. Glendinning: Goya and his critics, New Haven and London 1977, pp.16–17.


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What is the relevance of the note published in the *Diario de Madrid*? Assuming that it was Goya, and not any other member of his household, who lost the box and published the advertisement, this would bring forward the date of his return to Madrid from Cádiz, formerly thought to be between mid-June and early July 1793. It also provides the precise location of Goya’s home at the time. More importantly, if the lost object was a French snuffbox decorated with enamels after Teniers, it suggests that Charles IV and María Luisa may well have shown clear signs of their admiration for Goya’s work at a relatively early stage. Tomlinson has referred to ‘the limited alternatives’ offered to the monarchs by the scarcity of talented painters in the employ of the Spanish court as a probable reason for the commission of the coronation portraits from Goya in 1789. According to the same author, after 1790, ‘he received no other royal portrait commissions until 1799’, which would suggest that their appreciation of ‘his talents as a portraitist’ only became manifest ten years later. However, a gift from the sitters would imply that, far from being indifferent, their reaction to the early portraits would have been positive.

A snuffbox was not only an ‘object of high-fashion’, but also ‘a mark of aristocratic favour’ traditionally offered to diplomats and to distinguished artists. On his return to London, David Garrick showed his proudly as a sign of his international reputation. Goya’s enamelled snuffbox would have signified his rising status at court. Was the missing box ever recovered? It is impossible to say, but the advertisement was not published again, and ‘two gold boxes’, mentioned in an inventory of Goya’s belongings dated 1812, were left to his son Javier.

Chicago (Art Institute) and London (Royal Academy) 1994, p.189. For Goya’s address in 1790, see J. Domínguez Bordona: ‘Diario del grabador González Sepúlveda’, *Archivo español de arte y arqueología* 11 (1935), pp.315–17. I owe this reference to Nigel Glendinning.


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**Juan Muñoz’s ‘Five seated figures’ (1996) at the Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid**

by LYNNE COOKE

Displacement, Nomadism and estrangement – the foundation of the modern condition – are the psychological states that preoccupied Juan Muñoz throughout a relatively short career, one that began in the early 1980s and ended with his untimely death, aged forty-eight, in 2001. Unidentified and unidentifiable places – that is, places that are neither nowhere nor yet somewhere nameable – were a constant in Muñoz’s work from its first public presentations in the mid-1980s. Small iron balconies, a minaret and a miniature staircase were among the subjects of the sculptures that comprised his first exhibition in 1984. Turning interior into exterior, or inside into outside, these works set up a tension between literal and imaginary spaces, thus producing a strangely dislocating effect. In subsequent pieces such as *The wasteland* (1987; private collection), Muñoz created disconcerting scenarios by introducing optically destabilising substitute floors of linoleum tiles in bold geometric patterns. Often they were inhabited by ventriloquist dummies, prompters or mannequins – surrogate speakers who serve as channels through which narratives might be voiced.

In the early 1990s, in a provocative move, the Spanish-born artist introduced a repertory of near life-size figures of young men whose bodies ended in spheres and whose anonymous faces bore features that indicated their age without betraying more specific traces of character or identity. At once mobile and immobile, these figures were deployed in groupings which Muñoz called ‘Conversation Pieces’. Generally, they appeared most animated when seen from a distance, glimpsed askance or spied in passing. This need for a certain physical distance had a
Baroque mise-en-scène, Muñoz’s somewhat indeterminate renderings are infused with a haunting sense of mystery that has modernist affinities, whether in the early paintings of de Chirico or the austere stagings that are a hallmark of Samuel Beckett’s plays. In his work, as in theirs, melancholy registers a sense of anomie and unidentifiable loss.

Critical acclaim for Muñoz’s work in certain quarters was matched by pronounced silence in others. At the heart of these contradictory responses were issues central to late modernism: whether the return to figuration and narrative in sculpture signified an academic retreat from the innovative forays made during the 1970s under the rubric of ‘the expanded field of sculpture’; whether the renewed preoccupation with the theatrical, another of the taboos in modernist discourse, indicated an embrace of cross-disciplinarity or, alternatively, a collapse of critical rigour; and whether debts to literary and filmic traditions in service of narrative traduced the formalist integrity of any visual work of art.

Muñoz’s challenge to some of the central modernist tenets was part of a broader generational impulse, as is evident in the work of such peers as Thomas Schütte, Katharina Fritsch, Robert Gober and Rosemarie Trockel. His contribution was nonetheless distinguished by traces of his distinctive Spanish heritage, as is evident in his iconography (the use of the figure of the dwarf in a number of key works), materials and techniques (his recourse to a language of constructed metal sculpture in early pieces), and in his sensibility (the mordant tone that permeates so many of his sculptures).

Although Five seated figures is less overtly indebted to this legacy than many of his other works, its timbre – the way in which the ensemble is suspended in a charged moment riddled with dark forebodings – bears Muñoz’s distinctive signature.

1 The work was acquired by the Museum at Sotheby’s, New York, Contemporary art, 11th November 2009, lot 53.