

THE DESASTERS OF WAR

GOYA AND THE PRESENCE

Exhibition Facts

Duration	24 May – 21 August 2022
Venue	Gallery / Bastion Hall, ALBERTINA
Curators	Klaus Albrecht Schröder Constanze Malissa
Works	80
Opening hours	Daily 10 AM to 6 PM Wednesday & Friday 10 AM to 9 PM
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Goya and the Present

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Since the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine in February of this year, the photographer Mykhaylo Palinchak (*1985) has been documenting his homeland's destruction and the attendant impacts on those who live there. His pictures of apartment complex ruins, the dead and survivors, people on the run, and those who have remained provide an impactful impression of this war's immediate consequences.

The ALBERTINA Museum is showing 40 recent war photographs by Palinchak, whose work has dealt repeatedly with incisive political developments in Ukraine, in juxtaposition with Goya's *Los Desastres de la Guerra*. Just like Palinchak's photography, Goya's early 19th-century depictions of war from the collection of the ALBERTINA document the universal brutality of wartime events and the suffering of the civilian populace.

Mykhaylo Palinchak

Mykhaylo Palinchak was born into a family of artists in Uzhgorod in 1985—his father being also a photographer. His first professional works date from 2008, and he exhibited them for the first time in November that same year together with the work of his father.

Working in different regions in Ukraine, Palinchak uses his photographs to tell the history of his country, taking a sharp and frequently critical look at the people living there. His series document the landscapes of the once popular seaside resorts and spa towns on the coast of the Sea of Azov, the village of Shyrokyne in the region of Donetsk, Chernobyl, Solotvyno, as well as the center of Kiev. The overall image he draws offers the viewer shocking insights into the life of the Ukrainian population.

Francisco de Goya

Francisco de Goya (Fuendetodos 1746–1828 Bordeaux) was the most important Spanish artist at the dawn of modernism. Starting out from the local Late Baroque painting school and the art of Tiepolo, he brought about a profound stylistic change. His pictures condemn social evils with merciless realism, express eerie and threatening occurrences in fantastic visions, and caused such a scandal with their partly provocative themes that Goya was forced to answer to the Inquisition.

The radical renewal of his art is particularly reflected in several series of prints, including the *Desastres de la Guerra*, which were not published in Madrid before 1863 in the form of eighty etchings, all of which are on view here. Goya used Napoleon's invasion of Spain (1808–14) as an occasion to denounce the atrocities of bloody warfare. Images of murder, torture, and the rape of women are followed by scenes illustrating the hopeless conditions during the famine of 1811/12, which took the lives of thousands. Allegorical depictions then deal critically with the post-war period under the reactionary regime of King Ferdinand VII.

By no means did Goya seek to document the events, but he rather augmented their drama through an artist's visual devices, thus endowing the pictures with a deeper meaning. Faces distorted with pain symbolize the horrible agonies of those cruelly slaughtered. The inhumane deeds of the French stand for bands of soldiers driven by the lowest instincts, for whom committing murder is fulfilling a mere duty and who even feel pleased at the sight of a hanged man. Dead bodies piled up represent the anonymous masses of people killed, deprived by the war of their names and dignity.

Placing his focus on only a few figures, Goya has condensed the story through wide, empathic movements, thus conveying the core message pointedly and with great immediacy. The drama is intensified by the contrasting chiaroscuro and the grim backgrounds: dead trees, gloomy walls underscoring the brutality of the cruel deeds, and dark drifts of clouds transporting the smell rising from the corpses. Goya also criticizes his own compatriots—the no-less-gruesome crimes of the Spaniards, the cold-heartedness of the wealthy toward those perishing, women turning into murdering furies, and the clergy's hypocritical bigotry. Goya's criticism is thus generally directed against the insanity of war and its aftermath. Never has an artist expressed this more impressively.

The tyrant does not declare the war he has unleashed. He forbids the word, refusing to hear it, so that he can feign ignorance of martial law. The horrors he brings into the lives of those unable to defend themselves are to be unspeakable. Concessions but fuel his bloodthirstiness. Nothing will remain of the cities he allegedly frees. Even families of his own people taking a stand against the war are extinguished. Children and old people are put down. Infants see the light of day in the form of a firebomb.

The tyrant denies the mass murder and confers decorations upon the brigade that committed it. The annihilation of a nation and its history is a means to the end of ruling the world.

The opponent's army is not the only enemy. Those supplying equipment—whether helmets or tanks—also become targets. The regime threatens all of us with a nuclear holocaust. This is what constitutes the tyranny. It suffices to stop buying from it to provoke its rage.

Even if we are far removed from where the action is, the freedom of all of us is at stake. The tyrant will not tolerate a peaceful Europe existing beyond his despotism. That is why he supports all those undermining democracy, be it in Brussels, Berlin, Paris, or Vienna. He expects submission. But to his dismay he has unified a whole continent that refuses to live under his rule and offers resistance.

His power is based on fear and terror. His hatred has always been directed at an art that functions as a mirror of what has befallen the victims. The tyrant knows about its strength and dreads its courage.

These are the pictures of people fighting and fleeing, of people who have been murdered, mutilated, raped, and tortured. They look at us. May those having eyes see.

Doron Rabinovici