

*Disparates*

Ca. 1815–16 (published 1864)

Etching, aquatint, drypoint

Sheet 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 19 in. (33.5 × 48.5 cm); plate 9<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 13<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (24.5 × 35.3 cm)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1924 (24.30.14)

Provenance: acquired from Anderson Galleries, New York

References: Harris 1964, no. 260.III.1; Carrete Parrondo and Matilla 1996, no. 33, p. 111

A working proof of this plate, probably one of the earliest Goya made for the series, was included in the bound set of the *Tauromaquia* (1816) that Goya gave his friend Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez.<sup>1</sup> Its title, “Modo de Volar,” is taken from the index probably written by Ceán Bermúdez at the front of the volume.<sup>2</sup> The absence of aquatint in that proof makes the figures appear suspended against limitless space, similar to several *Tauromaquia* etchings.

Five men wearing helmets in the shape of a bird’s head fly aided by wings strapped to their wrists and feet. The image has been interpreted as a metaphor of the latest political and philosophical currents, which were opposed by the most conservative sectors of Spanish society. That reading connects with articles written about 1811 by the priest Francisco Alvarado, who criticized the new ideas emanating from France by comparing them with man’s then futile attempts to fly.<sup>3</sup> A similar comparison appeared in an article about people demonstrating for liberty and equality after the French occupation and before Ferdinand VII abrogated the constitution in a Seville newspaper in 1814: “The whim of the man who wanted to fly was a folly, and a big one at that; but it can be explained; however, I don’t know how to explain the whim of one who wants to be taken to Hell.”<sup>4</sup>

Goya’s image can also be associated with the late eighteenth-century spectacles featuring aerostatic balloons and parachute descents that were still popular in Madrid in the 1810s.<sup>5</sup> The contraption worn by his figures also recalls the “new machine for flying” invented about 1808 by the Austrian clockmaker Jacques Degen (or Deghen), who was said to “ascend in the air like a bird” by flapping “two artificial wings made of small pieces of paper joined together by the finest silk.”<sup>6</sup> Degen’s flying machine was described and illustrated in 1809 in the *Annales des arts et manufactures*, a periodical then available at the Spanish Royal Library.<sup>7</sup> MCP

1. British Museum, London (1975,1025.422.37); Harris 1964, vol. 2, p. 395. 2. The preparatory drawing for the print is in the Fundación Lázaro Galdiano, Madrid (14866-22). See Gassier 1975, no. 299, pp. 450–51; Cano Cuesta 1999, nos. 10 (drawing), 53 (print), pp. 118, 221. 3. J. M. Matilla in Matilla and Mena Marqués 2012, no. 74, p. 262. 4. “El antojo que tuvo un hombre de querer volar, disparate fué y gran disparate; pero tiene alguna disculpa; mas el antojo de que se lo lleve a uno el demonio, yo no se como se disculpa”; *El Tio tremenda, ó Los criticos del malecon*, no. 87 (1814), p. 356. 5. Vega 2010, p. 210. 6. “Aérostation: Nouvelle machine pour voler dans l’air,” *Annales des arts et manufactures* 31, nos. 91–93 (1809), p. 50. 7. Real Biblioteca, Madrid, shelfmark PR. Real Biblioteca III/6002. On the connection between Goya’s print and Degen’s machine, see Wilson-Bareau 1996, p. 78. On the contraption depicted by Goya in relation to Renaissance images of flying machines, see Hofmann 1980, no. 162, p. 208.



