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EDICIONES
COMPLUTENSE

A Brief History of the Prado Museum

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The origin of the public museums

The Museo del Prado was born on 19 November 1819, though at the time it was called the Museo Real de Pinturas or Royal Picture Gallery, as its holdings came from the collections of the Spanish monarchs. One of the first public museums ever created, the Prado was modelled after the Louvre, which opened its doors on 11 August 1793, two years after the French constitution was ratified by the fledgling revolutionary government of the Republic. In fact, the creation of public museums was one of the ideas most ardently promoted by the French Revolution, ideas that later spread to the rest of Europe thanks to the Napoleonic Empire.

The concept of the museum is obviously far older, as the term itself indicates; it comes from the Greek word *mouseion*, which means "seat of the Muses" or, in a looser interpretation, "seat of inspiration". The idea of creating a museum is as ancient as the human passion for collecting or hoarding objects, whose origin is lost in the mists of time. In any event, the evolution of collections into museums in Western culture began, like so many other things, with ancient Greece, but the museum as we know it today has only existed since approximately the eighteenth century, when the revolutionary ideas of the Enlightenment triumphed, which explains the infinite proliferation of such institutions in our era.

What distinguishes our museums from those of earlier centuries is their public nature and, consequently, their instructive purpose. The modern state regarded education and culture as essential tools for combating the social inequalities of the past, and therefore used all the increasingly powerful means at its disposal to make both universally accessible. Although works of art, as luxury items, were relatively harder to democratise, the public authorities were determined to promote them in society, and museums were their instrument of choice. These did not necessarily have to be dedicated to art, but the ones that were quickly acquired greater prominence and prestige, owing to the high financial value of the objects they housed as well as to their exemplary historical significance, which also constituted an ideal reflection of collective national identity–something vital to the new model of statehood that was taking hold in the nascent contemporary era.

Once public museums had become the temples of secularised society, they had to strike a balance between the social drive to nationalise the artistic heritage of a

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country and the desire to underscore the universal, cosmopolitan nature of art. Thus, in satisfying the humanist aspiration of universality through the concrete, specific historical experience of a people, and simultaneously achieving a sense of transcendence formerly unique to religion, whose hold was already weakening, the museum acquired tremendous social significance thanks to the charismatic material objects it contained. At the same time, it must be noted that museums were practically the only instrument the state could use to ensure an effective democratisation of art, which initially consisted solely of unique works valued precisely for their singularity.

However, returning now to the creation of the Musée du Louvre, the model for all other European museums, I must point out that its original mission was to "nationalise" an artistic heritage hitherto almost exclusively controlled by the aristocracy and the church, and, as a direct consequence of this public service vocation, that its orientation was didactic and recreational. This soon sparked a debate over whether the guiding principles of the new institution should follow an "artistic" pattern or a different, "historical" one, what was later pedantically termed the "scientific" approach. It almost goes without saying that the idea behind the first option was that of a museum run by artists, while the second implied a museum run by art historians or archaeologists. In either case, the new public museum was devoted not only to amassing as many artworks as possible, but also to presenting them in an orderly fashion, though initially the logic behind this order oscillated between the showier, more ornamental Baroque approach and the Enlightened model, based on a method of historical progression skewed by a tendency to divide works into different national schools.

Principal Spanish precedents of the Museo del Prado

Naturally, all this also influenced the founding and historical evolution of the Museo del Prado, which was officially inaugurated, as mentioned, in 1819, but only after the groundwork had been laid by a series of preliminary events or precedents which I will now briefly review, beginning with what may be considered the first attempt to establish a museum of painting in the Spanish capital. On 1 September 1800, Mariano Luis de Urquijo, Secretary of State, gave the order to transfer the Murillo paintings in Seville's Hospital de la Caridad to the court in Madrid, and justified his decision by explaining that schools and museums were formed at the courts of every civilised nation in Europe.

While this constitutes the earliest precedent, the most significant was undoubtedly the frustrated project of the no less frustrated monarch Joseph Bonaparte I, the aptly termed Museo Josefino or Josephine Museum, whose founding charter was published as a royal decree on 21 December 1809. The four articles of that decree vaguely indicated that the museum would be in Madrid, though the exact location was not specified. It also stated that a selection of works by the finest Spanish masters would be sent to enrich the Musée Napoléon in Paris, "being a monument to the glory of Spanish artists", and that other pictures would be hung in different official buildings. Perhaps the most interesting part of this decree was its preamble, as it reflected the revolutionary doctrine that inspired the creation of the first public museums as well as its implementation by the Napoleonic Empire. The opening lines read as follows:

> Desiring, for the benefit of the fine arts, that the many pictures which, removed from the sight of connoisseurs, have hitherto remained sequestered in the cloisters, be made available; that these specimens of the most perfect of the old works might serve first as examples and models for talent; that the merit of the renowned Spanish painters, little known to neighbouring nations, might shine, and at the same time bring them the immortal glory they so richly deserve [.. .] we have decreed [.. .].

With this initiative, Joseph Bonaparte was applying the same imperial Napoleonic policy that had led Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, then King of Holland, to found the Koninklijk Museum in Amsterdam, the immediate predecessor of the Rijksmuseum, on 21 April 1808, and Jerome Bonaparte, King of Westphalia, to do the same in the city of Kassel. At any rate, the only one of the Bonaparte family's museum initiatives that truly prospered was the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, which opened on 15 August 1809, a few months before the founding decree of the Museo Josefino in Madrid appeared. The plan was to set up this museum in Buenavista Palace, which stood on a plot between Calle de Alcalá and Paseo de Recoletos. However, given the functional difficulties of converting this building to a museum, another plan began to take shape in September 1811 that called for the occupation of the as-yet unfinished Academy of Natural Sciences in the Paseo del Prado–the very building that would eventually become the Museo del Prado, but which at the time was being used to quarter French troops stationed in Madrid.

The outcome of the Peninsular War, which ousted the French from Spain, put an end to this project, but it remains the clearest prologue to the inauguration of the Museo del Prado ten years later. There were other more or less vague precedents, such as the idea mooted in 1800 during the reign of Charles IV, but neither this initiative, which barely qualifies as a rough draft, nor the plans hinted at in other enlightened sources, which amounted to little more than to wishful thinking, prove anything except that Spanish politicians in the Age of Reason occasionally entertained the notion of creating a museum.

The Royal Picture Gallery that was eventually established under the auspices of Ferdinand VII differed from these unsuccessful prior attempts in one important aspect: the nature of its holdings. The museum that opened in 1819 was comprised entirely of pictures from the royal collection, a fact that proved decisive in shaping the institution's history and personality. In any event, prior to that inauguration a considerable amount of time was devoted to deliberations and plans which I feel are worth mentioning.

Ferninand VII's reasons for founding a museum

After the Peninsular War ended, the Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando wanted to create a picture gallery in Madrid with the works that the French troops had left behind, and therefore petitioned the king for a spacious building to house both the academy and the gallery. The board's first choice was Buenavista Palace, given its proximity to the academy's headquarters in Calle de Alcalá. However, several politicians opposed the idea, and the academy, beset by financial difficulties, could not afford the remodelling work the palace would require, so over time the proposal be-

gan to look less like a museum of the Academy of Fine Arts and more like a museum of the king.

The first curious detail about this project is how precociously the recently restored king manifested a desire to create a museum. Ferdinand VII made his triumphal entry in Madrid on 13 May 1814, and barely two months later, on 4 July of that same year, he signed a royal order that stated his intention of turning the confiscated Buenavista Palace over to the Academy of San Fernando, to establish therein a gallery of paintings and other objects of artistic interest, as well as the monarch's own pledge to provide the gallery with surplus works from the royal residences. We do not know precisely what triggered this sudden display of munificence from a king not especially known for his love of contemporary art, but the prior initiative of the "usurper" Joseph Bonaparte was almost certainly an influential factor, as was the keen interest in Spain's artistic heritage expressed by all foreign combatants during the Peninsular War.

Other motivations have been suggested, though they seem quite minor in comparison to these two compelling reasons, such as the instigation of certain members of the king's inner circle and even his family. Among them was a rather enigmatic figure, Isidoro Montenegro y Morentes, who had accompanied Ferdinand during his exile in France and, after the restoration, became a trusted court official whose duties included managing the king's "discretionary funds", from which the endowment for the new museum came. Years later, the reinvented Montenegro bragged that he had been the driving force behind the initiative, and at the time no one disputed his claim. Queen Isabel de Braganza also must have played an important role in the enterprise. We know that she was a great lover of the arts, and in a posthumous full-length portrait by Bernardo López Piquer she is depicted with one hand resting on the architectural plans for the museum and the other pointing to the Villanueva building, silhouetted against the background of the picture on the wall.

A king at first more fervently desired than any other, but who soon became more despised than anyone could have imagined, Ferdinand VII was the victim of all sorts of preposterous black legends, even in connection with the most politically irrelevant or harmless matters. By way of example, with regard to the founding of the Prado, a rumour began to circulate –documented by a well-known British Romantic traveller, Richard Ford– that the king had transferred such a rich assortment of his finest paintings to the new museum in order to redecorate the Royal Palace with wallpaper, the latest French fashion. Be that as it may, debating the truth or falsehood of such malicious gossip is pointless in light of the incontrovertible evidence of the generous initiative, especially when we consider that the considerable costs of remodelling and, above all, maintaining the building were paid out of Ferdinand VII's own purse.

History of the Royal Museum of Natural Sciences

The first documentary record of the king's manifest desire to create a museum appeared in 1814, but the official inauguration did not take place until five years later, in 1819. Most of that time was spent searching for the right location and, once they had settled on the rambling, unfinished Royal Museum of Natural Sciences, remodelling and fitting out the premises. Contrary to what one might suppose, the latter task was completed far more swiftly than the former, which suggests that the prob-

lem of finding a suitable home for the museum was compounded by serious cash flow difficulties, logical in a country recently impoverished by a bloody war. In any case, the project finally began to move forward in 1818, when it was decided that the Villanueva building would house the new museum, and works were practically completed by the summer of 1819, although the opening was delayed until November of that year, in light of the impending nuptials of Ferdinand VII and his third wife, Maria Josepha Amalia of Saxony.

Antonio Rumeu de Armas published an interesting study on the building traditionally known as the Real Museo de Ciencias Naturales or Royal Museum of Natural Sciences, begun in 1785 and virtually completed in 1808, which proved that it was initially a far more ambitious initiative, consisting of an Academy of Sciences which would contain, in addition to the foreseeable cabinet of natural history, chemistry laboratories, a cabinet of machines, a mineralogy school and an astronomical observatory. These plans explain the otherwise inexplicable fact of the building's enormous size and privileged location in the Prado de los Jerónimos, an urban area planned and designed with painstaking care by the enterprising Charles III. It seems that the error of turning such a vast scientific project into a simple natural science museum originated with the architect in charge of the works, Juan de Villanueva, but the actual dismemberment of its contents had more to do with the course of historical events; even with construction still underway, by the time Manuel Godoy came to power there was little interest in equipping it for scientific use as originally intended. Furthermore, French troops had done extensive damage to the property, turning it into cavalry barracks, stripping the rich lead from its roofs to melt down for bullets, and leaving this lovely, impressive edifice in a sorry state before it could even be put to use.

Characteristics of the Villanueva building and subsequent renovations

Considering the building's ruinous condition and strategic situation in the lovely and much-frequented Paseo del Prado, we can see why Ferdinand VII and his advisers seized upon it as the home they had long been seeking for their new picture gallery: it was admirably suited to this purpose, and its conversion would restore a noble yet visibly mistreated edifice to its former glory. The building designed by Juan de Villanueva, with its three massive sections connected by two long galleries, was undoubtedly worth the effort. After Villanueva's death, his most talented disciple, Antonio López Aguado, remodelled and repaired the structure to make it ready for the grand opening in 1819. Since then the building has undergone substantial transformations, more or less apace with the growing importance of the institution and the consequent expansion of its holdings. The first changes involved building the parts that Villanueva had designed but which were never constructed, to give the museum more space, while later projects altered certain sections or simply added new galleries.

A quick review of the main alterations made to the building in the course of its lengthy history shows that there were at least half a dozen prior to 1980, when it became apparent that the only definitive solution to the museum's chronic shortage of space was a new wing. Before mentioning them, however, I should briefly review the salient details of Villanueva's original design, which consisted of three main sections

with their connecting galleries. The central section was fronted by a monumental outer portico and extended to form a basilica-like structure. Thus, according to Fernando Chueca's authoritative interpretation, the entire complex followed a sequence which, from north to south and in relation to the three aforementioned monumental sections, can be described as vestibule, basilica and palace, the vestibule being the present-day Goya Entrance and the palace what is now the Murillo Entrance, facing the Botanic Garden.

With this general picture in mind, we can now turn to the substantial list of alterations to the Villanueva building, the first of which was the construction of the basilica and apse of the central section in 1853, according to plans by Narciso Pascual y Colomer. The rest were as follows: between 1882 and 1885, the north facade was altered by Francisco Jareño, who levelled the existing slope and in its place added a spectacular monumental staircase abutting the building, and who also modified the Hall of Queen Isabella and opened windows in the solid lower part, both products of Colomer's previous additions to the main section; in 1923, the enlarged galleries at the back of the building, designed by Fernando Arbós, were opened; in 1927, Pedro Muguruza remodelled the central gallery in concrete with lovely results; in 1943, the same architect altered the monumental staircase on the north facade to provide better lighting for the underground crypt along the bottom part; and the galleries were enlarged in two remodelling projects, drawn up by Fernando Chueca and Manuel Lorente in 1956, and Jose María Muguruza in 1967.

A full account of every change over the years, including those of a technological nature (e.g. the works to install the museum's artificial climate control system), would be unnecessarily long, but the modifications I have already mentioned are the ones that truly determined the current appearance of the building conceived by Juan de Villanueva. However, shortage of space persisted even after the galleries were enlarged in 1967, for not only did the collection continue to grow, but the traditional exhibition criteria inherited from the nineteenth century also changed. The idea of finding an outlet for that overflow in another nearby building gradually took hold, as any further modifications to the Villanueva building would have meant radically altering its original structure, an attack on a truly unique piece of Spain's architectural heritage. This explains the decision to give the Prado use of the Casón del Buen Retiro in 1971, taking advantage of a redistribution of the national collections. From that moment on, the Casón housed the works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries owned by the Prado.

Even so, the museum was beset by new problems, such as those derived from the mass influx of visitors and the services they required. After approximately 1970, when the economic prosperity of Western nations spawned a tremendous mass tourism industry, the world's finest museums became obligatory tourist destinations, attracting far more visitors than they were able to accommodate. This also brought a significant change in the type of visitors they received, who were better informed and consequently more demanding. In this respect, the presence of organised groups and visitors who spent many hours in the museum, among other vicissitudes, called for a wide variety of new service areas –lobbies, conference rooms, screening rooms, library, etc.– as well as places of rest and recreation, such as cafés and restaurants, not to mention cloakrooms, toilet facilities, and spatial and technical adaptations for visitors with physical disabilities. At the same time, it became clear that museums needed to substantially increase their human resources; in light of the aforemen-

tioned developments, not only did they have to multiply the number of warders on staff, but they also needed to incorporate a whole range of new, more or less qualified positions and, of course, they had to considerably augment the conservation and restoration team, the only way to ensure that, as it became fashionable to say then, the museum would not seem “dead”.

All this revolutionised the lives of museums, which began to make changes that are still far from complete. For the Prado, the first symptoms of upheaval affected the very structure of the historic Villanueva building; the works to install an artificial climate control system disrupted the institution’s daily life in the second half of the 1970s. At the same time, it had to reconsider all the other new needs, which could only be met by sacrificing exhibition space. Consequently, after 1980 demands for an external expansion of the museum grew louder, and despite the proposals and actions of the government and the museum, these petitions did not cease in the following decades and continued to resonate even after the twentieth century had run its course.

Aside from the rather far-fetched scheme, presented in 1976, of moving Francisco de Goya’s works to the seedbed pavilion of the Botanic Garden after expanding and adapting it to this new purpose, and other similar ideas (such as using the headquarters of the Ministry of Agriculture as an extension of the museum), one of the first expansion plans was proposed in 1981, when the Directorate-General of Artistic Heritage suggested that Villahermosa Palace could be annexed to the Museo del Prado. That same year the Minister of Culture, Íñigo Cavero, announced that the government was wrapping up negotiations to purchase that palace for the Prado. However, the sale of Villahermosa Palace to the Ministry of Culture did not go through until 1984, the same year the Salón de Reinos or Hall of Realms in Buen Retiro Palace, home of the Museo del Ejército, was annexed by the Prado. In any case, Villahermosa Palace was initially used to host temporary exhibitions organised by the Museo del Prado –the first of which, *Pintura napolitana. De Caravaggio a Giordano*, opened in October 1985– and later designated by the museum’s Royal Board of Trustees to house the permanent exhibition of Goya’s works and other eighteenth-century paintings. However, the latter plan was never implemented, as the Ministry of Culture reached an agreement with Baron Hans Heinrich von Thyssen-Bornemisza on 20 December 1988, which stipulated the loan of over seven hundred works from the Thyssen collection for a period of no less than ten years, the creation of a foundation, and the free assignment of Villahermosa Palace to said foundation.

This agreement deprived the museum of Villahermosa Palace, which would have met its urgent need for more space –as Alfonso Emilio Pérez Sánchez, then director of the Prado, manifested in the *Boletín del Museo del Prado*– and this problem once again became the primary preoccupation of the museum, its board of trustees and its directors.

That concern became increasingly specific, and six years later the entire Royal Board of Trustees approved a plan outlining the museum’s needs, which underscored the urgency of enlarging the public service facilities and exhibition areas and proposed an international call for ideas to expand the museum. The Ministry of Culture finally announced the competition in 1994, and one thousand five hundred and twenty teams of architects from across the globe submitted projects.

As the contest continued, a motion was passed in the lower house of the Spanish parliament to give the Prado more room by annexing the north wing of the old Buen

Retiro Palace, then occupied by the Museo del Ejército, and the plot of the cloister of Los Jerónimos.

In 1996, the jury declared the "Call for Ideas for the Expansion and Remodelling of the Museo del Prado" null and void, and the Royal Board of Trustees therefore asked the museum director's office to draw up a museographic plan based on an in-depth analysis of the museum's space issues, exhibition and visitor needs and requirements, and others related to the installation and improvement of services.

Meanwhile, at the end of that year the Directorate of State Heritage purchased the building that had housed the corporate offices of Aldeasa, in Calle Ruiz de Alarcón, and allocated it to the Museo del Prado for use as office space.

However, the failed ideas competition did not put an end to hopes of expansion, and in 1998 an agreement was finalised with the diocese, securing the land around the cloister of Los Jerónimos to build a new wing for the Prado. After that agreement was signed, the ten finalists of the competition cancelled in 1996 were invited to participate in a new, restricted call for proposals. Candidates only had to submit a design for the exterior of the new structures, as most of the interior layout had already been defined. The winning project, announced on 10 November 1998, was the design presented by Rafael Moneo.

In early 2001, the architect submitted his definitive plans for the expansion of the Museo del Prado to the Department of Infrastructures, and works commenced immediately with the dismantling of the cloister of Los Jerónimos.

Organisation of the Museo del Prado in its formative period

In any event, after nearly two centuries in existence as the Museo del Prado, we must now return to the origins of this institution as the home of Spain's most important art collection and undoubtedly one of the most prestigious of its kind in the world. Readers will recall that we had left off at the point where Ferdinand VII, newly arrived in Spain after his forced exile in France, had expressed a desire to create an art museum, and the then-deteriorated Villanueva building was chosen as its final location in 1818. Obviously, the many alterations made to the building, briefly outlined in the preceding section, were a consequence of the steady growth of the collection and its increasing social relevance in Spain and abroad. This means that physical changes to the museum were inevitably linked to deeper sociological and political changes, with their attendant administrative repercussions.

After the museum was created by a decree issued in 1818, the first and most pressing matter was to establish an organisational system. The first political step was to name a director of the museum, and the honour went to José Gabriel Silva-Bazán, Marquis of Santa Cruz, then chief steward of the Royal Palace. This appointment accurately reflected the Ancien Régime mentality of Ferdinand VII, an absolutist monarch, as well as the indisputable and perhaps even more important fact that the new museum was his private property. The first period of the Prado's history, from 1819 to 1838, was marked by an aristocratic administration, in which the directors were all prominent members of the Spanish nobility with ties to the royal household. In addition to the Marquis of Santa Cruz, who held the post for barely a year, from 1819 to 1829, these men were as follows: Pedro de Alcántara Téllez-Girón l, Prince of Anglona, from 1820 to 1823; José Idiáquez Carvajal, Marquis of Ariza and

Estepa, from 1823 to 1826; and José Rafael Fadrique Fernández de Híjar, Duke of Híjar, from 1826 to 1838. As had occurred previously with the Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, founded at the midpoint of the eighteenth century, these directorial sinecures entrusted to the nobility were also conveniently accompanied by expert advisers, which in this case could only mean artists. Thus, in addition to the office of museum director, granted to Santa Cruz, the posts of artistic adviser and head caretaker (manager) were created and filled respectively by Vicente López, then first court painter, and Luis Eusebi, a miniaturist noted for his passion and remarkable knowledge of art history. In those early years, after Vicente López's death José de Madrazo replaced him in that fundamental advisory role, becoming the first of a series of artistic directors.

During this first stage of the museum's life, which we might call its formative period, funding for the institution came from the king's "secret purse", belying the reports of Ferdinand VII's disinterest or stinginess with regard to this project. Not only did the king supply the funds needed to remodel and fix up the building, but he also provided a monthly maintenance stipend, in addition to paying the salaries of the directors, caretakers and porters and other administrative costs. Final proof of the injustice of those insidious rumours is the fact that, in the nearly fifteen years that transpired between the inauguration of the Prado and the king's death in 1833, all requests to requisition paintings in the monarch's private collection were approved, wherever they were located not to mention the policy of new acquisitions, which began with the purchase of *The Trinity* by Jusepe de Ribera on 5 April 1820, barely a year after the museum opened its doors, the funds for which came from the king's own purse.

Indeed, the museum's collection grew spectacularly during those first fifteen years of existence: when it opened, it had just three hundred and eleven paintings of the Spanish school, but by 1827 there were approximately four thousand pictures in storage. To a certain extent, the collection's growth was part of the original plan, with more works being acquired as spaces became available for use, but ultimately it drives home the idea of Ferdinand VII's consistent, generous efforts to endow the museum with grandeur and brilliance, thanks to which its fame soon spread far beyond Spain's borders.

At the same time, the fledgling museum embraced the most advanced principles of the day, and we must not forget that the very notion of opening a public museum was quite novel at the time. This is eloquently expressed in an article explaining the project that appeared in *La Gaceta de Madrid* on the eve of the museum's official inauguration:

> Among other thoughts of common utility that have inspired our Lord King's ardent desire to seek the good of his subjects, and to promote good taste with regard to the fine arts, one was that of forming and offering to the public a copious collection of national and foreign pictures in the order of the different schools: an establishment which, while beautifying the capital of the realm and contributing to the glory and splendour of the nation, would provide amateurs with the opportunity to enjoy the most honest pleasure and students of the drawing arts with the most effective means of making rapid progress. To this worthy enterprise H.M. destined great copies of lovely paintings distributed among his lovely Royal Palaces and country estates, and allocated funds for equipping the halls and galleries of the magnificent

> building of the Museo del Prado, where the collection is to be placed. His august wife, Queen Maria Isabel de Braganza, God save Her Majesty, moved by the same desires as H.M., also took it upon herself to protect and encourage this important endeavour; and after a year and a half spent working on its execution, a large part of the building is already completed, wherein are now arrayed the pictures, having been thoroughly cleaned and restored, of the Spanish school, distinguished even among the other nationalities that have gloriously cultivated the noble arts; and works continue to successively prepare the rooms that shall contain paintings of the Italian, Flemish, Dutch, German and French schools; but H.M., not wishing to delay the pleasure and utility which his beloved subjects may derive from having assembled before their eyes the most outstanding productions of the painters who have honoured the nation with their works, has determined to offer free admission to the public, and has resolved that on the 19th day of this month of November the museum shall open for eight consecutive days, except in the event of rain or mud, and every Wednesday for the rest of the year, from nine o'clock in the morning until two in the afternoon.

We would be hard pressed to find a better summary of the *raison d'être*, function and purpose of a public museum. However, the Prado differed from other contemporary models in one important detail: everything depended on the king, who supplied the collection and the necessary funding. Speaking of the Spanish school, the article quoted above emphasises its "difference" from the rest and underscores its importance, for at the time it reflected the same Romantic criterion that would deliberately be imposed in the following decades and precociously define the aesthetic personality of the Prado.

The museum opened to the public on the announced date with the three hundred and eleven Spanish works that had been selected and arranged in the north gallery and rotunda, the part of the Villanueva building that had already been completed and prepared for use. Thanks to the catalogue put together by Luis Eusebi, we know exactly which paintings were chosen and put on display. There was a predominance of pictures by Diego Velázquez and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo –more than forty each– but the exhibition also included twenty-eight canvas by Ribera, fifteen by Joan de Joanes, and six by Francisco de Zurbarán, as well as works by practically all the great Spanish masters: Juan Carreño de Miranda, Juan de Valdés Leal, Alonso Cano, Claudio Coello, Alonso Sánchez Coello, Antonio Palomino, Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo. There was also remarkable selection of works by contemporary artists such as Francisco Bayeu, Mariano Salvador Maella and Luis Paret y Alcázar, and some who were still alive at the time, like José de Madrazo, José Aparicio and the great Goya himself.

The response of local audiences to the opening of the museum was not immediately thunderous, but it did elicit some criticism, which oddly enough was quite similar to the objections voiced in France when the Louvre first opened, censuring the chronological order in which the pictures were arranged and the inadequate restoration work done on some of them. All in all, the museum was off to a good start and would soon prove that no setback could sway its determination to survive and prosper, not even the dangerous ups-and-downs of political life: shortly after its inauguration, Rafael de Riego led a revolt against the absolutist monarchy, but this circumstance had no effect on the institution other than to give it a new director, the

Prince of Anglona, a liberal sympathiser who nevertheless had the same ideas about museum management as the deposed Marquis of Santa Cruz.

When the Prado directors were grandees of Spain

In practice, neither this short-lived, ill-fated liberal episode –during which the "progressive" Anglona replaced the "servile" Santa Cruz– nor the subsequent absolutist restoration at the hands of the Hundred Thousand Sons of Saint Louis, which initially placed the Marquis of Ariza at the helm of the museum, altered the direction of the Museo del Prado's already unstoppable forward march. In fact, the only significant event –quite remarkable at a time when the political pendulum swung back and forth with alarming frequency– was the strange publication of a French translation of Luis Eusebi's catalogue, already in its third edition. The reason for this unusual initiative was undoubtedly the wave of French troops that swept across the Spanish border on 7 April 1823 under the command of the 1st Duke of Angoulême, Louis Antoine of France, and soon set up camp in Madrid. It is also indicative of the international prestige that the Museo del Prado had begun to enjoy, a reputation confirmed at the beginning of the following decade by the glowing reviews published in some of the neighbouring country's best arts journals and signed by such renowned names as Prosper Mérimée and Louis Viardot. However, we cannot forget that the 1830s, the decade of the glorious triumph of Romanticism, was also when the Spanish school became fashionable. Its popularity soared after the opening of Louis Philippe's famous Galerie Espagnole in Paris, of ignoble memory for Spaniards, who allowed and even facilitated the plunder of some our greatest masterpieces. Yet that museum not only popularised the hitherto little-known and frequently reviled Spanish style, but made it as a legendary point of reference for subsequent Parisian avant-garde movements, from Romanticism to Impressionism and this despite the fact that the celebrated Spanish gallery soon disappeared when political developments sent Louis Philippe, the "citizen king", into exile. In any case, after that time it seemed clear that no cultured European could forego the mandatory tour of Spain, complete with a visit to the Museo del Prado.

Returning to the more mundane details of the Prado's history, which progressed steadily from that moment until the demise of Ferdinand VII, we must note the dereliction of directorial duty –disinterest, to put it plainly– of the Marquis of Ariza, who happily abdicated responsibility in favour of his nephew the Duke of Híjar, unanimously remembered as one of the best directors the institution has ever had. Ariza's dismissive or neglectful attitude towards the Prado is perhaps more surprising because it deviated from the norm in this early stage of the museum's history, when each of his noble peers –Santa Cruz, Anglona and Híjar– performed their duties with remarkable relish and skill, regardless of the political incidents that truncated or extended their respective terms of office. The Duke of Híjar held the post far longer than any of them, from 1826 to 1838, and was therefore able to achieve the best results, perfecting the Villanueva building and the institution's regulatory and operating conditions and, of course, substantially increasing the number of works in storage and on display. The favourable climate worked to his advantage, although of course this does not make his personal achievements any less meritorious.

During his twelve-year stint at the helm of the Prado, the Duke of Híjar concluded the museum's formative period, so to speak. For one thing, he managed to consolidate the collection, the cornerstone of any self-respecting museum, by wisely mining what had hitherto been the institution's mother lode, the royal collections, and occasionally discovering untapped sources, such as the works entrusted to the Academy of San Fernando by the virtuous Charles III, which included some of the finest nudes ever painted (masterpieces by Titian, Rubens and Dürer), though his probing and searching turned up many other brilliant gems. In his efforts to expand the museum's holdings, the duke also implemented the Prado's first acquisition strategy, the crowning achievement of which was undoubtedly the purchase of Velázquez's brilliant *Crucified Christ* from the Parisian collection of the Countess of Chinchón, María Teresa de Borbón y Vallabriga. The Duke of Híjar also oversaw the first major installation of the collection, a job he took so seriously that he even ordered the temporary closure of the museum. He was justified in this decision, for the task involved hanging a total of seven hundred and fifty-seven paintings, of which three hundred and thirty-seven were Italian, three hundred and twenty-one Spanish, and ninety-nine by artists of other schools. In addition, he published the first rules and regulations of the museum, extending public visiting hours to two days a week –Wednesdays and Saturdays– and providing various instructions to ensure the proper conservation of the pictures.

The duke made many other positive contributions during his time in office, but, as I mentioned earlier, it is also true that he was able to work in highly favourable circumstances, which might be described as an autocracy in which the autocrat was an enthusiastic supporter of the cause, and moreover a cause no one could object to. In the years that followed, autocrats abounded in Spain, but unfortunately their ostensible love for the Museo del Prado was never more than rhetorical. Thus, the Duke of Híjar's term brought the first period of the institution's history to a close, a period marked by the absolutist reign of Ferdinand VII in which it seemed that nothing could hinder the museum's steady progress.

The death of Ferninand VII threatens the Prado's survival

As soon as Ferdinand died, the Museo del Prado was besieged by difficulties, some so great that they posed a serious threat to its continued existence. Perhaps the worst was the fact that the works in the collection were included in the king's estate as freely disposable assets, to be distributed among his heirs and consequently dispersed. The collection was inventoried and appraised in preparation for this disposal, but thanks to a delay in executing the terms of the will because Isabella II was not yet of age, and later to the intervention of a committee which wisely decreed that the other beneficiaries should receive financial compensation in lieu of the works themselves, the collection and the museum were saved. Even so, the danger did not pass entirely until the museum was declared property of the Crown in 1865, which from a legal standpoint had the same effect as nationalisation.

The First Carlist War that broke out immediately after the king's death also had many undesirable direct and indirect effects on the museum, which began to suffer budget cuts and found itself routinely ignored. Aside from these material strictures, a direct consequence of wartime chaos, it is paradoxical that the end of political ab-

solutism proved detrimental to a public institution like the Prado, although its legal ownership was still unclear. In any case, the new political order did introduce an administrative change that directly affected the museum: governance of the institution was taken from the hands of the nobility and given to artists, who up to that point had only served in an advisory capacity. And so began the second and longest of the three phases in the Prado's managerial history up to the present day: the period of artist directors, which lasted from 1838, when the Duke of Híjar was forced to resign (with great resentment) and replaced by the painter José de Madrazo, until 1960, the year when Fernando Álvarez de Sotomayor passed away and was immediately succeeded by the art historian Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón. Thus, the office of director of the Museo del Prado has been held by members of three different classes or professions: aristocrats, artists and art historians.

Setting aside the exceptional involvement of members of the nobility, whose presence is explained by the fact that the collection belonged to the king and that the Ancien Régime was artificially prolonged in Spain, the question of whether artists or art historians were better suited to serve as museum directors sparked a heated debate that lasted for most of the nineteenth century, the echoes of which, though much fainter, can still be heard today. At the heart of this discussion is the ambiguous nature of art itself and whether it should be approached from the perspective of sensibility or treated as a historical document. Regardless of how the museum is conceived, it cannot be dissociated from the nature of the objects it houses, and any partial vision will therefore be limiting in one way or another. Consequently, in this matter sectarian approaches are pointless, as an ideal outcome will always favour "hybrid" creatures, i.e. artists with an excellent knowledge of history or historians with artistic sensibility, to mention the two professions that have traditionally vied for this privilege. It should also be said that, given the organisational and administrative complexity museums have acquired over the years, their activity is no longer limited to the conservation and study of works of art, and the ideal director must now be well versed in not two but three areas: art, history and management.

The artists' hour

However, if I have chosen to comment on this topic, making a short digression from the history of how artists came to replace aristocrats at the helm of the Prado in the late 1830s, it is not merely because I wish to show that, during these first two phases, there were good and bad directors in both groups, and the same holds true in the third phase dominated by university art historians. In reality, history has taught us that the fate of an art museum is not determined by its directors, and certainly not by their professional background, but rather by its social context, the society to which it owe its existence and, above all, on which it is dependent. While politicians, theoretically the qualified representatives of a society's will, can occasionally give museums a boost or point them in the right direction, no one can create a good museum despite or against the wishes of the community that sustains it.

The history of the Museo del Prado certainly bears out the truth of this statement. Since the museum was founded, Spain has witnessed a variety of monarchic and republican regimes and all sorts of political developments, from dynastic transitions to absolutist, constitutionalist, revolutionary, right-wing and left-wing governments,

but none have had the power to change the cultural level of society overnight. Public museums undoubtedly find their noblest *raison d'être* and most favourable environment in democratic regimes, but only to the extent that these are relatively more aware of the fact that cultural institutions cannot be built, much less prosper, without social consent and support. In a way, this was the crux of the problem that the Museo del Prado faced after 1838.

When the painter José de Madrazo was appointed director –a post he held for nearly twenty years, until 1857, one of the longest terms in the museum's history, surpassed only by his son Federico, who directed the museum for twenty-two years, and Fernando Álvarez de Sotomayor, who stayed for thirty, though the two pertained to different periods– he introduced some positive changes in the area of museography. Thanks to his lengthy term of office, and to the almost dynastic nature of the Madrazo family's involvement with the Prado, these changes were consolidated and eventually became a kind of defining "style" of the institution. The broad cultural knowledge and cosmopolitanism of José de Madrazo, who lived and moved in the refined circles of Rome and Paris at pivotal moments in art history, were instrumental in this regard. The request he made to the Musée du Louvre, asking to be sent a copy of the institution's internal rules and regulations, is an eloquent testament to Madrazo's early interest in giving the Prado an administrative structure and a catalogue based on modern management principles. In fact, shortly afterwards he submitted a staffing proposal that included, aside from the director, a secretary/controller, two restorers, three restoration assistants, a liner/colour grinder with an assistant, a caretaker, eleven porters and three sentries or guards at the entrances. He also calculated their respective wages, and the total cost of his proposed staff amounted to 118,080 *reales* per annum. However, he did not achieve his goal, and to make matter worse, when by dint of herculean efforts he managed to take one step forward in the right direction, he immediately found himself pushed two steps back. Naturally, the museum's insufferable lack of adequate resources eventually drove him to despair and hand in his resignation on 30 March 1857, after nineteen years of struggle. As if that were not enough, once his son Federico de Madrazo took over as director, following the brief interlude of Juan Antonio Ribera, a royal decree published on 17 November 1866 reduced the museum's staff to a bare minimum and cut the wages of the few who had managed to hold on to their jobs. This was the first –though unfortunately not the only– time that the Spanish government failed to distinguish between "building", "collection" and "museum": in other words, between the "matter" and "life" of a museum. A magnificent container and extraordinary content are of no avail without the personnel and maintenance resources that allow the institution to properly fulfil its purpose. In summary, the Prado had and still has one of the most amazing art collections ever amassed, but for a long time it was deprived of the funds and resources that would have allowed it to become a truly great museum.

Interestingly, José de Madrazo did not encounter similar obstacles to his other proposed endeavours: the completion of the remaining components of Villanueva's building (the basilica-like central section inaugurated in 1853, according to architect Narciso Pascual y Colomer's interpretation of the original plans); the addition of numerous masterpieces to the collection, including several spectacular yet much neglected works from El Escorial; and the new installation of the collection which, owing to the many remarkable new acquisitions as well as the sensible decision to sort through all the works in storage, entailed a surprisingly significant quantitative

and qualitative change. The new exhibition opened on 27 April 1839, with six new painting galleries and one sculpture gallery. According to the 1843 edition of the museum catalogue, there were one thousand eight hundred and thirty-three pictures on display, in addition to sculptures, reliefs and, above all, the marvellous pieces comprising the "Dauphin's Treasure", which José de Madrazo fought tooth and nail to secure for the museum. This tells us that, since 1828, the Prado had practically doubled the number of artworks on display, which were furthermore presented in unprecedented conditions of tidiness and proper lighting.

Aside from these major achievements, there were a thousand other relatively minor details that distinguished José de Madrazo's management and modern vision of what a museum should be, to the point of creating, as I suggested earlier, a unique "style". Some have ironically noted that the persistence of this style may have something to do with the fact that the Madrazo clan was so firmly ensconced in the history of the museum; José's son Federico also held the post of director for more than two decades, and other members of the family had ties to the institution. Although there are bound to be a few blots and stains on any career, especially one covering such a long period of time, the net result of the Madrazos' involvement with the Prado over the years is undeniably positive.

Reviewing the history of the Prado from this moment to the end of the nineteenth century, when Federico de Madrazo was still directing the institution (he died in office in 1894), we find only two significant changes: the aforementioned "nationalisation" of the collection, and the equally important though less fortunate episode which I will discuss in the following section. I am referring to the thorny issue of the "Museo de la Trinidad" and its merger with the Prado, made legally effective by royal decree on 22 March 1872.

The Trinity Museum and its merger with the Prado

The Museo Nacional de la Trinidad or National Trinity Museum, which opened to the public on 24 July 1838, was founded as a consequence of the famous Law of Ecclesiastical Confiscations, passed in 1835 by the Minister of the Treasury, Juan Álvarez Mendizábal. Following the enactment of this law, the state suddenly found itself with a fabulous number of orphaned artworks on its hands, as the Catholic Church, and in particular its religious orders, had been one of the leading sources of artistic patronage for many centuries. With hundreds of monasteries, convents and churches suddenly abandoned, a substantial portion of Spain's artistic heritage was at risk of being destroyed or plundered, a situation that justifiably caused public alarm. Salvage committees were appointed to address this problem, and they eventually hit upon the logical idea of creating a museum where all those assets could be stored and viewed. The building chosen for this purpose was the secularised Convent of La Trinidad in the very heart of Madrid, whose main entrance faced the centrally located Calle de Atocha, but which also had access to Calle Relatores and Plaza del Progreso. The first seizure brought in a total of nine hundred paintings, a number that continued to grow as more works were obtained by the same or other means, such as the confiscation of the collection of Dom Sebastian Gabriel of Bourbon and Braganza. Thus, the National Trinity Museum had its first official inauguration on 24 July 1838, as mentioned, and another several years later, on 2 May 1842.

Considering the historical circumstances and political climate in Spain at the time, the creation of this national museum may well have been motivated by a desire to compete with the Museo del Prado, pitting the new model of official, state-sponsored patronage of the arts against what was still rightfully called the Royal Picture Gallery, founded and owned by the royal family. At any rate, the Trinity Museum opened with a collection consisting largely of religious pictures which, though varying widely in value, did include works by some of the greatest masters of Spanish painting. In 1865 the distinguished historian Gregorio Cruzada Villaamil, who at one point served as deputy director of the museum, published an exemplary catalogue of the most excellent pieces in that institution –selecting five hundred and ninety-nine of the one thousand seven hundred and thirty-works it housed at the time, and including the seven hundred and sixty pictures by nineteenth-century painters that had won prizes at the National Fine Arts Exhibitions– which gives us a good idea of the quantity and especially the quality of its holdings.

However, considering the aforementioned difficulties that plagued the Prado, even with the benefit of direct royal tutelage and the immense international prestige it enjoyed, we can easily imagine what kind of problems the Trinity Museum faced almost immediately after its opening (or openings). The institution was begrudged the most basic needs, right down to its physical location, which was allocated to the Ministry of Trade, Education and Public Works without making any alternative arrangements for the museum. In such circumstances, the decision –recommended by the scholar Vicente Poleró in an impassioned pamphlet– to merge the Trinity Museum with the Prado on 22 March 1872 was hardly surprising. In all fairness, I should point out that this decision was, and occasionally still is, criticised in some quarters, although I personally consider those objections unfounded for two reasons: firstly, because a country that had already proved itself barely capable of maintaining one museum could hardly be expected to support two; and secondly, because the initial strategy of salvaging the artistic heritage of an impoverished, divided nation was based on the idea of concentration. And while the merger actually had the opposite effect due to the irresponsible negligence of the Spanish government and society in such matters, as we shall soon see, this does not mean the principle of the thing was flawed, nor that maintaining the Trinity Museum against all odds, if that were even possible, would have ensured the paintings stored within its walls a happier fate than the one they ultimately met.

In short, in the wake of the decreed merger, the museum's assets were haphazardly scattered across the length and breadth of Spain, ending up in the most unlikely places and the worst imaginable conditions. The reason was quite simple, for how could the Prado possibly absorb the sudden influx of thousands of works when it barely had enough room to exhibit and store its own collection? The merger was not to blame for this reprehensible disaster; it happened because no one had the foresight to provide the Prado with additional space or, if this were not possible, at least give it the means of implementing a well-thought-out policy of long-term loans. The truth of this is borne out by the fact that the first steps to properly remedy that folly were not taken until more than one hundred years had passed, and even then, only in response to widespread public outrage.

The worst part was that these long-term loans were granted with no consideration of the whys, hows, or wherefores, and soon any minor official vested with a modicum of authority, however temporary or trivial, was able to remove pieces from the Prado practically on a whim, and the museum had no effective means of monitoring the con-

ditions in which the works were kept. This pernicious practice became an ingrained habit among all Spanish government institutions, regardless of the political regime in power, and incredibly nothing was done about it until the mid-to-late 1970s when, with the country's transition to democracy already underway, the matter came to a head in the press, a judge intervened, and an effort was finally made to inventory, locate and revise these loans. Alfonso Emilio Pérez Sánchez, who was actively involved in this process, published several chilling examples of the fates suffered by those works and documented the disappearance of more than a few. Back in 1969, Diego Angulo Íñiguez, then director of the Museo del Prado, published a history of the museum on the occasion of its one hundred and fiftieth anniversary, a chronicle which concluded with a reminder of the urgent need for an adequate climate control system to protect the paintings from contamination and a dramatic increase in the number of warders –neither of which had received a positive response from the ministry, according to Angulo– and also touched upon the unresolved issue of works on long-term loan. Angulo wrote:

> It seems reasonable that the majority of the museum's pictures currently scattered throughout Spain, in buildings where they merely serve a decorative purpose and are only enjoyed by a privileged few, should be redistributed into systematic collections and exhibited in galleries reserved for this purpose in the leading museums, for the space of a few years, and periodically replaced, after being inspected and restored by the Prado's executive staff and its restoration workshop, with works exhibited in the other museums.

In the more than three decades that have passed since these words were written, the Prado has achieved or is in the process of achieving nearly everything this distinguished professor proposed. However, this matter forces us to stop and consider how swiftly something can be destroyed, and how slowly that destruction is repaired and remedied: a century of neglect and dispersal, and over three decades to rectify the situation!

A general plan for the systematic review of works owned by the Museo del Prado on long-term loan to other institutions was implemented in 1999, but two years later the Spanish Court of Auditors gave the Prado a rap over the knuckles when it officially advised the museum to keep better records of its artistic assets, especially those on loan to other institutions, in light of the difficulty of determining the real existence, location or condition of some works. After that point, efforts to properly manage the works that comprise the "Prado Disperso" (Dispersed Prado) were redoubled, and a fundamental milestone in this process was the presentation on 25 April 2003 of the Palace of the Águilas in Ávila as an off-site Prado venue. Once this building has been remodelled and refurbished, it will become the central office for the management and conservation of all Prado assets on loan to other institutions, as well as for producing and managing the "Prado Itinerante" (Travelling Prado) exhibition programme.

The Prado during the Restoration

Picking up the thread of our historical narrative, the swift and turbulent sequence of political events that rattled Spain between the dethronement of Isabella II and the

restoration of the monarchy in the person of her son, Alfonso XII, did not bring any changes to the Museo del Prado other than the ones we have already discussed, but they did worsen its already straitened circumstances. When Federico de Madrazo returned to the post of director, which he had been forced to abandon thirteen years earlier, in 1868, for political reasons, he found that, owing to the institution's chronic financial hardships, which had only grown worse since his father's resignation back in 1857, the Prado had become a veritable den of thieves, where entire families had taken up residence and other perilous irregularities abounded. Madrazo could not find a solution, or perhaps he simply lacked the means to take effective action, but ten years after his return, a curious incident caused a city-wide commotion that is worth mentioning.

On 25 November 1891, the newspaper *El Liberal* published an article signed by Mariano de Cavia with a shocking headline: "Last Night's Catastrophe: All Spain in Mourning. Fire at the Picture Gallery." Though the report was patently false, the wily journalist described the disaster in minute detail, explaining that the fire had broken out precisely because of the deplorable conditions described above, and that nothing could be done to stop it once the flames had taken hold. The account was so convincing that many residents of Madrid anxiously flocked to the scene of the crime, where the sight that met their eyes, while proving the newspaper report false, did nothing to allay their concerns –precisely as Mariano de Cavia had intended. And so, a situation that had been tolerated for years with utter indifference by government authorities and society itself inspired sudden pangs of contrition that immediately led to urgent corrective measures. Considering its results, Mariano de Cavia's article undoubtedly deserves the lavish praise it has received over the years, but it should also make us stop and think about why it takes a tragedy, whether invented or real, to make politicians and public opinion sit up and take notice of something so routinely, painfully obvious to any visitor to the Prado. If the museum needs mass media headlines to survive, things do not bode well for our nation's leading art institution.

Be that as it may, once the museum had been definitively nationalised, there were few administrative changes from the late nineteenth century until the mid-1990s. I will mention the three most relevant. The first was the creation of a Board of Trustees in 1912, which became an independent body in 1927, giving it the legal capacity to manage, own and acquire assets of any kind for the governance, enrichment and improvement of the museum. Neither the advent of the Second Republic, the Spanish Civil War nor the creation of General Franco's dictatorship brought significant alterations to the museum's structure, and there were no new regulations until the second major change in 1968. That year, the Board of Trustees of the Museo del Prado was placed under the authority of the newly created Board of Museums Reporting to the Directorate-General of Fine Arts, which managed the bulk of Spain's museums; as a result, the Prado lost its autonomy and full control passed into the hands of the government. This lasted until 1985, when the museum recovered its autonomy by becoming an independent organisation.

On this subject, it is also worth noting, albeit from a more anecdotal perspective, the change in the professional background of directors after 1960, when the painter Fernando Álvarez de Sotomayor, then director of the Prado, died in office and was replaced by the university art historian Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón. Ever since then, the museum has been directed almost exclusively by art historians from the world of academia –Diego Angulo, Xavier de Salas, José Manuel Pita Andrade, Al-

fonso E. Pérez Sánchez, Felipe Vicente Garín, Francisco Calvo Serraller, Fernando Checa, Miguel Zugaza– and the two exceptions, musicologist Federico Sopeña and archaeologist José María Luzón, were similarly endowed with scientific skills and proven experience in museology.

The Board of Trustees was created to give the institution supervision and guidance based on the independent counsel of prominent personalities in Spanish culture and society, a way of getting "civil society" involved or interested in the successful running of the museum. In the same vein, though completely separate from state authority, another body was created, Fundación Amigos del Museo del Prado (Friends of the Prado Foundation). The members of this private foundation, like the many similar associations that have emerged round the world in recent years, altruistically donate funds to purchase new works for the collection or sponsor different activities which the museum, with its perpetual budgetary constraints, could not otherwise afford. Fundación Amigos del Museo del Prado was set up in December 1980 at the initiative of Enrique Lafuente Ferrari and a group of individuals representing different sectors of society. The foundation's purpose, as stated in the by-laws, is "to engage in all forms of promotion, encouragement, support and development of any cultural, educational or other actions related to the museum, to further its mission and its activities, and to increase its collections, its knowledge, its national and international reputation, and its integration in society". Since its inception, the foundation has amply fulfilled that purpose and continues to do so today, proposing and carrying out initiatives such as donating works to the museum, sponsoring exhibitions, organising courses, trips, guided tours, lecture series and other activities, and publishing an admirable number of books related to the museum.

The decision to make the Museo del Prado an independent organisation was motivated by the need for greater managerial flexibility, something essential in an institution that now employees more than five hundred people, offers a wide range of services, and works with a complex budget.

The return of administrative autonomy was accompanied by the reinstatement of the Board of Trustees, but this was not the last change in the museum's makeup: in 1996 the Spanish government reformed the Prado's internal rules of procedure, adapting them to the new times and to the changes that the museum's future expansion would bring. The Royal Board of Trustees was thus given additional powers and obligations, and the following year the Museography Plan was approved, which set out guidelines for using the buildings and rearranging the collections that served as the basis of the aforementioned expansion project. Later, in 2001, the board decided to alter the legal status of the Museo del Prado from independent organisation to public corporation, which required a "regulation with the force of law" that would be effective and enforceable in 2002.

However, the most important modification came on 26 November 2003 with the publication of the law regulating the Museo Nacional del Prado in the *Boletín Oficial del Estado* (Official State Gazette). This law made the Museo Nacional del Prado a public corporation with special status, giving it greater autonomy and flexibility in taking the actions necessary to achieve its goals and more managerial self-sufficiency.

The historical evolution of the Museo del Prado since its founding clearly shows that its fate is closely linked to the history of the nation itself, which has not exactly been a model of stability. Indeed, for most of its existence the museum has been haunted by almost constant threat of imminent peril, and yet quite amazingly it has

survived the centuries virtually unscathed, with the exception of the careless dispersal of a portion of its holdings. We must recall that, on some occasions, the museum was even forced into exile; during the Spanish Civil War, which lasted from 1936 to 1939, the most important works in the collection were whisked away to Valencia and shortly thereafter to the Swiss city of Geneva to save them from the deadly bombs that rained down on Madrid. Fortunately, the museum has never suffered a major natural disaster or serious incident, such as the theft or destruction of any of its masterpieces, or the imaginary fire reported by Mariano de Cavia. Some of the gems in the Dauphin's Treasure were reported missing in 1918, but neither this nor other similar events have even come close to rivalling the havoc wrought by gross politico-governmental negligence which, as we have seen, carelessly scattered a substantial part of the museum's collection, though today this error has been almost completely rectified.

The process of straightening out this mess began –but only after negative press coverage and a judicial inquiry made it necessary– by drawing up an inventory of all loaned works and determining their exact whereabouts. Experts then analysed the condition of each located work and, if necessary to ensure its conservation, decreed its temporary or definitive removal from the borrowing institution. The next step was to implement a rational policy of long-term loans along the same lines as what former director Diego Angulo had proposed in 1969 on the occasion of the museum's one hundred and fiftieth anniversary: in other words, as readers will recall from the excerpt quoted earlier, a loan policy that prioritises venues where the artworks are accessible to the public and kept in safe conditions, which in practice means loaning almost exclusively to museums. This process is far from complete, as Prado executives often encounter stiff opposition from the official institutions involved, but things are steadily moving in that direction, and meanwhile the museum closely and constantly monitors all long-term loans. At the same time, with three thousand works scattered across the length and breadth of Spain, the Museo del Prado can claim the distinction of being one of the world's most decentralised national museums: in addition to generously sharing its assets, which comprise the backbone of the collections of more than a few regional museums, and forming what is now expressively and positively referred to as the "Dispersed Prado", it also offers an itinerant programme of temporary exhibitions that visit practically every corner of Spain year after year, known as the "Travelling Prado".

The Spanish monarchs as patrons of the arts

At this juncture, I should also say something about the collection of the Museo del Prado, which currently boasts more than twenty thousand works in a wide range of media, a truly spectacular figure, especially when we consider that it opened with just three hundred and eleven Spanish paintings. As I have already mentioned, the qualitative core of this collection has its source in the works amassed by the Spanish monarchy through the centuries, which means that the Prado owns pieces acquired by Peter IV of Aragon, called Peter the Ceremonious, Alfonso V of Aragon, the Magnanimous, and even Isabella, the legendary Catholic Queen, who bequeathed three hundred and fifty paintings and many other artistic objects in her last will and testament. The Spanish monarchy's interest in the arts reached epic proportions

after the sixteenth century, when the courtly custom of collecting art established in Renaissance Italy spread to the rest of Western Europe; artworks were collected by every occupant of the Spanish throne from Charles I to Ferdinand VII.

In this matter, the Spanish Habsburg dynasty had no rival in Europe, as exemplified primarily by Charles I, Philip II and Philip IV, to whom the Prado owes many of its finest assets; however, this does not detract from the later contributions of the Bourbon monarchs, especially considering that they ruled a far less prosperous nation than their predecessors. In any event, the modern idea of collecting art was introduced during the reign of Charles I (better known outside of Spain as Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor) and subsequently reaffirmed by his son Philip II, who shared his father's judgement and taste and was also the first to realise that the crown's artistic treasures needed a proper permanent home. He therefore installed the collection, kept in the Alcázar of Madrid up to that point, in new locations such as the Palace of El Pardo and the Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial, which at one point housed more than one thousand paintings.

These early Habsburg rulers, who adopted the strict etiquette of the elegant Burgundian court where they were raised, had very sophisticated tastes, but, perhaps more importantly, they also had a genuine passion for art. More than in the mere accumulation of objects, we find evidence of that passion in their compulsive zeal to procure the things they loved, as the surviving letters which both father and son exchanged with Titian clearly reveal. This, I repeat, is more significant than the aseptic evidence of the collection's material growth, as recorded in the inventories of the royal estate after each king's death, because that passion forged the unmistakeable stamp of Spanish taste and, by extension, the distinctive style of the "Spanish school" the same stamp that marks the unique personality of the Museo del Prado today.

A collection with character

Without a doubt, few collections in the world today have a more distinctive personality than that of the Prado, something that often works to its advantage but also has its drawbacks: some artists or schools have an almost overpowering presence, and the absences are equally conspicuous. The reason for this is that the Museo del Prado, perhaps swayed by the passion that assembled the best part of its original collection, never aspired to build an encyclopaedic collection; it eschewed the notion, rooted in Enlightenment principles, of owning representative examples of every artistically significant style or movement in the entire history of art, and combining them to form a harmonious, balanced whole. However, the Prado undeniably has no rival in the areas where it excels, and at this point it seems more natural to accept that its egregious gaps will never be filled. This character, for all its strengths and weaknesses, defines the museum as well as our national artistic sensibility, for its collection seems specifically tailored to Spanish artistic tastes, reflecting what the Romantics called the *Volksgeist* or "spirit of the people". Our country's increasing isolation from the rest of the world after the seventeenth century probably contributed to this extremely narrow focus on Spanish artistic tastes, but its original source was the collecting zeal of the first Habsburgs, which they soon passed on to the leading nobles of the Spanish court. Only from this perspective can we understand the passion for the works of Titian and Vene-

tian painters in general displayed by Charles I and Philip II, as well as the latter's more exotic and anachronistic predilection for Bosch, Philip IV's keen interest in Rubens and Velázquez and, skipping ahead a few generations, Charles IV's penchant for Goya.

But whatever gaps may exist in the collection, some imposed by history and others by the perverse stubborn streak that made us pass up other opportunities when they came along, we must ask ourselves this: who in their right mind would claim to know the Spanish school, or even the Venetian and Flemish schools, if they have never visited the Prado? Who can hope to become better acquainted with titans of art history, legends like Titian, Rubens, Velázquez or Goya, without repeatedly darkening the door of this Madrid museum? The fact is that the Museo del Prado, inimitable and immutable, reflects more than any other a singular historical tradition, taste and, in a word, passion the same passion that inspired the Spanish painter Antonio Saura to claim that the Prado, though it may not be the largest, is certainly the most "intense" museum in existence.

The Prado received a powerful reviving jolt in the late nineteenth century, thanks to Mariano de Cavia's effective false fire alarm as well as to the favourable climate of patriotic regenerationism which flourished in that same decade, a reaction to the loss of Spain's last overseas colonies, but it would not be the last. The coming years brought more agitation and controversy as multiple attempts were made to overcome the institution's many structural and functional deficiencies. After the dawn of the twentieth century, the government was noticeably more sensitive to the Prado's needs and made a greater effort to meet them than in the past, perhaps sensing that national or international public opinion had taken a keener interest in the museum's welfare. This explains the periodic works to enlarge and modernise the building, as well as the creation of the Board of Trustees and other reforms mentioned above. Around the same time, the museum began hosting temporary exhibitions, modified the display conditions of the permanent collection, published increasingly comprehensive guides and catalogues, and organised various complementary cultural activities, such as art courses or lecture series. Finally, the institution began to receive more and more private bequests from benefactors like Fernández Durán, Bosch, Cambó and Villaescusa. Changes became more noticeable, not only because of all the developments I have just mentioned, but also because the symbolic value of the Museo del Prado increased in the eyes of each successive administration and of Spaniards themselves. This was made apparent at several dramatic moments during the Spanish Civil War, when exceptional measures were taken to protect the museum from any tragedy that might befall it measures which the citizens of Madrid fervently applauded and even spontaneously helped to implement. However, it was also evident when the endangered administration of the Second Republic decided to name Pablo Picasso, by then already a world-renowned artist, director of the institution. This appointment was a symbolic gesture, as no one expected the great Spanish painter, who lived in Paris, to actually perform the duties of the office, but it shows an awareness of the tremendous respect that the museum and Spanish art in general commanded round the world at that time.

Post-war vicissitudes

The civil war years and the nation's terrible poverty in the post-war period, aggravated by the international community's rejection of a Spain under the dictatorial thumb

of General Franco, were not favourable circumstances in which to improve the lot of the Museo del Prado. The institution limped and hobbled along as best it could, but it was unable to solve any of its long-standing issues, much less deal with the new problems that surfaced. The last serious crisis in the museum's history hatched in the 1960s, when the Prado and other art institutions began to feel the pressure of the incipient phenomenon of mass cultural tourism, which in turn was a by-product of the phenomenal economic boom experienced by most of the Western world. The world's great museums began to find that their old estimates and expectations were woefully inadequate, not only because of the thousandfold increase in the visitor numbers, but also because of the qualitative variation in the demands of those visitors. Consequently, museums were forced to make structural reforms to their buildings and operating procedures, not, as had been customary in the past, to make room for new works or a more suitable way of exhibiting the old ones, but primarily to accommodate their audiences –providing areas for reception, learning, recreation, rest, etc., and a whole range of other user services– which revolutionised the lives of museums in both form and substance.

The massive influx of visitors also caused great concern because it affected the environmental conditions of the works, already endangered by exposure to the polluted air of the city. It therefore became imperative to equip museums with artificial climate control systems, beef up security and surveillance, and reinforce restoration workshops. Finally, the very idea of the museum was completely revised: museums were no longer frigid mausoleums but living organisms, which should theoretically be able to organise as many cultural activities as their users required without neglecting their original and essential duties in the field of research and scholarship. I could go on and on, listing the myriad changes that the new social situation brought about with regard to museums, but I think I have said enough to give readers an idea of the daunting problem that presented itself almost overnight.

The revolution in progress

Before turning to the subject of how the Prado dealt with this problem, I felt it important to point out that this has been a universal dilemma since the 1960s, when it hit the museum world with full force, because we failed to react in time and today we are still paying for that error in judgement. It would be untrue to say that nothing was done: the Prado installed artificial climate control in the late 1970s, and over the next twenty-five years it multiplied the number of employees in certain departments (warders, for instance), expanded by creating new exhibition rooms and annexing the nearby Casón del Buen Retiro, achieved a comparatively spectacular budget increase, and became an independent organisation and eventually a public corporation with special status. However, up to this point all these measures, taken with the urgent haste applied to a task long overdue, have been little more than stopgap solutions; patching up one obvious defect only made the other problems more conspicuous and sometimes even created brand-new ones, for example when new areas for offices, workshops, shops and a café were created by sacrificing necessary exhibition space. It is safe to say that the revolution is just getting started now: the long-overdue modernisation of the Prado to bring it up to speed with what museums round the globe have been doing since the 1960s, the revolution that will turn one of

the world's finest art collections into a fully-fledged museum, for these days it takes more than a collection to make a museum.

The Musée du Louvre celebrated its bicentenary in 1993 by completing an ambitious remodelling project that cost over one billion euros which, among other things, has equipped it to receive approximately ten million visitors per year in the best conditions. When we compare this with the situation of our own flagship museum, which has spent years begging for its most basic and urgent needs to be met –more space, more human and technical resources, a larger operating budget, a more flexible and effective management system, etc.– we understand that the yawning chasm between the two museums is not merely a reflection of the difference in the per capita incomes of the two countries; it also bespeaks a radical difference in the attitudes of French and Spanish society and their political representatives towards their greatest art institutions.

However, it must be said that the Prado has suffered despoliations which would have been unthinkable in the Louvre's case, and the most recent were not necessarily the least harmful. In this respect, we should not forget that in 1992 the Museo del Prado was stripped of the Picasso bequest and a substantial portion of the finest works by early avant-garde masters, which had been donated to it specifically by their authors or owners.

Such a loss is more significant that any arbitrary depredation inflicted on a collection of the stature of the Prado's ever could be, for it raises the question of how we should understand the "historical" nature of any museum. Confusion on this head can have more than a few negative effects on an institution and may even deprive it of its very reason for existing. In addition to pictorial masterpieces produced in the last five or six centuries, the Museo del Prado boasts an amazing collection of classical and modern sculptures –some of which, such as the head of an Egyptian official, predate the birth of Christ by six centuries, not to mention the Greek and Roman pieces purchased expressly for Philip IV in Italy by none other than Velázquez– as well as splendid examples of the luxury arts and crafts of every period, culture and civilisation. But until fairly recently, the Prado was also a perfectly natural habitat for contemporary works of art, which explains the fact that its collection includes works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whose comparative artistic poverty is merely a reflection of Spain's decline, conflict and isolation in the contemporary era. The appearance of museums devoted exclusively to contemporary art made it necessary to establish boundaries for the historical museums, in part to shield them from the onslaught of fickle trends spawned by the increasingly enervating quest for the novel and new, but also to provide a safe haven for the avant-garde proposals that were initially rejected by the majority of society. However, this new addition to public collections should not hinder the organic growth of museums like the Prado, which by definition must be prepared to embrace, with a proper sense of perspective, the artistic contributions of each new present, for the natural order dictates that every present will soon be past. The truth of this is illustrated by the example of Pablo Picasso. Though long considered the greatest herald of the twentieth-century artistic avant-garde, today Picasso is actually a two-hundred-year-old artist, for the Spanish genius was born in Málaga in 1881, during the nineteenth century. From our current perspective in the twenty-first century, this means that Picasso now occupies the place on the timeline of art history where, until recently, we situated Goya.

It is my hope that this rapid overview of the history of the Museo del Prado has, in some small measure, increased my readers' knowledge and understanding of this venerable institution, which undoubtedly does Spain the greatest credit abroad, but above all I hope that these lines have inspired them to love it intelligently. Without passion, little can be done in matters pertaining to art, whatever the object or the specific place it occupies, but in a museum like the Prado, itself the product of an enduring passion, the absence of passion is a truly insurmountable obstacle.

Since Miguel Zugaza took over as director of the museum in 2002, various changes have been made in three basic areas: expansion, modernisation, and activity and service. A new law passed in November 2003 altered the legal status of the Museo Nacional del Prado from independent organisation to public corporation. This fundamental change in its nature and management system has allowed the institution's governors to embark on a new phase, with a global vision of the different departments and their needs that has enabled it to tackle the long overdue challenge of updating its museography. The inauguration of the museum's new wing in 2007 constitutes the most important milestone in this phase, but it continues with the rearrangement of the collections, aiming to present the museum's holdings in a more spacious exhibition and in the most suitable conditions. However, this does not mean, by any stretch of the imagination, that the entire museum should be turned "upside-down and inside-out". On this topic, I am reminded of what the wise Eugeni d'Ors wrote in one of his most popular and frequently reprinted essays, the famous *Tres horas en el Museo del Prado* (published in English as *Three Hours in the Prado Museum*, translated by John Forrester, 1954). In the foreword to the eleventh edition of the book, speaking of the improvements made to the Prado in the years that had passed since the first edition came out, he stated, with his characteristic flair for irony, that the institution was indeed "greatly improved, precisely because it has changed so little". Obviously, by this d'Ors did not mean to imply that he was opposed to the changes which museums have been forced to make, for the historical reasons of progressive overcrowding mentioned above. Rather, he was pointing out the need to exercise great caution when considering any alteration to an institution like the Prado, with its centuries of history and distinctive personality, a timely warning to those who might be tempted to act first and think later, mistakenly believing that constant change, guided only by the fickle winds of fashion, is synonymous with good governance. What the Prado truly needs is a radical transformation of its physical conditions, and not just any transformation but one effected with careful forethought and sound judgement the opposite of the quintessentially Spanish tendency to make spontaneous, arbitrary decisions over a cup of coffee and the morning paper.

I will therefore conclude this very brief historical survey of the Museo del Prado by quoting another of its most knowledgeable admirers, Juan Antonio Gaya Nuño, who, in his splendid *Historia del Museo del Prado*, written in 1969 on the occasion of the museum's one hundred and fiftieth anniversary, said the following:

> The greatly abbreviated history that concludes here is peppered with instances of praise and reproach, though every attempt has been made to ensure the fair distribution of both. But even while praising all that is praiseworthy, censuring all that deserves censure, and collaborating –willingly or otherwise– in an enterprise that belongs to everyone, one thing is certain: the conviction that the Prado has been, is and always will be the most glorious cultural reality of Spain and one of the

greatest in the world […]. The Museo del Prado is a precious gift, the immediate custody of which is entrusted, though only relatively and precariously, to one man, two, three, right up to the most recently hired warder; but a no less active sense of stewardship, custody and esteem must endure in the hearts and souls of all men who still believe in the value of wonder. The Prado is our museum, our home, our love, our consolation in countless woes and troubles. At least in terms of the magnitude of that love, every Spaniard should feel a bit like a director –which, naturally, implies the duties of the most faithful servant– of our grand and glorious Museo del Prado.