

In the hands of Prado

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Hands in figurative painting. An estrangement view

The Museum of Prado was considered as the more adequate place to visit in order to do an introduction in hands in painting but also to move through the paintings of the museum's collection, which is one of the more important sights of Madrid. A huge majority of Prado's Museum paintings is based on the human figure, therefore hands are presented almost everywhere in the museum and this could convert the visit at the museum in a new challenge. The challenge was to convert the visit to a classical museum in an estrangement experience.

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In this case the interpretation of the masterpieces did not begin from the painting as a whole but from its parts, the hands. In this visit we were looking not only for a special element but also to reveal a new aspect for the painting. To help this different approximation and make more significant our research we said that we were looking for

strange hands, "monster hands"¹.

Based on the example of the hands we form a hypothesis that where the hands had been found a new sense the art of painting had made a new approximation. Almost in each of the big painters we came across with a different aspect.

Las Meninas_Velazquez

The best case and interpretation about hands in painting came from a young girl of the group. When she saw the dim hand of the painter in "Las meninas" painting of Velazquez she said that she couldn't recognize the distinction between the hand and the paintbrush, they were like one (body). Definitely for Velazquez his hands was his paintbrushes, his life was the painting.

Isaac and Jacob Ribera

The paintings of Jose de Ribera "Isaac and Jacob" and "The Blind Sculptor" seemed that where dedicated at hands and at the sense of touch. An allegoric issue is taken place, the painter is using the visual art of painting in order to speak about the hands and the touching.

El Greco

The hands are the extremities, the limits of the figurative body difficult to be configured and placed. El Greco painted the hands like the wings of angels, larger, thinner, almost non figurative and placed them also in fascinate and expressive positions. Although today hands of El Greco for many people can not be considered as "monster" hands, in the context and in the time that

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Goya

The hands in the Black Paintings of Goya perhaps are the more non representative hands in the permanent collection of the Museum of Prado. The hands, like the rest of the body in Goya's figures, are totally deformed. If we consider those hands in the time and context that they have been done, we could name them as Monster Hands.

It seems that Goya in the process of creation of his black paintings didn't care about the image of the hands, the face and body while he was transmitting the madness, the fear and the anxiety which maybe conquered his life in that time. Perhaps, in Goya's work, like in no other in the collection, is where the objective of the paint is to transmit the sentiment and feeling. And that's why Goya's hands remained esthetically abounded and deformed.

We can not dismiss some other works where we find what we named as monster hands. In **San Benito** of **Alonso Cano** the hands

look like El Greco's hands. Larger, thinner capable to hug our bodies. In **"Snake of Metal, Anton Van Dyck"** neglects the anatomy of hands in order to illustrate with the best way the feelings of the bodies. Frighten hands that tremble loosing their boundaries and their harmony. In **"San Pedro"** of **Antodio de Pereda y Salgado**. In this case the hands lose their anatomy and shape a favor of for the expressionism. Also Bartholomäus Strobel El Joven in his work. **"Degollación"** of **San Juan Bautista** presents hands which are deformed by the pain.

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As it was said in the beginning of that tour, the visit in the museum of Prado was the introduction in the term of Monster Hands that the participants were asked to construct later in the class. The summary of the visit in the museum reveals us that although the majority of hands in the paintings are

most figurative and perfect representative by the painters, there are many hands that can be considered as Monster Hands also by the time that there were painted.

Like happens in life, also in painting the hands appear deform when the feeling, the pain, the madness, and the way they are used is more important than their image.

1. Term extracted from the "first experimentation in the course DIBUJO AVANZADO E INTERPRETACIÓN GRÁFICA I, autumn 2011, Professor: Antonio Verd Herrero, ETSAM, UPM