



Prado bicentenary tribute draws crowds at National Gallery

The National Gallery's Prado bicentenary day was like "a birthday party where everyone has turned up", Director Gabriele Finaldi told a capacity audience gathered to hear him [in conversation with Miguel Falomir, Director of the Museo Nacional del Prado](#).

The free event was an illuminating gallop through the history and ethos of Spain's national museum, to mark its 200th anniversary this year. Hundreds of events have been held throughout Spain to celebrate the milestone birthday of a gallery which was actually designed as a natural history museum but was never used as such.

The Napoleonic invasion of Spain interrupted its construction, and what we now call the Museo del Prado was eventually established by King Ferdinand VII on the encouragement of his wife Queen Isabel de Braganza ("the only good decision he ever made", joked Sr Falomir). It was set up to allow public access to the stunning artworks of the Royal Collection, bring prestige to the nation and promote the Spanish school of painting.

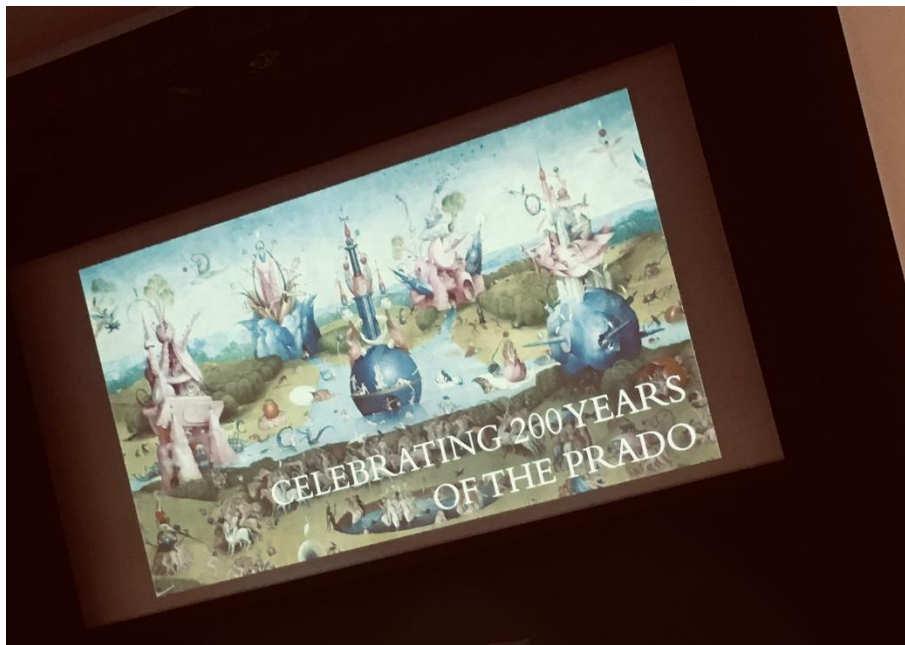
The Prado collection, however, is not limited to works by Spanish artists. It also boasts a wealth of masterpieces by Titian, Hieronymus Bosch, Rubens, Rembrandt, Fra Angelico, Mantegna, Raphael and Botticelli.

The fact that these works were commissioned or bought by Spanish monarchs (mainly in the Golden Age), displayed or stored in the Royal palaces and then transferred to the Prado means that they are in spectacular condition. They have never been passed from owner to owner, cleaned or re-framed repeatedly. "The worst treatment they have suffered is benign neglect," said Mr Finaldi.

Apart from the Civil War years, of course, when most of the Prado's art treasures were packed up and shipped out as bombs fell on the capital. Sr Falomir called this "the darkest period" of the

history of the museum, which was closed for three years. The paintings, including Velazquez' Las Meninas, followed the Republican government as it evacuated Madrid for Valencia, thence Girona and finally Switzerland.

Keeping the nation's art treasures close by gave the under-pressure Government an extra legitimacy, Sr Falomir suggested. Some have intimated that the Republicans had considered selling pieces to raise funds for their cause. "There is no evidence for this," the Prado's Director asserted.



This week's bicentenary conversation was just the latest in a number of collaborations between London's National Gallery and the Museo del Prado, with more to come. A travelling exhibition in spring 2020 will unite five of Titian's 'Poesie' for the first time since 1704. The paintings, commissioned by King Felipe II, are now scattered across the world. All six Poesie paintings will be on show in London, with five of them then moving to Edinburgh, Madrid and Boston.

The National Gallery runs an ongoing programme of talks and lectures, many of them free. Check out forthcoming events at their website: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/events>

Find out more about cultural events organised by and with the support of the Instituto Cervantes in the UK here: <https://londres.cervantes.es>

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