

Prado Museum

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To the unknown visitor.

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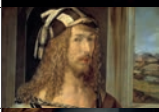





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Brief History of the Prado National Museum



From the Royal Collections to the Royal Cabinet of Natural History

The Prado National Museum houses the richest and most comprehensive collection of Spanish painting in the world, not only for the number of works but also for the quality and the importance of their authors. This collection is complemented by other great works of European art, belonging to the Italian, Flemish, Dutch, German, French and British schools, as well as important collections of sculpture, sumptuary arts, prints and drawings. It has its origin in the valuable Royal Painting Collections that had begun to be amassed in the times of the Catholic Monarchs and their predecessors. However, when monarchs died these collections were disbanded because, not being linked to the crown, they were distributed among their heirs. These collections increased notably under Emperor Charles V and his son, Philip II, emulating the art collections inspired by Italian Renaissance thought.

In the times of Philip IV, during the first half of the 17th century –although we know of documents that mention it a century earlier – there was a project to create a museum which would be housed in the Royal Palace of El Pardo, despite

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the fact that a large part of his accumulated treasure (works by Titian and portraits of the royal family from the brushes of Sánchez Coello and Antonis Mor) was destroyed by fire on March 13, 1604, during the reign of his predecessor, Philip III. Fortunately, the *Pardo Venus*, by the great Venetian master, was saved. It is now in the Louvre Museum. This project was not carried out due to the numerous works housed in the Royal Monastery of El Escorial, a collection enriched by Philip II with a large number of paintings that more than fulfilled the interests of the most educated social class at that time.

Still, the grandson of the Prudent King, a passionate lover of art, decided to increase his collections to create a gallery of paintings and, to this end, sent Velázquez twice to Italy to acquire works by the "best painters in existence."

However, the project was not completed in this century. It was in the following century, around 1757, after the fire of the old Alcázar, which on Christmas Eve, 1734, destroyed a good number of paintings from the royal collections, that Queen Bárbara de Braganza, wife of Ferdinand VI, had the idea to create a museum of paintings. However, her death the following year and the sadness that overwhelmed the king, who only lived another year after that, doomed the project.

When his brother, Charles III, took over the throne after resigning from the crowns of Naples and Sicily (which he had worn on his temples for 25 years), the Count of Floridablanca, first secretary of the monarch, became the promoter of the project. He commissioned the architect of the Royal Sites and the Madrid City Hall, Juan de Villanueva, for the construction of a building destined for the "Cabinet of Natural History and Academy of Sciences" in the Prado de los Jerónimos (so called because it is located opposite the Royal Monastery of this order). This cabinet, which focused on scientific development, had been created by decree on October 17, 1771, and from the day it opened to the public on November 4, 1776, was inadequately installed on the second floor of the Conde de Saceda Palace or Goyeneche Palace, located on Alcalá Street, where the Royal Academy of the Three Noble Arts of San Fernando was held, which is why it was then renamed the Royal House of the Academy of the Three Noble Arts and Cabinet. In 1815, it took the name of Royal Museum of Natural Sciences of Madrid and, in 1913, acquired its current name, National Museum of Natural Sciences.

The aforementioned project was first presented on May 30, 1785, in two versions, as requested by Floridablanca, with him choosing the least costly version of the two. The execution was started almost immediately, since the foundations of the building were already laid out by September of that year.



The Villanueva building seen from the northeast corner.

The Villanueva Building

Juan de Villanueva (1739-1811) was a prolific architect with numerous works in Madrid and its Court, in Aranjuez, El Pardo and El Escorial, in addition to other places in Spain such as Cartagena and Oviedo. He designed a building in the purest neoclassical style distributed in three parts organized longitudinally, adhering to the changes in Madrid's urban planning promoted by King Charles III in the Paseo del Prado, from which it will take its name, in addition to that of its author: Prado building or Villanueva building. The drawings of the first architectural design are preserved in the Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, illustrated in four prints that show some covered porticoes for public walks – not featured in the second project, its plans now lost. There is also a wooden mockup of the complex made in 1787, corresponding to a third project, which is kept in the Prado.

The urban plans were designed by José de Hermosilla in the form of a Roman circus in imitation of the renovation carried out by Bernini in the Plaza Navona in Rome. To decorate this reform, the fountains of Cibeles and Neptune – at first oriented to look at each other – and the fountains of Apolo, La Alcachofa (The

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Distyle porch with two Ionic columns *in antis*, on the north façade in front of which stands the monument to Goya by Mariano Benlliure.

Artichoke) and Las Cuatro Fuentes (The Four Fountains) or Las Fuentecillas, were planned according to the design of Ventura Rodríguez, successor in the direction of the project. Several buildings were erected: the Royal Botanical Garden and the Royal Astronomical Observatory, the Platerías Martínez building, no longer in existence, the Puerta de Alcalá and the General Hospital, of which only a portion was finished – it would later be occupied by the Reina Sofía Museum.

The works, which advanced at a good pace, came to a halt in 1792 with the fall of Floridablanca.

The museum had opposite entrances as it was designed as two bodies with independent uses, distributed over two superimposed floors: the Cabinet to the north, on the upper floor, with external access through a long curved slope, and



***Ferdinand VII Receiving the Tributes of Minerva and the Fine Arts* bas-relief in the attic located above the entablature that tops the western porch.**

the Academy to the south, on the ground floor, accessible at street level, in line with the Botanical Garden and the Observatory, with which it would be interrelated. The complex had a third entrance to the west for the perpendicular building, used as a meeting room for the academies of the time (Language, History, Fine Arts) and acting as a link between the other two buildings. Language, History, Fine Arts), which would act as a link between the two.

Laid out with a flat apse, which would later tend to be polygonal on the inside and semicircular on the outside, like a secular basilica (which Villanueva spoke of in his project), the mockup shows it was crowned with a cubical tower that was never built and whose original function is now ignored. On its upper floor we can find, since Moneo's reform, the heart of the museum, room 12, in which *Las Meninas* is exhibited.

Villanueva, like a good neoclassicist, distributed classical orders throughout the architectural fabric, although, as we will see, he preferred the Tuscan to the Doric. On the north façade, in front of which is the monument to Goya by Mariano Benlliure, 1902, he erected a distyle portico with two columns *in antis* in the Ionic style, an order that is repeated in the galleries of the second floor on the two wings of the western façade. The first floor of this front combines deep semicircular windows and rectangular niches adorned with twelve allegorical statues – Strength, Victory, Architecture, Fame, Immortality, Admiration, Constance, Magnificence, Symmetry, Fertility, Peace, Eurythmy – designed by Valeriano Salvatierra, alternating them with large planters; above each niche are

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Tuscan portico on the western façade, presided over by the bronze statue of Velázquez, made by Aniceto Marinas in 1899.

medallions with effigies of artists, sixteen in all, sculpted by Ramón Barba. Above the second floor, set back, is the attic decorated with modillions.

The rectangular attic above the entablature that tops the protruding giant hexastyle portico of Tuscan order (it occupies the two floors) that presides over this façade, is decorated in bas-relief with the frieze *Ferdinand VII Receiving the Tributes from Minerva and the Fine Arts* designed and initiated by Ramón Barba and completed after his death by José Tomás y Genevés, referring to the royal approval for the transformation of the original Cabinet of Natural Sciences into an art museum. Hence, next to the monarch, who is seated with a lion at his feet and with an unmistakable profile, a number of Olympian gods appear such as Neptune (unmistakable with his trident), Saturn, Apollo, Minerva, Mercury, the Muses of History and Astronomy (Clio and Urania), together with the allegorical figures of Architecture, Sculpture (carrying a chisel over a sculpted head), and Painting carrying a portrait of the great promoter of the museum, Queen Isabella of Braganza, now deceased. This symbolism makes the king the protector of science, arts and technology.

Right in front of the portico, in 1899, a bronze statue of a sitting Velázquez was placed. It was made by Aniceto Marinas on the occasion of the third centenary of the birth of the Sevillian genius. On the pedestal, by Vicente Lampérez, the following inscription can be read: "The Spanish artists, by initiative of the Círculo de Bellas Artes, 1899".

The south or Murillo facade is made up of two floors. The first, shows a door with a lintel; the second, conceived as a balcony for events and ceremonies, has a loggia of six Corinthian columns on which the entablature rests. In front, on the square, a replica of the bronze statue of the universal Andalusian painter located in his native Seville, both works by Sabino Medina. The original was completed in 1864 and the Madrid replica in 1871, inaugurated by Amadeus I of Savoy in the year of his arrival in Spain.

The architectural structure of the building is comprised of five cubic bodies: two in the form of a gallery with excellent natural lighting that acts as a connecting axis between the central body and those at both ends. These five bodies play with input and output surface planes and provide the building with chiaroscuro effects with a certain pre-romantic air. Its construction in stone and brick – the author's favorite materials – was intended to continue the baroque tradition of Austrian architecture, giving it that characteristic two-tone gray and reddish hue.

Inside, after passing through the north door, an octastyle rotunda with Ionic columns supports the large coffered vault, illuminated by a large zenithal oculus

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South facade in front of which the monument to Murillo stands. The second floor, conceived as a balcony for events and ceremonies, has a hexastyle loggia with Corinthian columns.

which was modeled, not surprisingly, after the Pantheon of Agrippa in Rome. Here stands the sculptural group *Carlos V and the Fury*, made in bronze by Leone and Pompeo Leoni.

From the Royal Museum of Painting and Sculpture to the Prado National Museum

Charles IV accedes to the throne in 1788. In 1800 an ordinance of the Secretary of State, Mariano Luis de Urquijo, ordered that different works by Murillo be transferred from Seville to Madrid. This was likely inspired by the recent creation of the Louvre Museum in Paris, since said ordinance mentioned the "practice observed in all the cultured nations of Europe, where schools and museums are created near the court." In a subsequent ordinance from the king's favorite, Manuel Godoy, there is already a mention made of a "King's Museum."

In 1808, with the occupation of Madrid by Napoleon's troops, the ground floor of the building, still unfinished, was used as General Murat's cavalry barracks. The French dismantled the lead sheets that covered the vault to melt them down for the manufacture of projectiles.

When José Bonaparte came to the throne, following the Napoleonic policy put into place in other countries of dominated Europe, founded the Museum of Paintings (known as "Josefino"), germ of the Prado, by decree of December 21, 1809. The policy, inspired by the spirit of the Enlightenment movement to bring culture closer to the people, gave rise to the creation of other museums such as the Brera Pinacoteca or the future Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam (then Koninklijk). He brought together the best paintings from the convents that had been suppressed, in addition to others that were in public institutions and contributed different works from the Royal Collection that were in the Royal Sites. The Buenavista Palace was designated as the venue. The intention was to generate a collection of masterpieces that were intended to be sent to Paris to be exhibited at the Napoleon Museum, inaugurated on August 10, 1793, at the Louvre Palace, under the name "Musée Central des Arts de la République".

Villanueva, integrated into the regime of the "intruder king" like other enlightened individuals, who saw in him a path to progress that was non-existent in the previous reign of Charles IV, was appointed Senior Architect Inspector of Royal Works. However, his death in 1811 did not allow him to see much of the construction of the building that was underway.

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When he fled in 1813, José Bonaparte took with him a huge convoy of requisitioned works of art, which were returned to Madrid the following year by the Treaty of Paris.

After the war, and with the return of the “Awaited King,” Ferdinand VII, on May 13, 1814, before two months had elapsed, on July 4, *La Gaceta* published the Royal Order for the creation of a gallery of paintings and other artistic objects in the Palacio de Buenavista, in front of the Cibeles fountain. The Council of Castile, however, expressed their opinion that the museum should be installed in the Prado building, which the monarch accepted by Royal Order of December 26 of the same year.

After his second marriage on September 29, 1816, to his niece María Isabel Francisca de Braganza, the now queen, of Portuguese nationality, a lover of culture and Fine Arts, who had been aware of the first projects of the previous century, and specifically of reports by the German painter living in Spain, Antón Rafael Mengs, alluding to the advisability of establishing a gallery in the palace for the Royal Collections, was the great promoter of the creation of the new Royal Museum of Paintings and Sculptures. The king agreed by contributing funds from his “own purse” to rehabilitate and condition the Prado building in order to deposit in it many of the works from the Royal Collections “for their conservation, for the study of teachers and for the entertainment of the public.”

From 1838, with the exhibition of major works of neoclassical sculpture in the new rooms of the museum, it was renamed the Royal Museum of Painting and Sculpture.

López Aguado, a disciple of Villanueva, was the architect in charge of rehabilitating the building after the French occupation. The exhibition, held in three rooms that flanked the main rotunda, showcased 311 paintings— all from the Spanish school, selected by the painter Vicente López, as requested by the monarch — out of nearly 1,500 that were stored in the museum, property of the royal patrimony. The opening of the exhibition took place in the presence of Ferdinand VII and his new third wife, María Josefa Amalia de Saxony, on November 19, 1819. Her predecessor, who had so passionately advocated for the new museum, died barely eleven months earlier due to complications in her second childbirth, in which, believing her dead, the doctors who were assisting her decided to extract the fetus, at which point the mother uttered a tremendous scream making it clear that she was still alive, ending in a horrific butchery.

The museum was only open one day a week for the general public, reserving the rest of the days for scholars and researchers.



María Isabel de Braganza as founder of the Prado Museum (1829), by Bernardo López Piquer. The queen looks towards the spectator while resting her left hand on the plans of the museum while pointing with her right hand towards the painting that appears in the background, in which the building of Juan de Villanueva is represented, in the style of the engravings on the book covers of the Age of Enlightenment.

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The first director of the museum was Don José Gabriel de Silva-Bazán, 10th Marquis of Santa Cruz and Mayordomo mayor (High Steward) of the palace. The painter Luis Eusebi drew up the first catalogs, the initial one being published that same year and including the theme and the author of the paintings. They were arranged topographically according to the three rooms in which the paintings were exhibited.

The number of works increased quickly with the contribution of the royal palaces and monasteries, since the museum was part of the Patrimony of the Crown, and in 1828 755 paintings were already catalogued, a number that continued to expand progressively. After the Confiscations of Mendizábal, many goods from the Church were added to this collection. In addition, numerous works were also added through cessions, donations and different acquisitions, although some were transferred to other venues, as happened with *Saint Ferdinand before the Virgin*, by Luca Giordano, which in 1828 was taken to the Palace of El Pardo.

Around this time, Luis Eusebi warned of the existence of a room in the Academy of San Fernando that held a good number of paintings transferred from the royal and aristocratic collections because they contained nudity. They were deposited in this room since back in the 16th century because of the religious and social prejudices of the time. As these works were owned by the king, a total of 35 paintings were reclaimed, which swelled the inventories of the nascent museum.

In 1868, after “*la Gloriosa*” (*the Glorious*), the revolution that brought about the dethronement of Isabella II, the museum was nationalized by Law of December 18, 1869, which abolished the Patrimony of the Crown. Then, after the 1872 merger by absorption with the Museo de la Trinidad (Trinity Museum), which since 1837 held numerous works confiscated from convents and monasteries in Madrid and surrounding areas, the museum was renamed National Museum of Painting and Sculpture – name which was replaced in 1920 by Royal Decree of May 14 with its current one: Prado National Museum.

With the Civil War of 1936-39, the Prado treasure, along with other works deposited in different Madrid headquarters trying to escape the bombing of the Spanish capital by Franco's troops, began a long pilgrimage that first took it to Valencia, where it was deposited in the Colegio del Patriarca and in the Serranos Towers.

Later, it was transferred to the monastery of Pedralbes, to two towns in the province of Gerona and to Figueras, where it found shelter in a talc mine (La Vajol) near the Pyrenees, while the Second Republic held the last session of its Cortes in Spanish territory. Finally, after those solemn words from President Azaña to

Prime Minister Negrín stating that “the Prado is more important than the Republic and the Monarchy, because in the future there may be more republics and monarchies in Spain, but these works are irreplaceable,” the treasure arrived in Geneva on February 13, 1939, where it was held under the protection of the League of Nations until its return to Madrid in September of that year, when the doors of the museum opened again on July 17. Previously, the new government, upon receiving the delivery of the artistic treasure, agreed to exhibit a total of 152 works in the Museum of Art and History of the Swiss city.

The Successive Reforms and Extensions

The constant growth of the Prado's collection, both through donations and new acquisitions, has made it necessary to carry out successive expansions of the museum over time.

López Aguado, who died in 1831, was succeeded by his son Martín in the direction of the reforms. Martín, however, was unable to successfully fit the pending work into the semicircular structure on the eastern facade of the building.

Teodoro Custodio Moreno, who took over at the head of the projects, maintained the existing division of the building: the lower floors for sculpture and the upper floors for painting.

He was replaced by Narciso Pascual Colomer, who between 1847 and 1852 carried out the covering of the apsidal structure, in order to form a tribune-gallery on the upper floor, called the Queen Isabella Room, intended for the exhibition of paintings; while the lower area, less well lit, was left for sculpture.

Later, this work was modified by Francisco Jareño between 1880 and 1892, replacing it with a complete slab and raising its roof. This architect carried out two other reforms: the openings in the lower part of the north façade and the monumental staircase with six sections that led to the entrance after removing the original lateral access slope, as well as the construction of two new free-standing pavilions in the rear of the building. In 1885, a sculptural group dedicated to Fine Arts was placed crowning the portico, carved by Jerónimo Suñol.

The northern façade was modified again by Pedro Muguruza between 1943 and 1946 with the construction of a new staircase in order to give more light to the crypt, a reform that received quite a few criticisms. Likewise, this architect directed the replacement of the ribbed vaults of the great gallery, built by the disciples of Villanueva, because the original brick ones had to be demolished as they

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The apsidal structure, reformed on the inside on different occasions, seen from the outside, has a semicircular shape.

were in danger of collapsing, having been seriously damaged by humidity after the French, during the occupation, stripped the lead sheets that covered them. They were replaced by others made of reinforced concrete covered in plaster, reproducing the original lunettes and also keeping the skylights designed by López Aguado that gave overhead light to the central gallery, while the side lunettes designed by Villanueva were shut. Two large triumphal arches resting on Ionic columns were erected, modeled after the Louvre, to give solemnity to the enclosure.

Muguruza had made the central staircase of the museum in 1925, as initially the building only had internal stairs at both ends – next to the patio in the south and next to the rotunda in the north – because it had been designed to house two independent institutions: the Academy of Sciences on the lower floor and the Royal Cabinet of Natural History on the upper floor, and it was believed there should not be excessive communications between the two.

Previously, in 1913, Fernando Arbós y Tremanti, who had modified the upper apsidal structure of the eastern wing again, also designed a new corridor on each of its sides. This project was completed after his death by Amós Salvador in 1921, opening the rooms to the public two years later.

Between 1954 and 1956, Fernando Chueca Goitia and Manuel Llorente doubled this space by adding two new volumes side by side, which gave rise to sixteen new rooms.

Brief History of the Museum

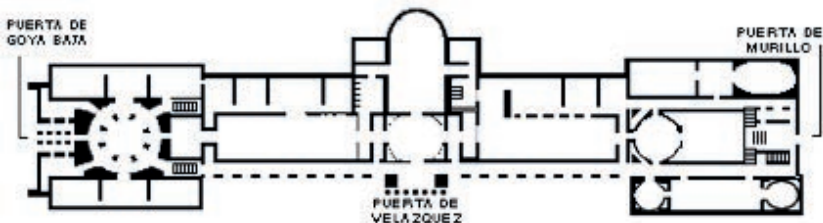
Between 1964 and 1968, José María Muguruza carried out a new reform aimed at gaining space inside the building, which consisted of covering the two patios that had resulted in Arbós' reform.

In 1971, the 19th century state-owned collections from the extinct Museum of Modern Art, founded in 1894 and with headquarters on the ground floor of the National Library, were incorporated for exhibition at the Casón del Buen Retiro.

Between 1981 and 1983, José María García de Paredes designed and completed the works of the assembly hall on the ground floor of the apsidal body, which after the Moneo reform acts as a distributor of spaces between the latter and the Villanueva building.

In 1995, Dionisio Hernández Gil and Rafael Olalquiaga designed a reform of the roof. Since that same year, by means of a parliamentary pact agreed upon in the Congress of Deputies for the foundation of a museum campus made up of the Villanueva building, the Jerónimos cloister, the Casón del Buen Retiro, the administrative building on Ruiz de Alarcón street and the Hall of Realms of the Palace of Buen Retiro, and subsequently with the publication of Law 46/2003 of November 25 regulating the Prado National Museum, its much needed modernization was undertaken, which culminated in 2019 with the celebration of the bicentennial of the creation of the museum.

An international competition for architectural expansion was announced in 1996, but it was declared void. Two years later, in a second call by invitation only, restricted to the ten finalists, the draft signed by Rafael Moneo Vallés was chosen, approved by the Museum's Board of Trustees and endorsed by the jury in March 2000, and finally executed in 2007. As we consider it an annex to the original



Floor plan of the building after the reform of Fernando Arbós and Tremanti.

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Villanueva building, we will talk about it in the last chapter of the book along with other annexed locations.

In 2009, what remained from the Palace of Buen Retiro, the “Casón” (Spanish for large house), was incorporated to the museum and transformed into the Prado Study Center, which integrates the conservation departments and the library, archive and documentation services.

In October of that year, the new spaces dedicated to 19th century art were opened. This is the largest collection in the museum, which included everything from the last neoclassical masters to Sorolla – a total of 170 paintings. On July 6, 2021, a reorganization was carried out in the fifteen rooms of the south wing of the Villanueva building, increasing the number of works exhibited to the public to 275 pieces, thanks to acquisitions, restorations and recovery of deposits. The theme begins with the work of Goya (a painter who began his career halfway between Neoclassicism and Romanticism). His famous paintings of May 2nd and 3rd, 1808, are exhibited alongside contemporary painters of the time, in order to offer a joint panorama of the painting of this era.

The exhibition ties in with the first decades of the 20th century, in order to offer continuity in the artistic movements of the end of one century and beginning of the next, among which we can find the Impressionism of Darío de Regoyos and the Modernism of Anglada-Camarasa.

In addition to some foreign masters, which allow a comparison with the work of Spanish authors, there is a greater presence of female painters from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th. For the first time, Filipino artists are also included and even other artistic disciplines, like miniature art, with more than forty works by both Spanish and foreign artists, engraving and medalistics, a branch of numismatics.

A room has been dedicated to portraits and self-portraits of both artists and all the directors of the Prado throughout the 19th century, and greater importance has been given to painting with a social perspective. Historical painting, with its large format, has been grouped for the first time in a single room, room 75, in which sculptures in the round are also exhibited.

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