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SANTA FE'S METEORIC ART EXHIBIT: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow

Story by Anne Z. Cooke, photography by Steve Haggerty report

You have to ask yourself, as did I. Why is the exhibit currently at the New Mexico Art Museum, in multicultural New Mexico, attracting not just artists and scholars, but fans of the cartoonist's art (read: Mike Luckovich, Rob Rogers and Gary Trudeau?)

And why, you might wonder, is it worth a hastily-planned trip to see them before they return to the archives in London's British Museum? Because the La Fonda Hotel on the Plaza, a museum in itself is advertising a killer rate for two in a double room, including a scrumptious breakfast and tickets to the exhibit.

But I would have gone anyway. First, the "Renaissance to Goya" exhibit is small enough to see all 132 pen-and-ink and chalk drawings and sketches in a morning and still have time to study them in detail. Some are quick and rough; others are "cartoons," (from "carte," meaning paper), designs drawn for tapestry weavers. I took my time, giving each one the same attention I pay to the political cartoons on the *Times'* Opinion pages, and came away with some clues as to how successful artists plan and complete the enormous oil paintings that cover the walls of major museums.

When you compare two or three of Francisco Goya's preliminary sketches for a painting, you can almost see how he thought. Playing with different layouts, he would try one angle and then another until he found the most effective way to proceed. It's what



Photo Credits: New Mexico Art Museum



you or I do -- more or less -- when we take a photograph, zooming in and crossing the street to avoid the ugly truck or

telephone pole. Poets do it when they edit first drafts of poems. A look at the first draft of the *Declaration of Independence* reveals lined out words and substitute phrasing suggested by John Adams and Benjamin Franklin as they contributed to Thomas Jefferson's writing.

Equally intriguing – but in a different way -- is the story of the collection itself, much of it assembled by Tomas Harris, (AKA Thomas Harris) a British painter and draftsman, and astonishingly a MI5 double-agent for Britain during World War II. I would never have considered poking through second-hand book and print stores near the British Museum to find the works of art. But Harris, who knew what to look for, recognized them immediately. Ever on the hunt, he assembled the largest collection of its kind. And the MI5 connection gives the story a certain zing. I like to imagine that his underground secret-agent life gave him special access to shady characters and hidden works of art. You think? After he died (in a post-war car accident) his collection went to the British Museum where it lives in the archives.

Though half a dozen artists are represented, the majority are known favorites including painter and print-maker Francisco Goya (1746-1828). Living and working during one of Spain's most tumultuous eras, he witnessed – and recorded – brutal scenes of war, military sieges, random killings, drought and political repression. The prints he made in the last decades of his life, some printed in popular publications, wouldn't look amiss in tomorrow's newspaper. Roughly drawn with dark, harsh, quick strokes, they decry the horrors of modern war: denuded landscapes, mutilated corpses and starving peasants. Signaling the end of a long era of classical European art, they foreshadow both Impressionism and Expressionism.



Photo Credits: New Mexico Art Museum

The "Renaissance To Goya" exhibit remains at the New Mexico Art Museum, in Santa Fe through March 9. The Museum is open every day except Monday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; entrance fees are \$9 for out-of-state residents and \$6 for New Mexico residents.

For up to the minute lodging and dining information, go to www.santafe.org. Or stay where I do, at the historic La Fonda hotel, on the Plaza. Completely renovated from the plumbing to the plaster, the much-loved, art-decorated ground floor and lobby appear unchanged, and the guest rooms look as they did when Architect Mary Coulter designed them in the late 1920s. Paintings, murals, sculpture, Pueblo pottery and Spanish colonial influences make sleeping and eating here an experience. The New Mexico Art Museum is a five-minute walk away. La Fonda's "Renaissance to Goya" hotel package starts at \$139 per night and includes breakfast for two in La Plazuela, La Fonda's the enclosed courtyard restaurant.

Los Angeles writer Anne Z. Cooke takes every opportunity to explore the highways and byways of New Mexico and Arizona.

