

“Such pushing and shoving... and the smell! Why ever would they allow these people in to the Academy?”: sociability and body language of Madrid’s museums visitors (19th century)

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ABSTRACT: In 1828 preparations were being made for the opening of the first public museum in Spain: the Royal Prado Museum. Along with the placement of the works of art and the control of their security, visitors were an essential part of the organisation of the establishment. Although the valued role of museums as democratisers of culture has been emphasised, more recent studies have observed that the first visitors to European museums were not from all social strata. This article aims to analyse the public museum as an arena of sociability and to investigate the involvement of social elites in both the control of access and the imposition of behavioural models within these “temples of the arts.” For this reason, this paper approaches the debate around the concept of citizenship. On the one hand, it explores the gradual opening of museums to all social classes and the social debates surrounding it. On the other hand, it analyses the use of the museum as a space of symbolic battle for the appropriation of these scenarios and the creation of exclusion dynamics to limit interactions between social classes. Therefore, the text analyses, among other sources of analysis, the body language of visitors. An object of study that has been understudied but which can offer us interesting answers.

KEYWORDS: art galleries, public places, museums, visual culture, Spain.

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Título traducido: “¿Cuántos empujones... y el olor! ¿Por qué dejan entrar a esta gente en la Academia?»: sociabilidad y lenguaje corporal de los visitantes de los museos madrileños (siglo XIX).

RESUMEN: En 1828 se preparaba la apertura del primer museo público de España: el Real Museo del Prado. Junto con la colocación de las obras de arte y el control de su seguridad, los visitantes eran una parte esencial de la organización del establecimiento. Aunque se ha destacado el valorado papel de los museos como democratizadores de la cultura, estudios más recientes han observado que los primeros visitantes de los museos europeos no pertenecían a todos los estratos sociales. El objetivo de este artículo es analizar el museo público como escenario de sociabilidad e investigar la implicación de las élites sociales tanto en el control del acceso como en la imposición de modelos de comportamiento dentro de estos “templos de las artes.” Por ello, este trabajo aborda el debate en torno al concepto de ciudadanía. Por un lado, explora la progresiva apertura de los museos a todas las clases sociales y los debates sociales que la rodean. Por otro lado, analiza la utilización del museo como espacio de batalla simbólica para la apropiación de estos escenarios y la creación de dinámicas de exclusión para limitar las interacciones entre las clases sociales. Para ello, el texto analiza, entre otras fuentes de análisis, el lenguaje corporal de los visitantes. Un objeto de estudio poco estudiado pero que puede ofrecernos interesantes respuestas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: galerías de arte, espacio público, museos, cultura visual, España.

The Musée d'Orsay organised an exhibition in 1994 dedicated to the development of the earliest French museums. Entitled *La jeunesse des musées. Les musées de France au XIXe siècle*, the event posed questions regarding the pillars on which these artistic institutions stood, and their role among the citizenship: Places of study? Spaces in which to display national or local identity? Venues for gatherings and entertainment? Museology in the late 1990s and the early twenty-first century focused especially on the political discourse deriving from museum collections. Museums began to be envisaged as agents of social transformation integrated into historical narratives, as shown in the work by Dominique Poulot (1991, 1997), Edouard Pommer (1995), Pierre Géal (2005) or Francis Haskell (2002). However, in this renewed interest in museological studies, one aspect was sidelined despite representing an essential element in the development and evolution of museums: the public.

In the catalogue for the above-mentioned exhibition, Poulot (1994, p. 332) stated that, unlike other disciplines such as the history of the theatre or the history of reading, the study of visitors to nineteenth-century museums was still unexplored. Little was known of those who had walked through the galleries and halls of Europe's great museums. The history of their foundation underscored their democratising influence on the arts, making it possible for any citizen to access this source of knowledge independently of their provenance or social class (McClellan, 2012). However, primary sources—ranging from regulations to visual documents such as paintings, vignettes or caricatures—offer a different panorama. Although over twenty-five years have passed since Poulot's appreciation of museum visitors, there is still much to be explored and learned. A considerable impulse has been given to this matter by *visitor studies*: these typically feature multidisciplinary methods stemming from various fields of study such as sociology, anthropology, linguistics and market surveys, and their aim is centred on understanding the role of museums today and why and for whom they are needed. These issues, essential in recent decades to museological and museographical studies, have been researched through disciplines related to marketing, communication and the study of audiences; an array of works geared toward a reflection on current museum practices and how to enhance them (McManus, 1996; Davidson, 2015).

These concerns gave rise to a line of research focusing on the museum visitor from a more sociological and historical perspective. Qualitative methodologies were applied, derived from studies in the sociology of art to understand the connections linking culture and society. Since the 1990s, museology has been influenced by this type of research. Proof of this is found in the publication of case studies and in specialised journals such as *New Research in Museum Studies*, whose first issue appeared in 1990, later transformed into *Museum and Society* in 2003. Issue number 14 (2016) was dedicated to "Sociology and Museums" with an introduction expressing the incorporation of sociological methods to museum stud-

ies and, in particular, to museum visitors, through the observation of three key concepts: visitors, policies and knowledge (Fyfe and Jones, 2016). The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods for in-depth studies on museum visitors is a topic that has been discussed in two recent issues of *Cultural Trends* under the heading "Looking back: understanding visits to museums in the UK since the nineteenth century." Both of these volumes have been especially relevant to the work outlined in these pages as they focus on the analysis of visitors in the nineteenth century, an unusual trait given that *visitor studies* are generally more interested in examining museum visitors of the 20th and 21st centuries. Accounting and the use of a questionnaire have been key to determining the modern museum visitor profile. The studies by Bourdieu and Darbel have been essential in this line of work, although this has long been problematized and resolved (Dicks, 2016; McCarthy, 2013).

The earliest public museums were created at the time the national state was being constructed. According to Nick Prior (2002a, 2002b), museum institutions were scenarios endowed with new significance. On the one hand, they were constituted as socially exclusive spaces. On the other hand, they were used to disseminate a notion of national community that enabled constitutional governments to acquire legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. In this line of research, I have strived to uncover the nature of these institutions' *model visitor* and how, using restrictions and regulations, they configure the behavioural patterns associated with the ideal museum visitor, while generating a political discourse in which the museum is taken to represent a national community.

The attraction exerted by museums over a wide range of visitors from different social classes has been demonstrated in several studies on the first European museums (Hill, 2005; MacClellan, 1994). It is of interest to observe museums as scenarios of sociability; a common space in which groups who believe they belong there (and therefore deem themselves entitled to their use) coexisted with another category of visitors experiencing their first visit to view a collection of art. The tensions and dynamics arising in this scenario have led me to reflect on museums in terms of sociability. The advent of this analytical tool to the field of history in the mid-1960s was due to the researcher Maurice Agulhon. It was incorporated into Spanish historiography a little later, no studies centred on cultural sociability appeared until the 1980s and 1990s (Canal, 1992). From sociocultural history, sociability has been an essential historical category in the study of the dynamics of leisure, free time and festivities. Resulting from these lines of work were the specialised case studies published in the early twenty-first century in which further lines of research have been pursued to include feminine and sports sociability, or new scenarios for analysis such as brothels (Guereña, 2003). However, among those scenarios in which nineteenth-century culture has been developing, Spanish museums have not been a central analysis for sociocultural historians, unlike other European museums (Whitehead, 2005; Pommier,

1995). Nevertheless, museums and art exhibitions build a main space for bourgeoisie sociability where it was linked leisure with culture and politics (Cruz Valenciano, 2014). The present work approaches Spanish museums as scenarios of sociability, understood as “people’s capacity to form groups that are more or less stable, more or less numerous, and the form, scope and expression of community life created for this purpose” (Guereña, 2018, p. 17). This line of research forced to me to establish a dialog with Eugenia Afinoguénova works, an expert in the study of the Prado Museum and its transformation in a leisure place during the nineteenth century. In her work, *Prado: la cultura y el ocio (1819-1939)*, she analysed how the Prado’s architectural complex—interior galleries and vicinity—was consolidated as an entertainment place. Following this study way, this paper deals with two complementary study subjects. In the first part, I get to the bottom of which museums and exhibition places, specialized in fine arts, were used to debate the citizen’s concept during the building of the Parliamentary regime. In the second part, I explore how the high class and the bourgeoisie created dynamics to avoid interaction with the lower classes when the museums were opened to all public. In this context, the approach to sociability concept has been very useful in this research. Specifically, the body language study has been an interesting subject to look into informal sociability forms. In the same way that to investigate this kind of sociability it has been studied public places such as squares, taverns, and cafes; museums and exhibition galleries can help us to understand more about popular sociability.

As Hannag Greig said the proliferation of commercial avenues and public gardens «have facilitated sociable mixing» for the eighteenth century. However, it has been less analysed the practical facets of this democratization of urban spaces. Studying this matter in more detail is pertinent because if we delve into some primary sources we can see how this public sociability maintained class separation biases (Greig, 2012, p. 51). To this end, I have followed in the footsteps of other research dedicated to the analysis of leisure spaces since, as pointed out by Jorge Uría—quoting Anthony Giddens—understanding the distribution of human actions within certain spaces contributes to gaining knowledge of social life and social meanings attributed to sociocultural experiences (Uría, 2008: 209). One of the most interesting propositions that have influenced this study is the paper by Dimitra Christidou and Sophia Diamantopoulou, *Seeing and Being Seen: the multimodality of Museum Spectatorship*, in which, through direct observation and visual records, they have analysed the corporal methods with which visitors maintain or discontinue social interaction. In my case, the analysis of visitors’ gestures is conducted using iconographical sources, a set of documents from which to trace the social dynamics of visitors to exhibitions or fine arts museums through their body language, the way they view the art collections, their groupings within the museum space and how they interact with the rules set forth by the museum institutions regulating the

visits. Incorporating a body language analysis has let me study how the middle and high classes tried to maintain their social status by means of formal and informal dynamics. From official rules—different timetables or dress codes—to authority arguments about behaviours building boundaries with other social groups; practices especially analysed by British visual studies (Rees Leahy, 2012).

In sum, this combined methodology aims to offer an outlook ranging from individual to collective viewpoints, on what constituted a visit to a public museum in Spain in the nineteenth century and, more specifically, at the time of building of the Constitutional Regime.¹ The spaces analysed have been chosen from public museums of fine art, especially the Real Museo del Prado, and their relationships with other scenarios within the field of art such as exhibitions of paintings. As for the sources consulted, as in any study involving cultural history, these are diverse; from regulations and rules approved by the institutions themselves, to journalistic reviews.

VISITING THE MUSEO DEL PRADO: FROM ARTISTS TO CITIZENS

On 18 November 1819, the *Gaceta de Madrid* announced the opening of the Real Museo del Prado for “eight consecutive days, except when raining or when the streets are muddy, and for the remainder of the year every Wednesday from nine o’clock in the morning till two o’clock in the afternoon.” In the same notice, reference was made to “the public,” “beloved vassals,” “enthusiasts and students of the arts” as the principal beneficiaries of the newly opened museum in the Palacio de Villanueva. This idea of democratizing culture, associated with the origin of the earliest museums in Europe, has been elaborated upon in a succession of museological works over recent decades, as aptly shown by Astrid Swenson (2019, p. 5) in her study of visitors to the Louvre. During its early years, access to public collections was restricted in two ways: one of these was time, and the other decorum.

The first restriction stemmed from the distinction between the general public and specialised visitors. Artists, fine art students and members of the sociocultural elites were free to visit the museum collection throughout the week. For all other members of the public, the museum was accessible only once a week. In the case of the Louvre, (until 1855) this was on Sundays; at the Prado, on Wednesdays. The British Museum was opened from Monday to Friday for visitors holding the appropriate entrance ticket featuring their name, condition and address (Rees Leahy, 2012, p. 25). Such differentiation among visitors constructed a discourse that legitimated access to the collections for some population groups over others.

1 With this concept I refer to the political regime established in Spain since 1833. The historical period in which the administration of the State was consolidated under a Constitutional Monarchy, known in Spanish historiography as “España liberal.” See Pro, 2019.

The museum was identified as an educational venue, on the strength of which condition it became institutionally regulated. Nevertheless, there remained an undertone of class distinction, manifested in the freedom of access granted to the social elites independently of their relationship with the world of art. Preserved in the archives at the Museo del Prado are several petitions of this nature. Political figures, members of the diplomatic service and foreign writers requested from the managers of the Prado passes to visit the museum, despite the museum being open to the public on fixed days.² Highly revealing is a letter written by the Duchess of Alba to Federico de Madrazo requesting permission for herself and “several friends of hers” to view the portrait of her sister included in the museum collection “as it is impossible to view the painting during the public hours of opening owing to the throngs of visitors on those days.”³ The petition by the Duchess was the usual procedure among Spain’s privileged classes. To these, the museum was another scenario for their leisure pursuits; however, they upheld their segregation from the remainder of social groups visiting the art gallery, especially those attending on designated public opening days. These measures can be considered as what E. Goffman called *involvement shields*: actions to limit or avoid social interaction in shared spaces. In the case of museum visits, these were practices established in advance—dress code and differentiated rules of access—and during—gestures or actions—the visit (Goffman, 1963, p. 38; Christodou & Diamantopoulou, 2016, p. 13). On the one hand, interaction with undesirable groups was excluded or at least limited, while on the other hand, group identity was consolidated through visiting the museum in privileged conditions. This was the case of the circle of acquaintances of the Danish Ambassador to Madrid, who used to visit the museum galleries at midday. This group was international and intergenerational—according to Eugenia Afinoguénova (2019, p. 150)—, but not inter-class.

Class distinctions were also reflected in the regulations approved by the museum. In 1828, the Duke of Híjar, director of the Prado art gallery until 1838, issued information on changes in the institution’s hours of opening. From March that year, access for the public would be on Wednesdays and Saturdays—except when raining—and admittance would be given to “all persons

without distinction of class, but denied to those who are ill-dressed or barefoot.” This requirement was emphasised in the *Regulation to be adhered to by the janitor and other employees of the Real Museo de Pinturas*, adopted in the same year.⁴ Disadvantaged classes were not invited to view the paintings in the art gallery on the strength of a rule of etiquette. Such rules were not in disharmony with the expected function of the museum. The public targeted by the management were the cultural elites; especially the aristocracy, identified as the new patrons of Spanish fine arts after the Crown and the Church had declined in this capacity.⁵ This train of thought stemmed from enlightened intellectuals’ wish to promote *good taste*, that is to say, to extend their love and understanding of fine arts to a select group of enthusiasts and artists; a far cry from any endeavour toward democratising culture (Géal, 2005, p. 71).

Although it would seem, at first sight, that visitors to the Real Museo del Prado were homogeneous, at least as far as social class was concerned, some sources offer a more heterogeneous pattern. Since 1843, the art gallery has kept a register of all visitors during not public open days. Entries in the visitors’ book included the full name, nationality and profession of each person entering the museum, thanks to which data we know that the greater part of those accessing the exhibition halls were painters or copy artists. In addition to personages from artistic circles, however, the visitors included merchants, members of the military, diplomats, businessmen and lawyers (Pajares Duro, 2019, pp. 145-149). Such a diversity of social classes caused the museum to be considered as a new leisure venue, such institutions being used by the burgeoning classes to legitimise their standing. As a result, from 1830 onwards voices being raised against the closure of their exhibition halls during the only non-working day in the week—Sunday—and against privileged entry rights for the wealthy classes (Afinoguénova, 2019, p. 138). The museum director at the time, José de Madrazo, heeded these critiques and resolved to open the museum to the public on Sundays and public holidays so that “disciples visiting as copy artists are not obliged to interrupt their work on those days and to enable employees and others unable to visit due to their occupation to do so on non-working days.”⁶ Madrazo took recourse once again to the educational value of the museum to

2 Many such petitions are preserved in the Museo del Prado archives [AMP]. To mention a few: Letter from Sofia de Minissir to Federico Madrazo in which she requests a ticket to visit the Museum. AMP, Archivo Personal: 12 / N° Exp: 19 [01-01-1849]; Memorandum by the Director of the Real Museo de Pintura y Escultura to the Director of the Museo Naval to communicate having dispatched six entrance tickets for the Real Museo for their distribution, and that the sender and another officer at the Museo Naval are entitled to free access. AMP, Caja: 415 / Legajo: 18.08 / N° Exp: 14 / N° Doc: 1 [22-02-0856].

3 Letter from the Duchess of Alba to [Federico] Madrazo requesting a permit to visit the exhibition when it is closed to the public to view the portrait of her sister, AMP, Archivos Personales: 11 / N° Exp: 69 [undated]

4 Regulation to be observed by the keeper and other employees of the Real Museo de Pinturas. AMP, Caja: 357 / Legajo: 18.01 / N° Exp: 3 / N° Doc: 1 [15-03-1828]. The Museo del Prado was not alone in using dress as an element of differentiation. In 1829 the regulations of the Museum of Dijon specified in Article 11: “L’entrée du Musée sera refusée aux enfants qui ne seraient pas accompagnés par des personnes d’un âge raisonnable. Elle le sera également aux gens mal vêtus ou dont la tenue ne serait pas décente.” Municipal Archives of Dijon, 4R1/6-29. Cited: Poulot, 1994, pp. 332-350.

5 This wish was expressed by the Count of Campo Alange in an appeal issued in the pages of *El Artista* [EA]: “To the Spanish aristocracy,” EA, volume I, 1835, pp. 25-27.

6 Letter from José Madrazo to Federico Madrazo in which he remarks that he has decided that the Real Museo [del Prado] should open to the public only on Sundays and public holidays

regulate access thereto, while focusing attention on the key social class in the Constitutional Regime: employees (Public Administration workers). As further remarked by the director in his correspondence, the new timetable would contribute to encouraging a taste for the fine arts; at the time, however, the arts spoke not only of techniques and aesthetics, but were becoming incorporated into a national identity strongly influenced in El Prado by the conceptualisation of the Spanish School (Afinoguénova, 2009).

Citizens began to view El Prado as the Museum of the Nation, the museum in which the country's riches were displayed. This appreciation arose from the French Revolution and from considering national heritage as a collective good (Choay, 2007). Thus, in the pages of the press there were several debates over the role of the museum's collection; this was viewed by some as a national asset, while by others as part of the Royal family's wealth (Gilarranz-Ibáñez, 2021, pp. 37-40; Géal, 2005, pp. 208-222). This affected the institution's organisation, museum opening hours and visitors' access regime. In 1847 the periodical *El Clamor Público* described an English traveller's visit to the Real Museo del Prado. The tone of this narrative undoubtedly suggests a critique against the institution's management, masked as an opinion given by this possible fictitious foreigner, for not opening the art galleries every day to the public but only for a few hours on Sundays.⁷ José de Madrazo did not take long to reply in the pages of the same journal. The director highlighted the alleged visitor's ignorance regarding museums in Europe, given that “neither the Louvre in Paris, nor the art gallery at the Vatican, nor the Museum of Florence, nor that of Parma, nor indeed any other of the Museums throughout the civilised nations of Europe is open but on certain days, in most cases Sundays, just as in the case of Madrid.”⁸ Underlying this debate was the question of whether or not the Real Museo should be considered a national heritage, with what this entailed: free access to the holders of national sovereignty, the people. This judgement was reproduced, that same year, in *Eco del Comercio* in criticising that the term “National Museum,” which the periodical identified with the Prado, seemed to refer to the exclusive and absolute property of the Queen, to which it added: “This, in our opinion, is an error, and refraining from addressing the issue here in further depth we shall state that the Museum is the property of the nation.” On this premise, the rising emergence groups of the Constitutional Regime claimed this space as their own, thus giving legitimacy to their right to enjoy the use of it. In 1842 this line of thinking was expressed in *El Correo Nacional*, which published a complaint against the closure of certain exhibition halls at the Prado on Sundays: “We are not sure of how fair it is to deprive art enthusiasts of their chosen object of passion on the

days long designated for public access to the Museum. This, in a sense, has already become right.”⁹ Pressing for hours of opening more in line with the leisure time available to the middle classes in linked to ideas regarding the conceptualisation of the national heritage, assets that were no longer in the hands of a very small minority but that should be made available for the entertainment of citizens. Hence, for one part of society, visiting the museum became a symbolic act celebrating the riches of the fatherland in “a ritual of national glorification” as described by Carol Duncan & Alan Wallach (1980, p. 451).

MODELS AND BEHAVIOURS OF VISITORS TO THE REAL MUSEO

The museum was institutionally configured based on scholarly visits, with rules that *a priori* were intended to restrict the public that habitually frequented other spaces of leisure such as cafés, taverns and fairs. This bias toward art professionals was clearly perceived in practices such as the scarce assistance given to lay visitors. Many museums offered no information panels to identify the artistic works on display (McClellan, 1994). Such museum practices, alongside other social dynamics—maintaining silence within the halls or allowing visitors to carry a cane¹⁰—provide an insight into the codes of behaviour established for visits to the museum and their close ties to the privileged classes. As pointed out by Nick Prior (2002a, pp. 32-33), this symbolic language encoded the *habitus* and behaviour of the sociocultural elite, both for itself and for others, drawing lines of separation from the rest of the visitors. However, we should bear in mind that these codes underwent modifications. The criteria for good behaviour and the differentiation between the conduct of experts and laymen were in continuous and sustained negotiation, while new types of visitors were included such as women, children and the working classes (Rees Leahy, 2012, p. 4). For instance, in the early nineteenth century it was common for experts to take notes while viewing the exhibitions. When this became a generalised exercise among enthusiasts, those considering themselves as scholars and intellectuals abandoned the habit to avoid confusion (Rees Leahy, 2012, p. 6). Gesticulation and movement through the exhibition halls likewise marked a distinction between experts and the remainder of the public. A chronicle appeared in the periodical *Correo literario y mercantil* in which an enthusiast of “excellence” visited the Real Museo. The author told how, during his visit to the museum, he had observed a gentleman “who spoke authoritatively of the arts” upon which he decided

rather than on Wednesdays and Saturdays: AMP, Archivos Personales: 2 / N° Exp: 96 [17-11-1838].

7 *El Clamor Público*, [ECP], 21 August 1847.

8 ECP, 27 August 1847.

9 *El Correo Nacional* [ECN], 14 March 1842. Criticism of museum closure on Sundays was continued in ECN, 17 March 1842.

10 According to the Museo del Prado regulations, all visitors were required to leave their walking stick at the entrance “except visitors whose character and rank entitles them to carry it.” Opening of the Real Museo de Pinturas on 19 March 1828: AMP, Caja : 357 / Legajo: 11.202 / N° Exp: 14 [12-03-1828].

to follow him. At one point, he saw this gentleman making some strange movements, “now advancing, only to stand back again; turning to the left, then to the right; tilting his head this way and that” which prompted the author to approach the man and inquire if he felt indisposed, to which the gentleman replied: “I am seeking the best angle to view these pictures, without success.”¹¹ The narrative in the *Comercio* reflected such interaction between different types of public and the body language that serves to distinguish them provided the observer has the appropriate cultural background. In the case at hand, the amateur was unable to identify the gestural code of the expert, leading him to assume an ailment. This constituted a barrier between these two types of spectators since the expert gentleman, on being asked whether he felt indisposed, immediately detected the chronicler’s ignorance and cut the conversation short.

In determining factors of inclusion and exclusion, and in the legitimization of appropriate practices and behaviour in the museum, a prominent role was played by the press. Articles, chronicles and announcements on the inauguration or visits to an exhibition or public museum provided clues to what should and should not be done in these spaces. These texts not only gave information, but directly and indirectly influenced the development of museums and the behaviour of museum goers (Siegel, 2008, p. 80). To this was added the increasing popularity of cultural products such as travel guides, both Spanish and foreign, in which a section would be devoted to cultural institutions such as fine arts academies and Museum collections. Many of these books, beyond providing the days and hours of opening, included advice to the non-initiated in the artistic world. In the *Manual for the Spanish visi-*

11 *El Correo literario y mercantil*, 12 September 1828.



FIGURE 1. Spanish Hall at the Real Museo de Prado. *Siglo Pintoresco*. Tomo 1. 1845. Archive.org.

tor from Madrid to Paris and London,¹² the author, Antonio María Segovia, recommended the following:

Those lacking consummate intelligence regarding the arts, should adhere to the following method when visiting the galleries or collections: purchase the catalogue; ask an initiated person to mark the masterpieces therein, or seek their titles in a reliable guide. Upon this, go and view the works in person taking notes and endeavouring to discover their beauty and their defects; then, plan a second visit accompanied by a pundit and ask for his opinion, which you may compare with your own initial appreciation and, if possible, with that of other experts you may chance to hear (Segovia, 1851, pp. 111-112).

From this quote, it is possible to infer experts visited exhibitions alone or in the company of a peer, and not as part of a group. The expert aimed to learn about the aesthetics and artistic techniques rather than experiencing the museum as entertainment. Among the opinions published in the press in the mid-nineteenth century, it was frequent to read criticism of the masses visiting museums and exhibitions with no knowledge of fine arts at all, and a growing trend was observed in the use of museum spaces for entertainment purposes (Afinoguénova, 2019, pp. 142-145). Illustrators and caricaturists also depicted museums as a leisure venue for the middle classes, often giving satirical and burlesque examples of ignorant visitors’ bad habits. This type of illustration had already appeared in the British and French press during the early nineteenth century. In 1815, the caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson had represented the silliness of spectators viewing the collection at the Royal Academy, ridiculing their manifestly ignorant manner of approaching the works of art. In Spain, woodcuts were published representing public exhibition halls, both in the Museo del Prado and those of the Real Academia de San Fernando. These depicted the visits by the wealthy classes who maintained a code of conduct similar to that of an expert: individuals visiting alone or in the company of one other person whose gestures indicate that he is explaining an exhibit to his companion, in the proper stance to view the works, and whose dress identifies them as belonging to the distinguished social classes. This is the case of the illustration published in *Siglo Pintoresco* depicting the Spanish Hall at the Real Museo de Prado (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, other iconographical sources offer scenes in which the art gallery is used as leisure venue, as suggested by the attitudes of some of the visitors. Both in the work by Pedro Kuntz –*Rotonda del Museo del Prado*, 1833– and in that by Fernando Brambila –*Vista de la Rotonda del Real Museo*, 1834– the protagonists are strolling visitors, and I use the term deliberately as this is their princi-

12 The full name in Spanish is *Manual del viajero español, de Madrid a Paris y Londres: precedido de una mención histórica de los viajes más célebres de los tiempos históricos y modernos*. The digitized edition of this book can be found in the Hispanic Digital Library (Biblioteca Digital Hispánica). <https://bdh.bne.es/bnearch/detalle/bdh0000039304>

pal activity. The Prado served as a *meeting point*, in the words of Carlos Reyero (2008, pp. 193-194), where most of the figures wander through the museum interior with hardly a glance at the works on display. It is not surprising the presence of this type of public even first years of the Prado Museum life. Since the eighteenth century there were different cultural spaces in reign capital where anyone interested in art and science could satisfy their curiosity. The aperture of an establishment as the Prado Museum constituted one more stage for enjoyment (Molina, 2020, p. 75).

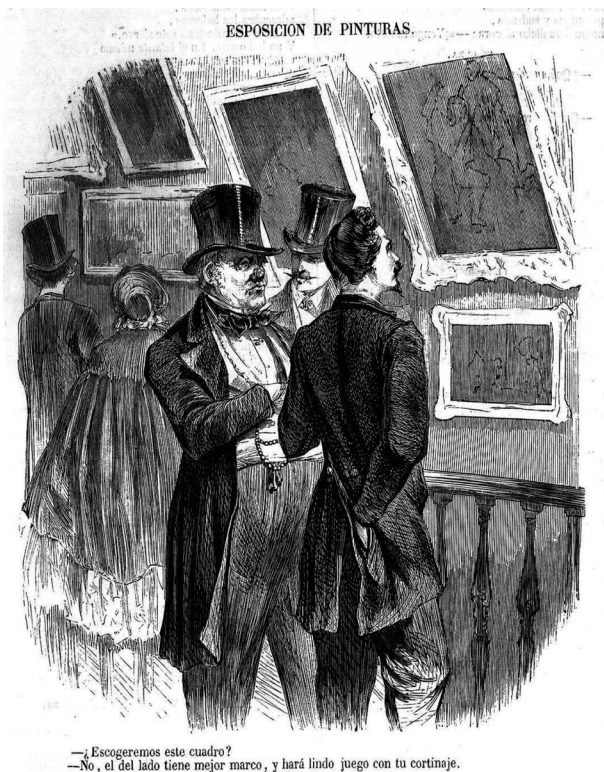


FIGURE 2. “Painting Exhibition,” *El Museo Universal*, 14-10-1860. Biblioteca Virtual de Prensa Histórica CC BY 4.0 Online: prensahistorica.mcu.es

From the mid-nineteenth century, these depictions of manners and mores were enlarged to include humorous critiques of the inexpert public. Pedro de Madrazo, the son of José de Madrazo, published on several occasions his animosity toward all those visitors who, regardless of their social status, viewed the fine arts as a mere pastime. Amateurs were the professional artists’ natural enemies. To Pedro de Madrazo, they embodied the “woodworm of the arts, uneducated professors,”¹³ individuals who gradually took over the art exhibition spaces. This hostility toward the uninitiated grew in step with the popularity of the artistic exhibitions promoted during the first half of the nineteenth century by the Real Academia de Bellas

13 Pedro de Madrazo: “Painting,” EA, volume I, 1835, p. 14.

Artes de San Fernando, and by the government, following the Royal Decree of 1854, with the newly established National Exhibitions. Ramón de Mesonero Romanos, a contemporary author specialised in local customs and manners, described the visitors to the 1838 painting exhibition as “a crowd that comes and goes, moving in and out, talking, staring, laughing, bustling, coughing, murmuring, in a word confounding and spoiling spectators’ view.”¹⁴ A differentiation is made between “populace” and “spectators,” as here, too, it is the seemingly uninterested masses that prevent the experts—in this case, the spectators—from enjoying the works of art on display.



FIGURE 3. “At the Permanent Exhibition,” *El Mundo Cómico*, 5-07-1874. Biblioteca Virtual de Prensa Histórica CC BY 4.0 Online: prensahistorica.mcu.es

This description by Mesonero Romanos recurred in the visual cultural media in comic vignettes ridiculing uncultured visitors, independently of their social class, such as two illustrations in *El Museo Universal* and in *El Mundo Cómico* (Figs. 2 and 3). The former was published in 1860 and represents a scene from that year’s painting exhibition. In the composition, three gentlemen are viewing the collection, with the caption: “Shall we choose this picture?” “No, the one next to it has a better frame and will match your curtains beautifully.” The illustrator plays with the spectators in the drawing. At first sight, and judged by the dress code and body language—standing properly before the painting, adopting an appropriately thoughtful gaze and stance—they appear to belong to the expert class. However, their lack of artistic knowledge is patently evident in their conversation. A similar composition appears in the illustration published by *El Mundo Cómico* in 1874, only in this case the scenario is the Permanent Exhibition. Again, two men approach a painting next to which stands the author, who claims: “This is my painting, gentlemen,” to which one of the gentlemen replies, “What a fine frame!” Both

14 Ramon Mesonero Romanos: “Customs of Madrid. The painting exhibition.” *Semanario Pintoresco Español* [SPE], 30 September 1838. Cited: Afinoguénova, 2019, pp. 31-32.

of these illustrations highlight one of the key aspects of the cultural activity of visiting museums or art galleries: the emulation learned through what Marcel Mauss (1973) called *prestigious imitation*, or in other words, the acquisition of normative corporal techniques that give the inexpert visitor the necessary confidence and competence to give a convincing performance in this unfamiliar space. We should not overlook that museums and public fine arts exhibitions alike, as well as other scenarios for upper middle-class leisure pursuits, served equally as vantage points from which to observe and be observed (Reyero, 2008, pp. 229-232). Attempts to incorporate the actions and gestures of those held to be experts was a way of communicating within such public scenarios, expressing the desire to be identified as part of a select group; these means of non-verbal communication were developed to transmit the will to be accepted or excluded from certain social groups or interactions (Christidou & Diamantopoulou, 2016).

IDENTIFY THE LAYMAN WITH THE POPULAR

The inexpert visitors were equated with the commoners using satirical cartoons and press chronicles. Especially, the middle class consolidated and disseminated an imaginary about a lower class that was used to maintain the distance with the working classes in public places such as museums or art galleries. They developed a social profile where the behaviours of lower classes were associated with the idea of “bad visitor” being a comical subject in many satirical illustrations.

On the one hand, among people in fine art field there was a bad opinion about the proximity between popular urban areas—such as fairs—to museums and exhibitions galleries. An example of these arguments was published by Pedro de Madrazo, the son of José de Madrazo, director of. He, among other artists, strongly opposed the proximity, both spatial and temporal, of the fair to the Academy of San Fernando premises, given that the fairs were generally held in September the Prado Museum, coinciding with the season for annual exhibitions of fine arts. Madrazo demanded “to the painting exhibition its secluded venue, separate from the uninitiated crowds seeking blankets from Palencia” and criticized this “the Madrid public was so inclined to view the halls at the Real Academia de San Fernando as a kind of extension of the stalls selling peaches and old iron ...¹⁵ The dividing line between the artistic galleries and fairs could be incorporated into the strategy developed by professional artists to sacralise and professionalise the spaces dedicated to artistic endeavours, a trend deriving from the long-standing debate on differentiating between artisan and artist.¹⁶ Thus, among their proposed measures “for

the enhancement of fine arts” was the “distinct” separation of fairgrounds and art exhibition venues, that are “confused by so many innocent spectators,” as noted by a columnist in *La España*.¹⁷

The cartoon by Goya titled *La Feria*, dated in 1779, features a street vendor offering several paintings at his stall to a nobleman. Passers-by could view all sorts of gadgets, garments, food and even works of art at these markets. Those dedicated to selling books, prints and other cultural goods were usually held in the vicinity of artistic institutions (Lorente Lorente, 2014, pp. 183-185). Social diversity and crowds of shoppers were a feature of these public scenarios, which gradually shifted to the interior of academic institutions, as described by Thomas Crow (1985) and Eva Boutillo (2010) about the Paris salons. The Madrid fairs were similar to those established in other major European cities. In the Spanish capital, they attracted both native and foreign travellers and became a prominent feature in the Early Modern Age literature of manners and mores (Simón Díaz, 1967). In these narratives, the critique of buyers and onlookers was a common feature, and this social satire was likewise featured in iconographical media (Fig. 4).



FIGURE 4. “The Fairs of Madrid. The amateurs,” Cartoon album by Francisco Ortego. Bizkaiko Foru Liburutegia/Biblioteca Foral de Bizkaia.

This proximity between the two spaces produced the incorporation of the popular classes as part of the visitors to the art exhibitions, mobilizing an imaginary in which the commoners were a nuisance to the rest of the visitors. The writer Mesonero Romanos described these sensations in a satirical way in *Madrid Cómico* journal in 1838. He related the experiences of a women’s group visiting the exhibition of Madrid’s Art Academy. The older of them complained about some men’s group comments in front of a woman’s portrait; before the elderly woman cried out: “Come, child, come away (cries the

15 Pedro de Madrazo: “The painting exhibition of 1847,” SPE, 7 November 1847.

16 Painters developed several discourses with which to professionalise their activity: control over access to the academy,

arguments banning figures such as enthusiasts and amateurs, exclusion of women as members of their professional group. See: Gilarranz-Ibáñez, 2022.

17 *La España*, 7 October 1849.

old lady), dear Jesus! Such pushing and shoving... and the smell! Why ever would they allow these people into the Academy?” The lady referred to a group of ‘Alcorconeros’, that is, from the town of Alcorcón. This township to the south-west of Madrid was well known for its pottery,¹⁸ mentioned by Mesonero Romanos who described the group as “enthusiasts of the arts, [who have] come to take a look round the Academy, while their colleagues set up the market stall to sell their wares of culinary sculpture.”

A visit to the fine arts exhibition was considered an extension of Madrid’s leisure opportunities.¹⁹ The use of these spaces by the metropolitan populace led to the activities and habits of the street market being transferred to the interior of the exposition halls.²⁰ When visiting the stalls at the fair, it was common practice to talk and laugh, form crowds and touch the wares. To the uninitiated, art salons were not sacred sanctuaries; they were not identified as unique spaces in which a special behaviour was called for; and this led to misunderstandings among some visitors when asked to keep silent, remain at a distance from works of art or directly to refrain from touching them.²¹ Their conduct cannot be classified as rudeness or bad manners, but rather as actions undergoing negotiation (Elias, 1993, p. 52). However, in the construction of the social imaginary about the inexperienced visitor, all these behaviours were linked only to the commoners, lower and working classes.

Despite of gradual aperture of museums and galleries to the wide public, these artistical places didn’t constitute a full public establishment in the nineteenth

century. Class segregation was normal among different social groups. The dominant classes decided what behaviours were valid and which not preventing social interaction. Despite an “opening reputation,” the middle class promoted and maintained carefully a social hierarchy (Greig, 2012, p. 53). To achieve this aim, they cultivated a social imaginary about popular visitors spreading using press chronicle and cartoons. As Eugenia Afinoguénova (2011, p. 215) said the museum was an ideal place where the bourgeoisie laughed at class adversaries. Especially, the cartoonists represented the lower classes’ experience in museums linked with ignorance and religious exaltation. Most of the satirical illustrations reflected the reactions of these groups in front of a nude—oil painting and sculptures—or in ridiculous behaviours such as knelt before a religious image exhibited at museum as *El entierro de Cristo*. These arguments were used by the middle and high classes to avoid interaction with the commoners (Fig. 5).



FIGURE 5. “In front of ‘The Funeral of Christ’, num. 78,” *Madrid Cómico*, 04-06-1887. Biblioteca Virtual de Prensa Histórica CC BY 4.0 Online: prensahistorica.mcu.es

18 In his dictionary, Pascual Madoz mentions the existence of “eight workshops manufacturing ordinary pottery, but superior in class and durability, glazed and unglazed, with clay taken obtained within the jurisdiction. A local product, it surpasses in quality all others throughout the country, and supply the Court and many other towns, near and far.” See Pascual Madoz, *Diccionario Geográfico-estadístico-histórico de España y sus posesiones de Ultramar*. Madrid: Establecimiento Literario-Tipográfico de P. Madoz y L. Sagasti, 1845, vol. 1, p. 463.

19 As comically expressed in *Gil Blas* on 17 May 1868. These pages included the publication of “Notes by an Old Castilian visiting the annual fair in Madrid taking advantage of the reduced railway fares.” On the list of obligatory activities was a visit to the Real Museo: “I viewed the museum on Sunday. My, it was hot! There were many pictures and very large halls. All in all, I am glad to have seen it before I die. NOTE: you would have had a better time viewing the *horchatería* on Carrera de San Gerónimo.” Cited: Afinoguénova, 2019, p. 104.

20 The same occurred in other European exhibition venues such as the National Gallery in London where the multitudes used the space to eat their lunch and keep out of the rain. See: Prior, 2002a, p. 40.

21 In his chronicle, Mesonero Romanos adds in referring to the group of *Alcorconeros*: “they keep up their commentary while marching in closed columns through the halls (...) The thing that annoys them most is that museum guards do not allow them to touch the pictures.” Cited: Afinoguénova, 2019, p. 31. On this issue of touching the exhibits there was also a distinction made between experts and laymen, and even a social class issue, as this prohibition against touching the works of art was not imposed upon members of the social elites, as pointed out by Pedro Lorente Lorente, 2014, p. 194.

The satirical press spread these efforts to maintain the social distance as illustrated Francisco Ortego, the popular Spanish cartoonist. His illustration—titled “In the Exposition inauguration”—represented women, men and children group waiting anxiously behind line dividers looking at the arrival of “the guest with ticket that come in the Exhibition” as described in the cartoon’s subtitle. Textual and visual sources identify as “bad behaviour” which is linked with popular classes. Nevertheless, the sources produced by professional figures of the artistical field demonstrated that their contempt of laymen was not merely based on social class, since as pointed out by Pedro de Madrazo himself, the *uneducated masses* comprised “commoners or plebeians” as well as “a large part of those ranking in the higher echelons of social

hierarchy.”²² And even natural figures in the artistic field such as copyists or fine arts students were reprimanded for what experts considered bad behaviours inside the museum. For this reason, to establish a clear code of conduct within the institution. Direct procedures can be found in rules such as those adopted by the Museo del Prado in 1863, which required employees to prohibit “smoking within the premises, singing, dancing, whistling, affixing signs or images on the walls, speaking in a loud voice, reading newspapers or other printed matter”²³ any student or copy artist present in the gallery.



FIGURE 6. *Things of the World! A burlesque gallery of human frailties; an eccentric and amusing publication by the literary typographic society of Ayguals de Izco brothers, 1858.* Public Domain, Google-digitized.

From the wording of this regulation, we may infer that the behaviour deemed proper at the museum was undergoing a negotiation process. Even “experts” like students and copy artists were sometimes admonished for inappropriate behaviour according to the institutional directive. Indirectly, elements were introduced to the exhibition halls to redirect visitors’ movements. An analysis of the iconographical sources allows us to visualise

the placement of barriers to prevent people from getting too close to exhibits, and the fitting of racks near the entrance for walking sticks and sunshades.²⁴ The installation of these objects moulded visitor’s attitudes and provided a cue to what would be acceptable or improper throughout the visit. These recommendations were taken up by satirical illustrators. Their caricatures became an unofficial guide to museum etiquette reflecting in humorous terms the code of good behaviour required when visiting public museums (Fig. 6).

CONCLUSIONS

Having completed the above analysis, my view is that underlying the origins of public museums in Spain, and particularly the fine arts museum, there was no intention of democratising culture, and the same holds for other European museum projects. Nevertheless, their inauguration was instrumental to nineteenth-century society’s approach to art. The opportunity to share a space with pundits and the regulation of visits through direct and indirect practices enabled “uneducated” visitors to learn the proper way to approach works of art. In the written and iconographical sources alike, it has been remarked that, very often, the modes of inclusion and exclusion were based on non-verbal codes of communication. For these reasons I consider that further research into the gestures and body language of nineteenth-century museum-goers, thus examining in greater depth their behavioural modes and models, may uncover new and interesting data in the future.

Public museums in the mid-nineteenth century in Spain became, as did other European museums, the theatre of a symbolic battle. Several groups within the elites struggled, by different means, to claim these spaces as their own. The political dynamics and the process of building a national state rendered public museums a scenario from which to claim citizens’ rights. The elites’ discourse, aiming to gain a position as legitimate public museum patrons, was contradictory. On the one hand, these groups denounced the former regime’s malpractice in granting privileged access to these institutions to the aristocracy. They appealed to national identity and their right to enjoy the country’s riches on the same footing as any other citizen. At the same time, however, they set up measures of exclusion, both against the lower classes qualified as the lay public, limiting the enjoyment of art collections and museums through different means. The reliable representation of body language in visual resources can be questionable. However, their analysis, accompanied by the study of other documents such as museum rules or press articles, helps us to know more about ways to mould and make uniform behaviours in public places. Furthermore, thanks to these sources it is possible to go deeper into the boundaries created by social elites

22 Pedro de Madrazo: “The painting exhibition of 1847,” SPE, 7 November 1847.

23 *Regulation to be observed by copy artists.* AMP: Caja: 359 / Legajo: 111.01 / N° Exp: 5 [1863-02-02]. Cited: Afinoguénova, 2019, p. 122.

24 Estimates for the construction of a stand for visitors’ walking sticks and sunshades at the Real Museo. AMP: Caja: 435 / Legajo: 34.02 / N° Exp: 18, [20-04-1839].

restricting their interaction with other social classes. For these reasons, I consider that depth research on body language allows us to learn more about informal sociability. This paper opens a work line that will be continued in future analyses.

The study of all these sources invites us to think about the social use of museums and artistic exhibitions in two senses. First, their homogenization as a leisure place. A practice established in the first half of the nineteenth century by a part of the privilege classes and it was acquired by the rest of society when access to these kinds of places was opened. Second, the analysis lets us observe the growing interest of emergent urban classes in the acquisition of distinction and cultural capital. The incorporation of cultural capital was made by means of imitation practices of figures categorized as experts. This profile usually was identified as high classes. Why? In contrast with the social imaginary which it was associated the layman visitor with the commoners and lower classes. Recognizing the “bad visitor” among the lower and working-class persons was useful for high classes. Despite museums and artistic galleries were opened their doors to all kinds of social groups, the fact is that it is possible to perceive how the middle and high classes tried to maintain a certain degree of exclusivity in these social plural spaces.

Professional artists played a key role in limiting access and in the constitution of codes of conduct within these institutions. Among the attitudes of respectability and appropriateness required of museum visitors, I have observed that artists deployed a strategy to sacralise these spaces to aggrandise their profession. This is a line of research that merits more in-depth study.

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