

**ENRIQUE CHAGOYA**

American, born Mexico City, Mexico, 1953

*Return to Goya No. 9*, 2010

Etching and aquatint with letterpress on paper, 14 5/8 x 11 1/8 inches

Purchase funds provided by Sandra Lynn Riggs, 2010.18.2

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In *Return to Goya No. 9*, Enrique Chagoya satirically reinterprets Spanish artist Francisco Goya's (1746–1828) *No te escaparás* (You will not escape) from the series *Los Caprichos* (The Caprices, 1797–98). Chagoya diligently recreates his near-namesake's print with one provocative difference: he replaces a bemused, female dancer's face with the smiling visage of President Barack Obama. This transformation provokes many questions, a signature tactic of Chagoya's work (after all, he once titled a painting *Part of the Charm is the Elusiveness of Meaning*).

We might ask: Who are the four gargoyles in the ghoulish gaggle that menace the feminized dancer-President as he grins his way through an arabesque? How has Obama's presidency thus been set upon? How is it under threat? How do Goya's overarching critiques of the Spanish ruling class relate to this representation of the first African American president of the United States?

The detail at the bottom of the print presents another riddle to interpret. In the red stamp beneath this cross-dressing historical satire, Chagoya tucks a cross in the wing of a plucked chicken that wears a conical mask as it flees from a blaze. Once we let this pun hatch, we might hear only the "clucks" of a chicken-hearted Ku Klux Klansman. But other inquisitions haunt the cartoon detail: the mask also recalls the religious penitents who parade in the *capirotas* (canonical hats) of the Spanish Nazarenes—hats that likely inspired the early Klan outfits. Historical fashions may not have changed as much as we like to think, as is apparent in this disturbing link between Goya's eighteenth-century Spain and Chagoya's allusion to a racist present.

Chagoya's larger body of work—paintings, etchings, screen-fold books, and other media—incorporates a complex universe of mutating historical details like this plucked chicken and misplaced Obama. These transformations render their meanings elusive and unstable, even if these meanings, like Obama, cannot "escape" their historical situations.

—Harris Feinsod

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