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PHILANTHROPY

The Impact of Art

ARTS & CULTURE NONPROFITS OFFER PROGRAMS TO THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY



Goya's *Seated Giant*, housed at The Met, creates the impression one has interrupted the Colossus in a pensive moment.



BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING

“**T**he Colossus,” I answered, as my son and I strolled down Fifth Avenue in the early evening hours of July 20.

Grant and I were on our way to meet my wife, Stephanie, for dinner after visiting the “Art of Noise” exhibition at New York’s Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum on 91st Street. As is the case with his older brother and sister, playing, listening to, and performing music have become Grant’s true passion, so I am always looking for ways to connect with him through experiences like this outing.

The exhibition showcased a dizzying array of artifacts curated to show how design shapes the way we experience music: concert posters, record albums, phonographs, digital music players, handheld radios, and other sound devices. A large-scale, handmade listening room designed by artist Devon Turnbull

COURTESY OF METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



Grant can hardly contain his excitement upon arriving at Cooper Hewitt.

looked, sounded, and felt as if we were sitting inside a hi-fi audio system as it played Wagner's Prelude to Act III of *Tristan and Isolde*. It was a lot to take in, and I could tell that my son was moved.

Grant was quiet for most of the eight blocks we'd come since wrapping up our Cooper Hewitt visit, so I was surprised by his question as we approached The Met.

"Does art ever make you feel emotional," he asked?

I marveled at the maturity and weight of this question from this soon-to-be-13-year-old son of mine and shuddered at the cosmic precision of his timing. We were standing in the shadow of the place

where my giant lives.

While I imagine there were instances from my childhood where a song, or a play, or a movie elicited joy or fear or another easily accessible feeling, *Seated Giant*, a work featuring the same giant portrayed in Goya's earlier painting *The Colossus*, is the first piece of art I remember being truly moved by as an adult.

It was 1995, and I was 22 years old, halfway through my year of service as an Americorps volunteer. My days were spent doing outreach to homeless men and women sleeping on New York City streets, helping them to find shelter, a meal, or other resources if they

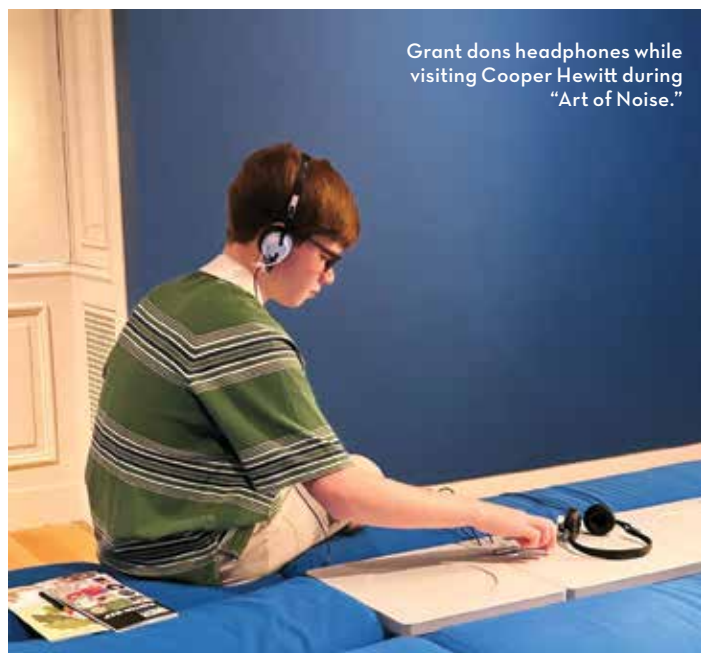
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Grant dons headphones while visiting Cooper Hewitt during "Art of Noise."

wanted them. On nights and weekends, I was part of an intentional community sharing an apartment and a vow of poverty with five other lay missionaries living on a stipend of \$60 a month. Free entry to most of the city's museums was a welcome respite, especially in the dead of winter for this Florida boy.

"Goya in The Metropolitan Museum of Art" was the first chronological display dedicated entirely to the museum's permanent collection of Goya works across all media. I went at the invitation of two of my roommates, one who studied art history in college and the other who was a well-read English major. Both were fluent in art and understood the significance of this exhibit. To be honest, I did not have many expectations other than to check a visit to The Met off my list of activities I wanted to accomplish during my year-long stay. I had no idea what impression it would make on me.

As we entered, the docent explained several of Goya's more significant works. *The Countess of Altamira and Her Daughter*. Okay. *Don Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zuniga*. The "Red Boy," got it. *Majas on a Balcony*. Sigh. We were less than an hour into our visit and my mind was already drifting.

The docent continued by directing our attention to a series of galleries that contained more than 200 of Goya's works on paper, including print cycles named "Caprichos," "Disasters of War," "Disparates" and "Bullfights." Some were displayed in frames, others were attached to canvas, and the most fragile-looking of these drawings were kept under glass in a windowless, dimly lit salon. It was like speed dating. But with a sketchbook. At dusk.

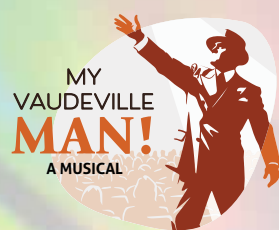
Interesting. Glad I made it. Now I was ready to go, but my roommates lingered. And then I spied it.



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INDIAN RIVER INSIGHTS



COURTESY OF MUSEO NACIONAL DEL PRADO

This portrait of Goya was painted by Vicente López Portaña.

Sitting in its own glass case, propped up at an angle on a roughly 9-by-12-inch metal plate, was *Seated Giant*, a thought-provoking depiction of the Colossus himself. What looked like a watercolor was actually an aquatint, a printmaking technique that uses acid and resin on metal to create shaded areas of tone instead of only solid lines. This technique was the closest thing to photography in Goya's time, and he used it for dramatic effect. It worked.

Unlike many of the subjects Goya painted whose gaze met the artist head-on, the Colossus is more enigmatic. As I approached the giant I observe him from behind, seated and framed against a desolate sky where a crescent moon hangs in the distance. In the predawn moonlight, the

giant is glancing back over his right shoulder. I don't believe he was expecting me, and it feels like I may have interrupted a meditation. Instead of dismissing me or standing up and walking away, he remains calm, holds his position, and returns to his mantra. He takes my intrusion as it comes, knowing that his patience and stamina are transcendent. I will depart. He will stay.

It is difficult to convey through writing the overwhelming emotions I felt while standing there staring at *Seated Giant*, but I believe in some way they related to the homeless men and women I was meeting daily. At first, I felt frightened by the sheer loneliness that was depicted. I could not imagine living in a world without people to connect

with and be close to. Next, I felt saddened by the look on his face. It seemed to suggest that he was used to being left alone or ignored. I felt angered by the hundreds of years that had passed since Goya completed this work of art. It could easily be a social commentary about inequity in modern times. Finally, I was surprised that a work of art could cause such a reaction in me. Whatever just happened, I wanted to experience more of it.

Throughout history, more of “that” has been made possible by artists and the patrons who support them. It is a symbiotic relationship wherein the cost and burden of making, preserving, and

sharing art are born by a minority while most of our society benefits. Even in our little town of Vero Beach, where arts and culture abound, only 13 cents out of every dollar given to charity goes to support arts and culture organizations. Last year this amounted to \$24 million spread among 25 organizations. Yet these organizations and their programs are available to 100 percent of Indian River County residents.

As I stood there on the sidewalk in front of The Met with my son, it was not lost on me that my initial encounter with the Colossus and his reappearance 31 years later was not by chance. Opportunities



The renowned Met has been in its current Fifth Avenue location since 1880.

to be moved by art are everywhere, but they are difficult to experience amidst the noise and distractions of modern life. Sometimes noticing them requires us to slow down so they can have the space and time to show themselves.

It is hard to miss a giant

hiding in plain sight, but I am sure it happens to me all the time. Less frequently than in my youth, and less likely with a curious son nearby. This thought gives me hope.

When I depart, he will stay, so that giants and art can have their day. 🌟



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