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Miro

CENTENNIAL JOAN MIRÓ RETROSPECTIVE OPENS AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"One thing comes as a reaction to something else. Both my life and my work are governed by alternating phases. When I am traveling, I am always on the move, but when I return home I spend twenty-four hours in bed, I eat nothing, I drink only water. It is the same in my work. After a series of calmaustere pictures there will be colorful dynamic ones. Yes, indeed, one can speak of cycles in my painting."

-- Joan Miró, *Selected Writings and Interviews*, 1970

The largest and most comprehensive exhibition ever held in the United States of the work of the Catalan master Joan Miró (1893-1983) opens at The Museum of Modern Art on October 17, 1993. Organized by Carolyn Lanchner, curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, **JOAN MIRÓ** celebrates the 100th anniversary of the artist's birth with some 400 works in virtually all the mediums he employed. The exhibition is the first major survey to examine the artist's pervasive tendency to work in series, and represents nearly all of his major cycles. **JOAN MIRÓ** thus examines the full range of Miró's oeuvre, offering an unprecedented opportunity to chart the development of one of the twentieth-century's most innovative artists, as well as providing insight into the creative process itself.

On view through January 11, 1994, the exhibition is sponsored by Argentaria, Corporación Bancaria de España.

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JOAN MIRÓ, which can only be seen in New York, is installed chronologically on both levels of the Museum's temporary exhibition galleries. It comprises more than 150 paintings, as well as drawings, prints, sculptures, ceramics, and illustrated books, assembled from public and private collections from throughout the world. Among the many series represented is the group of so-called "dream" paintings from the 1920s, twenty-one of which are included in the exhibition. All twenty-three works of the Constellation series of 1940-41, a pivotal group of paintings on paper that shows the artist at the height of his career, are exhibited together for the first time. Also included is a selection of works left in Miró's studio at his death. These paintings, of an often startling expressivity, have never been seen in the United States.

The print and illustrated-book component of the exhibition is installed separately in the third-floor galleries. Organized by Deborah Wye, curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, **MIRÓ PRINTS AND BOOKS FROM NEW YORK COLLECTIONS** highlights the Museum's extensive collection and supplements it with fine examples from local institutions and private collectors. These works in intaglio, lithography, woodcut, and *pochoir* demonstrate Miró's special attraction to a variety of materials and techniques, and his characteristic inventiveness in using them.

JOAN MIRÓ begins in 1915, with paintings that predate the artist's first trip to Paris. A number of Miró's experiments with avant-garde pictorial styles, such as the Cézannist "*La Publicidad*" and *Flower Vase* (1917) and the Fauve-inspired *Portrait of E.C. Ricart* (1917), are included in this section. Such works illustrate the development of a personal style which challenges both traditional and vanguard artistic values.

The paintings Miró executed after visiting Paris for the first time, including *Still Life with Rabbit (The Table)* (1920-21) and *Horse, Pipe, and Red Flower (Still Life with Horse)* (1920), continue to reflect the tension between the artist's attempts to forge a style out of the conflicting currents of modernism and his own deeply felt Catalan identity. Miró maintained that his paintings were rooted in nature and his native land -- in particular, the family farm at Montroig. His early masterpiece, *The Farm* (1921-22), sets down in meticulous detail the life of the farm in Montroig and is a perfect example of what Ms. Lanchner calls the artist's "ardent desire to reveal the marvelous in the quotidian," a desire that was the driving force behind his long career.

Beginning in 1925, Miró began to plan blocks of work in advance, grouping drawings from the pages of his notebook into predetermined series. He once compared his working methods to those of a gardener: "I think of my studio as a vegetable garden. Here, there are artichokes, there potatoes.... Things follow their natural course. They grow, they ripen. You have to graft. You have to water, as you do for lettuce. Things ripen in my mind. In addition, I always work on a great many things at once."

Miró's series are not based upon variations on a single theme or motif or permutations of a given set of elements, but rather are defined by a consistent conceptual grouping. This is obvious in the sequence of remarkable "dream" paintings of 1925 to 1927. These paintings, in which recognizable imagery gives way to schematic lines and opaque shapes held in suspension against loosely brushed and monochromatic grounds, have frequently been seen as exemplars of Surrealist automatism. Yet Miró's notebook studies for these works, a selection of which are shown here alongside the paintings for the

first time in this country, demonstrate that they are far from products of the unfettered unconscious. Nonetheless, they provided the model for both the free, gestural painting of Abstract Expressionism and a new and open pictorial spatiality that has come to be known as "color-field" painting.

By 1930 Miró told his friend Sebastià Gasch that he was ready to bid a "farewell" to painting; and, indeed, for the next two years, his energies were increasingly devoted to assemblages and constructions incorporating such untraditional materials as shells, mirror, rock, and nails. But this flurry of object making was succeeded by an emphatic return to painting in 1932 with a series of small oils on wood of jewel-like precision and radiant color. The following year he created a series of large canvases of elusive mystery. Based on small, utterly mundane collages Miró made from the clipped-out images of ordinary objects, these works offer a vivid illustration of how he gave form to the ever coincident realities of the visual and the imaginary worlds.

The political climate of the times and the Civil War in Spain made the latter half of the 1930s a turbulent period for Miró. On a visit to Paris in late 1936, he found himself unable to return to Spain and thereafter lived in involuntary exile in France until mid-1940. During 1937 and early 1938, he stopped working in series and produced two paintings stylistically unique in his oeuvre, and utterly different from each other: *Still Life with Old Shoe* and *Self-Portrait I*. With the subsequent *Self-Portrait II*, Miró was sufficiently established to resume his customary working habits.

Hoping to escape the threat of imminent war, Miró settled in the small village of Varengeville on the coast of Normandy. There, in 1940, he began a series of twenty-three paintings, mostly in gouache and oil, on uniform sheets of paper. His work on the paintings, collectively known as the Constellations,

was soon disrupted by the Nazi advance on France, and he and his family sought refuge in Palma de Mallorca. There, Miró continued working on the series; he completed the last three at the farm in Montroig.

Within the precisely articulated lines of these small-scale works, the artist compressed the whole of his knowledge and vision, giving the paintings a sense of immensity despite their small size. He wrote, "When I was painting the Constellations, I had the genuine feeling that I was working in secret, but it was a liberation for me in that I ceased thinking about the tragedy all around me."

By the end of the war, in works such as *Women Listening to Music* (1945), Miró had established the calligraphic, magical imagery of women, birds, stars, and wiry figures for which he was to become renowned. He returned to poetic, whimsical titles, such as *The Bird Boom-Boom Makes His Appeal to the Head Onion Peel* (1952), which recall his early "painting-poems" of the 1920s.

From the 1940s through 1960, Miró focused increasingly on sculpture, ceramics, and printmaking; from the late 1940s on, he was involved in a number of public commissions, including murals and sculptures executed on a monumental scale. A representative sampling of this work in the exhibition includes *Moonbird* (1966), which is over seven feet tall, and *Mural Painting* (1950-51), which, commissioned for a Harvard University dining room, measures nearly twenty feet in length.

By the late 1950s, Miró was able to secure the enormous studio he had always wanted, in Palma de Mallorca. Here he executed most of the exhibition's large-scale canvases. In their scale and sense of expansiveness, such works as the *Blue I*, *Blue II*, and *Blue III* triptych of 1961 may be seen as Miró's

response to American Abstract Expressionism combined with his own prior innovations in the early "dream" paintings.

During the last full decade of his life, Miró executed a large number of paintings that were freer and more gestural than ever before. In the paintings from the 1970s included in the exhibition, there is a sense of foreboding, urgency, and unseen danger which strikes an emotional chord unique in the artist's career. Like Picasso's late paintings, they reflect Miró's struggle to deal with mortality, yet their unabated energy betrays no diminishment of his artistic will, or of his need to give form to the joy and predicament of life. As Ms. Lanchner writes, "In whatever medium he worked, Miró's intent was... 'to rediscover the sources of human feeling.'"

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