

These are necessary works and hence true, which imbues them with powerful emotional value. Possibly the most beautiful of his last works are the numerous, disturbing black heads with red or blue luminous eyes, and the paintings featuring women, perhaps goddesses of the night whom he pursues in his search for creative fertility, as seen in *Woman in a Trance State Caused by the Flight of Shooting Stars* (1969), *Woman and Nightingale Birdsong in the Night* and *Woman Facing the Moon* (both from 1971), *Woman with Three Hairs Surrounded by Birds during the Night* (1972), *Woman during the Night* and *Women, Birds* (both from 1973), *Woman Facing the Moon II* (1974) and many others.

Scheherazade, the female narrator of *One Thousand and One Nights*, offers herself to Sultan Shahryar, who had ordered that 3,000 virgins be executed after he had wed them as an act of revenge against his unfaithful wife. But before Scheherazade submits to him, she asks to be allowed to tell her sister a story. The story goes on so long that it remains unfinished that night and so must be continued the next night and so on for the thousand and one nights of the title of this universal classic, by which time the sultan has fallen in love with the beautiful and intelligent narrator, marries her and ends his bloody vengeance. The women Miró painted so determinedly at the end of his career were for him like the stories told by Scheherazade: they kept him alive. Birds, however, are capable of flying high, are symbols of ascending to another reality, like the ladders mentioned earlier, and perhaps represent him during the creative act, understood as an ecstatic practice. Curiously, one of the best known works in Sufi literature is *The Conference of Birds*, a long poem written in the 12th century by the Persian Farid al-Din Attar. In this work, the birds, led by a hoopoe, set out on a long journey in search of a bird that no-one has ever seen and which they wish to proclaim king. After many adventures, they discover that they were looking for themselves.

Dupin asked Miró whether the colour black in his last works was an anticipation of death and the artist answered that it was not. In my view, he continued to marvel at the black light we have talked about, as perhaps demonstrated by works such as *Towards Escape I, II and III* (1972), three paintings in which a large red sun floats with astral symbols in a mainly black space with areas of luminous white. Further evidence might be provided by one of his large masterpieces from this period, *Dance of Characters and Birds under a Blue Sky. Stars* (1968), held in the collection of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, in which we find other black forms that resemble musical notes and bright red dots against a blue background below a long line of the black horizon. If this is an outdoor space, perhaps a starry sky full of nocturnal birds, the image would also, however, suggest infinite inner expanses. Miró is always ambiguous in his use of symbols, merely offering lyrical images that nevertheless constitute tributes to the night as the threshold of the poetic or artistic mystery.

To close, we will now turn our attention to Miró's sculptural work. By the late 1920s, he had already made several collages that were very closely in keeping with the ideas of the Surrealists. He also modelled a number of sculptures proper in the 1940s and 50s. However, it was not until he came to use his new, spacious studio at Cala Major that he concentrated determinedly on sculpture. Miró collected traditional handicraft

objects, among them *siurells*, whistles from Mallorca in the shape of white figurines painted in other colours, and all kinds of other items, such as toys, gourds, stones and intriguingly-shaped tree trunks. Some of his sculptures are juxtapositions of assorted objects, from tortoise shells and animal horns to shoe lasts, wicker baskets and rudders; many of them contain something of the Surrealist game par excellence, the exquisite cadaver. Later on, when he cast the sculptures in bronze, the objects were unified into wholes, most of which have something of the totem or figure about them. Many of these grotesque and subversive human figures seem to have emerged from a play by Alfred Jarry, whose *Ubu Roi* Miró found fascinating, but they also call to mind his so-called 'savage paintings' from the 1930s.

Some of these sculptures were also made from ceramic and were later cast in bronze. Miró had the good fortune to work with Llorens Artigas and to make a number of pieces with him, from small works to large ceramic projects around the world. Many of Miró's ceramic pieces are sculptures in their own right, though he also worked with conventional forms. Another of the people Miró collaborated with was Josep Royo, with whom he made numerous tapestries. This exhibition includes *The Lizard with the Golden Feathers* (1989-1991), a work with a powerful presence made after Miró's death. Like most of his tapestries, it is sumptuous in its appearance and contains a traditional tribal aspect as well as an entirely contemporary element, impressions that are unquestionably heightened depending on the location where the work is hung.

It is likely that Miró's work, especially when viewed from this spiritual perspective that we have explored, is far removed from the materialist forms that seem to dominate the contemporary art scene though there are artists who continue to explore these issues and not just through painting, such as Fred Tomaselli, Philip Taaffe, Francesco Clemente, Wolfgang Laib and Bill Viola. Miró's generation was also that of historians such as Sigfried Giedion, who referred in his discussion of "primeval art" to an "eternal present". In a well-known interview with Georges Duthuit, published in 1936, Miró stated that "every speck of dust has the soul of something marvellous in it. But to understand that, we need to recover the magical and religious sense of early peoples."<sup>20</sup> Miró was undoubtedly pleased with his own dissolving in a mystical ecstasy of identifying with the infinite, when he was able to attain this state, but he did not lose himself in this ecstasy, nor did he connect it with religion: instead, he transformed it in its entirety into sophisticated plastic images and so achieved some of the most memorable ever known. His craft ensured he remained of this world, with his feet firmly on the ground; through this craft, he continues to make us reflect on private and profound truths.

1. St. John of the Cross, *In the Dark Night of the Soul*, 1583. Translated and edited by E. Allison Peers, retrieved 4 March 2014 from [http://www.heiligeteksten.nl/dark\\_night0.9.pdf](http://www.heiligeteksten.nl/dark_night0.9.pdf).

2. Pietro Citati, *La luce della notte, Mondadori*, Milan, 1996. Translated into English from the Spanish translation by Juan Díaz de Atauri: *La luz de la noche*, Barcelona, Acantilado, 2011.

3. Sir Roland Penrose, "Miró, Señor de la noche", *Destino* magazine, Barcelona, 29.11.1968, p. 39.

4. Margit Rowell, *Joan Miró, Selected Writings and Interviews*, Boston, G. K. Hall, 1986.

5. Jaques Dupin, *Miró*, Paris, Flammarion, 1993. Translated into English from the Spanish edition: Barcelona, Polígrafa, 2004, p. 95.

6. Jacques Dupin, op. cit., p. 113.

7. Margit Rowell, op. cit.

8. Joan Miró, *Painting and Anti-Painting 1927-1937*, New York, MoMA, 2008, curated by Anne Umland. In 1988-89, the Joan Miró Foundation in Barcelona and the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London mounted another exhibition covering virtually the same period from 1929 to 1941.

9. Javier Álvarez Rodríguez, *Éxtasis sin fe*, Madrid, Trotta, 2001.

10. Joseph J, Schildkraut & Aurora Otero (eds.), *Depression and the Spiritual in Modern Art, Homage to Miró*, Chichester, West Sussex, John Wiley & Sons, 1996.

11. "I dream of a large studio", published by *XXe Siècle* magazine, Paris, May 1938.

12. Michel Leiris, quoted by Jaques Dupin in op. cit., pp. 122-124.

13. The poem appears in his last book, published posthumously, *Fragments a su imán*, Barcelona, Lumen, 1978.

14. Enrique Juncosa, "Prólogo" (Foreword), in José Lezama Lima, *Confluencias*, Almería, Editorial Confluencias, 2011, p. 14.

15. Jacques Dupin, op. cit., p. 238.

16. Jacques Dupin, op. cit., p. 242.

17. Jacques Dupin, op. cit., p. 243.

18. A notable exception is the exhibition *Joan Miró 1956-1983. Sentiment, emoció, gest*, Joan Miró Foundation, Barcelona, 2006.

19. Jacques Dupin, op. cit., p. 337.

20. Georges Duthuit, interview published in *Cahiers d'art*, Paris, no. 8-10, 1936.

## THE FIELD OF THE PASSIONATE IMAGINATION

Colm Tóibín

Slowly, as the nineteenth century turned and the twentieth century began, writers and painters became almost brazenly aware that writing is made with language and that painting is made with paint. Artists also became deeply alert to ideas about consciousness, symbols and will, ideas that made their way into the public domain courtesy of Freud, Jung, Nietzsche and their followers. Thus a sentence or a brush-stroke had its own dynamic power; it was an act of pure will, but it was also an act of guile; it managed to conceal as much as it revealed. A brush-stroke could be both paint in its absolute purity and also carry a symbolic force. The artistic art allowed revelation to come hand-in-glove with concealment. In work made, the nervous system, the music of the hidden self, emerged as much as did the decisive image or the deliberate rhythm.

What more could painting mean, or do, as Joan Miró, who was born in 1893, began to work? What could the world, or indeed the pictorial surface, look like if it had to seem both knowing and pure and also be refracted in the viscous, complex and uneasy waters of the symbol and the self? These problems preoccupied Miró as he attempted to create new forms and systems, as he tried to work out a personal iconography. What is fascinating is how alone he was when he began this process, and how provincial the city of Barcelona remained in these early years as he began as an artist. Despite the advances and experiments in architecture, and indeed in politics, Barcelona was a sort of backwater for a painter. The real world was over the French border.

In his solitary striving, away from a large set of cosmopolitan influences, Miró began to work as though from scratch with colour and substance, shape and shadow, dreams and consciousness. The world of appearances and the pictorial world he wished to create came into being by hard lonely dreaming and then by hard striving. Solitary in the city, and then alone in the landscape of Tarragona, single-minded and unsure, Miró began to work with a simple set of systems and, almost by sheer perseverance, managed to create a relationship between himself and the marks on the surface of the picture which was tentative to start with, and then hard-won, exacting and uncompromising. He played with innocence and experience as he allowed his dream life and his life awake to echo against each other.

Miró had much in common with Francis Bacon. They both came from backgrounds which had no interest at all in painting. They both sought and found liberation and inspiration in the Paris of the 1920s. They both learned a great deal from Picasso. They both made versions of portraits from art history. They both invented a personal iconography which became instantly recognisable; and then they both spent years struggling to refine, reform and extend what they had invented, attempting to combat self-parody. Although neither fought in the Second World War, the imagery in the work of both seems deeply affected by it, and Miró's by the Spanish Civil War. They were both not afraid to render the human figure as ghoulish, animal, predatory.

For the last thirty years of their lives, they each used only one studio. Both were solitary figures who went their own way.

Nonetheless, an early flirtation with Surrealism helped them both enormously even if only to alert them to the sheer pleasure of painting to shock and annoy and disturb. Although Miró took inspiration from nature and Bacon did not, and Bacon's vision seems more bluntly concerned with human despair than Miró's, which was more open and ambiguous, it would be a mistake not to see dark and terrorised energies at the heart of much of Miró's vision.

But they had in common something else which is more interesting. Neither was an accomplished draughtsman, and this lack of accomplishment became for them both a sort of gift. By necessity, they became interested in the image itself and the use of instinct rather than line or definition or constant change or any display of prodigious talent. They both became interested in images which contained or released forms of psychic repression, a dream world close to a world of nightmare. They both denied that they made drawings in preparation for paintings, although they both in fact did so. Both made drawings on the pages of books; both also used descriptions in words and phrases to plan a painting. Miró denied he made preparatory drawings to please the Surrealists who viewed such a thought-out preparation for a painting as a sort of treachery, a betrayal of the power of the unconscious. Bacon probably denied it because he thought it wasn't important. After his death, however, when his studio was being removed fragment by fragment from London to Dublin, definite evidence emerged of Bacon's drawing.

There are four buildings which were important for Joan Miró and each of them in different ways helps us understand his complex spirit and the art he made. The first was the building where he was born in Barcelona; it is in a small arcade off Carrer Ferran, near Plaça Sant Jaume in the old quarter of the city, with the inauspicious address of Passatge del Crèdit. Miró's father had a business in nearby Plaça Reial mending and making watches. Even though the city was going through enormous changes in the years when Miró was growing up, he seemed as much stifled by its conservative atmosphere as excited by the new architecture or the political ferment there.

Miró had none of Picasso's prodigious and precocious talent. He was, from an early age, more interested in pure colour and structure than in representation. In any case, he could not make academic drawings. Thus when he began to study art in the Llotja, where Picasso had studied, he was not encouraged to stay. At the age of seventeen, under pressure from his parents, he began work as a clerk; he toiled in an office six days a week from eight in the morning until nine in the evening, and after a year suffered a kind of breakdown.

He was, and indeed remains, an easy figure to misread. He seemed shy and timid, but he possessed a deeply uncompromising spirit. His work may seem apolitical and pure, but he remained all his life a fervent Catalan (his notebooks are in Catalan or French, but not in Spanish), and he made his left-wing sympathies clear both during the Spanish civil war and during the Franco regime. He had many friends, but, despite a connection with the surrealists, he was a member of no group, and was a deeply independent figure.

At the age of nineteen he went to study in an art school run by a Catalan called Francesc Galí. He still could not draw,

could not, in his own words tell the difference between a curved line and a straight line. Galí worked with him, tried to make him do still-lives of objects without colour such as a glass of water or a potato. Miró invariably made them look like sunsets. Nonetheless, he admired Galí, and made a number of friends in his art school, and, like Picasso before him, began to enjoy the street life of the city.

He became aware, however, that the real world was elsewhere, that there were no cubists or constructivists or surrealists working in Barcelona, that most contemporary art displayed in the city was old-fashioned and dull; he was indignant when an abstract painting by a friend was publicly mocked. He came to see Barcelona as philistine and confining, and, like Catalan artists of previous generations, he began to dream of Paris. His mother and Picasso's mother were friends, and, while he saw the 'parade' which Picasso designed for the Russian ballet in 1917, he was too shy at first to call on Picasso when he visited Barcelona. By the time he did so, Picasso had left; Miró was not to meet him until he went to Paris. Despite his shyness he became friendly with Francis Picabia, one of the leaders of the Dada movement who had taken refuge in Barcelona during the First World War, but Picabia merely whetted his appetite to leave. 'I must tell you,' he wrote in 1918, 'that if I have to live much longer in Barcelona I will be asphyxiated by its atmosphere.' Once the war was over, a note he sent to a friend had only three words written on it: 'Paris! Paris! Paris!'

When he arrived in Paris in 1919, Miró found great personal and artistic liberation there, in the streets themselves and in the museums and galleries. He was so excited by the place, indeed, that at first he could do no work.

The second building that matters in the life of Miró is a farm house in a place called Mont-roig close to the beach in the province of Tarragona which Miró's parents bought when he was sixteen. Just as the atmosphere in Paris would come as a shock to his system, so too this house and the landscape around it, filled with olive groves and with jagged red rock, where he was left at peace to draw and paint, had an enormous impact on Miró. He did a number of famous early paintings of the buildings which made up his parents' holding, including *The Farm*. But he was interested too in the smallest aspects of nature, how grass and trees grew, in the small animals and farm implements, in the light from the sea, and how certain local villages in the area were configured.

Mont-roig became a refuge for him from Barcelona; and, once he was in Paris, it also became his refuge from the fierce sensations which that city offered him, and soon, a refuge too from a group of associates there, including some painters, and writers such as Hemingway, with whom he sparred in the boxing ring. In 1923, Hemingway bought the painting *The Farm* from him.

In the 1920s as he moved each year between Paris and Mont-roig, Miró's work began to change under the influence of the Surrealists, as he invented his own iconography. At times, when money ran out and his work did not sell, he returned to the family apartment on Passatge del Crèdit where he worked in an upstairs studio. In 1929 he married Pilar Juncosa who came from a cultured Mallorcan family; in 1931 their only child Dolors was born.

As his fame spread, Miró found an American agent Pierre Matisse, son of the painter, and between 1932 and 1939 had twenty exhibitions of his work in America and Europe, but none in Barcelona. In 1968, as the Franco regime began to liberalise somewhat, he was finally given a retrospective, which took place in the Hospital de Santa Creu in Barcelona. Miró was pleased at the recognition, but he felt the loss too, not having been able to show his work in the city of his birth for fifty years.

He asked for a site where he could build a foundation and donate many of his own paintings which he still held, and encourage family and friends to do likewise. The authorities, still uncertain about his fame and his status, nonetheless gave him the most beautiful site on the side of the hill of Montjuïc overlooking both the city itself and the sea. The white building designed by his friend Josep Lluís Sert, who had designed the Spanish pavilion in the Paris exposition of 1937, is both low-key and exquisite in its shape. Its very whiteness seems to breathe in the light. Each room is shaded from the direct glare of the sun; the light is thus both guarded and intense, making the galleries seem like a sanctuary against the world outside.

The way the rooms are made seems to add to the strength of the images Miró made, but also offers them a sort of mystery and beauty and delicacy. There are times when his work seem filled with a hard-won simplicity, images pared down to a number of pure marks and symbolic gestures. Other paintings are filled with images; they are busy and ominous, or funny and surreal. But some of the work is also beautifully and sensuously painted; the sparseness of the imagery, especially in the work of the last few years, seems to serve to emphasise the paint, offering it a sort of transcendent power. Some of his sculptures on the roof of the foundation are very funny and also strangely disturbing.

Nearby is the Palau Nacional, which is now the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Here is housed a collection which had a profound effect on Miró when he was growing up, work which mattered to him as much as any of the contemporary paintings he saw. This is the superb collection of Romanesque wall paintings which comes from small churches dotted all over the Catalan landscape. This collection was formerly housed in the Parc de la Ciutadella, an easy walk from Passatge del Crèdit. Miró once pointed to the veins running up his arms when a friend of mine asked him if this collection was important for him. His father took him to see this collection during his childhood. He loved the flatness of Romanesque painting, the importance given to small things as much as angels or saints, and the sheer power those images had arising from a mixture of simplicity and a sort of deep and deliberate line and use of colour which gave them a stark intensity.

The fourth building which shaped Miró's art was the large light-filled studio which his friend Sert designed for him on the outskirts of the city of Palma de Mallorca in the mid 1950s.

Miró's arrival in Mallorca on the outbreak of the Second World War requires some explanation. Essentially, he came here because he had nowhere else to go. Since he had made a painting, *The Reaper*, which hung close to Picasso's *Guernica* at the Spanish pavilion in Paris in 1937, and had openly

supported the Spanish republic, he was in some danger after 1939. Once Franco took power, Miró therefore remained in France. When it became obvious that a German invasion was imminent, however, he made his way back to Catalonia, but was warned not to come into Barcelona; instead he went to Mallorca where his mother had roots, but, more importantly, where his wife's family lived.

For all of us, the Balearic Islands are filled with a sense of pleasure and mystery. The language spoken is very close to Catalan. But there are great variations within the islands themselves. Mallorca, for example, is a bastion of bourgeois values. A sense of traditional life has survived mass tourism. The landscape of the interior is magical and beautiful, as is some of the rugged coast and the more hidden places by the sea. The city of Palma has a stately grace and holds itself apart from outsiders with a sort of grim dignity. Going there with his wife and daughter in 1940, Miró had the best of both worlds. He could live in a Mediterranean, Catalan-speaking country; he could work with the light he loved. But he could also live quietly and safely under the protection of his wife's family. Thus he could be at home and in exile at the same time. He was careful in the years of the dictatorship to make his opposition clear without becoming a martyr.

For more than forty years he worked on the island, producing paintings, sculpture, ceramics, lithographs. Most of the time he managed, despite the limits of his own systems, not to grow tired, or parody his own iconography. And when the old dictator died, he was ready to come back to Barcelona and make political posters and album sleeves, work with young theatre companies and relish the success which his own foundation enjoyed. With his soaring imagination, he helped to re-make the city of Barcelona, the place he had once despised. He loved, for example, the graffiti which began to appear on the walls after 1975. He made a set of colourful tiles for the Ramblas in Barcelona.

By the time he died in 1983 at the age of ninety, he was a hero in the city, one of those who had kept the faith in dark times not by making propaganda but by lifting the human spirit beyond argument, by creating an openness in his own pictorial space, working with a sort of daring innocence with light and paint, figure and line. His work, and indeed his exemplary presence in the world, exuded freedom, the dreaming mind at its most exalted, images at their most pure.

Because Miró himself in interviews spoke freely about his own early difficulties and lack of natural abilities as a painter and a draughtsman, there is a danger that we might take this too seriously or treat it too simply. Giacometti's remarks on his work may be a useful rejoinder to Miró's own humility: 'For me, Miró's art was absolute freedom – something more airy, more disengaged and lighter than anything I had ever seen. In a way it was absolutely perfect. Miró could not add a dot except in the right place. He was so truly a painter that all he needed was to drop three blobs of colour on the canvas for it to exist and become a painting.'

Once he ceased to attempt to represent the world, or figures in the world, Miró's art became concerned, in Yves Bonnefoy's wonderful phrase, with 'the field of the passionate imagination.' Bonnefoy goes on to write about an art which 'chooses before

it knows, sees without calculating and makes decisions according to degrees of emotional intensity: thus painting for Miró after the mid-1920s became a form of action. What he used to temper this was a rare sense of tact; he knew where to make the marks and when to leave the surface alone; he began to trust that the rawness of his own instincts could be delivered with care and precision in paint to a surface, or in his work as a sculptor, without any apparent signs of struggle. His paintings had the aura of pure voice, pure vision, but they also were controlled with exquisite care. The power came from the playful gap between what was released and what was meticulously put in place. There is plenitude in his colours and his imagery, but there is also a starkness, a fierce urge to control. Miró’s paintings have the beauty and sense of spontaneity of birdsong, but they also have a deep-seated and hard knowledge which comes from the eye, the selecting gaze, the sense of flight-path, destination, danger.

What he sought from the marks he made was a kind of purity, but it was not a simple kind; he used colour with zeal and authority and he understood the complexity which colour could offer a pictorial space. A simple splash of colour, or some form approximating to something in nature or something in dream, could suffice then to place over the background colour; he could use dots, squiggles, spidery or sexual shapes, amorphous shapes, blurs, planes of flat colour, black lines, figures, lines, birds. Miró liked the sun, the moon, the stars in the same way as he liked the other marks he made. He did not need to represent the sun, the moon, the stars, or even the human form, or even invoke them; he needed to find a form for them in the picture as though they had been lost to us, and needed to be restored as living forms, as essential shapes by which all other shapes could be judged or created. Or because the picture needed something there, in that place, and he responded to the picture’s need as a parent will to a child’s cry, or a bird will respond to the worm or the fly.

But it might be too easy to suggest that Miró’s images arose merely from a need which his paintings had for them; the images are too elemental and essential in their power and force for that. There is a special glow and purity about his late canvases, as there is in the late work of other artists—the late poems of the Irish poet W.B. Yeats for example, or the late quartets of Beethoven—but also a fullness, a sense of belief in the connection between Miró’s own consciousness, his nervous system, and the painting he made. He had a way of making this connection seem monumental or fundamental rather than personal. In the connections he made between earth and sky, and the connection between dream and reality, he seemed to move out of the self into another space, pushing harder and harder to find an image in a painting or a piece of sculpture, which would seem humble, simple, accepting, and yet might, in its vast mystery and ambiguity, equal the world itself.

## JOAN MIRÓ AND HIS PASSION FOR THE SUPPORT

José María Pardo

The exhibition *Miró: The Light of the Night* features 25 paintings, 14 sculptures and one tapestry produced by the artist over a period spanning almost two decades from 1962 to 1979. These years were a time of busy pictorial activity for Miró following the construction of his new studio, complemented after his purchase of Son Boter by the conceiving of sculptures and production of graphic work. During this phase of his career, Miró, by now full of confidence in his own abilities, attained an astonishing level of freedom in his creative process and the treatment of his artistic material. He was now able to employ with ease any technique, procedure or support to express himself. He took his explorations further by working in series, groups of works he generally began, developed and concluded as a set, usually using the same pictorial procedure and the same support. This exhibition brings together a selection of works from a number of these series, which illustrate Miró’s artistic discourse during this period, some of which are on public display for the first time.

In 1959, the studio designed by Josep Lluís Sert gradually began to fill with works, though Miró found this difficult at the start: when it was empty, the light-filled studio could be as overwhelming as the white surface of a painting.<sup>1</sup> Miró had few referents but instead drew on his own resources. To continue expanding his imaginary, he needed to surround himself with works, some of them begun and at different stages in the process of creation, others already completed. Ten years later, his painting has become more spontaneous and direct, more open to experimentation with new materials. He did without the formal guide of charcoal lines drawn in advance and attacked the surface directly with paint, which entailed greater risk but was rewarded by increased integrity and freshness. He used a wide range of supports, and while this may have been the case earlier in his career as well, the diversity increased notably in the 1970s, as demonstrated by this exhibition. (P. 88, 89)

Miró’s creative process was complex and also subject to change, as the artist described on numerous occasions<sup>2</sup> in private, first-hand testimony on his work as a painter shut away in his studio, driven to paint “by a force more powerful than myself that I cannot control”,<sup>3</sup> suggesting atavistic behaviour and a compulsion to paint, draw, print, sculpt or model his inexhaustible imaginary. Decoding the complexity of the material nature that made this imaginary possible calls for careful observation of the pictorial facture of his works, of the materials he used, their arrangement and their application on the surfaces. The purpose of this brief essay is to consider these works in the context of issues connected with his studio and his pictorial oeuvre as a whole, and to look at how he fashioned them and the materials he used.

To begin with the first of this selection of works in date order, *Painting* (CAT. NO. 1) is painted on a long canvas without primer or stretcher, as a result of which it calls to mind a medieval painted wall hanging or standard, perhaps with Oriental proportions. Miró worked on these pieces on the floor, dripping and spattering paint onto them, applying glazes

and drawing signs on them, the same approach he was to employ ten years later in *Paysage animé*, (CAT. NO. 6), done on a similar yet larger piece of fabric. These are austere, schematic works that appear repeatedly and which seem to represent a compositional challenge for the artist due to their unusual vertical format. Miró was experienced in resolving the compositional problems inherent in large panoramas, but he now faced greater difficulties arising from the vertical nature of this format and from the need to read it in a new way. The size of his new studio helped him considerably in dealing with this, as he was able to observe and analyse the development of his work with a perspective that had previously been impossible for him to achieve.

Miró’s vocation for painting became an absolute commitment to each and every pictorial medium. His usual tools were pigments and colours—in the form of oils, caseins, acrylics, gouaches, watercolours, waxes and pastels—but he had no hesitation in using lesser materials such as industrial colorants and resins, blacks and whites in liquid enamels and even putties: any material could be made to serve an artistic purpose by Miró. In addition, he had a powerful passion for the support, for supports in general, for the supports for his paintings.<sup>4</sup> There are limits to the expressiveness of industrial canvases, fabrics, boards or cards: they are free of unevenness and imperfections and inevitably result in a kind of reiteration in the effects. Miró found the delicacy of this artistic material acceptable but inadequate and his experimentation led him to others that he was able to purchase in specialist outlets and even to things found by chance in the most unexpected places.

Miró was remarkably selective as regards colour. As the spectator can quickly appreciate, his palette is closer to that of an accomplished Palaeolithic painter than to that of a master of later times such as Delacroix, who was well supplied with palettes scrupulously structured by ranges of hues and prepared for him by assistants.<sup>5</sup> With regard to Miró’s essential palette, it is not enough to speak of generic colouring or of ranges—greens, blues, reds or yellows. Instead, one must talk of specific varieties of colour, of cobalts and ceruleans in the blues, or of cadmiums in reds and yellows, to mention but a few key examples. He remained faithful to this colouring, which is an unmistakeable identifying sign of his on each painted surface, be it in the background or the signs, as in 2+5=7 (CAT. NO. 2).<sup>6</sup> The properties of these varieties of colours play a key part in determining the pictorial effect and are crucial to the stability and permanence of the colour. With them, Miró spanned the entire chromatic spectrum, visible in the degraded, rubbed or blended glazes and which we can discern in the backgrounds. This chromatic purity may be limited in terms of number but it was precisely this that enabled him, through repeated mixings, to obtain broad intermediate ranges of clean, transparent tones.<sup>7</sup>

Miró was familiar with the art of pictorial cuisine, so to speak, and added to these technical skills an admirable sense of intuition. His choice of support was crucial and depended on its intended purpose. He was able to obtain very different results on the same fabric, similar to the cotton wall hangings described earlier. In *Femmes et oiseaux II* (CAT. NO. 3), *Femmes et oiseaux III* (CAT. NO. 4) and *Tête, oiseau* (CAT. NO. 9), the canvas used is a fine, tightly and evenly woven linen, a fabric he knew well and often employed. The neutral, warm tone of this yarn

provides a magnificent backdrop: lightly sized, the fabric’s texture enabled him to apply liberally his coloured matter, the oil that impregnates and binds with the sober surface, and also to dilute as he saw fit. More importantly, however, this fabric enabled him to use white—which cannot easily be applied to primed surfaces—which becomes another colour and perceptible in the painting. Onto these neutral linen bases, Miró *painted white*, which he modulated by overlaying just as he did with any other colour of his palette. Indeed, in some instances white occupies almost the entire surface, creating subtle platforms onto which the artist superimposed his symbolic world of forms, signs and stars.

In principle, any type of material can become a surface for colour. The variety of Miró’s supports is indisputable, but it is difficult to specify preferences or tendencies, merely recurrent behaviour.<sup>8</sup> He continued to use traditional supports throughout his career. He was fully familiar with them and knew how to make the most of them, while the unpredictable qualities of others that he had never or rarely used before generated all kinds of fortuitous effects. He was, however, especially fascinated by the dialogue between the support and the procedure, in which he adjudicated by bringing both together in the solitude of his studio.<sup>9</sup> Miró could be stirred by an irregular, uneven and absorbent weave, just as he could by the polished and impermeable surface of zinc—as in *Femme, oiseau* (CAT. NO. 5)—on which, because the sheet metal has no absorbency whatsoever, the oil runs like a liquid, as a consequence of which thickness, density and opacity can only be achieved by using smaller amounts. The opposite occurs in two works that share the same title, *Tête* (CAT. NO. 11 AND CAT. NO. 24), which are both part of his exploration of not just unconventional but also extremely unusual textures and materials such as tarred paper<sup>10</sup> (IL. 1 AND IL. 2), the corrugated structure of which, when stapled to a rough board, was sufficiently suggestive that it formed the basis of a series produced by Miró in early 1976.

These examples demonstrate the importance of the ‘skin’ of Miró’s works, the tactile sense of his painting, the facture of the work. Nevertheless, this facture varies considerably in the artist’s oeuvre, as it is affected by the type of procedure and by the physical properties and the texture of the support. On occasions, he opted for rough scrap materials, as in *Personnages* (CAT. NO. 23), which is painted on the extremely surprising surface of a sturdy polypropylene sack that had once held agricultural fertiliser. The worn outer part of the sack, with its printed label, was the surface chosen by Miró, as his eye must have been caught by its unusual colour, a striking yellow that provided the perfect backdrop for his *Personnages* in 1976. Even though it may be purely by chance, a work dated by Miró on the very next day, *Oiseaux en face de l’horizon* (CAT. NO. 8), is a notable oil painting on conventional canvas, the challenge of which resided in distributing the eye-catching orangey yellow across its surface without saturating it with colour while avoiding layering and mixes and carefully shaping the space occupied by drips and signs.

Naturally, not everything is poetic in Miró’s oeuvre. Violence also appears in his works, as is well known. Frequently, this impulse is reflected in the texture of the surface and sometimes even the support. It is an aggression that Miró conveys without sublimating it through scraping and perforating, a buried