

JOAN MIRÓ ON IBIZA

Joan Miró visited Ibiza at least on three occasions. The first that we know of was in 1946, evidence of which is provided by a postcard dated 31 March that he sent to one of his brothers-in-law following a visit to Dalt Vila. In August 1958, Miró and his wife, Pilar Juncosa, again spent time on the island, in this instance with Josep Lluís Sert and his wife.

We publish here a set of unreleased photographs taken during Miró's third stay in Ibiza, in January 1970. Some of them have notes on the back handwritten by Pilar Juncosa. These pictures document a trip that Miró and his wife made with the architects Germán Rodríguez Arias (1902-1987) and Josep Lluís Sert (1902-1983) and record a further visit to Dalt Vila. One of them was taken during a visit to Sert's house, where his wife, Moncha, is shown on a terrace. The two architects were members of the GATCPAC (Group of Catalan Architects and Technicians for the Improvement of Contemporary Architecture), a group that advocated rationalism in architecture, and were frequent visitors to Ibiza, where they undertook a number of projects. Notable buildings by Rodríguez Arias include the architect's own house (1966-1971) and some of the residential properties he designed in the development on Cap Martinet (1966-1971). Sert's impressive constructions include the Can Pep Simó housing development, where both the architect himself and Joaquim Gomis—mutual friend and photographer—had a house.

Like his friends, Miró was interested in Ibizan architecture, in particular because of its human scale, as he revealed in his well-known interview with Yvon Taillandier, *Je travaille comme un jardinier*: “Truly successful architecture, such as the town of Ibiza, is anonymous.”

THE LIGHT OF THE NIGHT

Enrique Juncosa

*In the happy night,
In secret, when none saw me,
Nor I beheld aught,
Without light or guide,
save that which burned in my heart.
This light guided me
More surely than the light of noonday...*
St. John of the Cross¹

The great Italian essayist Pietro Citati entitled one of his books *The Light of the Night*.² In this work, in which he discusses the great myths of world history, he describes how many ancient authors referred to a swift and lambent light, the light of the night that inflames men's souls in a flash of blessedness, a moment when men believe they accede to divine things. In his book, Citati analyses a number of authors and cultures and occasionally finds fascinating similarities between them. The timespan he covers extends from the Scythians, the Greeks and the Romans to Mozart and Leopardi, taking in Apuleius, Zhuang Zhou, St. Augustine, Rumi, Cao Xueqin, Montaigne and others along the way. As I read Citati's essay, brim-full of beauty and learning, I could not help but think of the work of Joan Miró, who created an unforgettable visual mythology of his own and who was described by his friend Sir Roland Penrose as the Lord of the Night.³ The night and dreams, stars and constellations, as well as strange birds and women, came unquestionably—though not exclusively—to dominate Miró's work, whose significance is both spiritual and revolutionary in formal terms.

The subject of the night recurs particularly in Miró's works from the late 1930s and early 40s, culminating in his famous series of *The Constellations*, produced at perhaps the most fascinating time of his career. It is, nevertheless, a subject also to be found earlier, for example in his landscape *Dog Barking at the Moon* (1926), to which we will return, and in one his small paintings on copper, *Nocturn* (1935), to give but two examples. These nocturnal and visionary themes eventually became the main subject of his painting during the last years of his creative activity, though Miró continued to experiment with other avenues too at that time, such as his burnt canvases or his paintings on supposedly decorative paintings bought at street markets. The exhibition we present here features paintings and sculptures from his late period, the 1960s and 70s, the time that critics have paid least attention to, a period full of characters and birds in spaces in which the colour black predominates. This is not the case of his sculptures, however, in which Miró explores other issues such as the evocative power of objects, a theme we will also come back to.

Like most prolific and long-lived artists, Miró produced a body of work that is very rich in its diversity due to its evolution over the years, even though it retains its fundamental unity. Our emphasis in this exhibition and essay is on what we might call the more spiritual aspect of his work, but that does not mean in the least that we have no regard for other aspects of his work which, particularly in the 1920s and 30s, opened up many new avenues for art through works as mysterious

in their semantic implications as they are surprising in their forms. His passion for experimenting—a passion he never lost—led him at that time to work with various materials such as copper, Masonite and sandpaper and to undertake bold collages and constructions using bits of wood and *objets trouvés*. He also invented seemingly endless pictorial spaces in which form and substance are interconnected without any assumptions regarding hierarchy. It is widely acknowledged that American artists of the 1950s, among them Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko, as well as Antoni Tàpies in Spain, were all influenced to a considerable degree by Miró's work. This fact alone makes him one of the indisputable referents in Western art in the 20th century.

But let us review Miró's continuing interest in nocturnal themes. We shall begin by saying that he admired Modest Urgell (1893-1919), one of his teachers. There is a well-known anecdote that records that Miró liked to look at a large twilight landscape by Urgell, *Paisatge* (1893-1919), which was usually displayed at the Hotel Majestic in Barcelona. Urgell, a great admirer of the Swiss Symbolist Arnold Böcklin, was a painter who believed that painting should be the expression of the soul of its creator. He painted numerous desolate, mysterious and melancholic landscapes in sombre colours, among them the *Paisatge* that so pleased Miró, who confessed that his obsession with the horizontal line came from Urgell, as did his taste for empty landscapes and spaces and his constant representation of red circles, moons and stars. In Miró's early detailed landscapes, painted in the 1910s, there are, however, no shadows but an essential clarity that points to the *Cantic of Brother Sun* by Francis of Assisi, quoted by Miró in a letter, thereby providing evidence that he was familiar with it.⁴ This luminous and solar spiritual aspect seems to us to be equally relevant here because of the visionary component it also contains.

It was after Miró settled in Paris in the 1920s—where he soon came to know many of the leading figures of the avant-garde movements of the time, among them numerous poets such as Reverdy, Tzara, Max Jacob, Breton, Éluard and Aragon—that his work changed radically. Three paintings, *The Ploughed Field*, *Catalan Landscape (The Hunter)* and *Pastoral*, all dating from 1923-24, represent what Jaques Dupin terms “mutation”.⁵ Miró's images move away from their earlier painstakingly detailed realism to a new signic language that tends towards abstraction and indicates an internalisation of the visible. It is as if the painter were possessed by the landscape or by reality. André Breton, soon to become the leader of the Surrealist movement, the manifesto for which was drawn up in 1924, and who had worked in psychiatric hospitals and had studied the work of Sigmund Freud, stated in reference to painting that the model that used the exterior world was no longer useful and that a new painting was about to appear and that, whatever this new painting was like, it would emerge from inner experience. In 1925-27, we should remember, Miró was to create his extraordinary oneiric paintings in keeping, once again, with the apt term established by Dupin.⁶

Miró was a taciturn and pessimistic man and probably a depressive. In the 1930s, he suffered a profound crisis, one that was both personal and a reflection of the terrible political situation then prevailing in Spain and Europe. He felt anxious and rootless, as he put it in his correspondence of the time.⁷

The MoMA in New York recently put together an excellent exhibition concerning this period⁸ that closed with a singular and strange painting, *Still Life with an Old Shoe* (1937), which is representational yet which defies classification as realist. Ostensibly, it is to do with violence and hunger during the Spanish Civil War. In the painting, we see an old shoe next to a bottle of gin wrapped in paper and a lace, an apple stabbed by a fork and a heel of bread, all in a dark space in which black predominates, forming a kind of surreal landscape. Strange acid colours appear here and there, giving the whole an appearance that we might describe as reverberant and psychedelic. It is a hallucinatory painting that was followed the year after by some remarkable self-portraits.

Self-Portrait I (1937-38) is very detailed in the drawing but seems unfinished, as if it lacked colour. The artist's eyes, turned into large flaming stars, are the most striking feature of the work. These forms are repeated in various parts of the painting around the artist's head, as if they were floating. Various colours, hinted at rather than painted, above all around the artist's head, create a kind of luminous halo that surrounds him. The painter is not burning but is the source or is himself the flames that cause, or are, his vision. This work was followed by the very different *Self-Portrait II* (1938). Were it not for the title, we would be unsure as to its meaning: its background is black, but populated by forms in bright red, yellow and blue are very deep colours. Thanks to the earlier painting, we recognise the two large red circles surrounded by yellow flames as the painter's eyes, the only remaining vestige of his body. The eyes stand out against a completely black background containing silhouettes of stars, fish, something that might perhaps be a winged insect in the form of a half moon, and other abstract motifs of curving and organic lines. The artist is here portraying himself in the very act of looking. He identifies with what he is painting and what he sees, a nocturnal space full of floating lights. The light of the night, perhaps, at that moment of blessedness described by Citati. The Sufis, those Muslim mystics, also spoke of a black light as the supreme moment of spiritual bliss. Dupin, Rowell and many other commentators after them have drawn on the artist's testimony and have spoken of the importance for Miró of reading the writings of Spain's two great mystic poets, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa de Ávila.

We are not, however, thinking of Catholic or even Christian religious beliefs here. A few years ago, Javier Álvarez Rodríguez, a professor from the Universidad de Salamanca, published a fascinating book on the experience of extraordinary psychic phenomena as an evolved form of knowledge of reality. He termed this *hyperia* and demonstrated that it is a frequent condition among mystics, artists and the mentally ill that manifests itself in sudden fits of tears of joy or a feeling of ineffable nostalgia, which burst into the consciousness in an unexpected and passive way. Those who experience these states of bliss occasionally pursue them deliberately later on, employing a range of approaches in their quest, among them meditation, music, certain types of light or even drug-taking.⁹ We might also recall that in 1993, the centenary of Miró's death, a symposium was held in Barcelona that resulted in a book¹⁰ that debated the connections between certain mental disorders, spiritual experience and artistic practice. Miró did not reflect on these issues in writing, but he did talk about his states of mind and also about remaining still for a while,

fasting and contemplating a wall to bring on hallucinations or visions.¹¹ His later images, rather than a rational exercise, are more to do with the collective unconscious that Jung talked of.

It was Michel Leiris who described in a particularly powerful way those spiritual aspects of Miró's work in this long quotation mentioned by Dupin and which warrants inclusion here almost in its entirety:

It seems that [...] before writing, painting, sculpting or composing anything worthwhile, one must become accustomed to an exercise like that practised by certain Tibetan ascetics to arrive at what they call more or less [...] the understanding of emptiness. This technique—one of the most astounding ever invented by man in the realm of the alchemy of the spirit—consists approximately of the following: staring at a garden, for example, and examining all its details, studying them down to their very smallest particulars, till one has such a precise and intense recollection of it that one can continue to see it, with equal clarity, with one's eyes closed. Having acquired perfect possession of the image, one then subjects it to a strange process that consists of gradually removing from the garden, one by one, all the elements it comprises without the image thereby losing any of its force or no longer amazing us, however weakly. Leaf by leaf, we mentally strip the trees bare; stone by stone we denude the land. Here we remove a wall, there a stream, further off a living creature, over there a barrier covered with flowers. Soon there is nothing left but the sky purified of its clouds, the air without its rain, the ground reduced to arable land and a few scrawny trees, their trunks standing upright, their branches dry. We also remove these last plants, when their time comes, so that all that remains is the sky and the earth. Then one must make the sky and the earth disappear as well; first the sky, leaving the earth to a terrible soliloquy, which will have to disappear again, leaving absolutely nothing, the last absence that will enable the spirit to really see and contemplate emptiness. Only then can we begin to reconstruct the garden piece by piece, following the same path in reverse. Then we repeat the successive series of constructions and deconstructions till the moment comes when, thanks to this sequence of operations carried out at an ever quicker pace, we acquire a full understanding of true emptiness, an understanding of the moral and metaphysical void that is not perhaps what we might have come to believe, the negative notion of nothingness, but the positive understanding of this term, simultaneously identical and contrary to nothingness, that which we designate with that name as cold as a marble plinth and as hard as the clapper of a bell: the absolute, more difficult to grasp than a bronze arteriole in the interstices of an imaginary stone. Among the contemporary painters who have taken this type of attempt furthest, once must include [...] the Catalan Joan Miró.¹²

Dupin suggests that *Painting* (1925), a small-format, blue monochrome painting, may perhaps refer to this idea of emptiness suffused with meaning. Another work, entitled *Photo. This is the colour of my dreams* (1925), is a white painting

in which the words of the title are written, “el azul es el color de mis sueños” (blue is the colour of my dreams), together with a blue blot of paint. As I ponder on these questions, I am reminded of the poetry by the Cuban José Lezama Lima, who wrote a poem entitled *El pabellón del vacío* that deals with the same subject.¹³ In the poem—which is inspired by Japanese *tokonomas*, those alcoves in traditional homes where an artwork and a distinctive flower arrangement are placed according to the season or the day of the year—the poet describes scratching a wall with a nail and then losing himself in that minute scratch into which he inserts himself, but also, later on, the sky in all its vastness. It seems to me that that is what the Miró of the *Constellations* was doing with his brush. Lezama Lima also wrote a brief and extremely beautiful essay, *Confluencias*, one of his most admired works, in which he describes himself as a poet like someone waiting on whom night falls completely as he waits. The night is, for the poet, and here I quote myself:

as immense as the sea and full of voices. It fills him with terror and mysteriously turns into a mirror. That night is also an outstretched hand, a symbol of the Other who offers himself, and which one can take hold of after a deliberate effort. The night, the sea and the hand thus become breathing, concentration, the organic flow of images and the rhythm of incessant words.¹⁴

After the self-portraits came the famous series of ecstatic and distilled images, another of the pinnacles of Miró's career, consisting of astral bodies, numbers, people and birds floating in a space reverberating with light. We are talking about that organic flow of images of the *Constellations*. As the artist himself said, this series of gouaches on paper was inspired by the sight of starry night skies and their reflection in water. A lot has been written about these works and they have even been seen as responses to the war, though it seems to me they are clearly connected with those spiritual experiences we have been speaking of. One of these works is entitled *The ladder of escape*, as is a small painting from 1939. We should remember that the ladder is a common mystical symbol and one which, according to the Rumanian historian of religions Mircea Eliade, signifies the wish to ascend to a higher plane of reality. It is a frequent motif in Miró's work and appears in *Dog Barking at the Moon* (1926), mentioned earlier, and in other works such as *Harlequin's Carnival* (1924-25) and *Landscape with Rooster* (1927). The *Constellations* were begun in Varengeville-sur-Mer, a small village on the Normandy coast that Miró and his family began to visit in 1938. His host there was a friend of his, the architect Paul Nelson, who commissioned him to produce a mural for his house. This village proved important to the history of avant-garde art: major works were written there by Louis Aragon (*Traité du style*) and André Breton (*Nadja*), and Georges Braque had a house there. The damp green landscape, with its constant rain, bears no relation to the luminous, arid landscapes we normally associate with the painter. In Varengeville, to quote Dupin again, Miró was struck by “the heavy flight of the crows over the vast flatlands with distant horizons”,¹⁵ perhaps explaining why these black birds are such a persistent presence in the closing stage of his artistic career.

In August 1939, just before the Second World War broke out, Miró moved into a typical, small Normandy house in

Varengeville and gave himself up, according to Dupin, to “silent, active meditation similar to spiritual exercises, through which he attempted to escape from himself by dint of penetrating ever deeper into inner reality.”¹⁶ Miró himself declared to James Johnson Sweeney, in another very famous remark, “the night, music and the stars began to play a major role in suggesting my paintings.”¹⁷ The result, after nine paintings on hessian done in 1939, in which he invented the language that would eventually culminate with the gouaches, was a collection of images with synthetic script against an almost liquid space of tremendous mobility and organic rhythms. In these works, we can identify images of stars, birds and human figures that seem to surge up in an absolutely effortless flow, as we discussed, once they have attained the necessary concentration. The first constellation is dated 21 January 1940 and the last 12 September 1941. During this period spanning almost two years, the Nazis invaded Paris and Miró and his family arrived in the French capital. From there, with some difficulties along both stretches of the journey, they reached Mallorca, passing through Vic and Barcelona on the way. Amidst all these events, Miró continued to pursue his project with astonishing concentration.

Later, the 1940s and 50s were to be years of plenitude for Miró: he had attained complete mastery of his skills and with them had achieved enormous international recognition, as demonstrated by exhibitions in the most important international museums in New York, Tokyo, London and Paris. In addition, in the 1950s the architect Josep Lluís Sert designed a vast studio for him, just as he had always wanted, in Cala Major, which would now enable him to produce large-format works. In some of these sizeable pieces, Miró once again explores the idea of emptiness mentioned earlier, especially in his large triptychs such *Blue I, II and III* (1961) and *Painting on White Background for the Cell of a Recluse I, II and III* (1968). The triptychs seem to constitute spaces for meditation, while the second title suggests monastic cells that invite us to make our way into our inner world, like Rothko's paintings of the 50s. It is known that Miró liked to hang his large triptychs on three walls of almost square spaces so that the spectator was almost literally inside the pictorial space as he viewed them. These spaces, like some of the exhibition rooms at the Joan Miró Foundation in Barcelona, are not very large, and seem to invite the spectator to experience the works in solitude. Once again, we see that for Miró painting was a gateway to a higher reality.

In the 1960s and 70s, however, Miró also painted violently gestural works, some of them large in size, such as *Characters, Birds in the Night* (1973) and *Hands Flying towards the Constellations* (1974), as well as his burnt canvases and paintings lacerated with knives. These works have been interpreted politically and Miró did indeed give some of them unequivocal titles such as *May of 68* (1968) or the triptych *The Hope of a Condemned Man I, II and III* (1974), painted in response to the death sentence passed on the anarchist Puig Antich during the time of the Franco regime. Some of the forms in these paintings are the result of quick gestures, such as the act of throwing a bucket of paint at them, or are vaguely reminiscent of street graffiti, a common method employed for conveying political slogans at that time, though perhaps we would never have interpreted them in that way had it not been for the titles. Of course, we all remember Miró's contribution

to the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic in Paris during the Civil War (1937), in which Picasso's *Guernica* was shown alongside a work by Miró, *The Catalan Reaper* (1937), a large expressionist figure holding a sickle. This piece, the whereabouts of which are unknown, was not the only demonstration of Miró's support for the republican government.

In the 1960s, Miró participated in a project entitled “Miró, the other one” (1969), organised by Pere Portabella at the offices of the Professional Association of Architects in Barcelona. For this, the artist produced an ephemeral painting that stretched for 40 metres across the windows of the ground floor of the building. At the end of the exhibition, Miró destroyed the work while the filmmaker who had organised the event filmed him doing it. The show was planned as a replica of the artist's retrospective at the Antic Hospital de la Santa Creu, being held at the same time and which some regarded as a manipulation of Miró's work by the Franco regime. Looking back with hindsight, the impression is that Portabella was also manipulating Miró—who was a very generous man, as well as an international celebrity—but from another point of view and with the artist's consent. In any event, Barcelona finally acknowledged Miró as one of its most eminent sons by designing, with Josep Lluís Sert, the premises of the foundation that carries the artist's name on Montjuïc, which opened its doors to the public in 1975 during his lifetime.

In his later years, and we will now mention works featured in this exhibition, Miró also produced a group of paintings on paintings that he had found in street markets, such as *Horses Startled by a Bird* (1976), which demonstrate his constant interest in developing new ideas, as well as the burnt canvases mentioned earlier. In addition, he continued to paint on unconventional supports such as plastic, as in *Characters* (1976), zinc, as seen in *Woman, Bird* (1970), and sheets of fabric used for agricultural purposes such as collecting almonds, found in *Painting* (1962) and *Animated Landscape* (1973), along with sheets of card, bits of wood and Masonite. The last two works mentioned are vertical in format and are not held taut by a stretcher. There is something about them that calls flags and Oriental painting to mind, particularly the more recent *Animated Landscape*, in which the forms drawn in black lines suggest ideograms. Miró visited Japan on a number of occasions in the 1970s and had painted ‘painting-poems’, and must have been interested in calligraphy and the tradition of Japanese calligraphy paintings. Moreover, during his last years of artistic activity, Miró painted small paintings like those shown here. In many of them, as noted earlier, the colour black predominates, with all its nocturnal connotations, and forms appear, mainly of women, heads, human figures and birds.

Miró's last body of work has not received the attention from critics that it deserves.¹⁸ The dictates of formalist criticism remain important, so much so that the idea of newness takes priority over all other aspects, above all in discussions of the oeuvre of modern artists. In addition, Miró continued to work at a time in which conceptual art held sway and painting itself and sculpting in bronze began to lose the standing they had once had. Dupin ventured to say, “Miró did not revolutionise his language, he took it further and stripped it bare.”¹⁹ Perhaps the most attractive elements of Miró's final work are the evident urgency with which he produced it and the stubbornness that succeeds in countering what some have seen as repetitive.

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."²⁰ 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.

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.