

ENGLISH TEXTS

PRESENTATION

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Joan Miró was widely recognised during his own lifetime and, with the passing of the years, his influence and standing have grown enormously, as is the case with truly great artists.

The exhibition that we are now pleased and proud to present consists of some 40 works—paintings, sculptures and a tapestry from private collections, some of them never shown in public before—produced by Miró during the 1960s and 70s, giving us insights into one of the most fertile yet least studied periods of the artist's career. In addition, it reveals to us the artist's "personal cosmos" that Eugeni d'Ors referred to.

Miró used a wide range of supports and techniques over the course of his life, among them canvas, Masonite, paper, cardboard, plastic and wood, as well as oils, enamels, Indian ink, watercolour, gouache, wax, pencil, charcoal, etc. He developed an interest in discarded materials and objects of humble origin. With his characteristic modesty, he said of himself, "I work like a gardener". Everything he touched turned into pure poetry in the garden he cultivated, in which flowers still blossom and will continue to do so hereafter.

This immense variety of techniques and supports is represented in this body of work that reveals to us this genius in all his splendour and which enables us to grasp that spirit of innovation and transgression that has made him an icon not just of the 20th century but of the entire history of art.

Joan Miró. The Light of the Night. Works from the 1960s and 70s will be shown firstly at the Ibiza Museum of Contemporary Art, then at El Roser in Ciutadella de Menorca—the presence of Miró's work for the first time on both islands makes this a particularly special exhibition—and finally at the Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró a Mallorca, the foundation which he generously donated to us.

The essays in the catalogue, written by Joan Punyet Miró, Enrique Juncosa, Colm Tóibín and José María Pardo, will prove essential reading for those who wish to learn more about Miró's universe, guided by the insightful reflections of those who know better than most the codes that structured his work.

I would like to pass on my thanks to the exhibition curator, Enrique Juncosa, to everyone who has worked with dedication and enthusiasm to make this show a reality, and to our sponsors and patrons, mainly the "la Caixa" Foundation, for their invaluable support. I would like to express my particular gratitude to the artist's heirs: seeing a project of this nature through to fruition would have been unthinkable without their personal and passionate involvement.

MIRÓ AND PARRA: TRANSGRESSION AS A SYSTEM

Joan Punyet Miró

The conduit of Feeling is invisible and the shattering speed of thought mind-boggling. Shivers run down one's spine as in an air-tight cushion. There are instances in life in which the energy of a doubtless spirit settles in our bosom with a terrible sensation of despair. Reason, however, struggles fiercely to keep our focus fixed on awareness, fettering our senses to the simple vision of all that which surrounds us. Appearance is of no use; it is vacuous and devoid of meaning.

And this is especially true of Joan Miró and Nicanor Parra. Although the two never met, and their age and circumstantial differences might lead one to believe they had little in common, on closer scrutiny it would seem otherwise. Parra, who coined the term antipoetry and whose verses are marked by acerbic turns of humor and irony, where clichés can take on higher meaning; and Miró, who could infuse life into an *objet trouvé* or make the galaxies human scale. "Anti-Miró" and "anti-Parra" are behind their sculpted silences, unleashing during the sleep of reason a semantic flow of ripples that made them ill at ease with their outer selves. Delving deep, struggling against consciousness and refusing to settle in a safe, comfort zone, they instead strive for the pith of "anti-dictation". But the "Dark Passenger" lurks in the shadows... Both have seen their alter ego as a reflection behind the glass... And, at a moment's notice, the grotesque figures of Franco and Pinochet raise their ugly heads, and all the silent voices that recall the need to transcend Pablo Picasso, Vicente Huidobro, Pablo Neruda or Salvador Dalí are busy annulling the past.

Miró's contact with Chilean intellectuals was established early on. He met Huidobro¹ in Paris in 1930. In fact, there is a letter the Chilean poet wrote to Miró in Paris, while the latter was residing at 3 rue François Mouthon:

"Dear Friend, I look forward to seeing you both next Thursday, unless you are busy, to join us for a cup of tea with some friends at home at 5:30. My greetings to Madame and best wishes. V. Huidobro"²

And yet Miró never made an engraving for any of the former's poems, as he would years later for Pablo Neruda when he created two original etchings and aquatint for his poem *El Sobreviviente visita los pájaros* (The Survivor Visits the Birds). There is also a letter sent to him in 1932 by Eduardo Lira, who was Chilean by birth but Venezuelan by adoption, and who became a leading figure in the musical and artistic scene of his adopted country. In it he claims he learned of Miró's existence through an article written by Huidobro. He goes on to say:

"Vicente spoke to us about you and your art has had a deep influence on the Chilean youth [...] unfortunately, here in Chile there is nothing. [...] Our isolation is so great that we need to be in touch with the European artistic movements, and our wish is to correspond with you..."³

Lira writes to Miró again in 1933, thanking him for his letter:

"Your gentle words on Huidobro filled me with happiness. Maybe we the young are the only ones whose spirit has been bathed in a new light in this infested country..."⁴

Unfortunately, it would take years for Chile to be “bathed” in this “new light”. Great strides were made with the creation of the International Museum, which was officially inaugurated by Salvador Allende on May 17, 1972 to buttress his government of Popular Unity. This initiative was spearheaded by the Spanish art critic José María Moreno Galván, and between 1971 and 1973 the Museum received 450 works of art. However, Pinochet’s coup d’état on the 11th of September 1973 put an end to this breath of fresh air and influx of modernity reaching Chile’s shores, and the works were stored away in the basement of Santiago’s Museum of Contemporary Art. In a show of solidarity with Chile’s gagged democracy, Resistance Museums (itinerary in nature) were created abroad and funded from donations. It was not until September 1991, under the aegis of the Salvador Allende Foundation, that the National Museum of Fine Arts threw its doors open to the general public, incorporating the extensive collections composed of some 1500 pieces of its far-flung Resistance Museums. It is worth noting that the first exhibit organized by the *Museo Internacional de la Resistencia Salvador Allende* took place in the city of Barcelona in 1977, at the Joan Miró Foundation (IL. 1). It is interesting to observe how Miró highlights with great vehemence the name of Salvador Allende on his agenda with blue and red ink (IL. 2). The exhibition travelled to Madrid, Zaragoza (IL. 3) and to other cities throughout Spain, and on the text that accompanied the brochure, written by José María Moreno Galván, Miró marked in red the following paragraph (IL. 4):

“Now, this collection, or this museum, or whatever it is, finally has a name. It is called *Museo Internacional de la Resistencia Salvador Allende*. This is the second attempt to make it a reality. The reactionaries will think: “our enemies are very stubborn”. And indeed we are. Stubbornness is truth’s sister. This is the second inauguration of the Allende Museum of American resistance. Good luck. If we had to go on a third foray, as our Lord Don Quixote, we would. We wouldn’t be defeated by *Pinochetism*.”⁵

On the 2nd of March 1980, Carmen Waugh, in charge of the *Museo de la Resistencia Salvador Allende* in Madrid, wrote a letter to Miró informing him that a new venue of this Museum would travel to Palma de Mallorca, and she requested a painting from him. Miró underlined, again in red ink, some of the points raised in her letter⁶ (IL. 5 RECTO / IL. 5 VERSO). There is also an interesting advertising of the Museum (IL. 6). On the 20th of May, Miró received another letter confirming receipt of the donation, and in which we also learn that Miró would create the poster announcing the exhibit in Palma de Mallorca (IL. 7-1 / IL. 7-2). In that same letter, which is signed by seven intellectuals, it states:

“For the Museum this donation is most significant, since it is a Museum in exile, as is the fate of many Chileans who fled after the Fascist coup d’état that ended with Salvador Allende’s life.”⁷ (IL. 8)

Miró always classified his correspondence carefully, and when he received an envelope related to the Allende Museum, he wrote “Allende” on it (IL. 9). As the letter of September 3, 1980 by Joan Nadal, Palma de Mallorca’s City Hall Deputy Mayor, attests:

“Two photographs of the painting that you so kindly presented to the Chilean people.”⁸ (IL. 10).

Tête de femme, oiseau, 1976 (IL. 11) could very well be the allegory of freedom weeping over Salvador Allende’s death. On the back of the photo Miró wrote: “40 f. Musée espagnol de la Résistance (sic) Salvador Allende”⁹ (IL. 12) Without a second thought Miró donated another painting *Untitled*, 1972 (IL. 13) to the Chilean people to imbue their spirit with fresh light and hope in their quest toward democracy.

Miró was ninety years old when he passed away on the 25th of December 1983, and Parra it is hoped will turn one hundred on the 5th of September 2014. Having reached such a ripe old age should in itself be a cause for celebration. Tololo Ugarte, Parra’s grandson, who picked up the 2011 Cervantes Prize award for Literature (Spain’s highest literary honor) on behalf of his grandfather, and to whom I spoke regarding this “antitext” confirmed to me that our grandfathers never met, but on learning that he would be included in an article alongside Miró, confessed to his grandson: “I have the greatest admiration for Miró’s work.” Given their spirit of transgression and for turning things on their head, it would seem to me they would have seen eye to eye. Who knows, they might have created some poetic-objects charged with the ironic structure of antipoetry. Since visual language blossoms in the figurative enclosure of the object that enters our spirit through a tiny crack that our subconscious leaves unattended, unleashing a poetical and visual game within ourselves that turns its back to the figurative sense of the word, the Catalan and the Chilean would have swam in the same troubled waters. But still the murderer’s instinct keeps silent... no whispering between the cosmos can redress the past... And even if Miró never set foot in Chile, undoubtedly in spirit he must have travelled there many a time. Having created two paintings as a token of friendship and solidarity shows his concern and devotion toward the Chilean people who, thousands of miles away from his sun-bathed Mediterranean shores, were still thirsting for that new light Eduardo Lira had spoken so prophetically about years earlier. Miró was delivering on that much needed light.

Miró as the antithesis of Franco and Parra of Pinochet. The free spirit of art soaring above retrograde repression and obscurantism. Light versus darkness. The age-old struggle of Good versus Evil. The parallel lines are clearly drawn between these two men, distant in time and space but close combatants in the battle of ideals, using as their only weapon their painted poetry, to again conjure Huidobro. There is an invisible link of crucial periods that provokes a number of chain reactions leading toward a final eruption in our subconscious, as if some force beyond our comprehension could unleash sensations in a most mysterious manner... Very much in the same way that a bridge existed between Neruda and Picasso that created a synergy, a momentum of communion and a fusion of time and space. Distant barking can be penetrating, not so much due to its piercing pitch, but rather from the mysterious silence that ensues. An unspoken camaraderie gravitates throughout these travelled pages of unwritten Chilean and Catalan culture, ensuing from physical emptiness, but destined to bring the “other” to our notice. Walking on the edge of a dream with a language dry, spare and luminous, the essence is revealed to us through its austerity and the continuous renewing of drama. It cannot be fully exposed to the light. The twisted movement of a silent scream rends all the images lying dormant in our spirit, and only darkness might allow for the unexpected to surface. Both these painter-poets sojourn in a mist... seeking

the void, caressing compassion and eschewing philosophical abstractions...

The genius of Parra is his gift to modulate the prosaic and tragic elements by endowing the absurd and shallow language of everyday life with loftiness and verve. Given his uncanny ability to underscore the ineptitudes, failures and foolishness by which we are governed, he throws us into the lackluster life of the everyday man, as is powerfully conveyed in the following poem:¹⁰

Warnings
In case of fire
do not use elevators
use stairways
unless otherwise instructed

No smoking
No littering
No shitting
No radio playing
unless otherwise instructed

Please Flush Toilet
After Each Use
Except When Train
Is Standing At Station
Be Thoughtful
Of The Next Passenger

Onward Christian Soldiers
Workers of the World unite
We have nothing to loose but our life
Glory be to the Father
..... & To the Son

to the Holy Ghost
unless otherwise instructed

By the way
we also hold these truths to be self evident
that all man are created equal
that they have been endowed by their creator
with certain inalienable rights
that among these are Life
Liberty
..... & the pursuit of Happiness

& last but not least
that 2 + 2 makes 4
unless otherwise instructed

In Miro’s creative cosmos there is succession of images that ignite the night, littering the sky with a bluish hue... the hue that runs through our veins as our soul surges whilst reading a Miró antipoem:¹¹

The clapping hands are white doves that beat their wings before the caress of blue velvet
Shells on a white tablecloth to cover the braids of an eighteen-year-old girl who has fainted
Two tall thin society ladies dressed in black with a long canary feather in their hats leave the concert
fish that slips through my hands
the breath of Venus

A bee plays the cello with a harp made from a blade of grass
A yellow butterfly makes his nest in my girlfriend’s neckline as she walks barefoot on the ocean to make poppies grow
Night sky filled with electric stars

1936

At the time Philippe Soupault and André Breton published *Magnetic Fields* in 1919, considered the first book written following the precepts of automatic writing espoused by the Surrealists, Miró was about to embark upon his very first trip to Paris. His quick immersion in this new thought-provoking field where the subconscious takes central stage shattered Miró’s previous concepts into smithereens. It was as if he’d been branded with a hot iron for the rest of his life, unleashing within him a stream of oneiric forces that surface with great strength, transforming running cold waters into gigantic icebergs of creation. Miró held a brush when writing poetry. All his poetry is a transposition of his surreal imagery, frozen dreams caught in a split-second by the blink of an inner eye, blindfolding banality and scrutinizing incongruity; sensuality and parodic possibilities inherent in prosaic language. Miró was there to write or to paint “X”. This is how he defined the ebullition of his primordial volcano. According to Agnès de la Beaumelle,¹² he declares to André Masson that he wishes to “break the guitar” one of the most cherished of all cubist objects. And he will take this concept even further, as witnessed later on, when he sets his eye on that most beautiful of all objects: painting. It is in August of 1924 when he announces to Michel Leiris: “more or less total destruction of all that I left behind last summer and thought I would go back to. Still too real! I am freeing myself of all pictorial conventions (that poison)”.

What he was creating at that time can only be designated with an enigmatic “X”:
“I can’t find the right word; don’t want to say canvas or painting, either”.

And he signs off with a warning of sorts:
“This is hardly painting, but I really don’t give a damn”.

He knew that there was no more to be said, since no word in the dictionary quite defined his creations. He was going through a period of suffering and desolation, alone in Paris after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil war, anxiously waiting for his wife Pilar and only child, Dolores, six years old in 1936, to flee war-torn Spain and meet up with him in the French capital. Miró often claimed that he saw no difference between painting and poetry. In the aforesaid poem we also sense that urge to break free from the hostile bonds that encroach upon us in our daily existence. Longing for his native Catalonia and sensing a terrifying rupture with his roots, he found solace in poetry while despair was closing in upon him, intent on sapping every drop of hope from the very marrow of his bones.

The lines “A bee playing cello” and “Night filled with electric stars” are lyrical transmutations of his dreams. In his oneiric state he sheds himself of his body and all the restrictions and short-comings that our human condition entails, striving for the cathartic revelation that poetry brings about. As Margit Rowell explains:

“In a manner similar to that of his painting, his poetry is written in loose irrational clusters of abrupt, vivid images.”

And some time later, when he thought about making a book of his poetry, Miró himself wrote:

“reproduce paintings with very poetic titles. parallel between poetry and painting like that between music and poetry [painting]. intersperse throughout book etchings, lithographs, etc., and reproductions of several poetic paintings. also reproduce a beautiful page of astronomy. rather than a score of music by Wagner, reproduce a music with notes that follow a rhythm like my paintings. There should be a good reproduction of a painting (in color). Use Japanese brushes and pens of different thicknesses. Print certain pages with printer’s lettering; others should be written in my handwriting with certain magic letters; if they are not legible enough, add small printed type”.¹³

There is, in a sense, the projection of a book as a work of art, with a holistic vision, creating a communion of the senses with the central object as an integral part of the process of immersion in the world of the unknown. His unique and total devotion to sound, vision, touch and, above all, the spirituality that must emanate from every page of his book, denotes Miró’s whimsical approach to art. For him, the recipient and its soul ought to form a whole, a pictorial-poetical ensemble that will bloom in the reader’s mind.

And “Warnings” is Parra’s genius at his best. There is a relentless attack on the solid foundations of the Establishment. Mockery is plainly revealed, discomfiting whilst throwing the reader off-balance and into a trap; the trap of antipoetry. Signs hang in the air, acting as stepping stones that will show us the way... but the right path to follow leads towards the center of the fatal and incongruous heart of the human condition. Parra creates a parody, shattering convention so the reader can spread the wings of perception and intuition. To make use of our innate senses and flee the rules and regulations that serve only to remind us how to act and behave. We are led to believe that life is eternally waiting for us while we wallow away our time reading meaningless warnings. He targets the absurdity of authority, and the frustration it entails. Parra’s antipoetry prods the reader time and again, reminding him of the need to understand the hopelessness and despair felt before utter nonsense. A terrifying nonsense which the Chilean poet felt compelled to pick apart with acerbic directness and chilling bluntness, all while confronting metaphysical problems inherent to human existence. There is a direct defiance of God and Power through mockery, black humor, irony and a malleable disrespectfulness. Needless to say, Parra feels comfortable walking a tight rope with no safety net below. Gazing at the grayish hue of the cold concrete and sipping blood while biting his tongue to grasp the meaning of death or grab it by the horns. This antipoem smacks us on the cheek with a wide-open hand so to bring us out of our stupor and witness the speed with which we’ve been stripped of our freedom. Potential orders written on a wall imprison our soul,

annihilating our spirit, casting us off like Lilliputian insects unable to think for ourselves.

While Miró flies high, Parra breaks bones... While Miró hops from galaxy to galaxy, Parra skips from quote to quote... While Miró drinks, Parra smokes... While Miró dreams, Parra talks... While Miró sings, Parra swims... and in both cases we feel the familiar sensibility of two human beings that have flown the nest to face danger and decipher darkness. Poetry carries them through with difficulty, till they reach a point where their silent music erupts into a single voice with exacerbated individuality. A non-blinding individuality, for their aim is to reinvent from tabula rasa. To vaccinate without syringe... to fly without wings, and to swim without skin... Utopia embraces them with the same intensity with which they dive off the cliff. Or as Ignacio Echevarría, the Spanish editor and literary critic, has said about Parra’s poetry:

“Obsessed with bringing it to the common man, Parra set out from an early age to blow-up the conventional paths in which the poetical experience occurs, using for this purpose all kind of supports: posters, postcards, wood-panels, cardboard trays... Thus, the so-called “Practical works” emerge, which connect with some of the most fertile and contemporary artistic tendencies (from Duchamp’s ready-mades all the way to conceptualism), albeit, always using the poetical use of words as the trigger that provokes the “explosion” of meaning when it is written on different objects”.¹⁴

Or still yet Harold Bloom, the great American scholar and literary critic, who states:

“I firmly believe that, if the most powerful poet produced by the New World until now is still Walt Whitman, Parra joins him as an essential poet in our Twilight Lands.”¹⁵

And what Jacques Dupin writes about Miró during the period from 1928 to 1931, in which he was intent on assassinating Painting is extremely revealing:

“The notion of anti-painting or anti-art had originated and received its most extreme formulation in Dada, whose determining influence on Miró’s development is known. It stems from an ethics of negation and a rejection of all values. It left its imprint on many artists and writers, but it had been incarnated, in most exemplary fashions, in the enigmatic personality of Marcel Duchamp, for whom Miró had the greatest admiration. The idea of anti-painting had, as a matter of fact, haunted Miró for a very long time, but he had never before stated it so explicitly, nor let it influence his work so deliberately and resolutely. To be sure, he had been a member of the surrealist movement which was also a “revolt,” but Surrealism did not keep this idea in its program for very long.”¹⁶

Undoubtedly the reason I was prompted to write this text for this Miró exhibit on Ibiza, Menorca and Mallorca is because I was struck by the innovative spirit that permeates both Miró and Parra’s oeuvre. Their sensibility transcends time and space, and while I’m well aware of the incongruity of publishing such a text in this catalogue, I felt it was worth exploring both their subterranean connection and deep similarities. Miró was a

Catalan deeply rooted to his native soil, just as a seed that sheds its husk and sprouts, penetrating the surrounding earth. And for Miró that seed was freedom and democracy. Pardon me: Freedom and Democracy. I believe that his kindly spirit and whimsical and poetical art evinces a unity, a core that sets him apart on a planet all of his own devise, where he shines not only as an artist, but as a human being and a citizen of the world. And Chile’s distance from Catalonia was never an impediment for him. His devotion and generosity toward the Chilean people was steadfast and real and this, if nothing else, I felt compelled to tell.

Perhaps more than a text, this should be an anti-text, since it is far removed from the origin of this exhibit. If only for this reason I’m grateful that you’ve been kind enough to indulge me. My only aim was to broach some of the traits Miró and Parra share, and highlight the fanciful manner in which they went about peering into hidden, secret worlds. Their hands and spirit have clearly caressed the imaginary as well as the ordinary, turning their backs on objective truths and empiricism— which does not necessarily make their art irrational. Without delving into the science of the particular, they examine the laws that govern exceptions to come in close communion with the traditional universe and wrestle with the rebirth of unexceptional exceptions that flourish in the cathedral of the human soul.

1. A few years later, Miró provided the address of Huidobro in Santiago to his friends J.V. Foix and F. Trabal. See J.M. Minguet, T. Montaner and J. Santanach, *Joan Miró, Epistolari Català 1911-1945*, vol. 1, Barcino/Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, 2009, pp. 514, 595.

2. Successió Miró Archive, Palma de Mallorca.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid. He mentions Gabriela Rivadereina, María Valencia, Waldo Parraguez, Jaime Dvor, Claudio Costa, Volodia Teitelboim, Eduardo Anguita. Regarding them all, Miró writes the following to Christian Zervos on July 19th, 1934: “I think it is a very interesting group, one which could be very devoted.” Fonds Societé Kandinsky, Paris.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid. The signatories are José Ayllón, Carmen Waugh, Martín Chirino, A. Saura, R. Canogar, María Eugenia Zamundia.

8. Ibid.

9. “40 f” stands for the size of the painting.

10. Nicanor Parra, *Poemas para combatir la calvicie*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Santiago, 1993.

11. “Notebook of poems, 1936-39”, in Margit Rowell, *Joan Miró. Select Writings and Interviews*, G. K. Hall & Co., Boston, 1986, pp. 140-141. Originally written in French: «Les mains qui applaudissent sont des colombes blanches qui battent de l’aile devant la caresse du velours bleu / Coquillages sur une nappe blanche pur couvrir les nattes d’une jeune fille de dix-huit ans évanouie / Deux grandes dames minces habillées en noir une longue plume de canari au chapeau sortent du concert / Poisson qui glisse entre mes mains / respiration de Vénus / Une

abeille joue du violoncelle avec la harpe d’un brin d’herbe / Un papillon jaune fait son nid dans le décolleté de mon amie qui marche nu-pieds sur l’océan pour faire pousser des coquelicots / ciel étoilé par des astres à décharges électriques»

12. Agnès de la Beaumelle, “The Challenge of Miró’s “X””, in *Joan Miró: 1917-1934*, exh. cat., Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2004, p. 21.

13. Rowell 1986, pp. 135-136.

14. Ignacio Echevarría, *Obras Públicas. Nicanor Parra*, exh. cat., Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid, 2013, p. 1.

15. Harold Bloom in Nicanor Parra, *Obras completas & algo + (1975-2006)*, vol. II, (Preface), Galaxia Gutenberg, Barcelona, 2011.

16. Jacques Dupin, *Miró*, Flammarion, Paris, 2012, p. 151.