PERSONAE

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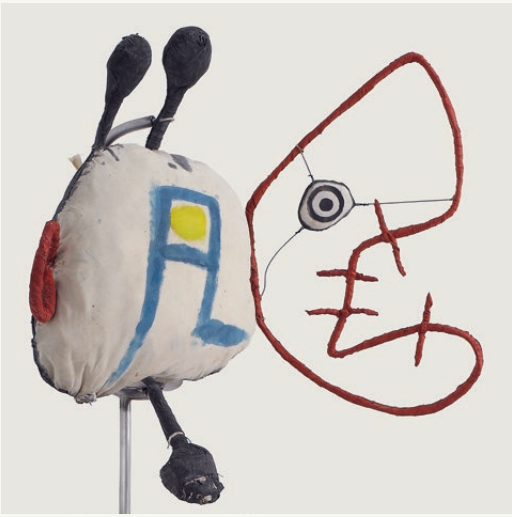


MASKS AGAINST BARBARISM

COLLECTION

Artists: Marina Abramović, Pilar Albarracín, Karel Appel, Mercedes Azpilicueta, Miquel Barceló, Per Barclay, Georg Baselitz, Christian Boltanski, Robert Cahen, Miriam Cahn, Pepe Cañabate, Maria Carbonero, Francesc Català-Roca, Toni Catany, Lluis Claramunt, Carles Congost, Esther Ferrer, Bel Fullana, Ana Gallardo, Alberto García-Alix, Daniel García Andújar, Ferran Garcia Sevilla, Amparo Garrido, Susy Gómez, Núria Güell, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Rebecca Horn, Wifredo Lam, Jana Leo, Robert Mapplethorpe, Nauzet Mayor, Manolo Millares, Joan Miró, Amedeo Modigliani, Jean Marie del Moral, Shirin Neshat, Antón Patiño, Pablo Picasso, Joan Ponç, Charo Pradas, Bernardí Roig, Francisco Ruiz de Infante, Antonio Saura, Gabriel Serra, Josep Maria Sert, Antoni Socias, Antoni Tàpies, Endre Tót, Eulàlia Valldosera, Darío Villalba, Robert Wilson, Wols and Francesca Woodman

Joan Miró, *Le Chien d'Ubu* [The Dog of Ubu], *ca*. 1977 (detail). Paint, fabric and diverse materials, 184 × 80 × 22 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, Govern de les Illes Balears collection long-term loan

PERSONAE: MASKS AGAINST BARBARISM

Imma Prieto

"Regardless of his politics, Franco is a physically disgusting man. There are faces that cannot lie."[1]
—Joan Miró

"Persona originally means mask and it is through the mask that the individual acquires a role and a social identity."[2]
—Giorgio Agamben

"Personae: Masks Against Barbarism" is an examination and analysis of the Collection, stemming from one of the branches of research that defines its identity: to think of the human body as a reflection of the socio-political situations that come to pass during each era.

Aware of the complexity of creating a conceptual framework that encompasses an entire collection, this exhibition is presented as an attempt to address the issue of the meaning that a collection can take on in society. Accepting, on the one hand, the distance in relation to the time in which

1. Statements by Joan Miró published in Georges Raillard's book *El color dels meus somnis* [The Colour of My Dreams]. Palma de Mallorca: Lleonard Muntaner Editor, 2021. Pere A. Serra, in the text "Ubu Roi: Miró's fight against Franco", recovers these statements and adds: "Joan Miró already felt attracted to Alfred Jarry's world of Ubu in the 1920s . . . Joan Miró saw, in the dictator, the incarnation of darkness, the iron fist of darkest Spain, the sinister force that sowed salt in the fields where freedom was meant to grow." www.cylcultural.org/expos/joan_miro.
2. Agamben, Giorgio. *Desnudez.* Barcelona*:* Anagrama, 2011, p. 63 [*Nudities.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010].

a work was created, and, on the other, understanding that the building up of a collection depends on multiple criteria and interests that progressively change over the years.

Taking one of the key pieces of the museum—Miró's series of puppets and drawings inspired by Alfred Jarry's text *Ubu Roi*—as a starting point, the exhibition formulates how, since antiquity, human beings have had the need to create an alter ego, another self, a disguise or a mask, in order to express themselves in contexts and situations that require the embodiment of other identities. Focusing on ritualistic or shamanic scenarios, classical theatre or, simply, historical contexts in which the political situation censored that which was different brings us closer to a multiplicity of manifestations that present a clear common thread: the representation of the human being as a reflection of the space-time we are part of, that is, which encompasses the vicissitudes of both an intimate *I* and the zeitgeist. From there, it delves into research that brings us closer to the creation of identity, based on an analysis rooted in the relationship that is established between the body, the individual and its image.

It is worth noting how the way we perceive the subject has transformed throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, and how this transformation has given rise to a new imaginary. Approaching the way the human body has been represented over time allows us to ask ourselves who we are and, above all, what makes it impossible for us to be.

The exhibition is structured in three different sections, allowing us to carry out a reading that immerses us in a timeless framework in which it is clear how, since prehistory, human beings have felt the need to represent themselves, to portray themselves; in short, to leave a record of their existence. Either from the simple desire to let others know that a place was inhabited or someone was there, to manifestations that, as we said before, become testimony of a specific socio-political moment.

The first section begins with the collection of materials that make up part of the research that Miró carried out

based on *Ubu Roi* and which eventually concluded with the theatre play *Mori el Merma* [Death to Merma] (premiered at the Teatre Principal in Palma in 1978 in collaboration with Joan Baixas). Its characters do not spare on nepotism and a certain decadence, filtered through high doses of irony. The work generates an atmosphere that exudes a feeling of asphyxiation and invasion. Thus, when we focus our attention, we become aware of their criticism and resistance in the face of injustice and lack of freedom.

Alfred Jarry wrote *Ubu Roi* in 1896, and it premiered at the L'Oeuvre theatre in Paris on 10 December that same year. Following its premiere, it became one of the fundamental texts of the so-called Theatre of the Absurd. The work is ahead of its time, portraying in a visionary way a dictatorial, grotesque and tyrannical individual. Joan Miró was fascinated by the character, which is why in 1966 he began an in-depth study by means of multiple drawings and lithographs that would end up forming three notebooks: *Ubu Roi* [King Ubu] (1966), *Ubu aux Baléares* [Ubu in the Balearic Islands] (1971) and *L'Enfance d'Ubu* [Ubu's Childhood] (1975). Finally, in collaboration with the La Claca theatre group, he materialised in a three-dimensional way the visual world he had created, by means of human-sized puppets. The theatrical piece was premiered in Palma in 1978 under the title *Mori el Merma*, a clear allusion to dictator Francisco Franco.

The room's final piece is the exclusive and previously unpublished collaborative piece that theatre director and playwright Robert Wilson has created based on a re-reading of Alfred Jarry and Joan Miró's *Ubu Roi*. The result is a sound piece titled *UBU SOUNDS THE ALARM*, which accompanies the characters in calling attention to the madness and decadence of contemporary society, while also recovering a mask's ability to be through a gaze and a voice.[3]

3. "The ambiguity of face and mask becomes immediately visible wherever the vivid interaction between gaze and facial expression

The second section focuses on a series of pictorial manifestations, mostly created during and after the second half of the 20th century, which take us deep into the transformation undergone by the representation of the human body. Amputations, fragments and deranged faces create a universe in which to contemplate one's self, allowing us to affirm that the situation human beings have been thrown into generates ill and incomplete beings, aware of the lack of a social contract that ensures every single person's well-being.

Following the First World War (1914–1918), the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the Second World War (1939–1945) the world was plunged into one of the deepest existential crises in history. Multiple creators and thinkers carried out a reflection on the situation in which human beings found themselves: from what position can we face life if all we produce is pain and death? German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno once said: "Writing poetry after Auschwitz is an act of barbarism." Despite the fact that he later recanted after reading the poetry of Paul Celan, a survivor of the concentration camps, the statement points to the reflection human beings had to face in relation to responsibility and ethics.

Many creators carried out various manifestations (literary, visual, musical, etc.) in order to reflect the wounds and cracks society was forced to live with. Scars, mutilated bodies, reduced to almost nothing, marked the way in which human beings saw themselves. Reduce the body to its very minimum, dismember it, disfigure it in order to rid it of any hint of beauty. The resulting material perfectly embodied the idea of horror as the only possible presence, while also revealing how the body becomes the place where the dichotomy between good and evil is fully present.

is disturbed or interrupted. This can happen in two ways, both of which produce a similar effect on us." Hans Belting, *Face and Mask: A Double History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, p. 10.

Finally, we observe various pieces that stem from reflections revolving around the question of identity, created mostly between the 1960s and today. We are brought closer to different processes, times and contexts in which people have struggled against their lack of freedom. Our present is characterised by oppression in its various forms, causing a certain deformation, or self-deformation, when approaching the (faithful) representation of bodies. We witness a sort of visual universe in which, following the acceptance of various critical subjectivities that make up our contemporary societies, the artistic gesture becomes the engine of struggle, thus producing a multiplicity of corporeal incarnations that testify to loss and even to the existential mutilation in which we still find ourselves.

During times in which the weight of morality and dogma become a modus vivendi whose sole purpose is to veto our freedom of expression, the exhibition repositions the focus on the meaning of "person", leading us to a space in which multiple contradictions are revealed that continue to characterise our societies, from those in which human beings are still oppressed by political forces to others, closer to home, where in the name of false freedom our identity is objectified by the dogma of the new capitalist dictatorships.

Heirs to the mutations the body has suffered throughout previous decades, the image that represents us is shown, once again, as a place of conflict and struggle, and is thus revealed as a space of confluence between memory, desire, rights and prohibition.

UBU
SOUNDS THE ALARM

Robert Wilson

Poland.
[a rooster crows.]
Papa Ubu!
Papa Ubu!!
Papa Ubu!!!
[a cow moos.]

~

Yes.
Yes.
Yes, there is someone with his skull cracked open.
What a beautiful spectacle.
[a man catcalls.]
If we made a race.
[a toilet flushes.]
What a good king.
What a good king.
What a good king.
[a gong sounds.]
Listen to them.
One, two, three.
Are you ready?
Yes, Yes.
Go.
Go.
[a car honks.]
They approach.
They!
The first one's losing ground.
[a villain laughs.]
My Lord, I really don't know how to thank Your Majesty.
Don't shoot, Papa Ubu!
Papa Ubu, he's the noblest of rulers.
You're making a mistake.
[a glass breaks.]
You think you're done?

~

What do you think he's going to do to me?
[a whip cracks.]
That fourteen year old monkey?
Pay attention to what I tell you.
[a dog barks.]
More money to hand out? You will be with me in the pot.
[a toilet flushes.]
I am going to cut you into little pieces!
[a villain laughs.]
The leaves fall…the leaves fall in the teasing of the wind.
[a missile crashes.]
How fast the printer prints.
The nobles are brutally shout—ing.
[a goat blares.]
What's your income?
What's your income?
You are going to answer.
Answer!
Very well.
Nothing,
nothing,
nothing.
Alright, throw the nobles down the hole.
[a woman exclaims.]
[a villain laughs]

~

I'm becoming richer.
[a whistle falls.]
[a gong sounds.]
The magistrates will no longer be paid!
[a baby cries.]
He struggles in pain.
[a chicken bocks.]
I want to keep half of the taxes.
It's absurd!
It's absurd!!
[an elephant trumpets.]
Did you hear the big news?
THE KING IS DEAD.
THE KING IS DEAD.
[a bell rings.]
Great god, what will become of us?

[a bell dings.]
There is a knocking at the door.
Listen.
[a bell dings.]
Listen. Is that someone knocking at the door?
[a whip cracks.]
Pay.
We have paid.
Have mercy on us.
[a sheep baaas.]
Very good, very good indeed, Mr. Ubu.
(what a silly man…)
[a horn honks.]
Ah, he's gone. But he left this letter.
[a villain laughs.]
I believe I am losing my mind.
Precisely—thought.
I am afraid!
I'm afraid!!
There is only one way out.
Which is what, my Lord?
[a whistle rises.]
War!
[a gong sounds.]
LONG LIVE POLAND. LONG LIVE PAPA UBU!
Papa Ubu!
I am going to get up on my horse.
He's obsessed with that horse.
Farewell, Papa Ubu.
[a horn honks.]
What a delight it will be to see gentle France once more.
They say it's a very beautiful country.
So beautiful.
[a rooster crows.]
It doesn't compare with Poland.

End!

Transcription of the sound piece *UBU SOUNDS THE ALARM*, created by Robert Wilson expressly for the exhibition. Text edited by Eli Troen.

Pablo Picasso, *Tête d'Homme (Mousquetaire)* [Man's Head (Musketeer)], 1972. Gouache, pencil and colour pencils on cardboard, 28,7 × 21,2 cm. Private Collection

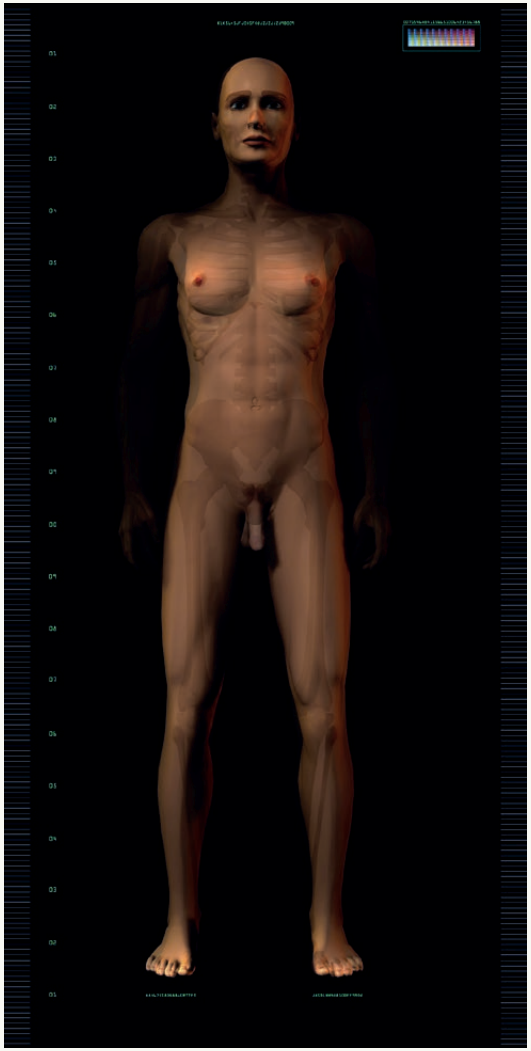
Antonio Saura, *Doña Jerónima de la Fuente*, 1972. Mixed media on paper, 100 × 70 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, donation of Fundació d'Art Serra

Maria Carbonero, *Untitled*, 1989. Oil on canvas, 92 × 73 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, Serra Collection long-term loan

Esther Ferrer, *Elle était là* [She Was there], 1994. Intervened black and white photograph with black marker on paper, 91 × 72 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma

Shirin Neshat, «Fervor» Series (Couple at Intersection), 2000. Gelatine silver print, 119,5 × 152,5 cm each. Edition: 5/5. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, private collection long-term loan

Daniel García Andújar, *The Body Research Machine,* 1997. Internet Project (web link/files), light box with Duratrans print with measures 200 × 100 cm, two posters (digital print on Hahnemühle paper with measures 70 × 50 cm each), dimensions variables. Edition: 1/3 + 2 A.P. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma



Bel Fullana, *Pinocha,* 2017. Oil, acrylic and spray on canvas, 290 × 190 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma

Miriam Cahn, *Schauen, 07.03.2018* [To Look, 07.03.2018], 2018. Oli on canvas, 160 × 180 cm. Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma, private collection long-term loan

MERDRE!

José A. Sánchez

> El teatre es fa i no en queda res… això no importa, però cal que hagi deixat les seves llavors a la terra.[1]
> —Joan Miró

Alfred Jarry hoped the premiere of *Ubu Roi* (1896) would provoke reactions as extreme as those that gave rise to the battle of *Hernani* (Victor Hugo, 1830).[2] But, unlike the latter, the young Breton did not seek the victory of a new style or of a developed aesthetic or political programme; his gesture can be understood as the artistic translation of a verbal and plastic slap in the face to whom he despised as "la foule". "La foule", the crowd, refers to those who attend the theatre, the general public, regardless of their social class, educational level or political convictions, and also includes many so-called artists, writers or intellectuals who are unable to access "true art".[3] As the crowd cannot understand art, the only mode of relating to them is through provocation, putting the public in front of the mirror of their grotesque representation so that at least they get frightened by their own monstrosity, and react.

There is no way of knowing if "the battle of Ubu" was as fierce or enthusiastic as Jarry wanted it to be and as his friends made an effort to narrate, but the truth is that, with the support of Lugné Poe, Claude Terrasse, Fermin Gémier, Pierre Bonnard and others, they managed to create a myth, the myth of a scandal to which, since then, many

1. "Theatre takes place and nothing remains… that does not matter, but it must leave its seeds in the ground." Joan Miró, quoted by Joan Baixas, "Nedar contra corrent fa bíceps", in *Joan Miró i el món d'Ubú. Ubu aux Baléares*, Es Baluard, Mallorca, 2006, p. 20.
2. Georges Rémond, "La bataille d'Ubu Roi", in Alfred Jarry, *Ubu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), p. 433–437.
3. Alfred Jarry, "Questions du théâtre", in id., p. 346.

stories about the theatrical avant-garde make reference to, but also about contemporary art and literature. Perhaps the commotion did not begin with the first word, as the most faithful assure, and that, as Gémier recalls, the audience only lost patience when in scene 3 of Act III they saw the door of the prison represented by an actor with open arms and father Ubu, who he interpreted himself, turning his hand as if it were a key over the actor's hand that acted as a door, while mimicking the sound of the "click clack" of the key in the lock.[4] However, it seems far-fetched to accept that this anger at the supposed ridiculousness of the staging was enough to cause an altercation, which was more likely caused by the real discomfort produced by the main character in the sense that, as Jarry maintains, in him we recognise everything we hate about ourselves as members of a society dominated by stupidity and a general lack of sensitivity.

Ubu is an *idiot*, that is to say, *unique*,[5] a possible being, an insignificant real, incapable of conceiving any other purpose to existence than to make everything become the same, annihilating or eating that which is different from his own self. Ubu's world is summed up in the process of ingesting and defecating, appropriation and ruin; for this reason, his identity is that of a huge belly decorated with an infinite spiral, from which a disgusting appendage protrudes, crowned by a bowler hat that also excretes words. Ubu's world is absurd, because it is made up of the mere succession of what's real, and because the character's brutality is incompatible with any form of distinction, on which the very existence of language and art depends, but also affective relationships and ethics. Insensitive to differences,

4. Fermin Gémier, *Excelsior* (4 November 1921), quoted in Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 234–235.
5. Clément Rosset, *Lo real. Tratado de la idiotez* (Valencia: Pre-textos, 2004), p. 61.

much less nuances, Ubu does not like contemplating things in the slightest—his relationship with the outside world and with others is dominated by two basic impulses: to protect himself or devour. For Ubu, everything is eatable: bodies, riches, honours, laws, even dreams.

Eccentric in his public appearances and elitist in his statements, Jarry identified with that character, who in a certain way is his opposite. In fact, the writer became a part of the Symbolist literary scene, led by Stéphane Mallarmé, from a very young age thanks to his friendship with Marcel Schwob and the protection of Rachilde (publisher, along with her husband Alfred Valette, of the *Mercure de France*), and interacted with many painters of the moment, to some of whom he dedicated his texts: Paul Gauguin, Maurice Denis, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Serusier and Édouard Vuillard, as well as his friend and collaborator Pierre Bonnard. In contrast to Ubu's crudeness, Jarry's literary production is of an exquisiteness that borders on the hermetic, and his fascination with painting led him not only to the production of numerous illustrated editions of his own texts, but also to the practice of a form of writing which, like Mallarmé's, transformed into a drawing or artistic composition on the printed page. Nevertheless, this brilliant writer cycled around Paris sporting a mane and moustache that might well have belonged to one of his characters, while always carrying a pistol to protect himself from mediocre writers and artists (until Apollinaire took it from him in 1905 after shooting sculptor Manolo at Maurice Raynal's house). Jarry came to sign letters and articles with Ubu's name, speak like him in public, or even make a show of himself in the literary salons he frequented—"Wasn't it as beautiful as literature itself?" Jarry asked Apollinaire while he escorted him out of Raynal's house following his performance.[6]

6. Guillaume Apollinaire, "Les contemporains pittoresques: Feu Alfred Jarry" (1909), in *Œuvres en prose complètes*, vol II (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 1041.

The young aesthete's identification with the brutal Ubu or with the pataphysical Faustrol can only be understood as a conscious exercise in masking, and manifests, in any case, the will to expand literature and art to social life through a theatre of the everyday, putting one's own body and existence at stake. "Living is the carnival of Being,"[7] he wrote, and in his artistic practice, in effect, carnivalesque masking exceeds the autonomous time of representation to make playing with identity an instrument of permanent subversion.

Being possible to derive from *Ubu* a critical discourse against cruelty, stinginess, the absence of empathy, arbitrary power and excessive greed as character elements that anticipated the fascisms of the past century as well as the uncontrolled *dérives* of current capitalism,[8] the centrality of play and humour bring fun and joy to the fore. Play in art makes and produces while simultaneously undoing and destroying, it entertains us while simultaneously allowing us to express, understand, enunciate or elaborate what matters to us. In producing the representation of tyranny and brutality, theatre embodies it while also dissolving it; in making accumulation or torture visible in so much as laughable, art contributes to discrediting, denouncing and combating them without its ethical or political position diminishing the enjoyment provided by play itself, or rather, it is the joy of play that produces the greatest challenge against the supposed seriousness of an oppressive and unjust order. The subversive and liberating

7. Alfred Jarry, "Être et Vivre", in *Œuvres complètes I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 342–343.

8. "He is the powerful, the dictator, the rich, who knows nothing but to resort to insolence and force, who has no other weapon to exercise control with than cruelty, a useless substitute for intelligence. He is the man who finds himself surrounded by the adulation of others, in fiction, yet who gains nothing but the spectator's contempt." Catalogue by Alexandre Cirici, *Mori el merma. Espectacle de la companyia teatral Claca amb ninots i màscares pintats per Joan Miró* (Barcelona: Obra Cultural de la Caixa de Pensions per a la Vellesa i d'Estalvis, 1978), p. 21.

power of the ludic was one of the cores of a way of being in art that publicly emerged with the Dadaist motto, and that went through numerous artistic and political *dérives* of the 20th century, from the elusive practices of Fluxus and the situationists in the 1960s or the strategies of joy activated by Latin American political activism in the 1970s, to the feminist performances that reach our present time.

In literary terms, *Ubu Roi* is an inferior work compared to the rest of Jarry's production, and this is due to the questioning of authorship being part of the artistic project itself. Jarry gave up the composition of the *well-made piece* because he wanted to preserve the power of child or adolescent-like subversion, as well as the imperfections of that first collective version of the farce, *Les Polonais*, first performed in 1886 in a barn owned by the Morin brothers' family.[9] When claiming the authorship of the work for himself and for his brother Henri, artillery lieutenant Charles Morin could not understand the intelligence of his old schoolmate, who through that gesture of appropriation (and reworking) was advancing the profound transformation of the conception of art that would later derive from the practices of Dadaism and conceptual art.[10] Jarry not only limited himself to changing the name of Hebe to that of Ubu (without which the myth would probably not exist), but his intention was to simultaneously represent the farcical plot and that ludic spontaneity that is a common property of childhood and adolescence, and that allows, in crude ways and with little reflection, to shake the weak foundations on which the great monuments of morality, politics, culture and the very meaning of existence are built. That is why it was so important to maintain the eschatological language and actions, the simplicity of

9. Jean-Hughes Sainmont, "Ubú o la creación de un mito" [in Alfred Jarry et al., *Patafísica: Epítomes, recetas, instrumentos y lecciones de aparato* (Buenos Aires: Caja Negra, 2009), p. 89].

10. Charles Morin, "Lettre de Charles Morin à Henry Bauêr", 17 December 1896, in Alfred Jarry, *Ubu*, op. cit.: p. 438–439.

the jokes and parodies, and the clumsiness of the dramatic structure. Understood in this way, Ubu is no longer Hebe, but a child-like mask affected by the legacy of Rabelais and Voltaire as well as that of Nietzsche's; certainly his behaviour seems despicable, but under his monstrous mask lives the *enfant terrible*, the libertarian adolescent whose brutal anarchism, without being a model, serves to confront the hypocrisy of the people of order.

The mask is one of the central elements in Alfred Jarry's theatrical approach. It serves, in the first place, to liquidate traditional dramatic performance, an interpretation based on words and facial gestures, and to encourage the actors to use their bodies in an expressive way. The character should no longer be dramatically constructed, since that is already given in a simple way by the mask, and this frees the interpreter to carry out a more complex corporeal performance, producing meanings that exceed the literalness of the text. The liberation of psychological performance paved the way for very diverse ways of working with the body throughout the 20th century, from the defence of the liberated dancing of Adolphe Appia and Isadora Duncan, to the stylised or constructivist elaborations of, for example, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Oskar Schlemmer, or the grotesque realism of Georg Grosz and Bertolt Brecht. But resorting to the mask also implies a recovery of carnivalesque freedom, in an attempt to expand the subversive potential of popular ritual to the privileged spaces of symbolic enunciation. This is how the grotesque body, that open body, which ignores the hierarchy between *noble* and *ignoble* parts,[11] in keeping with animal nature,[12] enters the symbolist scene and since then has become present in

11. Mijail Bajtin, *La cultura popular en la Edad Media y en el Renacimiento. El contexto de François Rabelais* [1941] (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1987), p. 27.
12. "My characters must move like animals, not people. It turns out that people who go to the office and all that seem dead. The movement of animals is fascinating. One must discover an irrational form of movement." Joan Miró, op. cit., p. 21.

very different contexts to manifest disagreement or to denounce tyranny and horror.

The liberating function of masks was not only taken advantage of on professional stages—it was also a habitual resource for painters, musicians and writers with a desire to break with tradition and institutions, to interrupt the autonomous exhibition space and put themselves on the line alongside their work. Masking is figurative in the histrionism of Marinetti (who met Jarry in Paris and wrote a play titled *Roi Bombance*)[13] and in the evolution of the type of puppet theatre developed by the Italian Futurist painters, and literal in Goncharova, Larionov and Zdanevich's nocturnal performances, or in the models that Malevich designed for *Victory over the Sun* (1913), by Kruchenykh and Matyushin. Masks jumped from paintings to parties and stages in the cubist theatre of Apollinaire, Picasso or Léger. While in the Dada scene, Marcel Janco's masks and Sophie Taeuber's puppets served as a bridge between African influences and abstract dance: dancing with masks on was, for the artists gathered in Zurich, in neutral Switzerland, the best way of responding with joy to the barbarity of the First World War.

But a mask also possesses the function of questioning identity, or rather, the fixation and immutability of social identity. The "joyful denial" of the "only meaning" and of "self-identification"[14] that the mask manifests through the concealment of the "natural" face opens up a field of experimentation that has been explored by numerous artists throughout the 20th century. One of the first was Claude Cahun, niece of Marcel Schwob, who made masking a way of

13. Published by *Mercure de France* in 1905, premiered at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in 1909.
14. Hans Richter, *Historia del dadaísmo* [1965] (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión), 1973, p. 42.

linking art, intimate experience and activism. Well known for her rejection of binarism, Cahun resorted to the theatrical model and dramatisation to highlight the multiplicity of the self.[15] She thus picked up the baton from Rachilde, who made her bisexuality a manifesto, and from Jarry himself, who without ever having made explicit his sexual orientation, and even having written *Le Surmâle*,[16] left enough clues to assume a gender ambiguity that may have been a determining factor in the configuration of his characters and imaginary.[17]

Beyond the hypotheses of the author's gender, what is unquestionable is the complexity of identity manifested by his characters, and it is this complexity that explains the interest the surrealist painters and writers had in his work.[18] As a puppet, purely superficial, Ubu functions as a mirror to our baseness, to our darkest impulses, to everything we are ashamed of. We laugh at his stupidity, not at his wit, and his puppet-like nature makes us, as spectators, digest the brutality and perversion with the same ease with which we can come to tolerate tyranny and injustice in exchange for staying on the side of the "well-eaten people".[19] Thus, with a bitter smile we witness the murders and beheadings in *Ubu Roi*, the impalement of Achras, pederasty and rape in *Ubu Cocu* (in which Ubu travels with his conscience locked

15. Claude Cahun, *Confesiones inconfesas* [1930] (Girona: Wunderkammer, 2021), p. 164.
16. Alfred Jarry, *Le Surmâle: Roman Moderne* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue Blanche, 1902).
17. Jill Fell, *Alfred Jarry: An Imagination in Revolt* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005).
18. Max Ernst, whose *Ubu Imperator* (1923) coincides with the beginning of surrealism, created the scenography for *Ubu Enchaîné* in 1937, directed by Sylvia Itkine. The programme, supervised by André Breton, contained texts and illustrations by Paul Eluard, Pablo Picasso, René Magritte. <https://www.themorgan.org/exhibitions/online/jarry/109> [7/10/2021].
19. Alfred Jarry, "Questions de théâtre", op. cit., p. 345.

in his suitcase) or the defence of slavery in *Ubu Enchaîné*, which includes a devastating mockery of democracy, based on enlightened thought, and staged by "the three free men" (I,2). We can easily despise the incarnation of this violence in historical figures, as Picasso did when comparing Ubu with Franco (1937). But it is also worth going along with Ubu to explore the evil we repress, that is latent in our dreams, and that can unfold to unsuspected extremes if circumstances favour it, as was expressed in Dora Maar's *Portrait d'Ubu* (1936).

The admiration for those who dared to stage and represent that dark dimension of the psyche from behind the mask of the monster led Antonin Artaud to pay tribute to Alfred Jarry when he created his theatre company in 1927, in collaboration with Roger Vitrac, shortly before being expelled from the surrealist movement. Artaud and Vitrac valued Jarry's antinaturalism, his willingness to contribute through theatre to the destruction of dominant culture, as well as his commitment to making theatre affect life in a more direct and determining way than the comfortable response to bourgeois dramas; hence the rejection of "illusion", the idea of the "unique" and unrepeatable stage event, conceived as an "act of life" or as a "true operation" in which both the spirit and the flesh are put on the line.[20] "If we make theatre, it is not to represent plays, but to make everything that is dark in the spirit, what is buried, what is unrevealed, manifest itself in a type of real, material projection."[21]

It is not surprising that Judith Malina and Julian Beck, before learning about Artaud's texts, which would become

20. Antonin Artaud and R. Vitrac, "Théâtre Alfred Jarry", in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, nº 58 (1 November 1926) and "Théâtre Alfred Jarry. Première Année. Saison 1926–27" (8 page brochure, 1926), in Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), p. 227–230.
21. Antonin Artaud, "Manifeste pour un Théâtre Avorté", *Les Cahiers du Sud*, 13th year, nº 87, Febraury 1927, in id., p. 232

so influential in their productions of the 1960s, were seduced by Jarry's work, which they translated themselves in the summer of 1952 and staged that August at the Cherry Lane Theatre, shortly before it was closed by a Fire Department inspector (claiming that the scenery designed by Beck was highly flammable), the first of a series of acts of harassment against this group of artists who were fed up with the extremely conservative context of American culture during the 1950s.[22] In *Ubu Roi*, Malina and Beck recognised the embryo of antirealist and poetic theatre, an idea that encouraged their search during those years, as well as the staged realisation of anarchism, which they practiced on a vital level, and with more explicit gestures both in the artistic and the political following their encounter that same year with John Cage and Paul Goodman, among others. *Ubu Roi* advanced the exploration of a form of theatre that is carried out with the body, and not only with words, as well as the investigation of what Artaud called "the imponderable" within us, and that years later guided the investigation of cruelty, evil and violence in plays such as Kenneth Brown's *The Brig* (1963) and *Frankenstein* (1965). The monster that the Living Theatre actors constitute with their own bodies in this last piece corresponds to what Jarry imagined in Ubu: "it is civilization threatening itself"[23].

Unlike the concept of evil that dominated the imaginary of the 19th century, and that could be summarised as the "Dostoevsky paradigm",[24] the biggest crimes against humanity revealed other ways of carrying out evil that, without subtracting individual responsibility from their

22. John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile, and Outrage*, Grove Press, New York, 1995, p. 84–85.
23. Julian Beck, *The Life of the Theatre: The Relation of the Artist to the Struggle of the People (with a new foreword by Judith Malina)* [1971–19986] (San Francisco: Limelight, 1991), p. 3
24. Simona Forti, *I nuovi demoni. Ripensare oggi male e potere* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2012), p. 46–47.

agents or permitting their immunity, force us to consider contexts in which the normalisation of injustice, cruelty or brutality render "banal",[25] from a psychological, moral or aesthetic point of view, the most ethically reprehensible acts that make up basic human rights violations. The dictatorship under Franco, whom Picasso, Miró and La Claca identified with Ubu,[26] would not have lasted for so many years without the support of a "crowd" who tolerated injustice. The same goes for the European fascist regimes of the 1930s, against which Max Ernst and Sylvain Itkine presented *Ubu Enchaîné* (1937), as well as the Argentine Military Junta, supported by a "we had no idea" society before which the Periférico de Objetos theatre company performed its version of *Ubú rey* (1990), and the apartheid regime in South Africa, sustained by the power of a white social minority that William Kentridge confronted with itself in *Ubu Tells the Truth* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997). The list of references could be endless, seeing as Ubu is the evil with which we coexist, and is also the mask with which we distance ourselves from it. He is the brutality and baseness, while also being the creativity and intelligence through which we process it. Playing with supposedly sacred things (to the point of representing their destruction) can also be the way of resisting the destruction of what is most sacred: life, but not mere survival, rather the life we live when celebrating encounters, the life of unique occurrences, the life of experiences, the one that displays its richness in the reciprocity of affection, and that expands in moments of intensity of which the masking and play of art are sometimes both a cause and a symptom.

25. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann en Jerusalén* [1963] (Barcelona: Lumen , 2013), p. 352,
26. "He wants the image of a beastly and ridiculous, very ridiculous Franco to remain in Catalonia." Joan Baixas, op. cit., p. 24.

ALFRED JARRY AND JOAN MIRÓ: SPECULATIONS AND ABJECTIONS

Maria-Josep Balsach

Alfred Jarry, *Ubu roi*. Mercure de France, 1896. Courtesy of Bibliotèque nacional de France

> L'objet d'art, par définition, est le crocodile empaillé.[1]
> —Alfred Jarry

1.

Neither the work nor the life of Alfred Jarry (1873–1907) can be conceived without the transgression that accompanies his urge to annul one's own identity: "We shall not have succeeded in demolishing everything unless we demolish the ruins as well," wrote Jarry in his work *Spéculations*.[2] Heir to the boundary-pushing literature of Gérard de Nerval, Mallarmé's *Le coup de dés*, the transgressive images of Lautréamont and the French visionary poets, Jarry's literary work expands in the conquest of a new world where the aim is to abruptly extract from words what would be a delirious metaphor: the place where we find what is highest and what is most abject, laughter and apocalypse, balance and hallucination. "What is real can only be expressed by the absurd," wrote his friend Paul Valéry.

Ubu, the main figure of *Ubu Roi* (1896), *Ubu enchaîné* (1900), *Ubu cocu* (1900), and, beyond the theatrical cycle, *Almanachs du Père Ubu* (1899 and 1901) and *Ubu sur la butte* (1906), is a characterisation of monstrosity. His genealogy could come down from the medieval farces, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and eighteenth-century Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*. Ubu represents humanity in its basest version, at once ordinary and despicable, making us laugh in a state that goes quite beyond laughter. In the first performance of *Ubu Roi*, at the Théâtre des Pynances in Paris on 10 December 1896, the spectators were antagonised. It was not because of the unsettling complexity of the character, but because of his obscene vocabulary, with farce taken to such extremes. The poet W.B. Yeats, who was at that first performance, describes the public's exasperation with the way this main character was depicted, as an animal carrying an upside-down broom as his sceptre. "That night at the Hôtel Corneille I am very sad, for comedy, objectivity, has displayed its growing power once more. I say, 'After Stephane Mallarmé, after Paul Verlaine, after Gustave Moreau, after Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after all our nervous colour and subtle rhythm, after the faint mixed tints of Condor, what more is possible? After us the Savage God.'" Mallarmé understood the creative violence of this "Savage God", and wrote to Jarry: "You have created, out of a rare and lasting clay, a prodigious character . . . and I am obsessed with you."[3]

1. [The art object is, by definition, an stuffed crocodile]
2. Alfred Jarry, *Spéculations* and *Gestes*, in *Œuvres complètes*, volume IV (Paris: Garnier, 1987), p. 22.

3. Cited by Roger Shattuck, *La época de los banquetes* (Madrid: Antonio Machado Ed., 1919), p. 177.

Indeed, Ubu is a macabre *Falstaff* who would touch upon the domains of tragic hybris, if it were not for the comedic accent that undoes all known references and situates us in an unknown location. Ubu is also the polarisation of Paul Valéry's *Monsieur Teste*: instead of a head *(teste)*, Ubu only has a massive barrel, or belly: the "faithless mystic" is laid over the "ignorant mule", in a literary construction where obscenity and excess trickle into irony, solitude and monstrous annihilation through freedom.

In the speech Jarry gave for the first performance of *Ubu Roi* we read: "[A]s for the action, which is about to begin, it takes place in Poland, namely Nowhere . . . Nowhere is everywhere and it is the country where we are to begin . . . Monsieur Ubu is a detestable being, and that is why he resembles (from the lowest of lows) every single one of us. He murders the King of Poland, then when king he massacres the nobles, then the officers, then the farmers."[4]

Ubu refers to all of us, sending our own image back to us when the lowest passions appear, when they cannot be at all controlled. Thus the Ubu character is also a denouncement of all those states that annihilate man and turn him into a slave of himself. At the beginning of his *Paralipomènes*, Jarry writes: "We will never become perfect anarchists, because we will continue to be human, and will continue to manifest cowardice, ugliness and filth…"[5] In his own solitary world, Jarry in turn praises the world of excess, following the William Blake poem found in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–1793): "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom; for we never know what is enough until we know what is more than enough." Blake, in this inversion of heaven and earth, tells us that at the heart of hell we ultimately find heaven, although it may still be hidden. It is in the midst of these dark depths that fire and light shine; from this death arises life, and from this hell comes heaven.

4. "Quant à l'action, qui va commencer, elle se passe en Pologne, c'est-à-dire Nulle Part. (...) Nulle Part est partout, et le pays où l'on se trouve d'abord. (...) Monsieur Ubu est un être ignoble, ce pourquoi il nous ressemble (par en bas) à tous. Il assassine le roi de Pologne, puis étant roi il massacre les nobles, puis les fonctionnaires, puis les paysans." Cited in Joan Miró, *L'enfance d'Ubu, 1953*, (Paris: Galerie Marwan Hoss, 1985).
5. Alfred Jarry, *Gestes suivis de Paralipomènes d'Ubu* (Paris: Ed. du Sagittaire, 1921), p. 9.

2.

Miró was fascinated by the proto-Dadaist Jarry, as well as for the characters Jarry construes from out of an unknown dimension, and created various works based on the reverberation of *Ubu Roi* during his 1920s artistic period. *Danseuse espagnole* [Spanish Dancer] (1928) has to be cruelly comical, with nails attached to her . . . Look at the drawing-sketch I have in Barcelona of Mother Ubu."[6] "The blood that drips from her like an ideogram, and ends up a star. I want there to be in these canvases a great sense of humour and poetry, like in Jarry."[7] Mother Ubu is the female partner of the monster. Miró gives us her face in a drawing from 1937, which is as deformed as the lumps of flesh in his series *Pintures salvatges* [Wild Paintings].[8] Years later he turned this image into a

6. Margit Rowell has studied the iconography of Jarry in the work of Miró. It is an influence recognised as early as *Portrait of Madame B* (1924). She further comments that in *La suma* (1925) the heads of the characters are virtually indistinguishable from the heads of the puppets Jarry used in the 1888 production of the play *Surmâle* (1902), which he knew because they had been reproduced by Apollinaire in "Les Soirées de Paris" (15/5/1914). See Margit Rowell, "Magnetic Fields: The Poetics", in *Joan Miró: Magnetic Fields* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1972–1973), p. 41–45.
7. Joan Miró, "Carnet 'Une femme'" [1940–1941], in *Carnets Catalans* (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1980), p. 131–132.
8. Miró's work would also have references to the iconographic and poetic world of Jarry. Amongst his personal books, we find a copy of *Ubu Roi*, published in Paris in 1921. In its margins we find a set of drawings that would lead to the definitive illustrations of his series

sculpture, *Mère Ubu* [Mother Ubu] (1975), cast in bronze, where the eye, body and breasts (like large pointy puncturing tools) become one. This kind of formal construction can be found later, now drawn on the whitewashed walls of Son Boter, his farmhouse in Palma de Mallorca, which Miró inhabited with grotesque presences and silhouettes in phantasmagorical manner.

Miró made his first series of drawings for Ubu in 1953; in it we see his calligraphic, semiotic approach to the depiction of the figures, done in primary colours. The massive belly of Ubu, with its characteristic spiral, and the animality of the features, along with other characters expressing perplexed beings, lead in these works to frenetic movements between the characters themselves. The words recall both the excremental scatology in Jarry's text and the lithographic series entitled *Ubu aux Baléares* [Ubu in the Balearic Islands] (1971), where Miró suppresses forms and colours entirely, limiting himself to writing textual fragments from the proscribed writer's works: "Merdre", "Tempête", "Panthère"—each term stands out over other phrases painted to evoke Ubu's clownish behaviour, turning the letters into images that are both symbolic and formal at once. In a conversation with Raillard, Miró offered an explanation: "Here the words and the painting are engaged in astute gamesmanship: who did what? Jarry's humour, in this upending that perturbs any gaze or soft manner of thinking that might make itself out to be serious."[9] In 1966, Miró made a series of thirteen colour lithographs (*Ubu Roi*

related to Ubu. Cf. Miró, Joan. *Notas de Trabajo, 1940-41*. Cited by Margit Rowell, *Escritos y conversaciones* (Valencia: Colegio Oficial de Aparejadores y Arquitectos Técnicos de la Región de Murcia, 2002), p. 248.

9. "Ici les mots et la peinture jouent un jeu retors: qui a fait quoi? L'humour d'Alfred Jarry dans ce retournement qui trouble le regard et les pensées molles qui se prétendent sérieuses." Georges Raillard, *Miró* (Paris: Hazan, 1989), p. 76.

[King Ubu], published by Tériade Editeur) where the realm of the text is inhabited by enigmatic beings and fantastical relationships; he uses no colour, and makes reference to the *vesica pisces* symbol of two overlapping disks, where the spirit of the grotesque is melded with the celestial domain of the stars.

Jarry extracts his awareness of spaces where polar opposites coincide from his conception of monstrosity. In an article for the magazine *L'Ymagier*, he writes: "We tend to call Monster those unhabitual concordances of dissonant elements: the Centaur and the Chimera received this qualification from those who did not understand them. I call 'monster' all beauty that is original and unlimited." He then adds: "Ubu, with this need to constantly show himself to the multitude, could perhaps be explained by his past, dedicated to completely liquidating anything good about himself. If he seems like an animal, it is above all because of his porcine face, his nose resembling the upper jaw of a crocodile, with his entire cardboard armour completely transforming him into the sibling of the most aesthetically horrifying marine beast of all, the horseshoe crab."[10] The principle of monstrosity applied to literature consists in bringing together objects and feelings that belong to differentiated universes. Anachronism, altered verb tenses, contrasts, are all combined as they surpass time to introduce us into his work's infinite nature.

L'enfance d'Ubu [Ubu's Childhood] (Tériade Éditeur, 1975) is a late series of lithographs where Miró radically

10. "Ubu devant être incessamment manifesté à la foule, il serait peut-être utile, de l'expliquer par son passé, a fin de liquider entièrement ce bonhomme. S'il ressemble à un animal, il a surtout la face porcine, le nez semblable à la mâchoire supérieure du crocodile, et l'ensemble de son caparaçonnage de carton le fait en tout le frère de la bête marine la plus esthétiquement horrible, la limule." Cited in Joan Miró, *L'enfance d'Ubu, 1953. Gouaches et collages* (Paris: Galerie Marwan Hoss), 1985.

alters his expression of the cosmos of Ubu: sexual features, fragments of ripped bodies, sparse lettering—as if the world had been blown into tiny bits, comprising a massive abstract collage, a huge firework effect. Infancy, in this case, is found in a more lyrical vision of the scatological world and in our earliest memories of the children's games we played, like a large *Carneval d'Arlequin* [Harlequin's Carnaval] (1924–1925), heir to the realm of the grotesque in Renaissance painting.

3.

These three notebooks, or collectible books by Miró, would culminate in 1978 in the three-dimensional materialisation of Ubu: the theatrical performance of *Mori el Merma* [Death to Merma].[11] Directed by Joan Baixas and performed by the Catalan theatre company La Claca, Miró contributed the stage design, sets and masks for all the crossdressing characters—as giant sculptural marionettes—emerging entirely from his preliminary drawings. "Monsters appear on the stage, along with demons, surreal scenes, unintelligible speeches, original music, in an unequivocal image," explained Roland Penrose in his Miró documentary.[12] At that precise creative moment, Miró was driven by an idea that was at once political and celebratory: the association of Ubu with the dictator Francisco Franco, who had just died peacefully in bed, in 1975. That signified the end of an era, a road of liberation from political and religious power and from police harassment, as Francesc Català Roca explained

11. Towards the end of 1975, Joan Baixas, director of the theatrical company Teatre de la Claca, worked with Miró in the creation of the theatrical play *Mori el Merma*. The first show took place at the Teatre Principal in Palma on 7 March 1978, and on 7 June of that same year it was premiered at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona.
12. Roland Penrose, *Joan Miró. Teatro dei sogni* (1978). Online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvlu7whTiPU>.

in a film on the creative process of the show.[13] Thus Miró associated Ubu in general with all dictators and oppressive regimes, as he explained to Raillard in May 1977: "Now everybody is clear that what Alfred Jarry imagined was in fact Franco and his cohorts. That is why Ubu always reappeared during the Franco years, that is why I drew him so often…. Franco, apart from his politics, was a repugnant man. Some faces do not lie."[14]

The stage is thus the great theatre of the world, and Miró experienced this show by exploring the parallels between the destiny of humans and the oppression of peoples alike, in a great carnivalesque festival alive with colours and grotesque characters, who made up a delirious phantasmagoria. The name of the piece—which has no dialogue—was taken from the Catalan folk tradition from the day of the Corpus Christi procession, when the fat-headed figures known as *capgrossos*, who accompanied the giants, were jeered by children screaming "Mori el Merma!".

Le Chien d'Ubu [The Dog of Ubu] is one of the main characters. In his preparatory drawings Miró notes: "Merma's dog who barks at the public at the burial-dog howls.... In front and behind. Different/mask and dog."[15] The animal is the exhalation of the monster. In the created character we see a head above large trousers stained with paint, with an added dog head, like a drawing in the air. *L'abanderat* [The Standard-Bearer], is another figurine in the farce, carrying a bouquet of flowers and the banner. Meanwhile, masked beings move back and forth on the stage, enveloping the imposing Ubu, who seems like the queen

13. Film by Francesc Català Roca on Miró's working processes with actors. See the reference online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9z23cy5a8ZU>
14. Georges Raillard, *El color dels meus somnis* (Palma: Lleonard Muntaner Ed., 1993), p. 237.
15. Preparatory drawings for *Le Chien d'Ubu*, ca. 1977. Es Baluard Museu, Govern de les Illes Balears collection loan, reg. no. 758.

bee of the show, the omnipresent monster, with his massive belly painted on a large sheet stretched across the stage and reaching up to the fly tower.

In a drawing to prepare the stage design, we also find a synthesis of a celestial journey: a large spiral (like on Ubu's belly) dotted with stars. Miró has written: "Representations at night, so that everything is more powerful. Play with reflectors. In the middle I paint this shape in black, colour stains all around, and stars."[16] Certain celestial orbs and abstract shapes help us perceive the genesis of this phantasmagoria. Noses that are penises, soft felt faces, eyes fully open, exercises in colour: black, red, blue, yellow, violet and brown, with a text referring to his painting entitled *Le Lézard aux plumes d'or* [The Lizard with Golden Feathers] (1971).

At the end of 1906, Alfred Jarry decided to shift his life into what would be his final literary character, before dying at the age of 34. *La Nuit des temps* is the journey to the hellish depths that he would create on the basis of a detailed reading of the Book of the Apocalypse. In this text, Jarry seeks to express the superior coherence of his conception of the world, alternating states of realism and wonder, of the possible and the unthinkable. He further decries the misery of man in his annihilating, somniferous state. The awakening by the jolting word is required. One of the great aspirations of painting and literature is their struggle to express an experience of reality that transcends us, without altering reality itself. Irony and comedy, enabling us to laugh in a world that treats us so badly, constitute the *other* path, leading to its expression.

16. *Untitled* (drawing related to the preparation of *Mori el Merma*), 1976. Es Baluard Museu, Govern de les Illes Balears collection loan, reg. no. 764.

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