PAYSAGE MIRÓ:
PAINTING IN BETWEEN THINGS

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The 20th century exposed both the strengths and weaknesses of painting, while also opening up many pathways that allow us to tell its story beyond its more conventional syntactic structure. This thesis is reinforced in this exhibition project, linked to "Paysage Miró", at Es Baluard Museu. Here, Miró is presented as an apt figure for constructing a history of contemporary painting, since in the 1920s he was already proclaiming his intention to move towards a more conceptual form of art, using what he painted as a starting point rather than a destination, and expressing his desire to metaphorically murder painting.

Miró was still discovering his own language, attuned to the Surrealist movement, and with a similar desire to venture beyond painting, yet eager to avoid its dogmas and paradigms to experiment with materials and techniques in a uniquely personal way. He would gradually turn reality into signs, to the point of admitting that he had lost contact with it. Nevertheless, his forms would never cease to signify something and, in that sense, he never sought abstraction as such. In any case, this act of distancing himself from the sensible world hints at his later significant influence on the processes and developments of abstract painting.

This exhibition is part of "Paysage Miró", a joint project organised with the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and presented at four iconic contemporary art venues in Palma—La Llotja, Es Baluard Museu, Casal Solleric and Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró a Mallorca— with additional support from Successió Miró and Galeria Pelaires. Each of the four venues offers its own perspective, yet together they make up a single landscape. The selection at Es Baluard Museu includes works made between 1916 and 1978 from the collections of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, the Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró a Mallorca and Es Baluard Museu.

In the 20th century, any image or object could be a painting, and Miró viewed the world through a pictorial lens. Evidence of this can be found is the story of two large-scale untitled paintings in the Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró a Mallorca collection, exhibited upside down in their original location in Taller Sert. It is very likely they were conceived as a diptych. In "Paysage Miró" they dominate the entrance to Es Baluard Museu, although displayed in an inverted position to how they are usually exhibited, obeying the original positioning that accentuates the dialogue between the canvases and highlighting Miró's pictorial perspective of the world. A photograph from 1975 reveals this positioning of the paintings as Joan Miró converses with Georges Raillard during an interview in his studio, where the artist states the following: "I was worried when I got to the studio. I thought to myself: 'This isn't going well, something's not right.' But I couldn't figure out why . . . When I got back to Mont-roig, I said: 'Ah!' And placed a question mark. Then the answer came and I flipped the canvas . . . I turned them upside down and now I can start. They seem balanced to me . . . Now the canvases are as they should be. Yes, just like this." Their inverted position reveals the dialogue between the works, as we could ultimately deduce from much of his oeuvre.

Joan Miró managed to apprehend a radically contemporary condition: his work is always enigmatic. Conversely, he paved the way for many approaches to painting that are not usually attributed to him, as his work is often confined to the realm of Surrealism, where he is undeniably a fundamental figure. However, we now know that his work was never the result of automatic gestures, but of his own methodology, using preparatory photographs, notes and drawings, as made clear in the documentation of the production process of the two aforementioned large canvases, dated 1973. Miró did not improvise, but sought to experiment freely. Hence his recurring use of childlike drawing and primitive pictography, which let him project a raw body of work to the point of wanting to "murder painting". Miró questioned everything and embraced incongruity, the apparently incompatible. He would go on to burn and tear some of his canvases, as in his paintings dated the same year. In these works, he searched for that other enigmatic dimension, following in the footsteps of Lucio Fontana and his *concettos spaziales.* However, Miró's exploration was rougher and more expansive, featuring circular tears that resemble the coloured balls he painted in the early 1970s and the curved forms he had already developed in the 1960s, as well as his character's eyes, inspired by Romanesque imagery and Catalan medieval painting.

Miró always declared his discomfort with the more conventional positions of painting. This led him to distort and exaggerate pictorial space, sometimes through violent gestures, at others by means of vast blue blotches and at others by transfiguring the most familiar of things. He never shied away from conflict, as he tried to confound in order to space out and animate the picture or his found-object sculptures. Maurice Raynal spoke of his anti-pictorial spirit as early as 1927. Years later, this led him to attack and sometimes even burn the canvas, which could be seen as a way of exploring emptiness according to his lifelong interest in this subject, as well as a kind of iconoclasm towards painting that characterised many artists of the time. This expanded interest sometimes led him to performative pictorial actions, such as creating graffiti or exploring the performing arts. This approach can be linked to his fascination with mural art and the random uncertainty of ceramics, but also to his sculptural universe, made up of enigmatic characters presented as mysteries that are only revealed through some of his titles, much like his paintings.

It is not far-fetched to think that his sculptures arise more out of images than volumes, as they rely on a very flat frontality, although Miró endows them with sculptural corporeality. If, in the late 1920s, Miró understood the construction of objects as an anti-painting and rebellious practice, by the late 1960s he was crafting some of his sculptures almost as an ode to painting. It was in his sand-cast bas-reliefs that Miró most clearly alluded to the concept of painting through the frontal view of both their sides and brushstrokes similar to his most monumental and expressionist paintings, where his gestures as a painter are most keenly felt. This is why each sign or blotch of paint is both a crack and a stage, a fissure in perception. Similarly, his sculptures are a platform of possibilities based on uncertainty. Their meaning is the imminence of a revelation that never quite takes place. Thus, when his works are untitled, viewers become disoriented; consider *Pintura,* from 1950, where different signs and brushstrokes coexist, floating and surviving on the surface of the canvas.

Joan Miró was the painter of open colours. Whereas the Impressionists, such as Monet, prioritised visual sensations, Miró elevated the concept of painting colour and capturing its vibrations to new heights. He first attempted this in his early landscapes of Mont-roig, one of which, dating from 1916, is included as the oldest work in this exhibition. Although Miró does not yet display his distinctive style in this painting, he attempts to inhabit the landscape and blend into its colours, marking a first step towards breaking away from conventional pictorial space. This polychrome landscape reveals his attraction to Romanesque frescoes and stained glass windows, as well as the imagination of artists such as Dalí. It is an imaginary landscape made up of reinvented colours. There is a fifty-year gap between the rows of trees featured in this early landscape and the colourful balls seen floating in his paintings from the 1970s, but there is a consistent obsession with ambiguous, elusive atmospheres and a desire to paint not

things, but the spaces in between them. It is interesting to think that Miró was a regular circus-goer. This might explain the acrobatic gestures in his work, as well as the juggling that is apparent in the coloured forms that float around the space.

In Joan Miró's paintings, signs and shapes dance across the canvas and colour expands. In a sense, we could say he revolutionised the use of colour in painting without having to stop representing things, as Alexander Rodchenko did, or to resort to the non-existence of the object, as Kazimir Malevich did through suprematism in uniform black or white. He also revolutionised the isotropic nature of painting, as Fernand Léger did after the war when he explored these possibilities with his acrobats and divers whose movements defy gravity. Miró always intended to transform the spectator's gaze. He would soon try to escape the rigidity of traditional painting in order to conceptualise his pictorial signs: paintings that hide more than they reveal. Even when the paint is hidden, we feel its effects and silence takes over, manifesting itself. The spectator sinks into the painting, but manages to emerge again if they focus their gaze.

In 1925, exactly a century ago, Miró presented a small, almost empty canvas dominated by a smallish blue blotch accompanied by the phrase "ceci est la couleur de mes rêves" [this is the colour of my dreams]. As a counterpoint, in the top-left corner he wrote the word "Photo" in much larger letters. It seems no coincidence that the stuff of dreams merges with reality in a work by someone who confessed to dreaming while awake in his studio, emphasising that dreaming was at the centre of his life rather than at the margins. Blue blotches would return to dominate some of his paintings, as can be seen in several works produced in 1973 and featured in this exhibition, which belong to the collection of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. In these paintings, these blotches possess an identity of their own. Iconographic motifs disappear and the artist's interest in the humblest aspects finds its most radical expression. The blotch becomes equivalent to those small blades of grass that Miró defended as being just as important as mountains. This is painting as poetry, as a piece of music. The simplicity of the seemingly accidental blotch reveals not only the detached nature of Miró's painting but also its boldness, as when he paints over already completed works—Miró at his more vandal and radical.

Like the blue adopted by Yves Klein, Miró's blue represents a shift from the pictorial space to a spiritual one, reflecting the artist's belief that everything takes place on a mental level. It is also reminiscent of the blue that Derek Jarman used as a metaphor for the blindness he suffered as a result of AIDS. Like poetry, Miró also used empty space as a trigger for sensations, since poetic expression begins precisely where verbal expression becomes impossible. Joan Miró's mastery of scale and intensity enabled him to take his time and allow the image to reveal its richness. Gadamer calls this *verweilen:* an unhurried waiting that reveals the inner workings of the artwork. The observer's gaze determines the object's subjectivity, and reality becomes duration in the sense of Bergson, when he points out that things are abstractions of reality, just as representations are abstractions of things. Painting is thus caught in the tension of duration. Ultimately, all the works exhibited in "Paysage Miró" reveal his radical mindset, as well as his tense and intense view of the world and his surroundings. After all, as Joan Maria Minguet i Batllori pointed out, Miró is often more contemporary than his interpreters. Miró painted his own landscape.