

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FOR RELEASE:

Thursday, March 19, 1959

PRESS PREVIEW:

Tuesday, March 17, 1959

11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

No. 21

The most complete one-man show ever assembled of paintings by the 66-year old Spanish artist Joan Miró will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from March 19 through May 10. Recent ceramics and book illustrations, major concerns of the artist in the past few years, are also included among the more than 100 works of art. The exhibition is under the direction of William S. Lieberman, Curator of Prints.

The retrospective traces Miró's development from his youth in Barcelona, days of extreme poverty in Paris in the early 20's, his association with the Surrealists, the work inspired by the Dutch "Little Masters" following a trip to Holland in 1928, the fantastic landscapes of the 30's, "Constellations" of the 40's, and recent paintings from the 50's, including one of mural size. About one fourth of the works are from the past 12 years.

Miró, who won the 1958 Guggenheim International award for the ceramic mural executed for the new UNESCO Paris Headquarters, is generally considered one of the leading modern masters of our time. Gay, bright colors, witty juxtapositions of freely invented shapes and sometimes abrupt, even savage, images characterize his art. Although he has worked for long intervals in France, the Romanesque frescoes, music, dances and festivals of his Catalan heritage are of overwhelming importance and inspiration. The simplicity of the outward aspect of Miró as a person and the sophistication of his work as an artist offer an enigmatic, fascinating contradictions.

The artist himself has defined his aims by saying: "I make no difference between painting and poetry. Sometimes I illustrate my canvases with poetic phrases and vice versa. The Chinese...did they not also do this... What counts is to bare our souls. Painting or poetry are made like love: an exchange, a complete embrace, without prudence, without protection."

On the eve of World War II, Miró said: "If we do not attempt to discover the religious essence and magic meaning of things, we will do nothing but add new sources of brutishness to those which are today offered to countless people."

Miró was born in 1893 in Montroig, a small town near Barcelona. Several of the early paintings in the exhibition are views of his native town, painted when he was in his twenties before he went to Paris in 1919. Other early works include still lifes and portraits of Miró himself and his friends.

The realism of this early work such as in The Table, reflects a deliberate primitivism. Miró once said: "Courage consists of remaining within one's ambience,
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close to nature, which takes no account of our disasters. Each grain of dust possesses a marvelous soul. But to understand this, it is necessary to rediscover the religious and magic sense of things--that of the primitive peoples."

The culminating work of his early career, The Farm (1921-22), has been lent to the exhibition by the author Ernest Hemingway, who bought it in Paris in the early 20s on the installment plan. Hemingway has said: "No one could look at it and not know it had been painted by a great painter...It has in it all that you feel about Spain when you are there and all that you feel when you are away and cannot go there. ...No one else has been able to paint these two very opposing things..."

A year or so later other paintings in the exhibition of farm subjects, such as The Farmer's Wife (1922-23) and The Tilled Field (1923-24), show a new and abstract simplicity as well as the introduction of strange apparitions. The Catalan Landscape (The Hunter) painted in 1923-24, at first glance appears totally abstract, although the figures of a bearded pipe-smoking hunter with his dog and gun and a frightened rabbit can be identified.

About the time Miró painted this he was nearly starving. He recalls that he used in his compositions "drawings into which I put the hallucinations provoked by my hunger." His diet, he recalls, consisted of one lunch a week, supplemented on other days by dried figs and chewing gum.

In the early 20s Miró became a friend and associate of the Surrealists. The exhibition includes four paintings from a series of freely organized relatively abstract works produced in the mid twenties, including Man with a Pipe, Candle and Le corps de ma brune, as well as three whose fantasy is more readable: Nude, Dog Barking at the Moon and Fratellini, an image of one of the celebrated families of circus clowns.

Miró's one man show in Paris in 1925 was attended and admired by a number of the most influential and talented men there and he began to sell his pictures. In 1928 he could afford a trip to Holland where he saw and admired the 17th century Dutch "Little Masters." Dutch Interior and The Potato, among the paintings he produced as a result, are included in the show, along with a number of collages and one of the series of imaginary portraits of female figures from the past which he painted at this time.

Two large painting, finished three days apart in 1933, are shown as well as witty collages using drawings, postcards and parts of old engravings done in the same year. One of the most successful pictures of the 30s, L'hirondelle d'amour has been lent to the exhibition by New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller. This was originally conceived as a cartoon for a tapestry. Hirondelle means swallow and the swooping darting forms suggest a swallow's flight.

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Like many artists, Miró was profoundly disturbed by the Civil War in his country, although he is known for having little interest in politics as such. His protest was recorded in the memorable Still Life with Old Shoe (Jan. 24 - May 29, 1937). During World War II, when he returned again to Spain, he withdrew into his own inner world, devoted much time to listening to music, particularly Mozart and Bach, and spent hours watching the play of light and color in a cathedral. Six gouaches painted during this period from a series collectively called "The Constellations" are in the exhibition.

Although Miró's interest in ceramics dated from the 20s and he worked in collaboration with the potter Artigas in the 40s, his most important contribution in this field started in 1953. Between that date and 1956 he and Artigas executed about 200 pieces. Five of these fragile works, all done in 1956, are in the present show.

Describing his ceramics, Miró said:

"Nothing is foreseeable--the smoke, the quality of the fire, can change a nuance. Sometimes 'accidents' in baking would suggest a new idea to me. What had started out to be vegetable form would be distorted in a way that made me think of a face: I would add a nose and a bit here and there, and it would turn into a human figure. There was a constant metamorphosis--a thing that started out with one identity grew into another."

Throughout the late 40s and during much of the 50s Miró was preoccupied with making woodcuts for Paul Eluard's book of poems, A Toute Epreuve. The task was not finished until last year. Eighty color woodcuts and three of the actual blocks used to make the prints are in the exhibition.

A dozen recent paintings in the show include the 6 x 12 ft. painting of 1953 in which Miró revived a favorite device--the encirclement of various shapes with con-
Petti-like halos composed of small dots of color. Two others, sent from Paris, are Coiffure Disheveled by the Flight of Constellations (1954) and Hope Returns to Us through the Flight of Constellations (1954).

This is the second time the Museum has presented a one-man Miró show. The earlier exhibition, in 1941, traced his development through 1939. No loans from other countries were available. Two thirds of the pre-war work in the present exhibition, therefore, was not included in the earlier show.

After the New York showing, the Joan Miró retrospective will be on view at the Los Angeles County Museum. Next fall the Museum of Modern Art will publish an extensive, profusely illustrated monograph on the artist by the well known critic, James Thrall Soby.