Freedom / Poetry

Sculptural process in Joan Miró (1928–1982)

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If there is one thing that defines the work and the personality of Joan Miró, it is the words POETRY and FREEDOM.

In troubled times, Jean-Paul Sartre, in his play *The Flies* (1943), presents freedom as something inherent to the individual, but also as a quality that may be conditioned by circumstances.

When it is adopted as a way of life, transcending the mere events of living, influences, fashions, customs and adjustments fade into the background and give way to a more meaningful existence that pervades all one's creative work, as it does with Joan Miró.

"Obviously, freedom of the spirit opens up new horizons",[1] he admitted, and this undoubtedly enabled him to break with traditional art, in a clear rejection of existing artistic and social rules, always based on the conviction that art is a moral activity.

And if we combine this aspect of his personality with his passion for poetry, we enter a unique, exceptional and enriching world, in every field of creativity he turns his hand to: painting, drawing, printmaking, stage design, illustration, ceramics, artists' books, textile works, and of course the sculpture we are presenting in this show at Centro Botín in Santander. All these works are closely related to avant-garde movements, but above all they are personal and free, so much so that they form a world of their own, sometimes called "Mironian".

Joan Miró (1893–1983), born and trained in Barcelona, held his first exhibition at Galeries Dalmau in that city in 1918. It already revealed his path of exploration in the works he presented, clearly influenced by Post-Impressionism, Fauvism and Cubism, with a certain underlying naturalism.

Two years later he went to Paris — a crucial journey. Encountering the avant-garde turned his artistic world upside-down to some degree, so that during the months of his first stay he felt unable to work and therefore devoted his time to visiting artists' studios, galleries and museums, as well as enriching himself at the literary gatherings he attended.

The city truly captivated him: "Paris is wonderful; the pink sun and the Seine kissed by fog. The grey patina on the old buildings. The musical speech of Parisian women. Exquisitely polite and gracious",[2] he wrote to his friend Ràfols as soon as he had settled in.

[1] Georges Raillard, *Conversaciones con Joan Miró*, Barcelona, Granica, 1984, p. 91.
[2] Letter from Joan Miró to Josep F. Ràfols, Barcelona, 1920. Published in Margit Rowell, *Joan Miró. Escritos y conversaciones*, Valencia, IVAM, 2002, p. 118.

This first visit had a great impact on his subsequent work, as Miró acknowledged years later:

> What impression did Paris make on me? I was in state of shock. Yes, real shock. I was completely overwhelmed. I can't explain why. The fact is that it became physically impossible for me. I went to the Academy to draw and I couldn't do anything. Not a single line! I just couldn't![3]

He stresses this artistic shock in other interviews:

> As soon as I got to Paris my hands became paralysed. I found it impossible to hold a pencil between my fingers. It was not a physical paralysis but an intellectual one. The shock of Paris had been too powerful: for a long time I was unable to do anything.[4]

He listened, looked and thought about all the new things around him, laying down aesthetic foundations at that time, free of influences, imbued with poetry, that were to mark out his route.

Miró had already taken an interest in literature in Barcelona, during his time at the Galí school and through avant-garde magazines, but it was in Paris, through André Masson, a neighbour at his studio, that he became deeply immersed in the world of literature, and more specifically of poetry, which fascinated him and influenced his later output, palpably enhancing and personalising his work:

> Masson was a great reader and was full of ideas. His friends included practically all the young poets of the time. I met them through Masson. Through them I heard discussions of poetry. The poets Masson introduced to me interested me much more than the painters I met in Paris. The ideas they expressed, and especially the poetry they discussed, made a great impression on me.[5]

He now consolidated his friendship with the most important writers of the time in Paris, enriching himself by reading their texts. He established good relations with the Romanian writer Tristan Tzara; the French authors Paul Éluard, André Breton, Louis Aragon and André Salmon; the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro and the American writers Evan Shipman, John Dos Passos, Henry Miller, and especially Ernest Hemingway, who was also one of his first collectors and with whom he spent afternoons practising boxing together.

Miró acknowledged that through them he found his path: "I am working flat out; you, my writer friends, have been a great help and have enabled me to understand many things."[6] Perhaps it was the free choice of imagery, the use of metaphors, the break with

[3] Luis Permanyer, *Los años difíciles*, Barcelona, Lumen, 1972, p. 119.
[4] Georges Raillard, op. cit, p. 80.
[5] *109 llibres amb Joan Miró*. [Catalogue of the exhibition] from November 30, 1989 to January 28, 1990, Barcelona, Fundació Joan Miró, 1989, p. 223.
[6] Letter from Joan Miró to Michel Leiris, 10 August 1924. Published in Margit Rowell, op. cit, p. 140.

traditional writing, that led him to change his aesthetic approach and envisage artistic creation as pure poetry, thereby achieving freedom in his artistic expression. This is especially evident in his paintings from the twenties, in which he traces painted poems that evoke images.

However, he found the art world disappointing; he saw a lot of trivial work, motivated by market demand, and out of the enormous group of artists he met the only ones he considered exceptions, on this first contact, were Picasso, Matisse, Derain and Braque.

Slowly but surely, he began to construct his personal idiom, a free form of expression in which poetry came into its own: "My work should be a poem set to music by a painter", he declared.[7]

His early work, up to 1922, consists of meticulously detailed flat paintings, in which the image has primacy. The supreme expression of this first period is *La masía* [*The Farm*] (1921-1922), which sums up his relationship with the land; later on, his imagination ran riot, intermingling the real with the imaginary, even reducing elements of the composition to signs, as in the *Dutch Interiors* series (1928), three paintings he produced after his trip to the Netherlands to look at the work of the great masters.

It was from this point that he developed a clearly defined world of his own, reducing painting to basic elements, such as composition, line and colour, in a constant search for the essential. And it was also at this point that sculpture — three-dimensional forms — first appeared in his creative process. His concept of sculpture, in terms of forms, volumes and use of a range of materials, has its roots in the avant-garde, and specifically in Dadaism and Surrealism.

He first became acquainted with and interested in the Dadaist movement, which championed the freedom of the individual, in 1918, and its artistic ideas are reflected in his later sculptural works, since Marcel Duchamp sought to decontextualise pre-manufactured products, giving them a new image or value by producing works from objects of everyday use: readymades. He made this clear as early as 1913 with his *Bicycle Wheel*, although his most famous work is undoubtedly *Fountain* (1917), sometimes called *Urinal*, which he presented that year at the exhibition organised by the Society of Independent Artists in New York, opening new avenues in art, but also sowing doubts and uncertainty.

Miró got to know this movement through fellow members of the literary gatherings he attended, and he coincided with Duchamp in using everyday, non-artistic materials, as part of his plan to put an end to traditional art and create an anti-art based on ideas: "his work has played a decisive part in the rethinking of contemporary art", Miró remarked years later when asked about this artist,[8] by which he meant that now "the young are on his side".

Duchamp, in turn, paid attention to Miró's first experimental works and especially to his painting: "He also executed some constructions directly related to Surrealism, but his true personality is best externalised in the play of coloured elements among them."[9]

[7] Notes 1940–1941. Published in Margit Rowell, op. cit, p. 200.

[8] Santiago Amón, "Joan Miró cumple 85 años", *El País*, 4 May 1978.

[9] Marcel Duchamp, "Joan Miró. Peintre" (1946), catalogue of the permanent collection of the Société Anonyme, Yale University Art Gallery. Reproduced in Marcel Duchamp, Duchamp du signe, Paris, Flammarion, 2008, p. 197.

Perhaps Miró found in Dadaism the freedom that he had always dreamt of and sought; at the same time, it opened the way for his work in the field of sculpture.

He was also interested in and close to Surrealism, but although the members of the group held him in great esteem, he never actually signed any manifesto, which did not prevent André Breton from declaring that Miró was the most surrealist of all the Surrealists.[10] He exhibited with the group's support in 1925, while the magazine *La Révolution Surréaliste* showed his work.

This has led to him being seen as belonging to the movement, although he himself clarified his connection with it:

> Just as Picasso has been classified as one of the Cubists, I have been labelled a Surrealist. But what I want first and foremost is to remain strictly, absolutely, totally independent. I can see that Surrealism is an extremely interesting expression of the spirit, a positive value; but I do not want to follow its strict disciplines.[11]

That same year he painted *El Carnaval de Arlequín* [*Harlequin's Carnival*], conceived in utter freedom, but also in utter financial hardship:

> I tried to render the hallucinations I was having as a result of the hunger I was going through. It is not that I was painting what I saw in dreams, as Breton and his people said, but that hunger put me into a kind of trance like those the Orientals experienced.[12]

He was increasingly autonomous, independent, free: "I was not a Surrealist. A Spaniard does not need to be a Surrealist; he is already irrational", while becoming more firmly set on his own path, rejecting the theoretical and intellectual aspects of the group.[13]

He distanced himself from it, despite the fact that many texts present Surrealism as the origin of his artistic change: "I was interested in the idea of *peinture*-poesie, painting as visual poetry, but the narrative side of Surrealism, the little stories, left me cold." He never considered himself a member of the group, which was already showing signs of irreconcilable artistic and political differences between 1928 and 1930.[14]

Nevertheless, Surrealism is fundamental to his subsequent development, not only for the knowledge and the contact with artists and writers that it gave him, but because it led him to synthesise forms while finding his idiom in the oneiric, in dreams. It was an iconoclastic movement, which undoubtedly lay at the origin of his creative process.

And it is particularly important in the area of sculpture, although his first steps in this medium go back to the years 1912 to 1915, when he was training at the Escuela de Bellas Artes de la Lonja, while also attending classes at the Escuela de Comercio and

[10] "It is true that for that very reason he could perhaps be considered the most surrealist of us all." André Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Paris, Librairie Gallimard, 1928, p. 62.

[11] Francisco Melgar, "Los artistas españoles en París: Juan Miró", Madrid, *Ahora*, 24 January 1931, pp. 16–18.

[12] Lluís Permanyer, "Revelaciones de Joan Miró sobre su obra", Madrid, *Gaceta Ilustrada*, 1978, pp. 46–47.

[13] Miguel Tàpies, "Cronología", in *Miró. Escultor* [exhibition catalogue], Ministerio de Cultura, 1986, p. 210.

[14] Ibid.

consolidating his education at the Escola d'Art run at that time by Francesc Galí, who instilled in him a sense of and feeling for form by blindfolding him while offering him various objects to perceive, which he then had to draw.

> He was the other teacher whose influence I still feel. He was very liberal and encouraged me to express myself with complete liberty. Colour was easy for me. But with form I had great difficulty. He taught me to draw from the sense of touch by giving me objects which I was not allowed to look at, but which I was afterwards made to draw. It is a way of creating volume.

It is a point Miró emphasises:

> I have a vivid sense of form after touching with my eyes closed [...] Even today, thirty years later, the effect of this touch-drawing experience returns in my interest in sculpture: the need to mould with my hands, to pick up a ball of wet clay [...][15]

And of course we cannot ignore the instinct for craftsmanship present in his sculptural compositions, no doubt inherited from his family, since his father was a goldsmith and watchmaker and his grandfathers were a cabinetmaker on his mother's side and a blacksmith on his father's. And we can also see it in his enormous respect for the work of the craftsmen he collaborated with, both in printing works and in the various foundries he attended, always in a modest and unassuming manner.

In 1927 Miró suffered a severe crisis of identity, which led him to declare: "I want to murder painting", [16] expressing a clear rejection of traditional techniques and materials, and although he does not refer directly to sculpture, his work in three dimensions undoubtedly lay at the origin of the whole process. It is a categorical statement, which led writers like Sartre and Paulhan to attribute to him, mistakenly, the authorship of a work with this phrase as a title.[17]

And only a year later he remarked: "I intend to destroy, destroy everything that exists in painting. I have utter contempt for painting. The only thing that interests me is the spirit itself."[18]

These words reflect his explorations, his state of mind, his free decision not to be tied to anything: "I believe that to do anything in this world you must have a love of risk and adventure, and above all dispense with what the people and bourgeois families call 'future'," he commented as early as 1928.[19]

[15] James Johnson Sweeney, "Joan Miró: Comment and Interview", New York, *Partisan Review*, vol. 15, no. 2, February 1948, p. 206.

[16] Maurice Raynal, *Anthologie de la peinture en France de 1906 à nos jours*, Paris, Montaigne, 1927, p. 34.

[17] Tériade published this quotation in *L'Intransigean*t, Paris, 7 April 1930, p. 8, without naming the artist. Miró maintained from the outset that the phrase was his, and it has been reproduced as such on many occasions.

[18] Francisco Melgar, "Los artistas españoles en París: Juan Miró".

[19] Francesc Trabal, "Una conversa amb Joan Miró", Barcelona, *La Publicitat*, 14 July 1928. Published in Margit Rowell, op. cit., p. 155.

It was then that what we can call his first sculptural period began. He produced three-dimensional works, albeit of limited volume, which constitute his starting point in this field. This was a point of inflection, a time of searching and breaking with the past, free of influences, in which he concentrated solely on the visual and the poetic, in a manner very similar to his development as a painter, and which came to an end in 1936.

In 1928 he conceived the three versions of *Danseuse espagnole* [*Spanish Dancer*] or *Portrait d'une danseuse* [*Portrait of a Dancer*], in a traditional painterly framed format, replacing lines in oil with mere cord and thereby contributing a new dimension, far removed from the use the Cubists had given it, with paper cutouts that establish relations with the object itself. He superimposes wood, cords, panels and metal on the painting space, thus replacing forms with elements such as sandpaper and a cork, and symbols with real objects — a set square, a feather — which certainly open the way to sculpture. And although people often speak of Surrealist influences, the basis, in my view, is an affinity with Dadaism.

Two years later, during his stay at Mont-roig, it evolved towards more synthetic forms (not to be seen as a digression, but simply as a way of conveying his imaginary and making it accessible), which he called *Constructions*, using metal and wood; for this he required the help of a carpenter, who followed the artist's instructions and observations throughout.

He now laid the foundations for his sculptural works, in terms of forms and method, bringing to an end a period to which he would never return.

And so it was that in a simple but remarkably poetic way, by deft and skilful use of form, as a result of his researches, he created a body of sculpture far from traditional canons, featuring figures and discarded objects such as shells, nails, chains and feathers, always on wooden supports.

This was the start of what was to be his way of giving form to sculpture through assemblage, a technique more popularly known by the French term *objet trouvé*, or the English *readymade*, using commonplace, everyday objects, whose meaning it alters, sometimes combining them, but which in Miró's hands are clearly transformed and elevated to a work of art; he calls them *Objects*, *Sculpture-Objects* or *Painting-Objects*, and in these works, conceived in complete freedom as a rapid, direct form of expression, he assembles wood, string, iron, bone, cork, and clockwork mechanisms. They present us with a striking dichotomy, since in contrast to the poetic nature, the joyful tonality and the delicate composition of his paintings, they appear solid, hard, even dry, but we perceive in them the search for a third dimension.

The sculptures/constructions in this first cycle of work met with great acclaim from critics and artists, but they had a negligible financial impact, ending up in the hands of André Breton or Georges Hugnet; the few surviving examples mostly belong nowadays to the collections of great museums, which, because of the delicacy and fragility of these pieces, safeguard and treasure them, valuing their importance and recognising their significance. Only thus can we understand the fact that institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, among others, do not allow these works to be shown outside their own rooms.

At Mont-roig, in the summer of 1931, Miró conceived *Personnage* [*Personage*], definitely considered to be his first sculpture; it represents a man, perhaps prepared for a date, sheltering from the rain under an umbrella and carrying a large bunch of flowers in his hand, and it gives the figure a certain feeling of eroticism. Published in the periodical *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* in December 1931 and exhibited two years later in the Salon des Surindépendants, it was subsequently destroyed; in 1973 he made two new copies, which are now essential items in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona.

These works are experimental, but powerfully evocative, poetic rather than painterly in their approaches, and over the years they became as solid and potent a medium of expression as the rest of his output; the journal *Cahiers d'Art* reproduced them in its pages, and though often regarded as paintings, they were presented at the Galerie Pierre in Paris between 18 December 1931 and 8 January 1932 under the title *Sculpture de Joan Miró*.

This show was to have important repercussions for his subsequent career, as the Russian poet and librettist Boris Kochno, on seeing these works while visiting the Galerie, asked him to collaborate in working with Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, for whom Miró, together with Max Ernst, had already produced the curtain and scenery for *Romeo and Juliet* in 1926.

Kochno devised a one-act ballet based on *Jeux d'enfants*, a suite of twelve pieces for piano four-hands by Georges Bizet, on which he worked with the choreographer and dancer Léonide Massine, to whom some historians attribute the commission. Working from an original script in which some toys come to life at night, drawing the girl they belong to into their irrational world, Miró worked on the curtain, the scenery and all the costumes for a production staged on 14 April 1932 in Monte Carlo and later, very successfully, in Paris and Barcelona. He encased the characters in three-dimensional forms, based on everyday objects such as spinning tops, rocking horses, kites and even moons, with very simple shapes, using cones and cylinders. His commitment to sculpture is evident in the volumetric forms, and I therefore regard this work as part of his sculptural development.

In 1932 he returned to Barcelona, where he stayed until 1936; he had personal reasons for going back, in search of his own identity, as well as mere financial motives, since the art market had collapsed as a result of the Great Depression of 1929.

He continued firmly rejecting classical materials and traditional techniques in his work; even more, perhaps, than at other times, freedom and poetry dominated his creative activity. In this period (1936) he constructed new sculptures from disparate elements, such as a parrot, chains, wood, pendulums: circumstantial, experimental pieces, since it was certainly not until ten years later that he became fully engaged in this area. They are works that the artist called *objets poétiques*, bringing his first sculptural cycle to a close, and he describes the process of creating them in a letter to his gallerist, Pierre Matisse:

> I feel attracted to an object by a magnetic force, without the slightest premeditation, and then I feel myself being drawn towards another object which is added to the first, and in combination they create a poetic shock, preceded by that visual and

physical revelation which makes the poetry truly moving, and without which it would be completely ineffective.[20]

In 1938 he took part in the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, held at the Galerie Beaux-Arts in Paris, which showed sixteen mannequins transfigured by various artists, including Arp, Tanguy, Duchamp, Masson, Dalí and Man Ray.

The figure Miró created reflects the Surrealist group's stereotypes regarding women rather than his own thought; he swathes and surrounds it with various elements, gives it a certain sexual ambiguity and transfigures it with a large moustache, following, perhaps, the example of Duchamp, who had already painted one on Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* in 1919.

This work has not survived, but in a sense it was a translation of his sculptural world.

During those years Miró went through a very difficult period in both human and material terms, which undoubtedly had an impact on his work: the Spanish Civil War, exile in Paris, the Second World War, fleeing the city when the Germans entered, seeking refuge in Normandy and subsequent departure, not to mention the collapse of the art market and the total absence of sales.

Despite all this, he created his finest works, the *Constellations*, begun in 1940 at Varengeville-sur-Mer in Normandy and completed in 1941 in Palma de Mallorca. These twenty-three small gouaches on paper, a summation of his search for creative freedom, are the supreme expression of his aesthetics. Faced with the harsh reality of life around him — war, exile, famine — he shielded himself in a world of dreams, filled with stars.

On returning to Spain, he found himself obliged to live on his mother's small pension, living alternately in Barcelona and Majorca, where his wife was from, and thus beginning a period of internal exile. These were years of solitude, of silence and meditation, in which he went back to reading intensely, especially Góngora, Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Baudelaire, as well as the Castilian mystics St Teresa and St John of the Cross, while taking refuge in the music of Bach.

The fact that he returned, despite the situation, is something not everyone seems to understand, although his isolation was total; he was sidelined and ignored because of his political associations, and his work and successes were passed over in silence, as he acknowledged forty years later:

> The Franco regime ignored me totally. Up to now it has been as if I didn't exist. If I have an exhibition in New York or Paris and it's a success, silence. They don't mention it.[21]

In contrast to this silence in Spain, internationally he received the highest acclaim, following his exhibition in 1941 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, establishing him as one of the great artists of his time; James Johnson Sweeney, historian, art critic and director of MoMA, wrote the first monograph on Miró, to coincide with the exhibition. He now exhibited some of his *Constructions* from the thirties, as well as a *Peinture-Objet* from 1932.

[20] Letter to Pierre Matisse, Barcelona, 28 September 1936. Published in Margit Rowell, op. cit. p. 188.
[21] Georges Raillard, op. cit., p. 39.

It was a crucial period, from which he emerged strengthened in his struggle for his artistic identity. He questioned the nature of visual art, hardly painting at all, filling his sketch pads with poems, so it is possible that these works simply reflect a desire to go beyond established limits.

His solitude, his isolation from the art world, led him to devote himself to sculpture, to which he returned with new vigour, giving rise to what we could call his second period. This consisted of a series of consecutive phases in which his areas of activity, achievements and influences went through various changes, but which constitute the whole of his work in this field; this period, which came to an end in 1962, was when Miró the sculptor was truly born.

He remained firmly committed to the idea of conceiving pieces in three dimensions, using a range of materials, simply assembled, as he wrote in his notes for 1940–1941:

> ...just as I make use of marks on paper and blemishes in canvases, doing this here in the field in a very vivid way, in contact with the elements of nature. Making a "moulage" of these objects and gradually working on them — so you don't leave the object as it is, as González does, but transform it into a sculpture, but not like Picasso — making a kind of collage of different elements, in a way...[22]

That was how he created *Femme* [*Woman*], in 1946, a piece that reflects this idea of sculpture, constructed from bone, stone and iron.

In the late 1940s he began the most fertile and fruitful stage in his development as a sculptor. Various external factors played a part in it, such as being reunited with the ceramist Llorens Artigas, the availability of new studios, moving to Palma de Mallorca and his excellent contacts with casters, but more important than all that was his artistic maturity, his complete freedom of expression in every artistic field he practised. His idiom became increasingly personal, in a remarkable fusion of freedom and poetry, dominated by colour.

As early as 1944 he re-established his friendship with Josep Llorens Artigas (1892-1980), a former fellow student at the Escuela Galí and later in the Cercle Artístic de Sant Lluc and the Agrupación Courbet, who had attained a high level and had achieved international recognition in the field of ceramics, and with whom Miró embarked on a new facet of his career, with works in clay which came to absorb his attention for a long period.

But above all it gave him a chance to share, to belong to a team; from that moment, his method of working changed. Nobody ever saw him paint; he always did it alone, in the silence of his studio, but when practising ceramics, as well as sculpture, printmaking and weaving, he had to leave his own studio and enter those of others. He sought out the best people in each field, sharing his explorations, failures and discoveries with them and being enriched by them. Moreover, his personality, unassuming, calm and unhurried, encouraged exchange and dialogue.

The productive collaboration he established with Artigas was conducted in the studio in Carrer Jules Verne in Barcelona, and subsequently in the small town of Gallifa, where he transferred his kilns to an eighteenth-century country house, El Racó. Miró went there quite

[22] Work notes 1941–1942. Begun in Mont-roig in July 1941. Published in Margit Rowell, op. cit., p. 251.

often, as he was also being assisted by the young Gardy Artigas, and this led to a fruitful period; they produced as many as 232 pieces in two years, presenting some of them in 1956 at the Galerie Maeght in Paris under the title *Terres du grand feu*.

Miró's freedom, poetic art and creative imagination were now subject to the control of Artigas, whose work is notable for its refined forms, clean surfaces and mastery of glazes and colours.

Their collaboration was stepped up when they received a commission for two large murals for the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. During the advance preparation process they travelled to Santander to visit the Caves of Altamira; they were accompanied by Gardy Artigas and the photographer Català-Roca: [**fig. 1**, p. 27]

> Then the idea occurred to us of going to Santillana del Mar to see the famous cave paintings of Altamira again and meditate in the presence of the first mural art. In the old Romanesque Collegiate Church in Santillana, the extraordinarily beautiful material of an old wall eaten away by damp left us spellbound. Artigas will remember it for the material in his collection.[23]

The base of the great mural is indeed made up of irregular ceramic pieces, in rusty shades inspired by that mouldering wall in the cloister at Santillana del Mar.

From that point on they collaborated on important murals: Harvard University (1960), the Handelshochschule (Business School) in Sankt Gallen (1964), the Guggenheim Museum in New York (1967), Osaka International Exhibition Centre and Barcelona Airport (both in 1970), as well as for the IBM Building in Barcelona (1976), the University of Wichita (1977) and finally, in 1980, for the new Palacio de Congresos (Conference Centre) in Madrid, among others. All these murals make us think more of a painter than of a sculptor in the use of large coloured surfaces.

All this won him dazzling and irresistibly growing fame, with major exhibitions in the leading museums of the time: the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1959; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, 1962; Tate Gallery, London, 1964, and Tokyo National Museum, 1966.

As I said before, the world of ceramics played a very important role in his development as a sculptor, though both are of a piece with his painting. Miró's work is compact and unitary, regardless of the technique used. He is not an artist who transfers his painterly ideas to other materials, but one whose entire creative process forms a single whole.

In his approach to ceramics he developed volume, that third dimension, long sought after since his earliest days. The 1945 stoneware pieces called *Femme* [*Woman*] are certainly a brilliant result of this search, which takes shape in these remarkable works, which have much in common with those he later produced in bronze. It was an experience that became deeply rooted in his work, both in the use of material and in the texture it gave to many of his finishes: "Through ceramics I have been able to discover new possibilities of expression and new horizons to enrich my work with new materials", he acknowledged.[24]

[23] Joan Miró, "Ma dernière oeuvre est un mur", *Derrière le miroir, No. 107/109*, Paris, 1958, n.p.
[24] Georges Raillard, op. cit., pág. 112.

That is why the sculptures he produced between 1946 and 1956 are closely linked to ceramics, as we see in *Figure* (1950) or *Personnage* (1956), which were conceived as various lumps of clay; but once again the objects, in turn, take shape as unique pieces, in such exceptional works such as *Femme-Sculpture objet* and *Personnage-Sculpture objet*, both from 1950, in which he worked in bone, wood and iron.

In those ten years he created thirty sculptures, which are transpositions or translations of his world into three dimensions; all are in the round, small-scale, with very simple volumes, some of them modelled in clay, with a clear predominance of textures, and their meaning or external appearance are enhanced and highlighted, in contrast to possible internal tensions, with a subtle use of light.

It was then that he laid the foundations for his sculptural work, establishing collaborative arrangements with casters, creating and developing his own distinctive iconographic language. At this point (1946) he conceived *Oiseau solaire* and *Oiseau lunaire* [*Solar Bird* and *Lunar Bird*], as opposing but at the same time complementary forces: sun and moon, which arise like heaven and earth, night and day, or the feminine and masculine principles; years later he produced large-scale versions, using a range of materials.

He used casting in bronze, a traditional, academic material, which contrasts with the idea of his work in itself, but which makes it possible for him to create assemblages of found objects. As Joan Teixidor wrote:

> This is where he faces the greatest risk. The idea of an absolutely original rendering needs to be exorcised. Only by starting from the ephemeral can one then attempt to crystallise it in a less mutable material that will keep the dream safe for ever. That is how we have to understand the long path that led Miró to start by using pieces of wood subject to decay, fragile materials.[25]

For this purpose he turned to the Vicente Gimeno foundry in Barcelona, founded in 1928 and located in an open-air plot in the historical area of the city. His friend, the photographer Joaquim Gomis, who became, years later, the first president of the Fundació Joan Miró, documented the artist's visit to these workshops with his camera.

And for his first bronzes he created an iconographic figure strongly present in all his subsequent work, which he generically called *Femme* and which refers not so much to a particular woman, as it might appear, but rather to a universal concept of woman; initially (1946) he assembled it in stone, ceramic and iron, and then afterwards, as early as 1949, he produced five figures of very different shapes, unified through bronze, powerfully expressive, with opulent, maternal forms, on which he drew various signs or graphics, poeticising them with birds. It was undoubtedly his favourite subject-matter, to which he kept returning throughout his whole career, along with birds and stars; combining them in certain ways made any transgression possible for him, while identifying him with a distinctive cosmic language of his own.

[25] Joan Teixidor, *Miró: Sculptures*, Paris, Maeght, 1974, p. 111.

In 1956 this cycle came to an end and a new period in his life and art began, in which moving to Palma de Mallorca played a very important part. He took up residence in a new house in the Calamayor area, which was then isolated and inhabited by almond and carob trees; there he built a studio which provided him with new, secluded spaces, and where, above all, he was able to turn an longstanding wish into reality: "My dream, when I can settle somewhere, is to have a big studio."[26]

Later, in another text, he described its specific purpose:

> To build myself a big studio, full of sculptures, so that when you enter you have a very strong impression of finding yourself in a new world; unlike paintings turned towards the wall or images created on a flat surface, the sculptures must seem like living monsters that inhabit the studio, a world apart.[27]

The architect Josep Lluis Sert, with whom he had maintained a close friendship since 1932 and shared aesthetic and political ideals, was entrusted with turning it into reality. The building, in a Mediterranean architectural style, provided him with freedom to work, with large, open surfaces, white and luminous, while enabling him to isolate himself in his own world. [**fig. 2**, p. 29]

To these spaces was added Son Boter, [**fig. 3**, p. 30] an large old seventeenth-century Majorcan house near his studio, on whose walls he drew graffiti in charcoal, [**fig. 4-5**, p. 31] related to the sculpture, and which he was able to purchase in 1959 with the prize money he received from the Guggenheim International Award, granted for the UNESCO murals and presented at the White House itself by President Eisenhower.

All these work spaces strengthened and increased his creativity, as they made it possible for him to work on several pieces in different studios. It was here that Miró really devoted himself to sculpture and produced new forms. Solitude, peace and silence empowered his soul and his spirit. He travelled a great deal, to Paris, Mont-roig, Barcelona and Gallifa, but always returned to create, to conceive new works.

He then began to collect together the paintings and works on papers that he had had scattered around France and Catalonia for years, as a result of being constantly on the move, and to transfer them to this space. Contemplating them after prolonged storage led him to a profound catharsis, culminating in a purgation:

> I was quite pitiless with myself. I destroyed a number of canvases, and especially drawings and gouaches. I would look at a whole series, then put them aside to be burned, then — *zac, zac, zac* — I tore them up. There were two or three "purges" like that over several years.[28]

There followed a brief period in which he created nothing, although the time was not lost but deliberately sought, a time of silence and reflection. He resumed sculpture in 1962,

[26] Joan Miró, "Je rêve d'un grand atelier", *XXe Siècle*, No. 2, Paris, May 1938, pp. 25–28.
[27] Work notes 1941–1942. Sculpture and studio I. Begun at Mont-roig in July 1941. Published in Margit Rowell, op. cit., p. 251.
[28] Miguel Tàpies, "Cronología", p. 214.

giving rise to a third period, the most fertile and personal, brilliantly described by his daughter María Dolores:

> ...Rather than "sculptures", we can speak of "assemblages", works produced in spiritual kinship to the *objet trouvé* envisioned by Duchamp. From the implausible constructions of the thirties we move on to a bold championing of the humble, the forgotten, the discarded, elevating it to the highest level, "freezing" it for ever under the irregular greenish patina of the bronze, as if it were a Greek, Etruscan or Roman relic found in a wreck. That was what my father wanted, as he told me: to leave a referent of the singularity of the objects used in his constructions, preserving the container but adding a symbolic and metaphorical content that reflected his poetic meditations.

In the 1960s he dedicated himself intensely to sculpture, but with a freer, more assured approach, far removed from the experimental projects of the thirties and even from the ceramics of the forties. Between 1966 and 1971 he created no fewer than 191 imaginary figures which emerged from assemblage of materials, transformation of found objects, fragments of nature. Very important factors in these works were not only the new spaces available to him, to which he transferred the most unusual finds, but also the collaborative relationships he established with various international casters, seeking to obtain different patinas in his finishes; to this we must add the use of new materials, which fired his imagination and enabled him to develop new forms that made it possible, moreover, to plan monumental pieces; and it was also at this point that he opened up an interesting avenue with sculptures in colour. In this intense period he was greatly occupied with the commission he received from his gallerists, Marguerite and Aimé Maeght, for the new headquarters of their Foundation.

Thus in the sixties he embarked, resolutely and confidently, on a period of immersion, setting himself a new challenge and putting to one side the previous sense of exploration and investigation. Miró himself underlined this point:

> ...I want to make sculpture, huge sculptures. I prepare myself by accumulating things in my studio. I put objects under "observation". Fortunately I have room. The new studio, which seemed so big, is already full.[29] [**fig. 6**, p. 33]

He worked on sculpture intensely, something critics, who regularly comment on this issue, find disconcerting, and his reasons are very significant:

> Because I'm in very direct contact with the earth, with stones, with a tree.
>
> When I'm living in the country I never think about painting. On the contrary, what interests me is sculpture. For example: it rains, the earth is wet. I pick up a bit of mud [...] It becomes a statuette. A stone dictates a form to me.
>
> Painting is more intellectual; it's for the city.[30]

[29] Rosamond Bernier, interview with Joan Miró: "Propos de Joan Miró". *L'Oeil*, No. 79/80, Paris, 1961, pp. 12-19.
[30] Radio interview with Georges Charbonnier, Paris, 19 January 1951. Published in Margit Rowell, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

He gathered together the most unusual items in his studio. Along with his collections of humble objects such as nativity figures, whistles, cart wheels and *siurells* (Majorcan figurines modelled in white clay and painted), he stored all kinds of household equipment and discarded objects which he picked up on his walks: stones from the fields or the beach, tin cans, toy cars, boxes of *ensaimadas* (Majorcan buns), roots, pumpkins, nails, iron objects, pieces of brick, stopcocks, tricorn hats, wicker baskets, scallop shells, wicker lamps, pieces of dolls, crockery, bars of soap, soap dishes, serviettes, to which he added certain foods such as tomatoes, biscuits, croissants, pumpkins and chicken bones. We even find industrial machinery and baby carriages. Whatever the object, its state of conservation, its form or its material, all these items, of no value, were transformed in his hands, without losing their essence, and endowed with a new life, certainly more poetic than their original one.

It is as if he used them to create a phantasmagorical, ironic, playful world, starting from nothing and reaching a higher state, which we call *Mironian*. It may sometimes seem that the sculpture is formed from an implausible conjunction of objects obtained at random, but nothing could be further from the truth. Miró sensed and looked for forms, always establishing a principle of association.

The cameras of great photographers such as Joaquim Gomis, Josep Planas Montanyà and Francesc Català-Roca have provided us with testimony of this search and also offer us images of the range of material he amassed in his studio. At dusk he would go out walking in the area round his house in Palma or in the country at Mont-roig, collecting the strangest objects he found on his way and selecting them solely according to his free imagination; he chose some over others without any appreciable aesthetic reason for his choice, which was very striking, especially to those who had the privilege of accompanying him and have left us their accounts.

Joan Prats, the artist's companion on many of these walks, remarked very aptly: "When I find a stone, it's a stone; when Miró picks up a stone, it's a Miró."[31] Jacques Dupin expressed himself to similar effect:

> But why pick up this pebble and not that one out of a pile of stones? Why this object instead of that one? The mysteries of creativity. I often accompanied Miró on his searches along the paths leading from Calamayor to the village of Gènova at dusk; what I expected would attract his attention left him cold. But he went into raptures at things that were invisible to me. The point is that he was engaged in a work in progress, while I merely witnessed the finished product.[32]

Miró clarified this strange preference:

> I feel attracted to an object by a magnetic force, without the slightest premeditation, and then I feel myself being drawn towards another object which, when added to the first, creates a poetic shock, preceded by that visual and physical revelation

[31] Jacques Dupin, Miró, Ediciones Polígrafa, 1995, p. 366.
[32] Ibid.

which makes the poetry truly moving, and without which it would be completely ineffective.[33]

He did not seek or select; he merely found what his boundless imagination made him see; perhaps he glimpsed the force and power of the material itself, the strange shape, its undiscovered symbols, but once they were in his hands he stripped them of their own identity and they adopted a new one, constituting, together with other objects, an individual figure with its own character; he endowed it with unity through a poetic vision of the whole, which he even sealed and identified with evocative titles, such as *Femme oiseau* [*Bird Woman*], *Tête dans la nuit* [*Head in the Night*], *L'équilibriste* [*The Acrobat*] and *Maternité* [*Maternity*].

We can see that *L'horloge du vent* [*Wind Clock*] (1967) is a hatbox pierced by a wooden spoon; *Fillette* [*Young Girl*] (1967) is an ordinary eggbox; *Femme* [*Woman*] (1966) is a deflated balloon; *Jeune fille s'évadant* [*Young Girl Escaping*] (1967) is formed from the legs of a mannequin and a tap; *Figure* (1981) is made from a tin can; *Femme et oiseaux* [*Woman and Birds*] (1972) from a stapling machine.

Sometimes works even arise from very small objects: *Torse* [*Torso*] (1969) is based on a tomato; *Personnage* [*Personage*] (1970) on an almond; *Tête de femme* (1974) on a nativity figure and *Personnage* [*Personage*] (1981) on an ordinary serviette; he forms the head of *Figure* (1968) with a whistle. To produce some of these works in their final form he used various techniques which are referred to in their own right in important studies on sculpture;[34] for example, a little clay turkey from a nativity scene, measuring just 12 centimetres, was expanded first to 30 centimetres and then finally to 90 centimetres, using a pantograph, to form part of the sculpture *Tête de femme* [*Head of a Woman*] in 1974.

He formed *Homme et femme dans la nuit* [*Man and Woman in the Night*] (1967) from two seats, using the same whimsical elements two years later in *Monsieur et Madame* [*Sir and Madam*], but with the forms and colours reversed. "I found these two stools in the patio, had them cast in bronze, added the egg and did that print. They are two characters made to be together."[35]

He plays with the symbolism of the same object used in various assemblages, in a simple idiom, giving them different purposes and lending them a double meaning, between the discarded material itself and the final sculptural form, united only by their rich poetic content. The pumpkin can be seen in *Sa Majesté* [*Her Majesty*] (1967), *Maternité* [*Maternity*] (1969) and *Tête et oiseau* [*Head and Bird*] (1981); we find the croissant, among other places, in *Homme et femme dans la nuit* [*Man and Woman in the Night*] (1969), *Bas-relief* (1970), *Femme chien* [*Dog Woman*] (1970) and *Femme et oiseau* [*Woman and Bird*] (1981).

[33] Work notes 1941–1942. Sculpture and studio I. Begun at Mont-roig in July 1941. Published in Margit Rowell, op. cit., p. 252.

[34] Marie-Thérèse Baudry & Dominique Bozo (ed.), *La Sculpture. Méthode et vocabulaire*, Paris, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication des Grands Travaux et du Bicentenaire, Imprimerie Nationale, 1978, p. 80.

[35] Georges Raillard, op. cit., p. 136.

The Catalan peasant's pitchfork can be found on its own in *La fourche* [*The Pitchfork*] (1953), whereas ten years later it crowns the head in *Femme et oiseau* [*Woman and Bird*] (1967), as well as in *Souvenir de la Tour Eiffel* [*Souvenir of the Eiffel Tower*] (1977).

All the materials present a new image, unified only by bronze, without losing their original form; they are endowed with a visual meaning they originally lacked, thereby becoming part of the Mironian universe.

We have just one unusual, somewhat novel piece, which is not included in the *catalogue raisonné* on account of its peculiarity, foreign to all his working methods, and is kept in its original state, perhaps because of the delicacy of the material itself. The sculpture-object *Untitled*, a clear tribute to Salvador Allende, was conceived on 12 September 1973, the day after his death, using an old copy of the Chilean newspaper *Mercurio*, dated Friday 9 July 1971. On this he drew various signs in gouache and also tied it in the form of a cross with a thin cord.

This way of assembling and using everyday objects, with unusual materials, is something we find in some present-day artists, such as the so-called Young British Artists Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst, for example, who popularised this method with unusual works in the 1990s; this could lead us into the error of regarding it as just another creative approach in the field of art, when it is really one that Miró contributed to the development of sculpture, already anticipated in his elaborate *constructions* and *objets* of the thirties, by developing over this long period a new concept that brought with it a new mode of expression.

He was not the only one, as I pointed out at the beginning, since as well as Duchamp we know of other sculptors producing similar works, such as Picasso, for example, when he created *Cabeza de toro* [*Bull's Head*] (1942) out of a bicycle seat and handlebars, or *La mona y su cría* [*The Monkey and Her Baby*] (1951), using a toy car; but in his hands the forms disappear and are totally integrated into the new sculpture, whereas Miró puts a stone, a tap or a broken doll before our eyes just as they are, assembling them with other objects, connected only by his personal poetic vision.

Although sometimes what he offers us to look at is simply powerful objects in themselves, unified by bronze, such as the tortoise shell in *Femme* [*Woman*] (1969), his grandchildren's highchair in *Femme et oiseaux* [*Woman and Birds*] (1972) or a wicker lamp topped by a Groucho Marx head in *Souvenir de la Tour Eiffel* [*Souvenir of the Eiffel Tower*] (1977); the predominant element in all of them is that poetic freedom he always displays, making us momentarily forget their true meaning and origin.

They are objects of no artistic value and should seemingly have been rejected on principle, but to Miró they radiated a certain magic or a positive energy; always following his intuition, he collected and kept them, although he might not know what to use them for at the time.

For all that, he created figures that are balanced in their own forms and present themselves to our gaze through the titles he gives them. He constructs a unique and extraordinary sculptural world, something he had really been seeking to do for many years. As early as 1941 he wrote in his notes: "It is in sculpture that I will create a truly phantasmagorical world of living monsters; what I do in painting is more conventional."[36] [**fig. 7**, p. 36]

[36] Work notes 1941–1942. Begun at Mont-roig in July 1941. Published in Margit Rowell, op. cit., p. 251.

As I was saying before, this vibrant phase originated in 1962, the year in which his gallerists, Marguerite and Aimé Maeght, requested his collaboration to produce large pieces for the new headquarters of their Foundation, which Josep Lluis Sert was building at Saint-Paul-de-Vence.

For six years he worked on this project, for which he devised a series of the first magnitude called *Laberinto* [*Labyrinth*], of great importance in his subsequent work, since he took his first steps in the use of new materials such as white Carrara marble, iron, sheet iron and cement, enabling him to experiment with new forms. In addition, he incorporated arches into his iconography, conceived ceramic sculptures and used nature, in pieces of monumental design and dimensions which he placed in gardens and on terraces, where they were set against a powerful plant environment.

In these years he intensified his productive collaboration with the most important founders in France and Italy, and of course in Spain; he worked directly at their facilities, and this brought him new knowledge which enriched his sculptural development and enabled him to achieve new ways of rendering his aesthetic ideas.

In his studio he planned, assembled and developed pieces, but did not finish them until the time he agreed with the founder. This, perhaps, is why he made simple, basic drawings of designs in a notebook, on which he noted down everything to do with the piece in relation to subsequent work to be done: mere sketches that would enable him to develop the project he had thought of. He also made use of photographic images of the assembly of the piece, perhaps to check the precise fit of the materials or their final appearance, and he even drew or traced variations on the actual photo, always before the piece was cast.

Once he had devised the piece, he collected all the materials and sent them directly to the Galerie Maeght in Paris, which forwarded them to the various foundries he worked with, always depending on the piece and its ultimate finish. The quality of these objects is certified in the customs processing documents, which literally say "old, used objects" (Successió Miró Archive, Palma de Mallorca).

Miró did not confine himself to sending the materials or visiting the workshops to check or monitor the state of the work; he actually watched the process there in person, supervised the finishes, the patinas, and directly intervened; the chosen procedure, lost-wax casting, allowed him at a certain point to apply his handprint or footprint to the piece, or to trace various characters on it.

He always turned up carrying his file of sketches, of ideas, since he had already sent all the objects he wanted to use to put the work together, having conceived and shaped it beforehand in his studio. His presence at the foundry was essential to the subsequent process of assembling the materials in their finished form.

He attached great importance to the final patina, which is simply the corrosive action of various acids; it produces a range of hues, and he therefore wanted it to be an integral part of the sculpture itself. He executed either a polished finish, seeking clean, simple forms, as in *Femme* [*Woman*] (1970), or on the contrary a rough, coarse, crude-looking finish, making the figure even more powerful, as in *Tête de taureau* [*Bull's Head*], also from 1970. This is why the different workshops are so significant; they were very carefully chosen,

always depending on the finish he wanted to give the piece, as well as the material used. It was a way of personalising and individualising his work.

As early as 1951 he confessed his desire to "find the secret of very rare patinas very close to those on ancient Chinese bronzes".[37] And he referred to it later in a letter to Pierre Matisse,[38] in which he left a clear statement of what he was looking for in one of the foundries he frequented: "Susse. Bronzes with noble patinas, black, dark red, large greenish surfaces", he wrote. He contacted them to cast the studies or maquettes he was preparing for the Maeght Foundation, producing as many as forty-one pieces, including *Femme et oiseau* [*Woman and Bird*] (1967) and *La caresse d'un oiseau* [*The Caress of a Bird*] (1967). His collaboration with these workshops, which continued until 1982, is a benchmark in the execution of lost-wax casting, specifically the removal from the mould of *Personnage et oiseau* [*Personage and Bird*], from 1974, in Jean-Pierre Rama's book *Le Bronze d'art et ses techniques*.[39]

He worked at the Clementi foundry, between 1967 and 1973, looking for "rich, personal, very magical patinas".[40] He finished forty-seven works in these workshops, many of which were sculptures subsequently coloured in Spain by Gardy Artigas. They constitute a special, distinctive group, as we can see in *Femme assise et enfant* [*Seated Woman and Child*] (1967) or *Monsieur et Madame* [*Sir and Madam*] (1969). We can get to know these pieces and watch them being developed through Clovis Prévost's film *Rushes Miró-sculptures*, in which he presents sequences of the artist at this foundry.

In 1969, through the good offices of Aimé Maeght, he contacted Robert Haligon (born 1932), whose family workshops, in Périgny-sur-Yerres, specialised in sculptures for large monuments, thanks to a pantograph devised by Haligon's grandfather in 1885; Rodin and Bourdelle, among others, had worked there. They had modernised by incorporating synthetic resin, which was a great step for Miró, since this new material gave him a finish with a smooth surface, enabling him to colour it afterwards; it even led him to create new forms, clearly defined in fourteen sculptures, including *Personnage (aubergine*) [*Personage (aubergine)*] (1972) and *Personnage* [*Personage*] (1974), to which he was also able to give various tonalities.

The subtlety of the patinas he sought and the possibilities of certain materials were clearly what finally induced him to impregnate various works with colouring matter. We do not know whether this was due to knowledge of ancient and medieval art, since all sculpture before the Renaissance had pigments applied to it, or to contact with Calder's work at that time. What is clear is that he was already using colour by 1967, and not merely as a decorative element, in works such as *Femme assise et enfant* [*Seated Woman and Child*] and *Femme et oiseau* [*Woman and Bird*]; in these, the painterly and the sculptural worked hand in hand, distinguishing the various parts of the piece and highlighting the individuality of each of the materials from which it was originally formed. He used bronze to

[37] Radio interview with Georges Charbonnier, Paris, 19 January 1951. Published in Margit Rowell, op. cit., p. 307.

[38] Letter from Joan Miró to Pierre Matisse, Son Abrines, Calamayor, Palma de Mallorca, 17 February 1970, Archives Pierre Matisse Gallery, Morgan Library and Museum, New York.

[39] Jean-Pierre Rama, *Le Bronze d'art et ses techniques*, Paris, Éditions H. Vial, 1988, p. 249.

[40] Le Her to Pierre Matisse, 1970, op. cit.

assemble them and colour to individualise them. At the same time, he sought out the workshops whose materials would enable him to obtain this finish, which still further personalised and identified his sculptural output, if that were possible.

His freedom and his personal idiom led him to use a specific and well-defined range of pure colours: green, blue, red, yellow and black, representing earth, light and the sun, predominant elements in all his work, which somehow remind us of the land around Mont-roig, but also of his admiration for the intense, bright colours of the Romanesque, and especially the work of Gaudí, for whom colour was an expression of life. His palette was always limited, but very personal and easily identifiable in its basic tones.

And a very important element in his use of colour and material in creating his works was plaster, perhaps because of the luminosity given off by the material itself. Whatever the reason, it was very much to Miró's liking, as we see in his correspondence with the American dealer Pierre Matisse:

> I also suggest exhibiting some sculptures in progress, with a monumental feel. In plaster, in their final state. Plaster is very beautiful and the white would give the exhibition a great touch. There is no fear of that monotony you seemed to be worried about; on the contrary, it will make a beautiful collection.[41]

Several plaster pieces have survived, including the little *Projets pour un monument* [*Projects for a Monument*], from 1972, but *Tête* [Head] (1978), in plaster, subsequently rendered in bronze, is a great piece in itself, inspired by a sweet wrapper, on which Miró himself projected two drawings, and it is therefore presented in this exhibition as a fundamental part of his development as a sculptor.

To a lesser extent, he worked between 1970 and 1982 with Fonderia Artistica Bonvicini, in Verona, to which he turned, particularly, to create large-scale, polished pieces, with muted colours and smooth surfaces, such as *Femme* [*Woman*] (1970) and *Projet pour un monument* [*Project for a Monument*] (1981).

Very occasionally, he sought the collaboration of the French foundries R. Scuderi, in Clamart, and Valsuani et Fils, in Bagneux, where he finished *Femme et oiseau* [*Woman and Bird*] in 1971, among other works.

However, his longest-lasting collaboration was with Manel Parellada, at whose foundry he successfully completed 172 sculptures: almost half his output. This fruitful relationship began in 1965, through the Gaspar Gallery in Barcelona, and Miró himself described it to his dealer: "Parellada: this foundry provides pure patinas, making it possible to preserve all the expressive force of the bronzes, in a wild and powerful state. These pieces cannot be conceived in any other way."[42]

[41] "Avant d'être exposées, vous n'avez que les frotter avec un chiffon et de la cire. / Je suggère aussi d'exposer quelques sculptures en cours d'exécution, d'un sens monumental. En plâtre à l'état definitif. Le plâtre est d'une grande beauté et ce blanc donnerait un grand accent à l'exposition. / Aucune crainte donc pour cette monotonie que semblait vous inquieter, au contraire, ça fera un très bel ensemble." Letter to Pierre Matisse, 1970, op. cit.

[42] Ibid.

The works that emerged from these furnaces have patinas that are not at all classical, but rather rough and aggressive, combined with greenish bronze tonalities, sometimes even clay-like; Miró liked them so much that he congratulated Parellada after returning from an exhibition in Paris: "Everyone agreed that the casting was impeccable and full of sensitivity. I am very happy, and I must congratulate you all for this beautiful work of great craftsmanship."[43]

The foundry stood on a hill near Park Güell and was run by Manel Parellada, trained at Gimeno's forge, who started out producing religious images and classical sculpture in traditional forms, so Miró's work must certainly have come as a great shock to him; but he had the intelligence to understand it, and a relationship of mutual respect and admiration was established between them. And although Miró used other workshops for his castings, it was with Parellada that he finished his last works in 1982.

Years later, in 1986 (see note 43), I was able to see for myself the admiration of this important founder for Miró's work in his workshops. He preserved the various objects Miró had used to make up his sculptures, all safely stored in boxes arranged in perfect order and even listed on pages with expressive sketches of their sculptural forms,[**fig. 8**, p. 40] enabling them to be rapidly identified. It was undoubtedly a fertile relationship of mutual respect.

Català-Roca's magical camera has provided us with clear records both of images in progress and of the artist visiting this foundry. And Josep Mulet's documentary, especially, brings us closer to Miró by filming and interviewing him in the caster's own workshops.[44]

Nevertheless, the work he produced over the course of his prolific career met with a certain amount of resistance from gallerists. Apart from his first show in 1931, *Sculptures de Joan Miró*, at Galerie Pierre in Paris (18 December–8 January), with his experimental constructions, it took nearly forty years for the power, intensity and value of these works to be recognised. Although they were included in exhibitions from 1951 onwards together with his paintings, works on papers or ceramics, not until 1970 was an exhibition held consisting entirely of sculptures, organised by the Pierre Matisse Gallery [**fig. 9**, p. 41] in New York: *Miró: Sculpture in Bronze and Ceramic 1967–1969: Recent Etchings and Lithographs* (5 May-5 June); it was subsequently shown at Galerie Maeght in Paris, under the title *Miró: Sculptures*, between 23 July and 30 September.

This work was recognised and accepted almost immediately, since the following year he was already holding an exhibition with only sculptural work, at Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, subsequently shown at Cleveland Art Museum, the Art Institute in Chicago, the Hayward Gallery in London and the Kunsthaus in Zürich.

[43] Letter from Joan Miró to Manel Parellada, 21 July 1966. Archivo Parellada.

[44] In 1986 I contacted Manel Parellada and visited his workshop, as a result of the donation made to the Spanish state by Joan Miró's heirs; when the payment of inheritance tax was processed, no sculptures were mentioned in the set of works, nor were there any pieces in his garden or his house, except the original produced for the Príncipe de Asturias Awards. When his wife, Pilar Juncosa, and her brother and executor, Luis, were asked why this was, she showed her surprise at our interest, commenting, and I quote: "Are you interested in sculpture?... Joan was a scrap merchant..." When all the paperwork had been completed and the works had been handed over, the heirs, with characteristic generosity, made the noble gesture of donating the rights in the sculptures for which the objects survived, making it possible to cast them. The Spanish state, through the Ministry of Culture, paid the casting costs, and these forty-three works are now part of the MNCARS collection.

And in response to all this, the first monograph, *Miró escultor*, was published in 1972, with text by Jacques Dupin and photographs by Català-Roca; a year later, Maeght published *Miró sculpteur*, written by Alain Jouffroy and Joan Teixidor, in which they even catalogued 300 works produced between 1928 and 1979. This task was very judiciously completed by his grandson, Emilio Fernández Miró, together with Pilar Ortega, with the publication in 2006 of *Joan Miró: Sculptures: Catalogue raisonné, 1928–1982*, containing 396 pieces.

Miró continued working intensely, isolated and indifferent to international recognition. In 1974 he prepared an exhibition, organised by the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs, for the Grand Palais in Paris, held from 17 May to 13 October and entitled simply with his name, *Joan Miró*; I had the immense good fortune to visit it, and it certainly made a powerful impression, not only by the large number of works (nearly four hundred) but also by the chronological review it presented from his first steps in every field of creativity, culminating, remarkably, in new forms, with torn and burnt canvases and powerful, monumental sculptures, such as the group *Les tres portes* [*The Three Gates*]; here he started from old pieces of wood, assembling them in a double pyramid, which opened onto the void, but also enclosed a setting, establishing a symbolic chain in each of them. Robust, energetic, solid, they rose in a spectacular format, making his personal imprint even more evident. A testimony of the process of shaping these pieces is Portabella's film, commissioned by Galerie Maeght in 1973 and shot live at the Parellada foundry.

It was as if he wanted to shout out to the world that in spite of his eighty years he was a living, current artist, still searching, still investigating. The show made a great impact and there was not a shadow of doubt about his struggle, his power and his creative freedom.

Looking at his career as a whole made a great impression on his mind:

> I went to the Grand Palais when there was nobody there. I was like a critic: severe, very severe. Overall I found the exhibition very moving. I did not dwell on the details, but considered the scope of my work as a whole. I had a clear feeling of having worked honestly. I am not saying I have achieved what I wanted, never that; but I have been an honest individual, that is all. [45]

And as an anecdote which clearly reveals his spirit, this comment from Miró is enlightening:

> The organisers had the happy idea of providing visitors with lots of sheets of paper on which they could freely express their opinion. One of the people who responded wrote this about me: "He should have his hands cut off." I liked that violent reaction, because it highlighted what is most important to me in my work: its vitality.[46]

At the end of 1975 the foundation bearing his name, designed by the architect Josep Lluis Sert, opened in Barcelona, with a substantial sample of his work in every field, making up his own private collection, which he donated in its entirety to this institution.

[45] Georges Raillard, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
[46] Santiago Amón, "Joan Miró cumple 85 años", *El País*, 4 May 1978.

Now in the last years of his career, he received major commissions for sculptures to be placed in public spaces, which was very much to his liking. For some time he had been seeking to create large-scale works extending beyond the confines of the studio and the exhibition room and becoming part of an urban environment that would compete with nature itself.

Once again, this longstanding wish came true: "I prefer monumental sculptures to small ones", Miró remarked,[47] and although he had executed his first large work as early as 1966 with the bronzes *Oiseau solaire* and *Oiseau lunaire* [*Sun Bird* and *Moon Bird*], it was now that his large-scale sculpture came to be in international demand.

He produced a sculptural group for the new district of La Défense, in Paris. For this work he created a design which broke with his entire previous way of working, in polyester resin, painted in his usual colours, red, yellow and blue, and gave it the poetic title *Couple d'amoureux aux jeux de fleurs d'amandiers* [*Lovers Playing with Almond Blossom*]. Its height of fifteen metres posed a new challenge in confronting its imposing architecture. The characters remind us of the costumes he produced for the ballet *Jeux d'enfants*, in 1932; they do not appear modulated or assembled, but seem rather to have been extracted from his paintings, though distanced from them volumetrically.

He donated the bronze *Mère Ubu* (1975) to the city of Madrid to form part of the Open-Air Sculpture Museum in the Paseo de la Castellana. Subsequently the City Council of Barcelona asked him for a work for the Plaza de l'Escorxador; he created *Dona i ocell* [*Woman and Bird*], 22 metres high, in concrete, covering it with ceramic, for which he asked Gardy Artigas to collaborate with him.

The commissions followed each other in quick succession. In 1981, he installed a twelve-metre sculpture, *Moon, Sun and One Star*, also known as *Miss Chicago*, in Brunswick Plaza in Chicago. The following year, the architect I. M. Pei requested his collaboration for a plaza opposite the Chase Tower in Houston, Texas. Using a maquette from 1973 as a basis, he developed *Personatge et oiseaux* [*Personage and Birds*] in bronze and steel.

Now nearly ninety, he continued working on sculpture, which he endowed with a power perhaps greater than ever, but in which his intuition and creativity are even more evident than in previous years.

Running throughout his sculptural production, from 1928 to 1982, was a creative process involving a long, complex, even slow way of working, new and different when contrasted with traditional sculpture, based on simple ephemeral or discarded materials, which he stored in his studio: "To make sculpture, I want to use the objects I collect [...] so that the objects I have in Barcelona do not remain mere objects but turn into sculptures."[48]

Using a working method that was the reverse of his procedure in painting, where he started from a mark, a spot, a blemish, his sculpture arose from something real and palpable, from diverse objects which he transformed with his hands, without thereby depriving them of their character and identity, and which he endowed with new life.

[47] Georges Raillard, op. cit., p. 204.
[48] Notes 1940–1941. Sculpture and studio I. Published in Margit Rowell, op. cit., p. 251.

What he sought to achieve through these works, conceived from a variety of elements that were part of everyday life, was precisely interrelationship, communicating with the viewer, establishing a dialogue in which his free poetic spirit would pervade and transform the viewer's feelings. He chose to be personally silent so that his works would speak for him.

His commitment and dedication, and the large number of works he produced, could create a false impression of Miró's aims and wishes; if we were ever to imagine that he practised sculpture for purely economic motives, we would be a long way from the real Miró, who only wished and sought to make us engage with his poetic world, his freedom, to attract our attention, fire our imagination and reawaken our gaze.

Hence the importance of the names, the titles of his works, not only because of the rich poetic content they bring to bear, but because they are a way of arousing our fantasy and bringing us closer to his world. He decided on them as he was developing his work; it was the process itself that suggested the name, which he always expressed in French, something that may perhaps seem disconcerting, but was his usual practice in everything he produced over the years. Once again, he himself clarifies this point: "Paris is where I was formed intellectually, so for me French is the language of intellectual activity and thought."[49]

Behind this Miró, the internationally celebrated artist, lay a person who was highly disciplined and hard-working, indeed methodical in his working hours and days, who believed profoundly in work and intuition, always preferring silence, in the solitude of his studio, to any outside event or meeting he might have to attend.

His works and his texts speak for him; I have used those bare texts, devoid of any further interpretation, to enter his world and his thought, tentatively attempting to approach his creativity, using them as a basis to get to the heart of his sculptural process, and this has led me, as I see it, to the two basic elements that shape all his work: *poetry*, which governed his spirit, and *freedom*, which he put before everything.

He always felt strongly attracted to poetry, in which he already took an interest in his youth, and he consolidated that interest in his Paris years, finding his own path precisely among poets, by regarding artistic creation simply as poetry; years later, he even wrote poetry himself, but his best poems were his works and the spirit that pervaded them.

Miró never abdicated his freedom. He was free to abandon a position and a profession, free to live in Paris, despite his straitened circumstances, free to reject every existing rule, whether artistic or social, free to create a new kind of work, far removed from commercial considerations, free to seek his internal exile despite the circumstances. And he was free to create and develop a new concept of sculpture, which today, when it is normal practice among present-day artists, seems obvious to us, but which at that time opened up new paths for imagination, fantasy and creativity, as Miró himself said:

> If I ever found myself without the materials to be able to work, I would go to the beach and trace shapes on the sand with a stick, draw by pissing on dry earth, draw pictures in empty space of the singing of birds, the sound of water and of the wind and of

[49] Georges Raillard, op. cit., p. 99.

a cart wheel and the buzzing of insects, and even though it would all be gone with the wind and the water, I am convinced that all those pure expressions of my spirit would magically and miraculously touch the spirits of others...[50]

[50] Notes 1940–1941. Published in Margit Rowell, op. cit, p. 245.