

From: *Joan Miró. Viaggio delle figure*, curated by R. Fuchs, J. Gachnang, C. Mundici, exhibition catalog (Rivoli-Torino, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 4 June - 18 September 1988), Fabbri, Milano 1988, pp. 83-85.

## *A close-up of Miró\**

### **Antoni Tàpies**

The first time I met Miró and visited his studio - if I am not mistaken in 1949 - was through Joan Prats. I already knew the collection of works by Miró that Prats had, in his then modest quarters in the calle de Europa, near the Diagonal. It was a minute apartment, but every time I went there I felt as though I was in a magnificent shrine. The walls were full of oils, gouaches, drawings, lithographs and posters by Miró and the books, few in number but in content extremely important, had struck me in the most indescribable way.

Prats carefully prepared the visit to Miró and took various friends with him. I remember Joan Brossa, Lluís Riera, Joan Ponç, Arnau Puig...

Miró still lived in the pasaje del Credito not far from the calle de Fernando where a close friend of his had a hat shop. We all arranged to meet in the shop, and after listening to various bits of advice from Prats, we set off solemnly and full of emotion towards Miró's studio. As we climbed the stairs Brossa, who had already visited Miró, warned us against boring him with stupid questions as he himself had done in the past. He told us that the first time he had gone there he had wanted to know what Miró did in order to succeed in going into trance; if by chance he took drugs or alcohol... Amazed, Miró had drily replied that he was always himself and, better, he was in a continuous state of trance without having to take anything.

On that first meeting, surrounded by legend and the atmosphere created around himself, it wasn't strange that Miró seemed to me a difficult, elusive person. At the beginning I didn't have the courage to ask him anything. Besides, with his usual reserve as far as strangers are concerned - something which I now understand perfectly - he seemed not to want to speak and replied with monosyllables or gestures.

I remember that he offered us some cognac and it was then that he went to get the first painting. Until that moment the studio seemed empty, with the paintings turned to the wall. But on the walls or shelves there were a few objects found and adored by him. Everything was in perfect order. There wasn't a spot of paint on the floor and the brushes, also spotless, were classed from the biggest to the smallest and arranged on a table near other tools and implements, also carefully laid out.

For me, who had never personally known a famous painter, it was a wonderful experience to visit an artist's studio. And above all to visit the one belonging to the painter who, with Picasso, I ranked as the greatest in the country and the most important of a generation. And I felt myself attracted as if by a rather ridiculous devotion.

Miró placed the canvases one by one on an easel, and then replaced them around the room in such a way as, at the end, to be able to embrace the whole lot together with just one look.

---

\* This text comes from an unpublished autobiography of the author. It was published in «Destino», April 21, 1973, in the issue dedicated to Joan Miró in celebration of his eightieth birthday.

What a marvellous sight! I feel as though I can still hear everybody's exclamations and, above all, Brossa's comments, accompanied by «me cago en esto y aquello» and by every type of gesture and expletive that he used to make and say when he showed enthusiasm about something.

Many of those paintings - more than twenty five years have passed since then - had such a great impression on me that even today they are present in my memory. *La lune*, now in Charles Zadok's collection, with that amazing sort of floating horse; the *Pintura*, of the Palm Beach Art League, so picturesque, a copy of which I received on my wedding with an affectionate dedication from Miró; the *Pintura*, which is in the Kunstmuseum in Basle, with that background covered in sort of drops of porcelain; that other rare background base which seems an antique superimposing of colours and which, only in 1950, became a collage of ropes etc. A complete series of paintings which I have afterwards reseen in many books and magazines or in the best museums of the world.

I remember that we remained together with Miró until late into the night, contemplating in silence or suddenly excited by comments with which we didn't all agree. My initial prejudice was quietly slipping away. Not because there had been any exterior change, as I still didn't dare to address him and Miró certainly did not ease things. But his person, his gestures, those same monosyllables that he pronounced communicated a special sympathy. Just the fact that he had wanted to receive us and have that show only for us - simply young men - made him already appear different in my eyes. And besides as the hours passed I realized that in spite of his dumbness - due possibly to his shyness - everything in him transmitted a rare cordiality, practically tenderness, a reciprocity and interest in us which did not come from conventions, from words, said or not, from education; but rather from authentic behaviour, from a truth which time has showed to be a constant in him, in whatever situation he should find himself.

I can only add that when we took our leave from him and Prats (earlier riser than us), we young ones continued to wander about until nearly dawn. And I arrived home more convinced than ever of that idea which was often talked about among friends: the quality of a work is inseparable from the human quality of its author, an idea which certainly does not always coincide with normal ethics.

In those days Prats also took us to Joaquim and Odette Gomis. They also possessed works by Miró, above all a magnificent ceiling of extraordinary beauty which had been painted the previous year in that same house on «fibre cement». I also saw a small pyrography in wood protected by a glass bell which made a notable impression on me.

It's curious, but certainly not casual, that it was thanks to the Gomis that on that same visit I saw for the first time reproductions of another painter who, together with Miró, has exerted an enormous fascination on me. It was Paul Klee. He was hardly known in our country. He had died a short while before and, just at that time, was beginning to become famous in Paris. Cristian Zervos had just dedicated an issue of «Cahiers d'art» to him which the Gomis made me look at enthusiastically.

Comparing the two painters I had the impression that Miró, in spite of his fame as a cheerful colourist, was more tragic, paradoxically more «black». Miró knows how to produce, if it's necessary, stronger brush strokes; those of Klee are on the contrary little persuasions. It's a question of two races, two peoples, two circumstances, but in both I discovered the same humanist background which I found inspiring. Miró has said: «More than the picture itself what counts is what is sown. Art can die, the painting can be destroyed. The important thing is the seed from which other things can germinate».

The techniques and variety of materials used by Miró, of an inexhaustible richness, painted on tar, on fibre glass, on sacking, collages with ropes, ceramic materials etc., had an enormous influence on my art then, as on that of many other artists. Not to speak of the subtlety of his images. Some of these have pursued me for years and years, like that of *Homme, femme, enfant* of 1931, of which I have spoken about so much with Brossa. A sort of bird of prey head with a ring and an «x», of an

unfathomable sensibility.

When I knew the Dada and Surrealist movement better I became aware that, from a plastic point of view, Miró was undoubtedly the richest, strongest and most convincing, the one who best knew how to extract something from used materials, outdistancing all the other painters of his generation.

There is besides another aspect which I consider extremely important and exciting. In this area Miró has exerted a decisive and crucial influence, confirming many of my convictions by his example. And that is the constant evidence of his country, his love for the land and his belief in the fact that it is necessary to have very deep roots if one wants to do anything truly important. Miró has represented the true spirit of Catalonia (he being the first to understand and interpret it). He has modelled, like no-one else, the sunny or anguished cry of our people, our exuberance, amorous, free, our rage, our blood... And all this, with our ceremony, has realized a universal work.

*(El arte contra la estética, Pianeta - De Agostini, Barcelona 1986, pp. 89-96; It. tr. L'arte contro l'estetica, Dedalo, Bari 1980, pp. 42-45).*