

Joan Miró: The Earth, the Unconscious and the Cosmos

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One of the three titans of Spanish modern art alongside Dalí and Picasso, the Catalan painter Joan Miró gained renown for his oneiric galaxies of stars, moons, eyes, females and birds. Miró's journey as an artist is a story of transcendence, from his early awakening on his parents' Montroig farm, to the indelible influence of Surrealism and poetry in reaching a higher consciousness through his work.

Sans titre (1947) encapsulates the three acts of Miró's oeuvre: the earth, the unconscious, and the cosmos, in particular through the two motifs that Miró would return to constantly in his work – the woman and the bird. The female, representing the universe, and birds, representing the earth, were often found together in Miró's works, constituting the primordial link between earth and the universe.

Sans titre (1947) was painted in New York, where enthusiasm for Miró's work was at fever pitch following two shows of the *Constellations* series organised by his dealer Pierre Matisse in 1945. The feeling was mutual – struck by New York's hustle and bustle, Miró described the city as "electric" and "a punch in the face". The artist was working on a major public commission at the time, a mural for the Terrace Plaza Hotel now hanging in the Cincinnati Art Museum, which is dominated by a rich cerulean blue characteristic of Miró's most acclaimed works from the era.



Joan Miró, *Sans titre*. Estimate: 32,000,000 - 50,000,000 HKD

Sans titre (1947) was painted for and dedicated to the photographer and filmmaker Thomas Bouchard and his daughter Diane, who created a film about the legendary artist during his stay in New York. *Around and About Joan Miró* is not only a fascinating artefact in its own right, but also serves as incontrovertible proof of Miró's authorship of *Sans titre* (1947). The painting lay undisturbed in the Bouchards' vault until almost half a century later, when its discovery and market debut at Sotheby's New York in 2014 caused a sensation. Nearly a decade later, *Sans titre's* (1947)

auction debut in Asia coincides with the landmark exhibition of Miró's work at Hong Kong Museum of Art, inspiring new audiences to discover life from the perspective of one of the greatest artists of the 20th century.



Joan Miró, *Mural for the Terrace Plaza Hotel, Cincinnati*, 1947. [The Cincinnati Art Museum](#) . Gift of Thomas Emery's Sons, Inc. © Successió Miró / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris 2016

The Earth

“I feel like a plant, my roots are in this earth. The earth, the earth, nothing but the earth. It's the earth, the earth, something stronger than me.”

Joan Miró

Born in Barcelona, the capital of Spanish Catalonia, a nervous breakdown at the age of 18 resulted in Miró being sent to recuperate at his family's farm in Montroig (“red mountain” in Catalan). Miró felt a passionate connection to the land, and art became his means of expression: “The implements were like sacred objects, and I worked as though I were performing a religious rite.” Apart from the Spanish Civil War, Miró returned to Montroig every year for the rest of his life.



STILLS FROM *AROUND AND ABOUT JOAN MIRÓ*, CAPTURE THE PAINTER AT WORK.

The motif of the farm and the Catalan landscape became a cauldron of experimentation as Miró flirted with Fauvism, Cubism (in 1919, after meeting Picasso), Dadaism, and most famously Surrealism. [The Farm](#) exemplifies Miró's enduring connection to the land of his people, portraying it through an amalgamation of primitive realism with the formal vocabulary of Cubism.

Miró's abandonment of real space in his paintings coincided with his move to Paris in 1920. No longer able to work outdoors painting directly from nature, Miró was now confined to a studio - yet it set his mind free: “I have managed to escape into the absolute nature, and my landscapes have nothing in common anymore with outside reality...” He began to assemble a new cosmology of

mysterious signs and symbols. In *Catalan Landscape (The Hunter)* (1924), the figure of the hunter – a symbol of Miró himself – is transfigured into a few lines, with only the pipe untouched. Miró's beloved Catalonia is represented by the word "sard," short for "Sardana," Catalonia's national dance (also a nod to the fragmented letters and words of Dadaist and Surrealist poetry) whilst French, Catalan, and Spanish flags fly in the background. An omnipotent eye fixes the viewer with a disquieting stare.



STILLS FROM *AROUND AND ABOUT JOAN MIRÓ*, CAPTURE THE PAINTER AT WORK.

The Unconscious

"I'm only interested in anonymous art, the kind that springs from the collective unconscious."

Joan Miró

In November 1924, André Breton published the first Surrealist Manifesto, declaring Surrealism to be "the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of dreams, in the undirected play of thought".

The siren call of Surrealist free association and automatism, combined with the hunger-induced hallucinations Miró experienced during those years, tipped his work irreversibly into the realm of dreams. The Surrealist poets Breton, Paul Eluard and Louis Aragon, introduced to Miró through his neighbour André Masson, were struck by his visions. Calling him "the most Surrealist of [us] all", Breton added that "No-one comes near to him in associating the inassociable, or in calmly breaking what we'd never hoped to see broken."

Whereas *Catalan Landscape (The Hunter)* had taken the better part of a year to complete despite its outward simplicity, now Miró relinquished control, pouring, brushing and throwing paint onto canvas (see for example *The Birth of the World* (1925)). "Rather than setting out to paint something I began painting and as I paint the picture begins to assert itself, or suggest itself under my brush. The form becomes a sign for a woman or a bird as I work."



STILLS FROM *AROUND AND ABOUT JOAN MIRÓ*, CAPTURE THE PAINTER AT WORK.

The Cosmos

“I always have my feet on the ground, and my eyes on the stars. It represents a flight toward infinity, toward the sky, while remaining on earth.”

Joan Miró

In 1940, with his family in Normandy, Miró wrote to his dealer Pierre Matisse that “I have reached a high degree of poetry, a product of the life we are living here.” His famous *Constellations* series began as an accident, as Miró cleaned his paintbrushes with solvent. Wiping the brushes on white paper, human figures, animals, stars, the sky, and the moon and the sun began to appear in the splotchy surface. Bringing “equilibrium and order among all these elements”, he painted the minute details with the obsessiveness of “a craftsman and a primitive”. The *Constellations* represented an emotional form of liberation from the wartime tragedies taking place around him, and became his most influential works.



Joan Miró, *Femme et oiseaux* . lot sold for 24,571,250 GBP

Thus Miró arrived at the apex of his craft, a living legend by the time he arrived in the United States and painted *Untitled* (1947). Although he would experiment with different media and forms, from looser, more dynamic biomorphic renderings to sparser compositions, each of his mature works recreates an astral map, tracing the steps of Miró's journey through the earth, the unconscious, and finally the overwhelming spectacle of the sky and the vastness of the cosmos.

About the Author

Marian Ang is a Hong Kong-based art writer and researcher, and a regular Sotheby's contributor.