

Sculpture by Joan Miro

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Abstract—The art of Joan Miro is not limited to the poetic manner of one movement. He made his own way to the expression of non-objectivity, ultra-reality and unconscious, he could work out an individual manner, which is stylistically on the borderline of different movements of modernism and reveals a particular world of the author, full of mysteries and symbols, specific only to Miro. His quest is reflected not only in painting graphics, but also in weaving, ceramics and sculpture (especially in the late period of Miro's art).

Keywords—Miro; artistic language; surrealism; sculpture; ceramics; mosaics; sculpture-object; park sculpture; collage; Josep Llorens I Artigas

I. INTRODUCTION

The art of the Catalan artist Joan Miro (1893–1983) is not limited to the poetic manner of one movement: he took part in different movements, tried to find his own style, to discover possibilities to express his personal aspirations and individual outlook, that's why it is sometimes difficult to define in which movement he fulfilled his potential to the fullest extent possible.

Miro made his own way to the expression of non-objectivity, ultra-reality and unconscious, he could work out an individual manner, which is stylistically on the borderline of different movements of modernism and reveals a particular world of the author, full of mysteries and symbols, specific only to Miro.

His quest is reflected not only in painting graphics, but also in weaving, ceramics and sculpture (especially in the late period of Miro's art).

II. COLLAGES-OBJECTS

Miro first became keen on collages and pictures-objects in a surrealistic and even a dada manner in 1929. Shown to the public in 1933, the assemblages, made of anything that turned up by chance, even then demonstrated his perfect skill to combine materials. For some time after that successful exhibition Miro didn't turn again to collages-objects or sculpture. He turned to collages-objects in 1950, when he published an original series of works, made of different mixed materials. But the time came when sculpture became one of his favorite ways of immersing into the world of poetic dreams, of creating his amazingly attractive world, his universe.

III. CERAMICS

Once in Barcelona in 1942 he visited an exhibition of his old friend a ceramist Josep Llorens I Artigas and decided to take up ceramics seriously. He had always wanted to master this skill in order to make sculptures similar to traditional Mallorcan small statuary, which he always admired. "The luxury of ceramics made me follow it, it is like sparks, and also the fight with the elements, with the earth, with the fire... As I already said, I am definitely a fighter by nature. When you work with ceramics, you have to have an ability to manage the fire" [1] ^{p.338}, said Miro in an interview to Yvonne Tallandier. To master the skill of a ceramist, Miro turns for help to Artigas, who he thought to be a pastmaster in his craft. Miro wrote: "Pepito, as we call him, is a wonderful man, who played a great part in my life. Thanks to his ceramic works I could open for myself new possibilities of self-expression, broaden my horizons, work with new materials" [2]. Thus a long and fruitful collaboration of two artists was started. Their main task was an attempt to combine Miro's artistic manner, his style with Artigas's ceramics. Painting and ceramics had to merge. "You don't have to transform into Miro; I, Miro, have to turn into a ceramist" [1], said the artist to his friend. The Catalan artists were inspired by their homeland nature: amazingly intense colors of the sky, of the mountains, of the greenery... In the work of a ceramist Miro liked a direct contact with the material, the fact that it was possible to make any shape with his hands and then to color it blindly because the colors reveal only after the burning. As a result there turned out works of a strange, unusual shape in a color typical for that period of Miro's art. The examples of this can be wonderful terracotta Head and A Figure made in 1944-1946.

In 1948 Miro came to Paris for the opening of his exhibition organized by Aimé Maeght in his gallery (Maeght started to represent Miro's interests in France from that moment). Paris met the artists with applause. All the artist's old friends gathered in the gallery to greet his return. Miro presents to the public his latest sculptures, ceramics, paintings and lithography. Georges Limbour wrote in *Derrière le miroir* No. 14/15: "You made us wait for a long time, but in the end you returned and brought not only paintings, but also your Spanish ceramics" [3].

The making of small objects of decorative art was of special interest to Miro between 1953-1956, but even later he turned to this on several occasions. In 1956 Miro brought to

Paris 32 ceramics more ceramic works which were made together with Artigas. The exhibition Miro-Artigas: The Lands of the Great Fire 1950-1956, which was held in Aimé Maeght's art gallery, was of a great success. "The people who visited the exhibition will never forget their impressions from the abundance of different shapes, which amaze and shine with bright colours. <...> This is a way of talking about beauty, about the fragments of the porous material full of colour and warm light of the shining enamels" [4], wrote a French critic Jacques Lassaigue in his review.

A whole series of ceramic sculptures was created by Miro together with Artigas in Saint Paul de Vence. For the Aimé and Margarete Maeght Foundation he planned and fulfilled his beautiful Labyrinth. The building of the Foundation was designed and built by Josep Lluís Sert and the artist couldn't resist his offer to use the unique space for creating an absolutely modern museum and, according to Gaston Diehl's pointed remark, a worthy dwelling place for a "collection of dreams". Miro thought a lot over the creation of the Labyrinth, he discussed it with Sert and Artigas. He wanted to fill this place with the aura of the Ancient Greek myths and legends about Dedalus, Minotaur, Theseus and Ariadna. His Labyrinth symbolized the sufferings and torments, aspirations and hopes of each of them. One could reflect here on the eternal questions, personify oneself with the characters of the ancient history — it could be Ariadna or Minotaur. One could defeat Minotaur inside oneself and leave the Labyrinth as a winner. One could lose oneself or find oneself and be free... You can see all types of Miro's sculptures here. Miro always wanted his sculptures to be placed in parks: "All the good sculptures must look fine in the open air. Moreover, I leave my sculptures outside. The sun, the wind, the rain and even the dust will make them only better. In the same way, I often put my paintings outside to evaluate them in a new way" [1] ^{p.307}. 13 sculptures made from ceramics, marble and metal were planned for the park (not all of them were ready for the opening, but later they all took their places. First he made his giant concrete Bow, then ceramic Goddess-mother, later he created the sculptures Two birds, A Totem, A Big Lizard, A Young Girl etc. Michel Ragon wrote: "We are passing the ark in the shape of massive elephant's legs. Here you can enjoy an ostrich's egg which a real ostrich would never lay as it is so big. Here dominate fantasy, humor and lively erotic" [5]. The wavy lines of the walls, decorated with colored mosaics sparkling in the sun, the towers, extraordinary high sculptures-objects (such as A Hayfork), a large number of lizards and already known to us insects refer us to the works of the favorite Miro's architect, Antoni Gaudí. It is evident that Miro was thinking about Parc Guell when he was creating this splendor. There are sculptures which came here from The Constellations such as A Sunbird and A Moonbird. Light and shade, reality and dream, dreams, fortune are the motifs that appear in Miro's Labyrinth and make it so attractive to the visitors.

Ceramics let Miro fulfil his myths about the Mediterranean, to return to his Mallorcan and Catalan roots and revive the fading away interest in this ancient craft, to create lively, bright, memorable images and inhabit with

them Miro's universe. Yet the fragile material gave him an opportunity to show the fragility of life and at the same time its strength — the constant dualism so much liked by the master. He managed to make ceramics a modern and modernist art.

IV. SCULPTURE

In 1966 Miro wrote: "When I live in a village, I never think about painting. On the contrary, I am only interested in sculpture. For example: it is raining, the ground is wet. I take a little bit of clay... And it turns into a small statuette. The rock dictates me some shape... Painting has been yet more intellectual; it is for the urban life" [1]. He was always keen on sculpture, but only after moving to Mallorca he could fully dedicate himself to this craft. In a spacious workshop there was room for several potter's wheels, for collecting various unusual sculptures-objects and, most importantly, for the work with big volumes. The artists wandered around the house, found some strange things: fragments of old kitchenware, baskets, straw hats, dumped kitchen utensils, turtle's shells, unusual twigs, metal fragments, rusty plates. He felt an extraordinary awe before them. Then he animated them, made sculptures-objects from those findings. If he liked the result for a long time, he cast it in bronze like, for example, *The Caress of a Bird*, which is now situated on the terrace of Miro Foundation in Barcelona. Miro kind of immortalized random findings, leaving for the future generation the images of his poetic world, the images that came to him from his childhood memories, from the magic world of Catalan and Mallorcan nature. It was Joan Artigas, with whom Miro continued to work for many years as well as with his father, who was the first to suggest making in bronze such an object. At the same time he cast in bronze several ceramic works to see them made from another material.

The texture of the work, the material, which often dictated the shape and made Miro follow it, was always important for the artist. He tried to master all existing techniques. When he decided to do ceramics, he learned pottery thoroughly; when he started to work with bronze, he looked into the technology inside and out. He knew the particular characteristics of the patina of different sculptors; he constantly spent time with the founders at the foundry Parellada in Barcelona, Susse in Paris and Clementi in Meudon. Miro supervised the whole technological process which the bronze sculpture had to go through. Jacques Dupin, who often visited the foundry together with Miro, remembered how the artist was dazzled by the moment of casting bronze and at that moment there was impatience and anticipation of a miracle in his intense look.

In sculpture Miro tried to create his universe — the same world of Miro in which the main character is a woman and next to it a star and a bird. This magic universe is constructed by playing with volumes, colours or the lack of it and a thorough choice of the material. The examples are numerous terracotta heads and birds of different sizes. The harmony, the elaborateness of the composition, the poetry present in his painting is achieved here by different volumes, various

proportions and “the mystical magic of materials” (by Joan Punyet-Miro pointed remark).

In 1962-1963 Miro creates beautiful big-scale works in which he sometimes used unusual combinations of materials: wood, plaster, iron, burnt clay, glazed earthenware, cork and other materials that he sowed, cut and combined in one unit, engraved and covered with extraordinary bright colours: *A Woman and a Bird*, *A Monument to Maternity*, *A Man and a Woman*.

Miro constantly experiments: he creates giant smooth monochrome sculptures such as *A Moonbird* (1966) and *A Sunbird* (1966). Although large, they refer us to the traditional art of Mallorca, *siurells* — small clay brightly coloured whistles, so loved by the master. There were plenty of those whistles in Miro’s collection as he started collecting them in the 1920s. It is interesting that in 1944-1946 Miro made *A Moonbird* and a *Sunbird* in terracotta and in a completely different format and only 20 years later he created those marble and bronze copies in a much bigger scale.

In 1966 Miro went to Japan on the occasion of his big retrospective exhibition. He was accepted very warmly in Tokyo and Kyoto. He managed to visit museums where he first met face to face the ancient art of Japan. He was impressed by sculpture and ceramics, and he will later be guided in his art by the oriental understanding of harmony and beauty. In 1970 Miro together with Artigas visited Japan again to assemble a giant ceramic panel for the International Exhibition (Expo) in Osaka. The ordering party was Japanese Gas which gave him a blank to decorate their pavilion. The artist planned to create not only a panel which was going to be disassembled after the end of the exhibition, but also an object which could be transferred into a museum to keep it for the Japanese public. The theme for the decoration was a smile. The smile, uniting the East and the West, was a smile of one island to another. A symbol and a sign which people throughout the whole world could understand. In his ceramics, which was made in advance together with Artigas in Gallifa, Miro gathered all the elements of his universe. He defined with black many different shapes painted with rich colours. These shapes and an incredible number of eyes remind of *The Constellations* — one of the most famous artist’s series of paintings. Besides this panel, Miro makes an amazing object — a giant *inhabited pumpkin* with a smile. In the entrance hall Miro locates a group of sculptures that seem to appear from his paintings and he sends human-size giant dolls — Miro style in shape and colour, bright characters from the world of Miro — to walk among them and to meet visitors. These characters will later be copied and improved in a play *Mori el Merma*. The Japanese public adored the pavilion made by the artist. And for Miro Japan became a symbol of the union of poetry and art, a symbol of harmony and balance in art, this hospitable country gave him a new impulse to creating sculptures and ceramics, calligraphy and plates.

From 1966 Miro makes more sculptures-objects: cardboard boxes, fragments of pottery, dumped boxes, tin lids, mugs, broken umbrellas, chairs again amazingly

combine in one unit, creating a poetic image of a woman, so loved by Miro. This infinite juggling with the objects, the combining of things that cannot be combined, humour and irony will be characteristics even of the latest Miro’s works. In the same years Miro discovered a new material — colored synthetic resin which allowed making works of a bigger size.

The master also created pop-art style works: *A Running Girl*, (1968), *A Woman and a Bird* (1967), *His Majesty* (1967–1968). They are made in rich colours, the artist plays on the contrasts of materials and objects from which he *composes* sculptures. Everything that he came across could become a sculpture. In a composition *His Majesty* it is a pumpkin and iron bits and pieces which the master shaped as a crown. In *A Running Girl* it is a fragment of a mannequin, a fragment of a tap with a globe valve etc. First he composed a model-object from these fragments and cast them in bronze. Then he painted the result. The works turned out to be very ironic.

At the same time Miro makes sculptures close to the art of Alberto Giacometti, such as *A Woman-Insect* (1968): a rough uneven surface, a vertical elongated body of the character — the features reminding of the works by the famous Swiss master.

In 1969 Miro started to cast flat bronze reliefs in the sand mould. He attached to them different kinds of convex and concave shapes of objects and materials. For example, clay geometric bodies (a sphere, an arch etc.) imprinted on wet sand and cast separately from the relief (*A Bas-relief* (1971) with an imprint of a palm in the centre).

Later there appear characters in sculpture which seem to come from the artist’s painting, so big is the likeness to the original painting: *A Figure* (1970), *A Constellation* (1971). Even in his last years Miro saw a great joy in giving life to his persistent ideas-images created by his infinite fantasy and in immersing into the world of dreams. He made rough colourful sculptures, often with fragments of plastic and concrete, which reminded of stone women idols, clad in long skirts looking like bells situated on the ground. There had been a series of similar sculptures made at the end of 1960-bginning of the 1970s. Some researchers find in them a reference to the Mediterranean and Andian culture — they remind of Cretan statuettes, Andalusian sculptures of the Virgin Mary, the symbols of goddess-mother, fertility and the initiation rituals in ancient civilizations.

A Woman and a Bird is a 20-metre-high work on the favourite theme; it is made of concrete and covered with bright ceramic mosaics. The palette of the ceramics not only reminds us of the traditional Miro colours, but it also refers us again to the art of Gaudi whose influence is very visible.

V. CONCLUSION

Miro always wanted his native city to have more wonderful areas like Parc Guell, and he wanted the sculpture like his *A Woman and a Bird* to meet the inhabitants of the city in different parts of Barcelona making an ensemble in Catalan style. He managed to do it with sculpture and ceramics. The artist’s works can be seen everywhere, they

became an integral part of Barcelona, “he got an opportunity to appeal straight to every passer-by, reckoning on a happy encounter or an interesting dialogue” [3].

In the late period of his life Miro again had one of the leading roles in the modern art. Thanks to his inexhaustible energy, a longing for creative work and an extraordinary talent, he managed to succeed in the majority of the art fields. His sculpture and ceramics are the clear evidence to it.

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