

Several Illustrations of Joan Miro for the Plays of Alfred Jarry

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Abstract—The work of the Catalan painter Joan Miró is closely related to the book. He is rightfully considered to be the author of the largest number of publications with the original printed graphics. A substantial part of them consists of works on images for the writings by Alfred Jarry – one of the predecessors of surrealism in literature, created at different times. In particular, Papa Ubu – a grotesque character, the hero of the series of plays “King Ubu”, “Ubu in Chains”, “Ubu on the Hill”, “Ubu Cuckolded” (“Ubu Roi”, “Ubu Enchaîné”, “Ubu Sur La Butte”, “Ubu Cocu”), etc. The image of Papa Ubu fascinated Miró in the 1920s, and the painter dedicated a large series of drawings to him in the period between 1953 and 1970. As a result, Eugene Teriade published four books, among them “King Ubu” (1966) with 13 color lithographs of the painter and “Ubu of The Balearic Islands” (“Ubu aux Baléares”) with the texts written by Miro himself in the poetry, accompanied by 24 color and 1 black-and-white lithographs (on the box).

Keywords—Miró; surrealism; artistic language; Alfred Jarry; Papa Ubu; King Ubu; lithography; livre d'artiste

I. INTRODUCTION

The artwork of the Catalan painter Joan Miró is closely related to the book. He is rightfully considered to be the author of the largest number of publications with the original printed graphics. Thus, it is told in the Catalogue Raisonné of the illustrated books by Joan Miró compiled by Patrick Cramer and Rosa Maria Malet in 1989, that 257 such editions were published in the period from 1923 through 1985. A substantial part of them consists of works on images for the writings by Alfred Jarry, created at different times.

II. ILLUSTRATIONS FOR POETICAL WORKS

In his work “35 Años De Joan Miró” Rafael Santos Torroella considers the “spirit” and “poetry” to be the two main components in the art of the master. The poetry organically became part of everyday life by Joan Miró back in the 1920s, when he sank into the world of poetic daydreams and surreal night fantasies. In 1928, he completed illustrations for the book “Once Upon a Time There Lived a Magpie” by Lisa Hertz, and in the early 1930s, he created his first illustrations for “The Tree of Travelers” by Tristan Tzara in Paris, in the workshop of the French graphic artist Louis Marcoussis. Firstly, the illustrations were ascetic

lithographs, and then – engravings with a dry point. In 1933, Miró performed etchings for the book “Childhood” by Georges Hugnet, published by Roger Lacourier. Then he created the covers for Georges Hugnet’s poetic magazine “The Use of the Word”, the magazine “Minotaur”, “Movements”, etchings for Benjamin Pere’s book “In the Paradise of Ghosts” and for Alice Paalen’s poem “Hourglass”.

An important thing for Joan Miró in the pre-war period was his participation in the work on Paul Eluard’s collection of verses “Solidarité”, in which each verse of the poet was accompanied by etchings made by one of the seven artists (Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Yves Tanguy, André Masson, John Buckland Wright, Dalla Husband and Stanley William Hayter). The book in two languages was released in an edition of 150 copies in April 1938. This work introduced Miró to the publisher Guy Lévis Mano, who subsequently printed a great number of books with the painter’s graphics.

The books with Miró’s lithographs were published one after another in the post-war period. It was facilitated by the acquaintance and cooperation with the publisher and owner of the famous French gallery Aimé Maeght. They met in 1947 at the international exhibition of surrealists. It was there that Tristan Tzara told Maeght about his desire to work with Joan Miró.

Thus, the Maeght’s publishing house released the famous book by one of the founders of Papaaism and a member of the surrealist movement – the poet Tristan Tzara “Parler seul” with 72 lithographs in an edition of 253 copies in 1950. The poem itself was written by Tzara in 1945. Miro’s work on creating lithographs for the book took almost two years. The result was a kind of dialogue between the poet and the painter. Miró interweaves the avant-garde poetic text of the poem into his graphic row. It is of interest to note that there were no capital letters and punctuation marks in the text. Miró supplements it with images of various geometric shapes, human figures and color spots on each page. Some pages and spreads are completely provided with lithographs and contain no texts. To create an overwhelmingly attractive visual effect, Miró uses various pure colors – red, blue, yellow and green, as well as black as a forming color which combines individual elements into a single image. The illustrations of the painter begin to dominate over the

author's text here and in a number of other books. The cover of the publication is a collage from a part of newspaper and a piece of yellow colored paper with the names and surnames of the poet and the painter, as well as the name of the poem. There is a lithographic image applied to the collage. The book case is glued with beige paper with the colored lithographs printed thereon.

In 1975, Miró and Jacques Prévert created a wonderful collaborative work "Adonides". This is one of the most beautiful and favorite books by the painter, the work on which took several years, and then several more years were taken to its publication (in total, it took 15 years to implement it). The painter did not like the first text by Prévert, and the latter changed it several times. The text and the image are closely intertwined on the book pages; they complement each other very harmoniously. The stampings with a lithographic image applied on their top carry a separate figural load. Despite the fact that the book sheets are maximally filled with the text, illustrations and stamping, it does not create the impression of overloading. The pages look light. The broadsides of the book represent a kind of surreal world filled with wandering colored lines, images of strange animals, birds, insects and some sea creatures. The box in which the publication is located is made in an interesting way – it is covered with blue canvas. The painter placed four colored spots at the box end, where the name of the book as well as the names of the author, painter and publisher were written in black. Unfortunately, Jacques Prévert died a month before the book was published, so the book contained his facsimile signature.

Aimé Maeght's son – Adrien Maeght continued the cooperation with Miró. About 1,500 etchings and lithographs were printed at his ARTE (Art et Techniques Graphiques) Printing House. For example, there was an amazing edition of André Frénaud's poetry "Le miroir de l'homme par les bêtes", published in 1972 in an edition of 225 copies. The book cover is of special interest here, which represents a collage of foil in three colors: blue, green and red. The book includes 10 sheets of metallized mirror paper in different colors, whereon the handwritten text of a poem by André Frénaud is applied.

One of Miró's most famous works in the book "Reliable" ("A toute épreuve") was published in 1958. This is a result of joint efforts by the poet Paul Eluard, Miró and the publisher Gáld Cramer. The master created this book for 10 years. Especially for this book, Miró produced 80 wood-cut engravings, for which he cut out 233 boards.

In 1967, an interesting joint work by Joan Miró and the German poet Yvan Goll¹ "A Bouquet of Dreams for Neila" ("Bouquet de Rêves pour Neila") was released, where the painter managed to combine his images with the poet's poetic text very delicately.

The publications with the texts by Miró himself are also worthy of notice. A good example is the book with elegant handwritten text by the painter "The Lizard with Golden Feathers" ("Le Léopard aux plumes d'or"). Miró wrote the

poetic surreal text underlying this book in 1936-1939. The text was first published in the magazine "Cahiers d'Art" in 1945. The handwritten text of the author here is intrinsically a piece of art. It correlates well with 15 colored lithographs, two of which occupy the entire spread of the book. One interesting story is associated with these lithographs. Thus, Miró produced 18 lithographs for "The Lizards with Golden Feathers" in 1967. After some time, having printed a part of the edition, the painter and publisher Louis Broder found the color distortion of the applied paint due to the defects of the paper on which the lithographs were printed. They had to refuse to continue printing, and the printed sheets were destroyed [1]. They did not manage to reprint the entire edition, since the images on some lithographic stones were ground off. Miró produced new lithographs in 1971. The book was published in an edition of 195 copies. All of them were signed by the author in pencil. However, it is not certain whether all copies of the first edition have been destroyed.

In 1974, the ARTE workshop by Adrien Maeght, that has already been mentioned earlier, published a book by Robert Desnos "The Punishments of Hell, or New Hebrides"² ("Les p énalités de l'enfer ou les nouvelles – hébrides") in an edition of 220 copies. Miró knew Desnos since 1921, when they entered the community "Blome Street Group" together. It was at this time that Miró and Desnos began their work on a joint project to publish a prosaic text with illustrations. The text was written by Desnos in 1922 after his return from a trip to Morocco. However, this project was not completed – a series of major global shocks began soon: the economic crisis, the Spanish Civil War and the outbreak of the World War II. The Gestapo arrested Robert Desnos in February 1944, and he died in the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1945. Many years later, Desnos's widow showed this manuscript and sketch drawings by Miró to Adrien Maeght. Maeght and Miró decided to complete what they started. In 1974, they released a book, which, it should be noted, was far from the originally conceived project. It corresponded more to Miró's view of life of the 1970s, rather than 1920s. However, the initial sketches did not disappear. They were released in the separate folder "Documents/1929", which was enclosed together with the main book into a box covered with red cloth. There were two names written on the box – Miró and Desnos. One of them was written upside down and both surnames were connected by the common letter "O". The book cover represents a colorful lithograph by Miró. The same lithograph was repeated on the inner sides of the box. All lithographs by Miró were made in an about-turn. They were inhabited by signs and symbols known to all fans of Miró's work: stars, female images, colored tangles, spots, musical signs, etc., as well as performed in Miró's favorite color scheme of that period. The graphical solution of Desnos's text was of particular interest – almost every page of the publication contains different fonts. The text was skillfully combined with small drawings located in the text lines. Despite the fact that the book was published rather late

¹ The true name by Yvan Goll (1891-1950) is Isaac Lang.

² New Hebrides is an archipelago and the historic name of Vanuatu, a republic located on the islands of Espiritu Santo, Ambrym, Efate etc. (total 80 islands) in the south-western part of the Pacific Ocean.

in relation to the time frame of the surrealism, it often appeared in the art studies on surrealism.

People could see a series of lithographs dedicated to the grotesque character who enchanted Miró in the 1920s – Papa Ubu at the exhibition “Juan³ Miró Images”, which was held at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art in 2013, dedicated to the 120th anniversary of the painter’s birthday. Later, the painter remembered: “I worked in the studio by [Pablo] Gargallo during my first year in Paris. Masson worked in a nearby studio. <...> The poets Masson introduced to me interested me more than the painters whom I met in Paris”.

“The Magnificent Seven”: André Breton, Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard, Tristan Tzara, Philippe Soupault, Robert Desnos, Benjamin Pere, Michel Leiris had a particularly strong influence on Miró. They tried to get rid of stamps and banal images, giving preference to a direct sensual impression. Their poetry gravitated to visualization, to ensure that it was not only “read”, but also “viewed”.

III. ILLUSTRATIONS FOR THE PLAYS BY ALFRED JARRY

Miró said: “I was fascinated by the new ideas that they carried, and especially by the poetry that they defended. I sank into it all night long, especially into the poetry in the traditions of “Le Surmâle”⁴ by Jarry”.

Papa Ubu was the hero of a series of absurd plays by Alfred Jarry, one of the predecessors of surrealism in literature (“King Ubu”, “Ubu in Chains”, “Ubu on the Hill”, “Ubu Cuckolded”, etc.). The play “King Ubu” was staged in 1896 and caused a shocking impression due to its irrationality and inaccessibility to understand what was happening on the stage. These were some phantasmagoria of events, vaguely reminiscent of situations from real life, but built in an inconceivably illogical row. Papa Ubu himself appeared as a caricature of the hated physics teacher Felix Hebert (Papa Ebe “Père Ébé”) at the college invented by Jarry and his friends for the puppet play “King Ubu”, and suffered many changes over the history of the twentieth century. This parody-character from a teenage play came down in the history of the world theater as one of the most important character images: a cruel fat man, a swaggering bouncer-tyrant liking to humiliate the weak and easily managing other people’s lives.

The play by Jarry was staged again in 1898 in Paris at the Theatre de Pantins, with the dolls created by the artist Pierre Bonnard. For this performance, Jarry created lithographs for the covers for three of nine albums “Repertoire des Pantins” with music by Claude Terrasse: *Ouverture d’Ubu Roi*, Polonaise Marsh and “Chanson du décervelage”. Miró drew, or rather copied, three figures from the cover of the “Chanson du décervelage” for an unimplemented ballet project on which he worked in 1933-1935. The notes by Miró on the drawing kept at the Joan Miró Foundation in Barcelona left no doubt that the cover served as a model for him: “[King Ubu]. La chanson du Decervelage [sic]”. Jarry attracted the attention of surrealists with his work, in

particular, with the eccentric character Ubu. Following the advice by André Breton, who considered «King Ubu» «the first prophetic play of our time» [2], they turned to the stage director Sylvain Itkine with a proposal to stage the play “Ubu Enchaîné”, which had never been staged before. Itkine was fascinated by this idea and, despite many obstacles that delayed the premiere at the Comedie des Champs Elysees, it was held in September 1937, coinciding with the World Exhibition in Paris. La Compagnie du Diable Ecarlate played the “Ubu Enchaîné” with the scenery by Marx Ernst and the music by Claude Terrasse. A booklet was released for the premiere of this performance. It contained a selection of Jarry’s texts with the illustrations by such painters as Picasso, Tanguy, Man Ray, Miró and others. Here Miró performed the grotesque “Portrait of Ubu’s Mother”.

Miró created a series of drawings related to Papa Ubu in the period between 1953 and 1970. He made a part of these drawings directly in his copy of Jarry’s book “King Ubu” published by E. Fasquelle in Paris in 1921. It should be noted that the Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró in Mallorca held (in addition to various notes and documents related to the writer) one more copy of Jarry’s book from the Miró’s personal library. It was published in the publishing house “Ediciones Minotauro” in Buenos Aires in 1957. It was known that the Swiss publisher Francois Lachenal presented the book to Miró with whom they were members of the College of Pathophysics⁵ established in May 1948. The book had a dedicatory inscription: “For Joan Miró A souvenir as a memento of one day in Palma [de Mallorca]. February 21, 1960. Francois Lachenal”.

The result of the painter’s passion for “King Ubu” was four books published by Eugene Teriade. Thus, the “King Ubu” was published with 13 color lithographs of the painter in an edition of 205 copies on April 29, 1966. Here, Miró created lithographs in a full U-turn. The frontispiece was an abstract image without a topic, the remaining 12 images represented colorful biomorphic satirical stories. These lithographs differed from many other works of the painter in a particularly clear depiction of the characters and a very tightly painted space of the sheet. The painter competently interpreted the absurd plot through a stunning vivid image.

The book “Suites pour King Ubu” was published in the same year 1966 and also consisted of 13 lithographs. On November 8, 1971, the book “Ubu of The Balearic Islands” was published with the texts by Miró himself, written in the poetic prose and accompanied by 24 colored and one black-and-white (on the box) lithographs. The latter was shown entirely at the Moscow exhibition. The idea of “Ubu of The Balearic Islands” arose in January 1964. Then Miró wrote to Teriade that he hoped to see him on his next trip to Paris:

⁵ College of Pathophysics (Fr. Collège de Pataphysique) is an international community of writers, translators, historians of literature, artists, musicians, stage and film directors established in 1948 in Paris as a parody of a scientific community with its sections, commissions, sub-commissions, reception ceremonies, corporate celebrations, etc. The subject of study is pataphysics, and the symbolic patron of the college is Alfred Jarry – the profession of the title character of his novel “Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician” gave the name to the community.

³ The Spanish pronunciation of the name “Juan”

⁴ Le Surmâle (1902, novel)

“<...> it is necessary to prepare “Ubu” completely, including the latest materials that I will bring for “Ubu of The Balearic Islands” [3]. It should be noted that Miró began to write texts in the poetic prose, like those ones included in “Ubu of The Balearic Islands,” as well as poetry for the books since November 1936. Their poetic style was more consistent with the surreal poetry, and some pornographic imagery referred to Jarry himself. The book of verses conceived by Miró was never published, but most of the written verses were included in “Ubu of The Balearic Islands”, and some of them – in “The Lizard with Golden Feathers”.

The new ideas about “King Ubu” overwhelmed Miró. Staying at Palma de Mallorca on December 16, 1973, Miró wrote to Teriade about a new series dedicated to Ubu: “I don’t know if Dupin told you that I found here a good series of models for Ubu <...> In addition, I have numerous sketches and the first ideas on the pieces of newspapers and on paper. This is a wonderful set that I am happy to return to. Do you think we could make a lovely book in honor of Papa Ubu by reviewing all the sketches and models for which I could make a cover and lithograph for the frontispiece?” [4]. Surely Miró had in mind the work on creating the series “Childhood of Ubu” (“L'enfance d'Ubu”) for the book to be published on December 15, 1975.

IV. CONCLUSION

In 1977, the painter admitted that the image of Papa Ubu was closely related to the name of General Franco for him. He said: “Now everyone clearly sees that the invention by Alfred Jarry turned into the reality with Franco and his gang. Therefore I was always captivated by Ubu during the years of Francoism, therefore I painted him so often”. The painter saw in the dictator “the embodiment of darkness, the dirtiest iron hand of Spain, the ominous force, sowing evil on the earth, where freedom should have grown” [5]. And he tried to embody all his hatred of Franco, his regime, his fears, his indignation and horror from the loss of his native country in the caricatural images of the characters of Jarry’s plays.

Incidentally, being inspired by “King Ubu”, Joan Miró created several huge marionette dolls and scenery for the play “Mori el Merma” in 1977, which was staged by Joan Baxas at the La Claca Theatre in Barcelona. Although, the premiere was held at the Teatro Principal in Palma de Mallorca on March 7, 1978.

It is interesting to note that the marchand and publisher Ambroise Vollard made King Ubu a character in his several literary works, officially acquiring the right to use the name of this hero from Jarry. Georges Rouault, Marx Ernst, Pablo Picasso and Rene Magritte also liked to illustrate Ubu's adventures.

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