MI

RÓ

POE

MA

I am working furiously; you and all my other writer friends have given me much help and improved my understanding of many things. I think about our conversation, when you told me how you started with a word and watched to see where it would take you. I have done a series of small things on wood, in which I take off from some form in the wood. Using an artificial thing as a point of departure like this, I feel sound; the "chirp chirp" from the song of a cricket, for example, or the isolated sound of a consonant or vowel, any sound, be it nasal or labial. This can create a surprising metaphysical state in you poets, even when you use the sound of vowels or consonants that have no meaning at all.

In leafing through my notebook I have also noticed the extremely disturbing quality of the dissociated drawings I sometimes do-meant for canvases I am preparing and on which I jot down a number of remarks: names of colors or simply the monosyllable "yes" when I feel that an idea should be carried out ... In other drawings, of objects that fly around on a flat surface, I write isolated letters. I agree with Breton that there is something extremely disturbing about a page of writing ...

There is no doubt that my canvases that are simply drawn, with a few dots of color, a rainbow, are more profoundly moving. These move us in the elevated sense of the word, like the tears of a child in its cradle ...

My latest canvases are conceived like a bolt from the blue, absolutely detached from the outer world ...

I can't find the word for it here; I don't want to say either canvas or painting ...

This is hardly painting, but I don't give a damn.

Letter from Joan Miró to Michel Leiris
Montroig, August 10th, 1924

"I make no distinction between painting and poetry." This rotund affirmation by Joan Miró raises a question: can painting merge with something as foreign to said practice as poetic writing? Poetry, that form of communication that is a concealment of explicit content, an intimate code, the veiling of the message, the stripping of the words, runs throughout Miró's work. A reader of poetry and frequently a part of the literary circles where he cultivated deep friendships with writers, Miró maintained a longstanding battle with the written word and a fertile dialogue with the ways of the poet. From the synesthesia and rhythm of *Modernista* poetry to automatic writing; from the lyrical high grounds of mysticism to the looseness of humor; from the calligram to concrete poetry; from the perfect rhyme to the free verse: everything filters into his artistic creation, a testimony of the silent intimacy between Miró and Literature, as well as of the constant dialogue with himself. A dialogue that is also a battle.

This exhibition traces the path between language and visual art through the paintings, drawings, illustrated books, illustrated verses and poems by the artist himself and other authors. In Miró's work, poetry travels in time; it unifies moments during his career that are far apart. Therefore, the exhibition has been developed between two poles: his work during the emergence of Surrealism (in the 1920's and 1930's) and his latter work (in the 1960's and 1970's) in an effort to demonstrate how poetry acted as the continuous undercurrent sustaining his entire career and established Miró as the translator of images for an ambitious creative project: one of experiencing poetry as an intense vital experience. Or, as he would state in a letter written to himself in 1940: one of "living with the dignity of a poet".

Carlos Martín
Exhibition curator

ON DANGEROUS PATHS

"I know I follow paths that are very dangerous and I confess that sometimes I panic like a wayfarer who is on a road that has never before been explored [...]. Meddling in the actual painting of things foreign to painting." These words by Miró announce his association with a movement born out of writing: Surrealism, which he enhances for his project of fusing painting and poetry. The distillation process of his work from 1924 onward caused perplexity among his contemporaries who quickly considered him, following André Breton, "the most surreal one of us". Representation is minimal, many of his backgrounds are of an ethereal blue (the *Azul* [Blue] of Rubén Darío) and they usually include a word in the title that is as ambiguous as it is relevant: *Peinture* [Painting]. Veiled suggestions in a dreamlike scene are all that remain of nature, forms that are naked like words in a poem, figures arising from a slow process of distillation and deformation that mislead viewers with their gaze.

Miró lets his subconscious flow while working out every detail. His compositions begin with a brushstroke or a sound; he eliminates description in order to grasp suggestion and applies rhetorical figures inherent in poetry. Metaphors and metonyms displacing and expanding the meanings of the images; onomatopoeia providing sound; or hyperbaton dislocating the natural disposition of words and things. These pieces are immediate and enigmatic; as Jacques Dupin noted "their eloquence invalidates all commentary".

THE BRUSHSTROKE AS A FORM OF WRITING AND REWRITING

Through the use of the brushstroke as a graphic symbol not linked to language Miró's painting becomes writing; but a form of writing without a tongue, without a code, without conventions. This is suggested by *Écriture sur fonde rouge* [Writing on Red Background, 1960], a painting that lacks literary references, something that did not deter Miró from considering it a written page. However, what happens when the artist is confronted with a poem other than his own? He does not comment on it, nor does he convert it into a narrative excuse for new compositions; he internalizes it, he expands it or re-inscribes it through the gesture of the hand that "writes" through painting. The freedom of the artistic symbol compared to grammar and syntax allowed Miró to unveil the spaces between verses and the silences of the poet: this is the case of Jacques Dupin's poems illustrated by hand. On other occasions, he added arcane scenes and symbols to what had been written, as in *Parler seul* [Speaking Alone, 1948-1950] by Tristan Tzara, or he generated creatures that occupy the page and engulf the words, like in *À toute épreuve* [Proof Against All, 1958] by Paul Éluard, where images cannot decide whether to underline or act as a counterpoint.

It could be said that all these brushstrokes have added verses to those by the poets; they have been able to recover the etymological sense of the word "illustrate": "illuminate", "bring to light". We must ask who is illuminating who: are the verses glowing in the light of the painting; or are the words framing the colors? In this way, Miró engages in a battle with the poets—his friends and his peers—forming a fraternal community through his gaze.

WORD CHAINS, FREE LETTERS

In 1963, Miró jotted down an idea for a project on a small piece of paper. The project entailed a series of canvases with letters and numbers. To this he added: “We will go further than Letterism”; a mention revealing Miró’s interest in younger creators such as the Lettrists who were very influenced by Dadaism and took poetry by storm with compositions based on graphic symbols and letters that broke away from words. In Miró’s resulting series, *Lettres et chiffres attires par un étincelle* [Letters and Numbers Attracted by a Spark, 1968], the stenciled symbols seem to float through the ether, liberated from the ties of language or attracted to a central point. Significantly, while Miró painted those pieces, the working class and student revolts of May 1968 would leave the walls of Paris full of creative messages claiming for freedom and imagination.

At the time, Miró also became interested in concrete poetry, a genre that lies between literature and art in which the spatial layout of the poem is favored over its content; an interest embodied by the book *Tres Joans. Homenatge a Joan Prats* [Three Joans. Hommage to Joan Prats, 1978] that was conceived alongside visual poet Joan Brossa. Other books authored by Miró during the 1960’s also carried an iconoclastic character, a challenge of traditional books and an ironic play on language. In these volumes, Miró recovered the playwright Alfred Jarry through Ubu; a character that seemed to reactivate his grotesque and foul-mouthed personality within this new context of poetry and revolution.

FROM POETRY TO POEM

From 1968 onward, Miró granted the title of *Poème* [Poem] to an entire series of works. This was an inversion of the pieces that carried the name "Painting" in their titles. His pieces do not refer to pre-existing or non-existing poems, or poems yet to be written. They declare, from the conviction granted by maturity: "this painting *is* a poem". These are rotund pieces that combine the symbols of his cosmic repertoire with thick black brushstrokes to reveal writing. Furthermore, Miró added stenciled letters that indicate a sound rather than the formation of a word, as if the poet's voice was moving freely through space without conforming to any sort of linguistic convention.

Poème III (1968) and *Poème à la gloire des étincelles* [Poem in Praise of Sparks, 1969] are a testimony of how Miró's battle with poetic text drew to an end. In parallel, the artist forged a whole new stellar vocabulary which already identified at the time him and which he applied to his latter books: first, to the classic *Càntic del sol* [Chant of the Sun, 1975] by Francis of Assisi, which seduced Miró through the sort of mysticism found in natural phenomena, connecting his youthful interest for the land to the highness of poetry by means of a few religious songs. And, second, to a more contemporary piece: Jacques Prévert's last book of poems, *Adonides* [Adonis Flowers, 1975], for which he used a series of plates conceived in the 1930's in a further instance of the intertwining of time. If, for Prévert "the true gardener discovers himself in the face of savage thinking"; then, for Miró the true painter is discovered when confronted with the Poem.