





1 Catalan Painter

Joan Miró (1893–1983) was born, educated, and trained as an artist in Barcelona, Spain. Although the art scene in Barcelona was lively, Miró moved to Paris in 1920, seeking a more cosmopolitan environment. There he met a fellow Spanish artist, Pablo Picasso. Miró was inspired by the interlocking shapes and facets of Picasso’s cubist art. Another influence on Miró’s style was his contact with the many other avant-garde artists—particularly Dada and surrealist poets—who lived and worked in Paris.

At the same time, Miró remained deeply attached to Catalonia, the northeast corner of Spain where he grew up. Each summer he returned to his family’s farm in Montroig, a village near Barcelona. Parts of the landscape of Catalonia—plants, insects, birds, stars, sunshine, the moon, the Mediterranean Sea, architecture, and the countryside—appear in Miró’s art throughout his long career. He began *The Farm* in Montroig in the summer of 1921. The artist continued to work on it in Barcelona, and he completed it nine months later in his studio in Paris.

American writer Ernest Hemingway—Miró’s friend and occasional sparring partner at a boxing gym in Paris—purchased *The Farm* as a birthday present for his first wife, Hadley, in 1925 or 1926. The painting later hung in Hemingway’s homes in Key West, Florida, and Havana, Cuba. The author once wrote, “Miró was the only painter who had been able to combine in one picture all that you felt about Spain when you were there and all that you felt when you were away and could not go there.”

2 The Farm

This painting is a “portrait” of a cherished place, an inventory of Miró’s life on his farm in Catalonia.

Look closely to find:

A large eucalyptus tree (its dark leaves are silhouetted against the brilliant blue sky)

Footsteps along a path

A barking dog

A woman washing clothes at a trough, with her baby playing nearby

A donkey plodding around a millstone

Mountains

Families of rabbits and chickens in a coop

A pig peeking through an open door

A goat with a pigeon perched on its back

A lizard and snail crawling amid grass and twigs

Buckets, pails, and watering cans littering the yard

A farmhouse with a horse resting inside and a covered wagon propped outside

Wonder

What time of day is it? Is that the sun or a full moon in the sky?

Whose footprints are those? Why do they suddenly end?

What might be making the dog bark?

above: Joan Miró in his Barcelona studio (detail), 1914, (photo: Francesc Serra), Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona – Arxiu Fofogràfic

right: Joan Miró, *The Farm*, 1921–1922, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Mary Hemingway

“This picture represents all that was closest to me at home, even the footprints on the path by the house. . . . I am very much attached to the landscape of my country. That picture made it live for me.” Joan Miró



3 How Surreal!

Although Miró never officially joined the surrealist group, André Breton, its founder, remarked, “Miró is the most surrealist of us all.” Surrealist artists tried to release the creative power of the subconscious mind by making images in which the familiar meets the fantastic. Miró wanted to depict the things he envisioned in his mind as well as those he saw with his eyes. This way, he could demonstrate the power of imagination to transform reality.

The Farm is an example of how Miró made the ordinary extraordinary. The scene is both real and unreal. It feels familiar, yet unfamiliar. Daily events in the farmyard are meticulously rendered, each element carefully observed and precisely described, yet the overall effect is strangely dreamlike. Miró’s style—fanciful and playful, while wonderfully detailed and thoughtfully arranged—creates a kind of magical realism.

try this

Touch Drawing Exercise

José Pascó was Miró's teacher at the Barcelona School of Fine Arts. He encouraged his young pupil to experiment. Years later, in 1948, Miró recalled, "Pascó was the other teacher whose influence I still feel. . . . Color was easy for me. But with form I had great difficulty. Pascó taught me to draw from the sense of touch by giving me objects which I was not allowed to look at, but which I was afterwards made to draw. Even today. . . the effect of this touch drawing experience returns in my interest in sculpture: the need to mold with my hands, to pick up a ball of wet clay like a child and squeeze it. From this I get a physical satisfaction that I cannot get from drawing or painting." Pascó tried to stimulate Miró's senses and make him become more aware of his surroundings. He wanted his student not only to rely on what he saw but also to work from what he felt and imagined.

Experiment: Make a drawing of something that you cannot see!

You will need:

Two large paper bags (a grocery bag will do)

Paper

Colored pencils, crayons, or markers

This activity requires two people. Each of you should secretly choose a safe object—a stuffed animal, toy, flower, hairbrush, spoon, keys, an item of clothing—and place it in a paper bag so the other person cannot see it. (Don't choose a dangerous object with sharp edges.)

Feel: Take turns reaching into each other's bag and touching the mystery object inside. Use your hands and your imagination, but not your eyes. Feel the entire object from front to back, top to bottom, and side to side. Think about the object's size and shape. Describe its textures. Is it smooth, bumpy, soft, rough, hard, or a combination of textures? Does it remind you of anything?

Imagine: Close your eyes, keeping your hand on the mysterious object in the bag. Imagine that this object is a new species. Where might it live? What might it eat? What sounds would it make? Does it fly, swim, crawl, or run? Imagine that the object came from another planet. What could it be? Imagine that the object is a building. What is its purpose? What or who is inside? What is the environment like around it? Imagine that the object is a kind of food. How would it taste?

Next, without looking in the bag, make a drawing inspired by the object. Describe the object's shape and texture as well as ideas that formed in your imagination. Draw without stopping to worry about the final result. Surprise yourself!

Reflect: How did this experience help you think about the object differently?



top: Joan Miró, *Shooting Star*, 1938, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Joseph H. Hazen. Copyright © 1998 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington

bottom: Joan Miró, *Figure and Birds*, 1948, color lithograph, Paris 1974, no. 231, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine