

MIRÓ.  
THE FLAMING  
HEART  
16.10–10.12.22

MAYORAL

## Miró. The Flaming Heart

16.10.2022 – 10.12.2022

Mayoral is honoured to present an exhibition that traces Joan Miró's philosophical and revolutionary use of fire as a material to be deployed to "assassinate painting."

The title of the exhibition was inspired by the inscription on the *verso* of a gouache gifted to Marguerite Maeght, which reads: "Le Cœur flamboyant chasse la nuit". The image of a flaming heart hunting the night seemed to perfectly capture the vision, talent and revolutionary spirit of this radical artist with a fiery heart who continues to move us and to whom we dedicate this exhibition.

Its centerpiece is *Toile brûlée II*, one of five iconic burnt and lacerated canvases executed in December 1973 at the age of 80, graciously loaned to us by Joan Punyet Miró and the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona. Alongside this powerful masterpiece, Mayoral presents a selection of works on paper, canvas and ceramic dating from the 1950s and '60s, which have also felt the effects of a burning flame and reflect this tension between destruction and creation.

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"I painted these paintings in a frenzy, with real violence so that people will know that I'm alive, that I'm breathing, that I still have a few more places to go. I'm heading in new directions"

Joan Miró, 1978

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When Miró conceived of his 1974 retrospective exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris, he did so "in reverse"; beginning with an idea for the final room with this series of five burnt canvases, two of which he suspended from the ceiling

with rope. They had the desired effect; the public's reaction was one of shock. Not only was Miró attacking his paintings in the most literal way possible—with fire and knives, in an act which many perceived to be the culmination of his famous 1927 declaration to "assassinate painting"—Miró was also attacking his own reputation, as Joan Punyet Miró explains: "Miró wanted to assassinate Miró". To reinvent himself. To protest against what he saw as the over-commercialization of his work. And, to denounce the atrocities being committed in the dying days of the authoritarian regime of Francisco Franco.

The multi-phase process of their creation was documented by Francesc Català-Roca whose short film is also on view in the gallery. Miró emerged delighted from the exercise; a phoenix reborn from the ashes having embraced a philosophy of total liberty.

Before embarking on projects of this scale, Miró often organized his thoughts in preparatory notebooks. It is interesting to note that in his preparatory annotations for the burnt canvases he lists the following: "I: Pour colours, II: Cuts, III: Tear and hang it, IV: Black spots" before adding "improvise with rage."

Despite Miró's reputation, the rage came to him easily. It was a rage inspired in large part by contemporary events since Miró's renewed "assassination of painting" coincided with the sustained economic and political crisis of late Francoism. The 1960s in Spain were marked by detentions, torture and executions and Miró engaged with the political climate deeply, donating artwork to pay the fines of those who had been arrested and attending protest rallies and meetings in person.

For Miró, an attack on painting represented a political gesture, a fundamental rejection of the reduction of art to elite culture and economic commodity.<sup>1</sup> In an interview in *L'Express* in 1978, after the death of Franco, René Bernard challenged Miró about having "never engaged in any direct action" and Miró's response was definitive: "Don't you think that the revolution of



*Toile brûlée 2, 1973*  
Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona  
On loan from a Private Collection  
© Successió Miró, 2022



Photo: E. Català-Roca. *Joan Miró with toiles brûlées*. Tarragona, 1973 © Fons Fotogràfic E. Català-Roca - Arxiu Històric del Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya

forms can be liberating? Unsettling people, forcing them to wake up. [...] You should hit hard. Violence is liberating."<sup>2</sup>

Miró came across the use of fire as a medium in the mid-1940s when he embarked on a first series of ceramics. He intuitively embraced its unpredictable qualities, finding the freedom from absolute knowledge about how his work would emerge extremely seductive. He subsequently set about transferring these qualities into his work on other supports such as *Peinture* (1963) which began as a studio rag that Miró crumpled, burnt and then painted directly in jewel-like colours that sparkle like stars in the night sky.

Miró relied heavily on his friend and collaborator the ceramicist Josep Llorens Artigas for technical mastery in his quest to control fire. Having first worked together on a series of ceramics in 1944-46, in 1953 Miró entreated Artigas to do so again. They set about challenging the association of ceramics with utility and aesthetic beauty in favour of staying true to their materials. Indeed, rather than calling their new work ceramics Artigas

and Miró chose the term "Terres de grand feu" or 'firestones' in order to emphasize the almost alchemical process by which they are created. With their inventive enamels, surface finishes, textures and hybrid forms, works from these series such as *Personnage double face* (1956) demonstrate Miró's genius for transforming found objects to create an effect that it at once sophisticated and primitive, cerebral and intuitive.

With an almost insolent economy of means, Miró the alchemist was able to transform the most humble of mediums—be it a rag, clay, or a blank canvas—into an object that has the power to erupt with life and make the scales fall from your eyes.

1\_ See Anne Umland, "Miró the Assassin" in *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-painting 1927-1937*, (exh- cat-), MoMA, NY, pp. 1-15

2\_ "Miró to *L'Express*: Violence Liberates" by René Berard in *L'Express*, 4<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> September 1978

**“I love to work with fire [...] it destroys less than it transforms, it acts on what it burns with an inventive force which possesses magic”**

## **Joan Miró, 1974**

Mayoral, founded in 1989, is an art gallery located in Barcelona and Paris. Specialized in Post-War and Contemporary Art, promoting artists such as Tàpies, Millares, Saura, Zóbel, Francés and Chordà, alongside works by key twentieth-century avant-garde artists such as Miró and Picasso, and the best of today's generation with names such as Macarrón, Oliver and Pratts. The gallery develops projects that are rigorously curated and grow out of an exhaustive process of research. In recent years, Mayoral has presented projects such as “Miró's Studio,” and retrospectives dedicated to Millares, Tàpies, Saura and Chordà, as well as dialogues between artists such as Miró/ Zao Wou-Ki and Francés/Vieira da Silva.

The gallery participates in arts fairs such as Art|Basel Miami Beach, Art|Basel Hong Kong, TEFAF Maastricht, TEFAF New York, Art Cologne, Art Paris and ARCOmadrid.

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Timetable:  
Tuesday to Friday  
10.30 - 13.00 / 14.00 - 19.00  
Saturday  
13.00 - 18.00