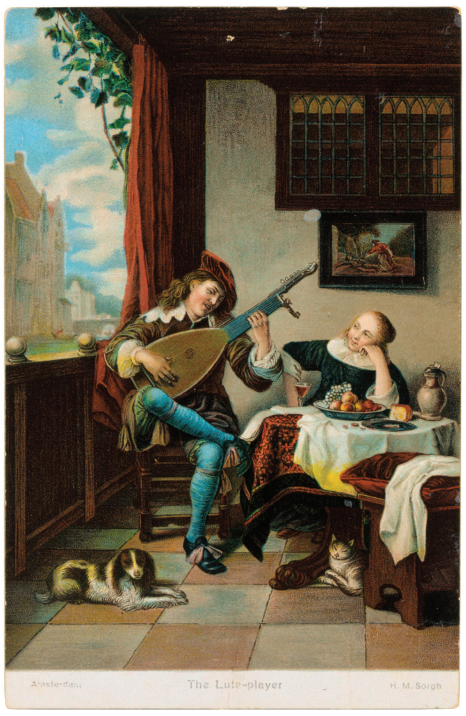
This hybrid image is one of Miró's early attempts to forge his own visual language. Pictured is his friend and Barcelona studio-mate, Enric Cristòfol Ricart, set against a bright yellow wall with a pasted-on Japanese print. Miró does not hesitate to fill the canvas with contrasting styles: abstraction, figurative representation and perspective, bright colors reminiscent of French Fauvism, and bold Expressionist brushstrokes coexist. While carefully mapping these different approaches, Miró also introduces his own touches, such as the floating painter's palette and the colorful wavy lines in Ricart's hair.

"You have to be an *International Catalan*; a *homespun* Catalan is not, and never will be, worth anything in the world," declared Miró after his first visit to Paris, in 1920. He returned to the French capital the following year, where he painted *Still Life—Glove and Newspaper*. The five objects on the table—Miró's own glove and cane, an artist's portfolio, a newspaper, and a pitcher adorned with a Gallic rooster—compose a symbolic self-portrait of a Catalan artist abroad. The periodical, which is folded so that only the first part of its title is visible, might be a reference to the French newspaper *Le Journal* as well as the word *lejos*, or "far away" in Spanish, speaking to Miró's position between Paris and Barcelona.

Upon seeing this painting, Pablo Picasso pronounced, “This is poetry.” *Still Life II* presents three mysteriously suspended objects in an ambiguous space. The gray and ochre planes in the background might be read as a floor or a table, or even as a representation of cast light. In this indeterminate setting, the meticulously rendered carbide lamp, sliced tomato, and iron stand—everyday objects from Miró’s farm in Montroig—are rendered uncanny.

“I have already managed to break free of nature, and the landscapes have nothing whatever to do with outer reality,” declared Miró while working on this painting at his family’s farm. “Nevertheless,” he continued, “they are more Montroig than had they been painted from nature.” Begun as a scene of a peasant about to barbecue his lunch, the work developed into a visionary, fantastic landscape filled with schematic signs that Miró would use over and over again. The flesh-enclosed eye at the center, Miró said, “is the eye of the picture staring at me.”

Dutch Interior (I) is based on a seventeenth-century painting depicting a lute player in a domestic interior. Miró bought a postcard reproduction of the work at the Rijksmuseum, in Amsterdam, a few months prior to beginning his painting. “I had the postcard pinned up on my easel while I painted.” With bold colors and flat shapes, Miró rejected the naturalistic modeling and perspective of the Dutch painting, and he greatly accentuated some elements of the original composition—the lute and the man’s head and ruffled collar in particular—while diminishing others.



Postcard of Hendrick Martensz Sorgh, *The Lute Player*, 1661, used by Miró in composing *Dutch Interior (I)*. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Department of Painting and Sculpture Study Center. Gift of the artist, 1973

In the summer of 1930, Miró moved away from painting to explore the possibilities of relief sculpture. Made from pieces of wood and metal that could easily have been found at a carpentry shop, *Relief Construction* combines organic shapes, some of which project forward from the rough, unfinished wooden surface. Miró identified the vertical metal spike and the small black disk as the neck and head of the curved white torso-like form. The red disk covered with sharp nails, he said, was the sun.

This painting's sinuous lines, exuberant forms, and interweaving of visual and verbal motifs epitomize the fluid exchange between painting and poetry in Miró's work. Strangely anthropomorphic birds float against a washy blue background, including one from whose eye flows a line identifying it as an "*hirondelle*" (swallow). Just below, another calligraphic line inscribes the word "*amour*" (love). Interlaced with these poetic exclamations, boldly colored figures, faces, and feet swirl through the sky, seemingly aspiring to the birds' liberated flight and unbound freedom.

Miró began this work by nailing a hefty bundle of rope to a cardboard support. The three painted figures around it were then formed in relation to the shape of the rope, which he described as "binding and torturing them." The distorted personages, with their grimacing faces, glaring eyes, and saw-like teeth, intimate a sense of violence and aggression. The figure on the left even appears to be inflicting violence on itself, by biting its own hand. *Rope and People, I* seems imbued with the deep political unease that marked this period in Spain and that would soon break into civil war.

With the Spanish Civil War advancing without a foreseeable end, Miró had to remain in Paris after a visit in the fall of 1936. Feeling uprooted and increasingly anxious, Miró decided "to do something absolutely different"; he would, he said, explore "the deep and poetic reality of things." Working from life for the first time in many years, he created *Still Life with Old Shoe* over the course of four months. Five psychedelically colored objects set within a somber, apocalyptic landscape communicate an atmosphere of tension and anguish over a shattered reality.

Mural Painting was commissioned in 1950 for the Harvard University graduate dining hall at the suggestion of the architect Walter Gropius. Miró executed the frieze in Barcelona, then sent it to Cambridge to be set into the canteen's wall. Floating over an atmospheric ground, watchful characters—which the artist identified as a bull and figures—are contoured with thin black lines, some of which are filled in with flat colors while others remain transparent. Ten years after the mural's installation, Miró replaced it with a more durable ceramic tile version and the original oil on canvas was acquired by MoMA.

Miró began his Black and Red Series with two compositions etched on copperplates. One presented signs and symbols floating in an airy space; the second, a crowded scene in which three figures face a ferocious long-nosed head. By alternately inking each plate in red and black, and superimposing them in different positions, Miró created eight distinct variations. Conceived in the midst of the Spanish Civil War, the series suggests a narrative of oppression and fear.

In 1939, hoping to escape the threat of imminent war, Miró and his family left Paris for Normandy. “I felt a deep desire to escape. I closed myself within myself purposely,” he recalled of that period. “The night, music, and the stars began to play a major role in suggesting my paintings.” In this work, a curved ladder reaches for a nebulous sky teeming with stars, a crescent moon, geometric forms, and strange creatures. Made at a frightening time, *The Escape Ladder* transcends the external world to propose a vibrant universe of unconstrained freedom.

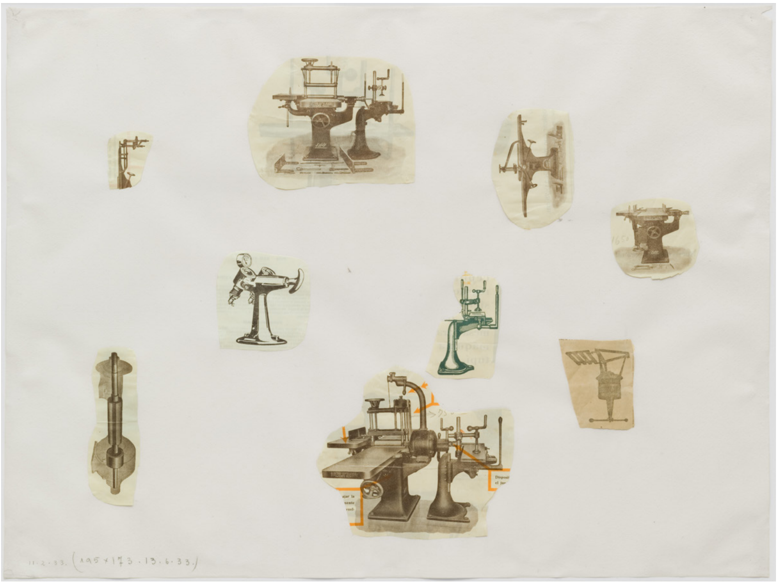
“I make no distinction between painting and poetry,” asserted Miró. Adopting similar creative techniques to those of his poet friends, Miró developed a vocabulary of visual signs that could be compared to words. In the drawing *The Family*, hieroglyphic forms symbolize a father, mother, and young child “glimpsed,” as Miró described, “in the intimacy of their home.” These imaginative characters are carefully placed within a faintly visible grid, in which the mother’s plant-like body acts as an anchor. The small flames extending from her heart, Miró indicated, stand for maternal love.

Writing to his dealer Pierre Loeb in 1927, Miró confided, “I have to tell you that I look at real things with increasing love.” In the same letter, he laid out his plan to create the collage-objects known as his Spanish Dancers. On display here is one of these works, which combines diverse objects and materials—sandpaper, nails, plaster, a plumb line, a clump of hair, and a drafting triangle—to suggest a performing female body. Simple and recognizable, these real-world items double as corporeal and erotic signs.

In this small wood panel painting, Miró set a figure against a geometric ground. Composed of three horizontal bars of varying colors, the backdrop—together with the painting's title—suggests an eerie beach landscape, in which a saturated red sun is suspended in a deep blue sky. The sea is both an acidic yellow and a bright white, and the sand is a green so dark it appears almost black. Across this carefully divided composition, the vividly colored bather extends its elongated, contorted limbs. While its profile can be deciphered, the rest of its body is more difficult to read.

In a series of pastels made in the fall of 1934, Miró pursued what he called "aggressiveness" through color. Rendered in acidic, highly saturated, and dissonant hues of thickly applied pastel, the isolated figure of the so-called opera singer appears to protrude from the paper's surface. Her asymmetrical head, twisted open mouth, overinflated genitalia, and single toenail resist the corporeal ideals embraced by the various fascist parties that were gaining power across Europe at the time.

In Barcelona in 1933, Miró created a series of collages with images of machinery and other utilitarian objects from local magazines and newspapers. One of these collages, which assembled reproductions of woodworking tools and other instruments, served as an inspiration for this painting. Under Miró's brush, the collage's cutout elements lost their industrial appearances, and were translated into ambiguous biomorphic forms. The opaque, openly suggestive shapes appear suspended against softly atmospheric and luminous grounds of color that bleed and blend into one another.



Joan Miró. *Collage (Study for a Painting, June 13, 1933)*. 1933. Cut-and-pasted photomechanical reproductions and graphite pencil on paper, 18½ × 24⅞" (46.8 × 63.0 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © 2019 Successió Miró/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Two months prior to completing this painting, Miró wrote to his dealer Pierre Matisse, “The work continues. In the end, I believe it will transport you into a world of *real unreality*.” Here, the artist partially returned to the devices of illusionistic painting, placing bizarre figures in a summarily perspectival mountainous landscape. The tempera paint’s dry effect and the shading’s irregularity lend a physical presence to the wandering, hybrid creatures, whose bodies seem to respond to their environment’s curious growths and metamorphoses.

In a small room in his temporary apartment in Paris, Miró set up his easel alongside a round convex mirror and executed his first self-portrait in almost twenty years. On a carefully thought-out ground, he delineated his image with penciled lines, shading, and the barest hint of oil. Around his features, suns, stars, sparks, and flames coalesce into an astral configuration that seems to emanate from his flaming eyes. Begun as a realistic drawing of the artist’s face, *Self-Portrait I* ended as a revelation of Miró’s imaginative universe.

According to Miró, his childhood friend Joan Prats came upon an ostentatiously framed, pompous academic portrait by an unknown painter and sent it to him as a joke. The sitter's pose and costume, his upturned gaze of inspiration, the official medal and ribbon on his table, and the rose garden outside his window typify the bourgeois taste and assuredness of the late nineteenth century. Within this orderly, rational, and humorless world, Miró mischievously inserted his own creatures and signs. As if to suggest the man's puzzlement at this unexpected interruption, he punctuated his forehead with a small swirling form.

Miró's profound engagement with literature led to various collaborations with poets and writers. The publications on display here range from illustrations for a children's book and a Surrealist play to poems by renowned writers. Collectively, these books testify to Miró's mastery of various techniques and his ability to create imaginative visual equivalents to the written word.