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ART

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Working
with
Fantasy

MIRÓ





COVER: Joan Miró (1893-1983) *People and Dog Before the Sun, 1949. Oil. Basle Art Museum.*

SCHOLASTIC

ART

Maurice R. Robinson, founder of Scholastic Inc., 1895-1982

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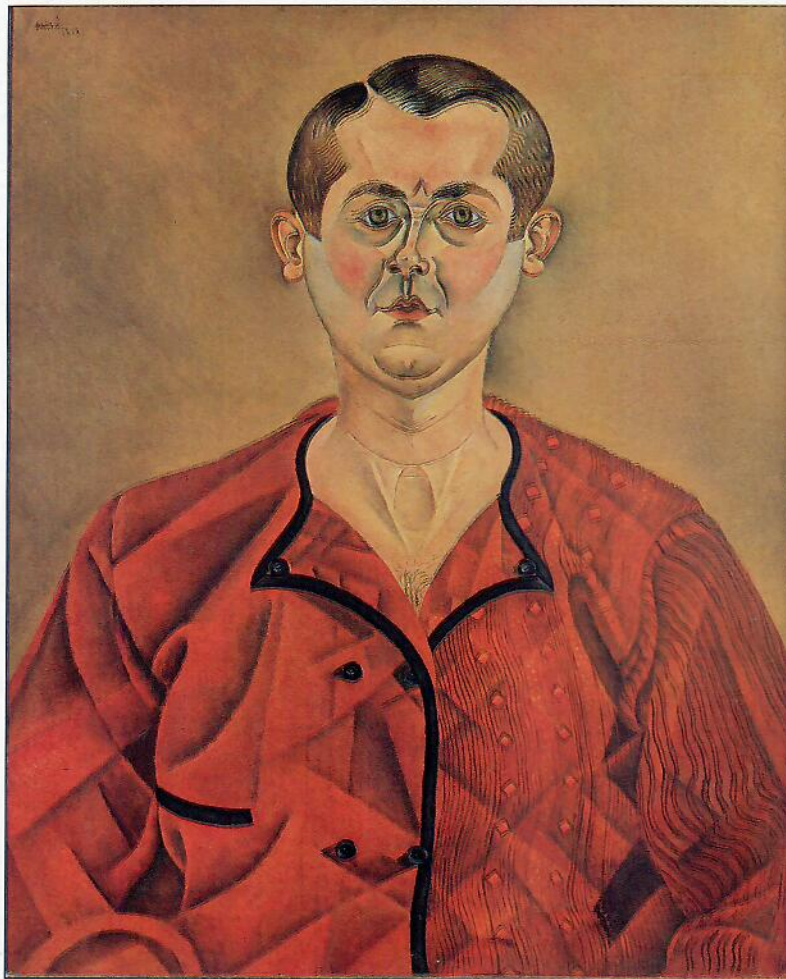
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Spanish artist Pablo Picasso liked Miró's work so much, he bought the artist's self-portrait (above) and kept it with him throughout his life.

Self-Portrait, 1919. Oil. Picasso Museum, Paris.

Every shape, every color in my pictures is based on reality.

— JOAN MIRÓ

Compare Miró's portrait on the right with the one above, done a few years earlier.

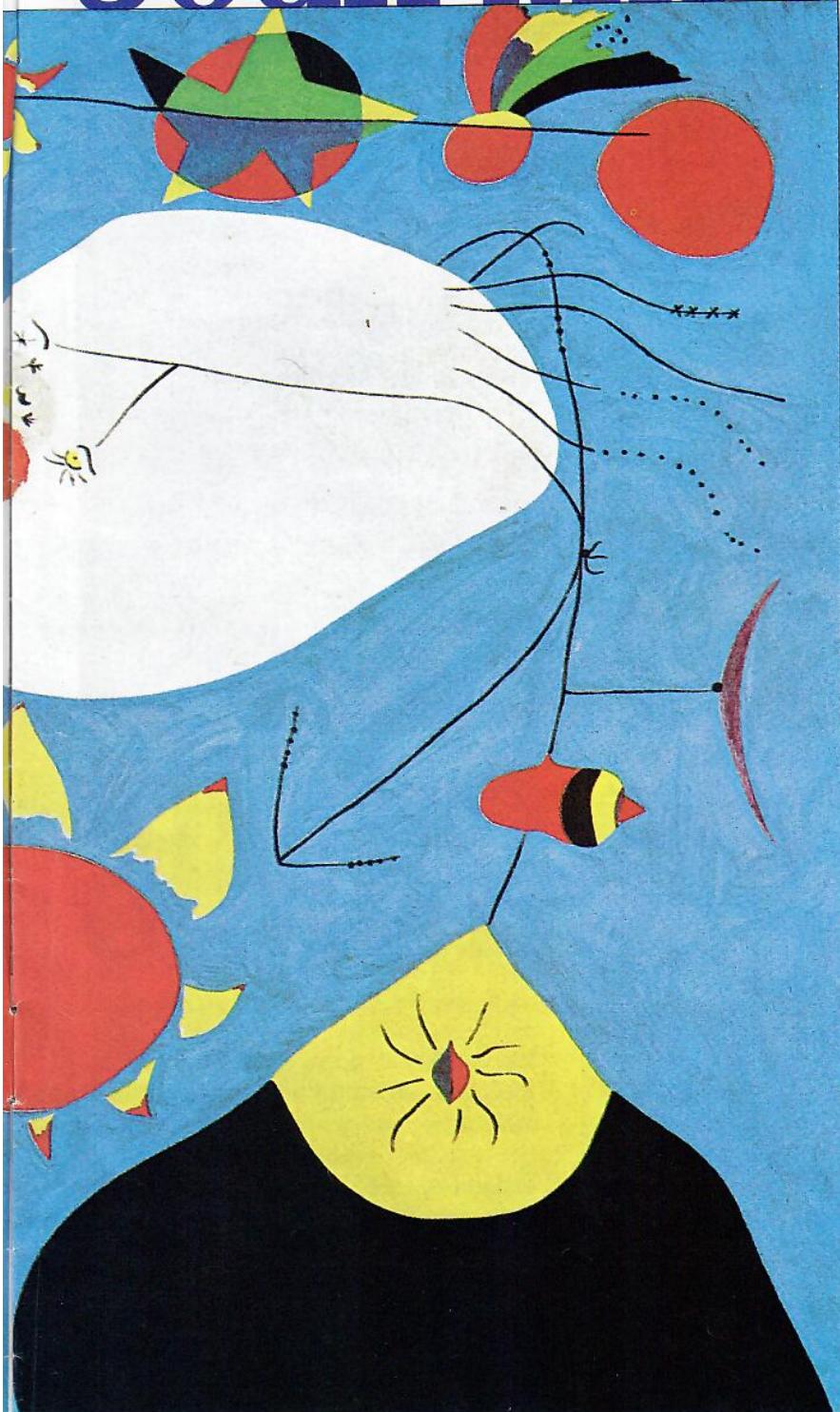
Portrait IV, 1938. Oil. Private Collection, Pittsburgh.

All Miró paintings in this issue © 1995 Artists Rights Society, New York

The



Fantastic Images of Joan Miró



These images and the one on the cover are paintings of people. Twentieth-century Spanish artist Joan (pronounced WAN) Miró's early self-portrait (far left), is not realistic. But it seems so when compared with a later portrait (left) done in the abstract style Miró became famous for. Why did the artist paint this way? What is the meaning of the fantastic symbolic language he created during his 80-year career?

Joan Miró was born in 1893 in Barcelona, a large city in Spain. Son of a successful goldsmith, Miró had always wanted to be an artist. But, after he graduated from high school at 17, his father made him take an office job. Miró became ill, and his father sent him to a family farm so he could recover. When Miró was better, he was allowed to go to art school.

In 1919, a year after World War I had ended, Miró moved to Paris, then the center of the art world. There he met other struggling artists—including a young Spaniard named Pablo Picasso. Deeply affected by the destruction of World War I, many artists and writers working at that time felt that logical views of the world had failed. They began questioning traditional values. The new science of psychology suggested that the “unconscious” mind guides feelings, fears, and desires. A few artists, known as **Surrealists**, began working with dreams, memory, and chance to create fantastic and often **abstract** images.

By 1924, guided only by his imagination, Miró was painting abstractly and showing with the Surrealists. He developed his distinctive style (see *Portrait IV*, left) using **simple lines** and **flat, brightly colored shapes** which took on universal and symbolic qualities.

In 1939, after the Second World War began, Miró left France and continued to paint abstract images expressing his deepest feelings. After the war's end, Miró began to work on a large scale, creating a series of monumental sculptures. At the end of his life, the artist came to the United States to paint murals. Miró died in Spain in 1983, at the age of 90.



Cosmic Symbols

In the painting above, can you find the ladder that Miró created to symbolize escape from the real world into the world of the imagination?

The Escape Ladder, 1940. 15 3/4" x 18 3/4". The Museum of Modern Art, NY. Helen Acheson Bequest. © 1994 The Museum of Modern Art, NY, NY.

The years Miró spent on a farm in the Spanish countryside while he was in his teens influenced the artist for the rest of his life. The images he saw around him during that time would appear over and over in his art. As you can see in his early landscape *The Farm* (above, right), many of his favorite objects—the sun, animals, ladders, plants—are represented **realistically**. In the other paintings shown here, these objects have been **stylized** and **transformed** into **abstract symbols**.

The Farm, painted in 1921-22, is an accu-

rate description of typical farmyard activities. The rocky, sun-drenched landscape is filled with tiny details—a woman washes clothes, a dog barks, a chicken stands on a ladder, snails and insects crawl beside blades of grass. The artist uses one of his favorite **shapes**, the **circle**, to **unify** and tie the painting together. The sun in the upper right **echoes** a black circle that surrounds the tree in the center; a hole in the trough in the lower right is **balanced** by the red wheel of the cart on the left. This circular shape works **symbolically**, standing for the

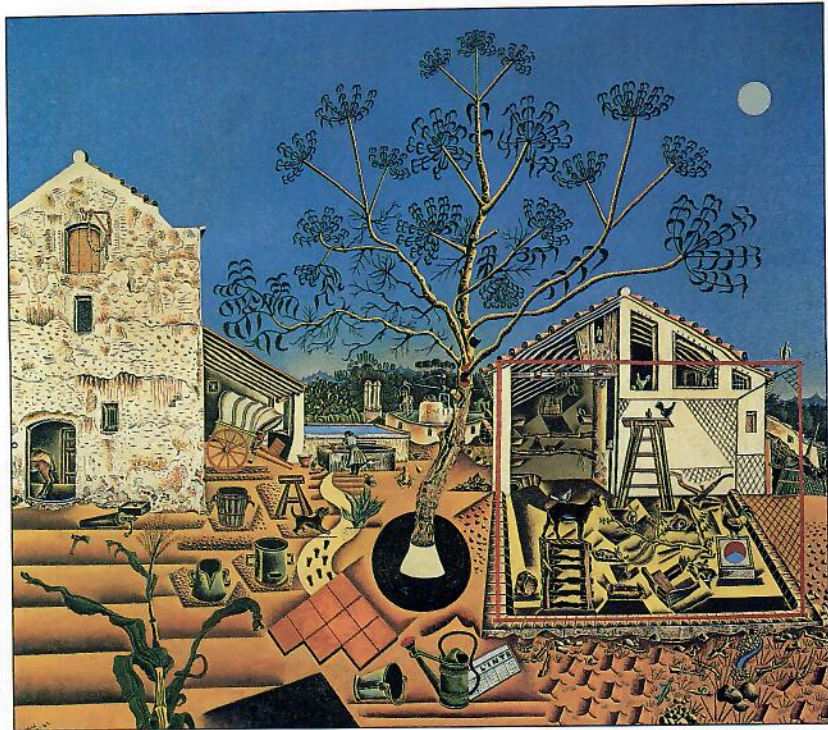
You must plant your feet firmly on the earth in order to leap into the air.

— JOAN MIRÓ

larger concepts of growth, darkness and light, night and day. The **positive** (white) circle of the sun *repeats and contrasts with* the **negative** (black) circle at the tree's roots.

In *The Farm*, a small ladder on the right is depicted realistically. It serves as a perch for a chicken. In *Dog Barking at the Moon* (below), painted around five years later, a large **simplified, stylized** ladder leads up into an empty black sky. Surrounded by the vast, silent, and mysterious night, a grotesque-looking dog howls at the distorted shape of the crescent moon above. Why is the dog barking? Where does the ladder lead? Is it a means of escape? What is the mysterious birdlike shape above the ladder? By **simplifying, flattening, and reducing** his forms, Miró creates a haunting visual image that leaves much of its meaning to the viewer's imagination.

In 1940, as another World War began, the artist wrote, "I felt a deep desire to escape and went within myself. The night, music, and the stars became all important." He left France for Spain, and began working in isolation on a series of small abstract works called the *Constellations*. In one of these paintings, *The Escape Ladder* (left), figures, insects, moons, stars, suns, and planets have been transformed into a **personal, symbolic** language. A sinister and artificial world of night is populated with wormlike shapes and distorted faces. The **grayish backgrounds, angular shapes, and limited color scheme** all add to the ominous feeling. The **symbolic shape** of the escape ladder (near the center of the painting) suggests movement. It points upward, perhaps as an invitation to rise above the material world into the spiritual realm. In the *Constellation* series, Miró created a vast universe, filled with good and evil and hope.

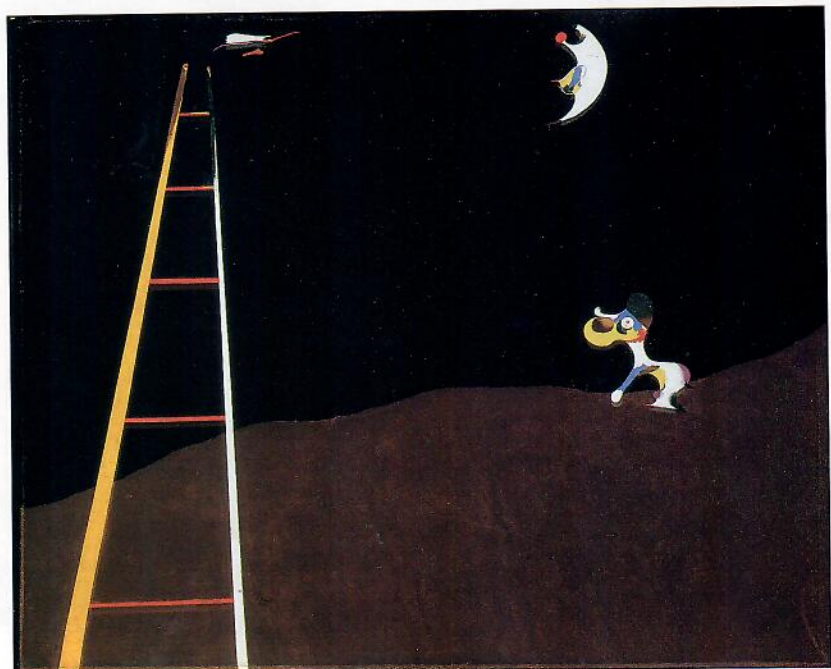


The work above, painted early in Miró's career, contains images the artist would use for the rest of his life.

The Farm, 1921-22. Oil. 48 1/4" x 55 1/4".
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.
Gift of Mary Hemingway.

"Signs that have no exact meaning create a sense of magic." — Joan Miró

Dog Barking at the Moon, 1926.
Oil. 28 7/8" x 36 1/2".
Philadelphia Museum of Art. A.E.
Gallatin Collection.





A New Language of Shapes

What does the small, tranquil scene above have to do with Miró's colorful abstraction shown on the right?

Hendrik Sorgh (1611-1670),
The Lute Player, 1661. Oil.
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

MASTERPIECE
OF THE
MONTH

Preview

In the spring of 1928, Miró visited Holland and became interested in the realistic, highly detailed scenes of everyday life painted by 17th-century Dutch artists. When he returned to Paris, he brought back reproductions to remind him of the paintings. Working from a postcard, Miró created his version of one of these works (right), calling it *Dutch Interior I*.

The Lute Player (above), by Hendrik Sorgh, features a couple—a woman sitting at a table listening to a man singing and playing the lute. Can you recognize any of the elements from this painting in Miró's version on the right? You can probably find the lute player, the dog and cat on the floor, and the large window on the left. But can you find the musician's foot, the table, and the figure of the woman? Miró has selected what he felt were the *essential* characteristics of each object and "freed them from the constraints of reality" by **distorting**, **simplifying** and **abstracting** them. He **emphasized** some objects, **combined** others and **left out** those he felt were unimportant.

The walls and floor, the lute, the dog and cat have been **flattened**, **stylized** and **distorted** but they are still recognizable. The musician's head and body and the table cloth have been **combined** into a single large white shape that fills the center of the painting. His face has been **transformed** into a red balloonlike mask, dominated by an open mouth filled with sharp teeth. Can you locate the man's mustache, hair, and velvet hat? Some forms, such as the figure of the woman, have almost completely

disappeared. Other objects, like the tiles on the floor, and the triangles of the leaded window in the upper right corner of the painting are still there, but have been **abstracted** into imaginative **geometric shapes**.

In Miró's *Dutch Interior I* and other paintings, the artist has developed his own **visual language**. His **vocabulary** includes stars, circles, spirals, squares, triangles, the sun, and the crescent moon. Can you find some of these **lines** and **shapes** in the painting on pages 8-9 titled *Harlequin's Carnival*? The **focal point** of this work is the figure of Harlequin, a character who plays the part of an unhappy clown in theatrical productions. A sad-looking Harlequin on the left, wears a diamond-patterned costume, a mask, beard, mustache, and a feathered hat. He is surrounded by a number of playful creatures. A tiny guitar-playing figure, top center, divides the painting in half; insects, butterflies, cats, and other beings play games. Miró uses blue—a **symbolic** color he associated with the space and freedom of dreams—to **unify** the painting.

The traditional painting, above left, was the inspiration for Joan Miró's fantasy, *Dutch Interior*, on the right.

Dutch Interior I, 1928. Oil. 36 1/8" x 28 3/4". The Museum of Modern Art, NY, NY. Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund. Photo © 1994. The Museum of Modern Art.



SCHOLASTIC
ART

MASTERPIECE
OF THE
MONTH # 3



Joan Miró (1893-1983) *Harlequin's Carnival*, 1924-25. Oil. 26" x 36 5/8". Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY.



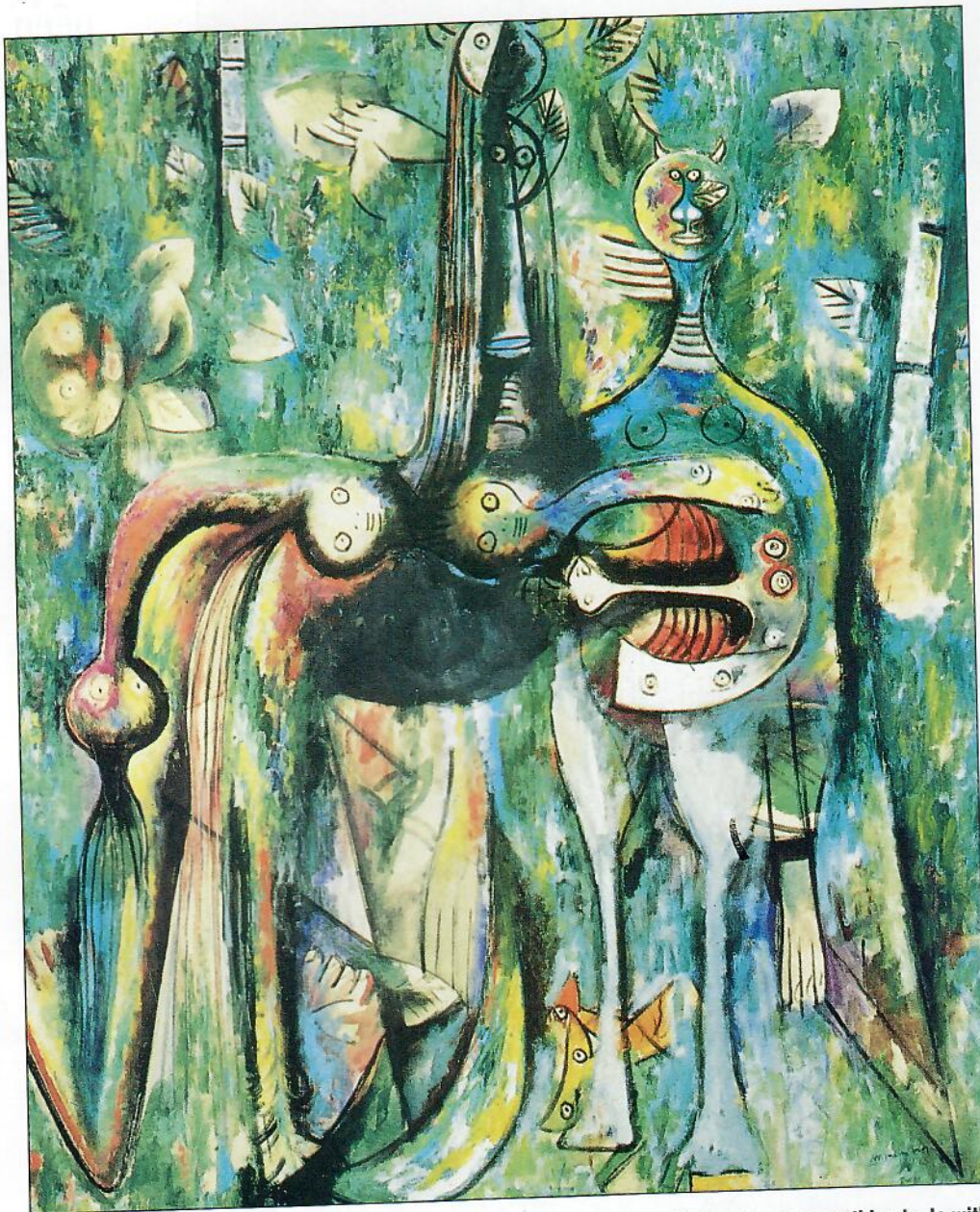
“My objects
are more
real than
if
they had
been
painted
from
nature.”

—JOAN MIRÓ

by
Joan
Miró

The Harlequin's Carnival

VISIONARY LANDSCAPES: Three artists who have created their own fantasy worlds.



Primeval Fantasies

This dreamlike scene (left), was painted by Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam in 1940, the year Joan Miró did *The Escape Ladder* (page 4). Compare the two works. Both contain grotesque beings and **simplified, stylized, biomorphic** (organic, taken from nature) forms. The works created by Lam and other Latin American artists resemble those of European Surrealists. But Lam's fantastic images are not so much a product of the unconscious mind as an expression of Latin American culture and its ancient pre-Columbian heritage.

Wilfredo Lam was born in Cuba in 1902. His mother was of African, Native American, and European origin; his father was Chinese. Lam spent 15 years in Europe. When he returned, the artist rediscovered his country's rich traditions and lush tropical landscapes.

In *Malemo, God of the Crossroads*, figures—part human, part animal, part plant—peer from between palm fronds, bamboo, and sugar cane. The **curved, repeated shapes, abstracted from nature**, dissolve into each other—legs turn into stems, leaves become faces. The **shallow picture space** increases the menacing junglelike quality.

"This picture has nothing to do with the real Cuban countryside. I wish to communicate a psychic state."

—Wilfredo Lam

Wilfredo Lam (1902-1982) *Malemo, God of the Crossroads*, 1940. Oil. Private Collection, Oak Park, IL.

Ladder to the Moon

The work on the right, *Ladder to the Moon*, was painted by 20th century American Georgia O'Keeffe. The artist described creating it, "At the ranch there is a strong handmade ladder to the roof ... One evening the sky was a pale greenish-blue, the high moon looked white in the evening sky. Painting the ladder had been in my mind and there it was—ready to be put down." From reading this, would you have pictured the imaginative image shown here?

Joan Miró's ladders (pages 4-5) have symbolic meanings. But sometimes, as in O'Keeffe's case, there is no intentional message. The artist said, "My paintings just grow, inch by inch." During the 1920s, O'Keeffe no doubt saw works by European surrealists, most of whom based their images on "unconscious" feelings. In many surrealist paintings, unrelated

objects seem to float in space. These qualities may have unconsciously influenced O'Keeffe's work.

In *Ladder to the Moon*, O'Keeffe has used natural forms, but has **reduced their number, flattening, simplifying, and dislocating** the ladder by floating it above the landscape. Her composition is almost **symmetrical** (the same on each side) except for the **asymmetrical** (different on each side, but visually balanced) position of the ladder, which enhances the work's haunting, mysterious quality.

Compare Georgia O'Keeffe's ladder (right) with those painted by Joan Miró on pages 4-5.

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986)
Ladder to the Moon, 1958. 40" x 30"
Photo © 1994 Malcolm Varon.



"Abstraction allows me to express the mysteries and complexities of life."

—Beauford Delaney

Beauford Delaney (1901-1979). *Untitled*, 1946. Oil. Smithsonian Institution, Evans Tibbs Collection.



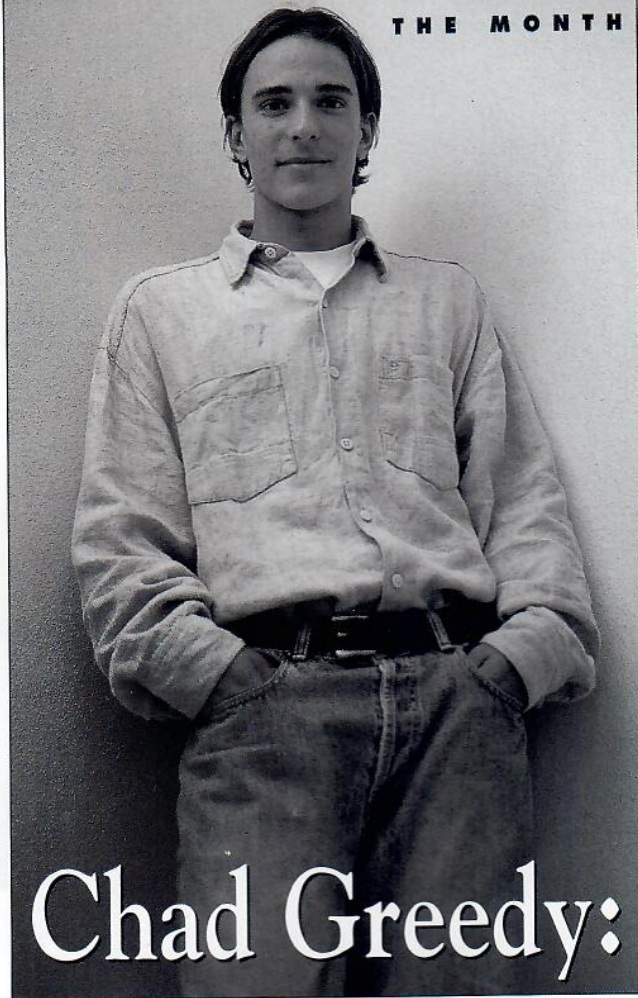
Painting Private Symbols

As a child, 20th-century African-American painter Beauford Delaney, son of a Tennessee minister, showed great drawing skill. At 16, he went to art school, and in 1929, the artist moved to New York. He held his first one-man show a year later. His early works were realistic, but by the 1940s he was painting imaginative street scenes and portraits in a **stylized, expressive, abstracted** style. The **brilliant hues** he used were unrelated to the actual colors of the objects; the **black outlines and thick textures** were

influenced by the dominant American art movement of the time—*Abstract Expressionism*.

Delaney's untitled work on the left emphasizes formal qualities—**line, shape, color, texture, balance**. But the very real subjects suggest the painting may have a symbolic meaning. A round shape in a white diamond inside a red circle are located on a purple background. The arrangement of the elements—a head in one corner (possibly a self-portrait), a snake and a bird in others—suggest a personal flag, crest, or emblem.

ARTIST OF
THE MONTH



Chad Greedy:

DRAWING MEMORIES

Compare the fantastic drawing on the right, created by 18-year-old Chad Greedy, with some of the strange-looking creatures painted by Joan Miró. Why has the artist put a fish inside a tree and what does it mean?

Chad did this Scholastic Art Award-winning drawing in his senior year at Edmund (Oklahoma) Memorial High School. Currently a freshman at Oklahoma University, Chad is majoring in art and is interested in working in video. He says, "I don't know if art will become a career. Right now it's fun. I sit down and create—there are no rules. It just seems like a hard career to pursue. But other people are making it, so there's hope."

We select our Artist of the Month from among Scholastic Award winners. To enter, ask your teacher to write to the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, 555 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3999 for entry deadlines and rules books. *Scholastic Art* magazine does not have a separate competition.

■ **How did you first get interested in art?**

My whole family is into art. When I was little, my grandfather and I drew pictures together. My brother draws; my aunt is an accomplished artist.

■ **How did you come to do this award-winning work?**

My last year in high school, I was in a studio class where our teacher let us do our own thing. We had to create a certain number of pieces, but it was up to us to come up with the ideas. During this class I felt freer to create pieces that came more from within.

■ **What medium did you use?**

This work was done in mixed media—oils, pastel, pencil, and

charcoal. I like working with different materials all at the same time. I can use each one to my advantage. I like to be able to start out with paint and switch to—say pencil—if I find that will work better. There are fewer restrictions if you combine media this way.

■ **What is the idea behind the drawing? Why a fish in a tree?**

A number of my pieces are based on childhood memories. Nature is a big theme of mine too. My family has always been outdoors oriented. We have a lake house in Wisconsin surrounded by trees. We fish a lot when we're there. It's a really nice place. A lot of my work—like this drawing—centers on my experiences there.

■ **What do the two sets of lines on either side of the fish mean?**

As I was working on this, I was thinking of the way time has passed for me—from early childhood on up to being a young adult, and how it will just keep going from there. I see it like ticks on a clock or maybe more like a timeline. I use marks like this a lot in my work. These lines are graphic elements that represent the concept of time passing.

■ **Does the red streak below the eye of the fish have a meaning?**

I put that in as a focal point and also to convey a feeling. The red streak means I'm getting older and not going to the house as much. It represents a tear, I guess, over the fact I

can't get up there. The fish's expression is down too.

■ **Why did you choose the colors you did?**

The colors represent the place—the blues of the water and the greens of the trees. When you're at the house, there's nothing around but you and those colors, made even more brilliant by the sunshine. I wanted the vivid colors I chose to convey that feeling.

■ **How did you do the drawing?**

I drew a tree, then went from there. I wanted the image to be simple, almost symbolic, but I felt I needed another element. So I painted the fish. I thought the drawing was done, so I put it away. When I got it out again, I didn't like it at all. My art teacher encouraged me to finish—she thought it had potential. So I added detail to the fish—scales, eyes, and the time lines. These elements gave it texture. When I got going on it again, I just couldn't stop. The new texture made me excited about the work again.

■ **Do you like to work abstractly?**

Almost everything I do now is abstract. I used to work very realistically, but I don't feel I want to work that way anymore. For me, an abstract image is the best way to express myself and my inner feelings. There are fewer rules and more room for my own interpretation of things.

■ **What advice do you have for other aspiring artists?**

For me, art is a way to let loose. Don't give up on your art, even when it gets frustrating. When you try putting your thoughts down, sometimes they don't come out the way you want. There can be a big gap between paint and paper. But don't give it up.



For me, an abstract image is the best way to express myself and my inner feelings.

PAINING A FANTASTIC LANDSCAPE

Use basic lines, shapes, and colors to create an imaginary world of your own.

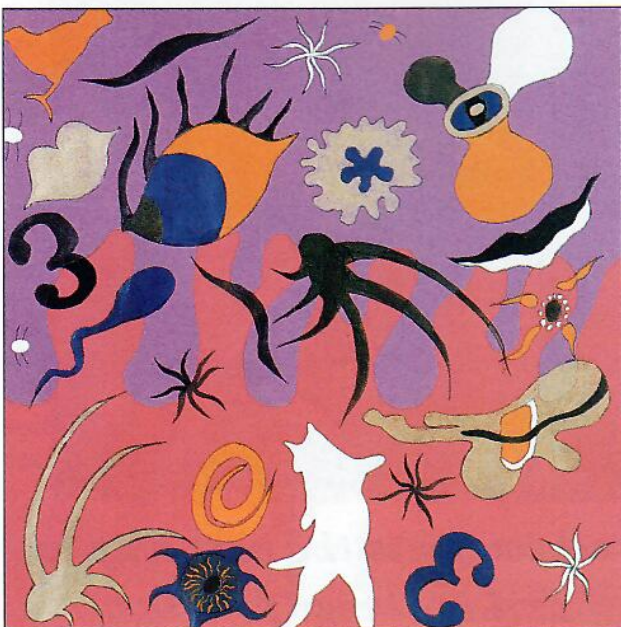


When you first see them, many of Joan Miró's works appear completely abstract. The artist said, "For me, a form is never abstract; it is always a sign of something real." Miró filled his unique and colorful worlds with shapes and forms adapted from reality. The artist *changed, distorted, and eliminated* elements according to the way he felt about them. By inventing his own visual vocabulary, Miró was able to communicate his deepest feelings and emotions.



SCHOLASTIC ART WORKSHOP

In this workshop, you will begin with "real" forms, changing and adapting them to create your own personal landscape.



Prepared by Ned J. Nesti Jr., art instructor, Morrison (IL) High School; assisted by Irene E. Feltes, sophomore, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL. Photos by Larry Gregory. Paintings by (left to right) Jeremiah M. Caves; Jamie L. Belschner; Jennie L. Vaughn; Brenda L. Buikema; Brian J. Dykstra.

Materials

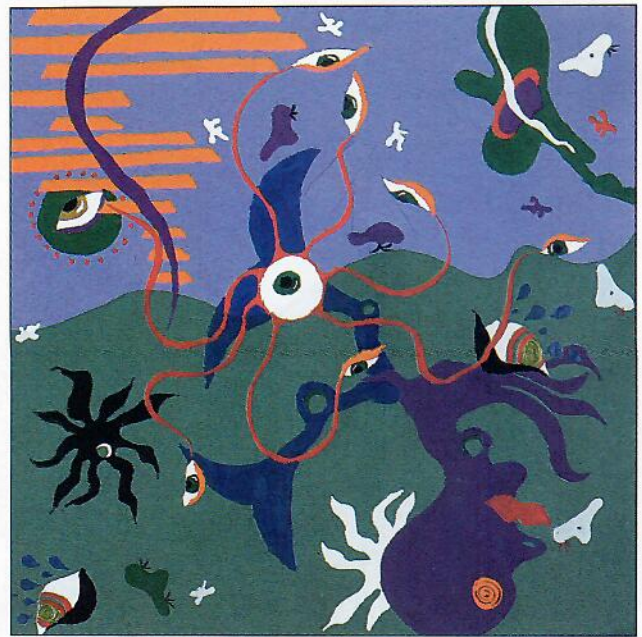
- Variety of old and contemporary magazines
- 12" x 18" tracing paper
- 18" x 18" colored construction paper
- Soft school pencils and vinyl erasers
- Primary, secondary, black, white tempera paint
- Containers for clean water
- Variety of small round and flat paint brushes
- Paper toweling
- Scissors

Starting Out

1. Look through magazines, collecting a number of clear, definite images that appeal to you. Trace images, changing or **abstracting** them as you trace. You may use **silhouettes**, **fragments**, **simplify**, **elongate**, **eliminate details**, and **rearrange** your images as you draw them. Will you use **rounded shapes**, **squares**, **rectangles**, **triangles**, or a combination of both? Fill several sheets of tracing paper with a variety of small abstract images, then select the most visually interesting forms and cut them out.

Step 2.

Will your scene be set **inside** or **outside**? Establish your **horizon line** (the point where floor becomes wall, or earth and sky appear to meet). Join two pieces of construction paper together at the horizon line. Establish a **visual rhythm** when you arrange your forms into a **balanced composition**. When you are satisfied with your arrangement, transfer your forms onto the background. (To do this, rub the back side of each with heavy lead pencil, then trace it onto the construction paper.)



Step 3.

Your color scheme will set the mood for your painting. Red, orange, and yellow are **warm** colors; green, blue, and purple are **cool** colors. **Bright, intense** colors appear to be outside in sunlight; **duller, cooler** colors suggest interiors or underwater scenes. Limiting your colors will **unify** the work. Begin painting, keeping forms **simple, flat, and two-dimensional**.



Some Solutions

The **horizon line** will be the most important element in your composition. Will it be **straight** or **curved**, **low** or **high**? Which area will be **dark** or **light**—the area on the bottom or the space on top? Is your composition going to be **symmetrical** (the same on both sides) or **asymmetrical**

(different on each side, but visually balanced)? Will your forms be **organic** (curved) or **geometric** (straight) or a combination of both? Your shapes can be **large** or **small**, they can **repeat**, **touch**, **overlap**, or **contain other shapes inside**. They can be **literal** (real objects) or **symbolic** (represent something else). You may add "tails" to the shapes or use **lines** to connect them.

Two
artists
who
create
modern
fantasies

Symbols of Today

Both Wilfredo Lam (see page 10) and contemporary Cuban-American artist Carlos Alfonzo, who did the work below, right, use elements from their Afro-Cuban heritage to create their fantastic paintings. Like the works of Joan Miró, Alfonzo's appear to be nonrepresentational, but they contain many very real references.

When you look at Alfonzo's *Self-Portrait #2* (right), what do you see? Among the **abstract, stylized organic (curved) shapes**, are you able to pick out any recognizable images such as eyes, mouth, teeth, tongue, perhaps even a knife? Alfonzo has combined Lam's more traditional pre-Columbian nature imagery—masks, animal figures, and tropical-plant shapes—with symbols of contemporary Cuban culture. The *knife*, in the Afro-Cuban tradition, offers protection from the *evil eye*. And the visual symbol of a *knife through the tongue* means a way of keeping evil quiet.



Compare Elizabeth Murray's
"bimorphic abstraction" with
those painted by Joan Miró.

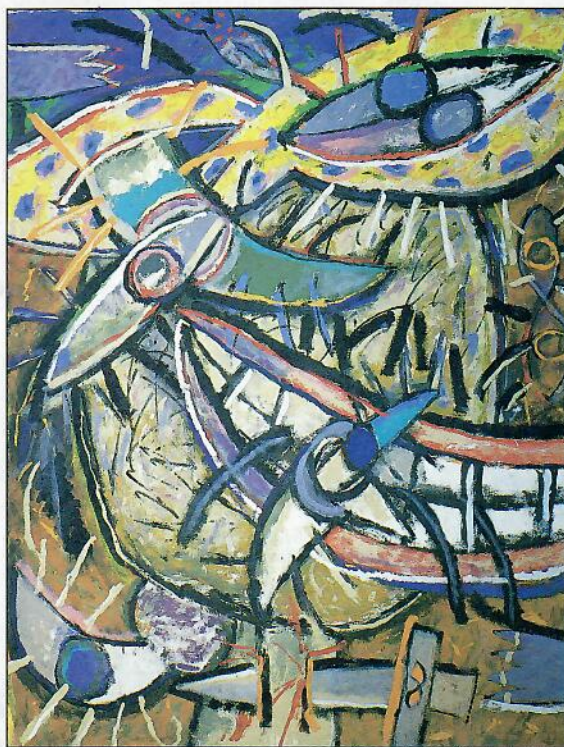
Elizabeth Murray b. 1940. *Deeper Than D*, 1983. Oil, 106" x 102" Private Collection, NY, NY. Paula Cooper Gallery. Photo Geoffrey Clements.

Images of Mortality

Like Miró, contemporary American artist Elizabeth Murray uses real references to create her symbolic abstractions. At first glance, *Deeper than D* (left) looks completely nonrepresentational, made up of **simplified, stylized, and organic (curved) shapes and straight lines**. Can you find a ghostly blue chair in a room? This chair is lit by a spiritual beam of white light coming from a small, yellow window. The seat of the chair can be seen as an easel stabbed by a brush. Are the two "headlike" shapes that make up the painting embracing or screaming?

This work is named for the artist's mother, Dorothy, who was dying and whom Murray feels she could never fully understand. The artist says, "I felt both beauty and sadness and I wanted to respond to that mix of emotions." The shapes and images in this work are recognizable, but their meanings are "deeper" and more symbolic.

ARTS ALIVE



Can you find the elements in the
painting on the left that make it
a self-portrait of the artist?

Carlos Alfonzo b. 1950. *Self-Portrait #2*, 1984. Acrylic on canvas, 96" x 72" Collection of the artist.

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