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MIRÓ LOOKING AT *IL·LUNA, SOL I UNA ESTRELLA*, 1968

JOAN MIRÓ: SCULPTOR

MIRÓ'S LATER BRONZES MIGHT BE UNDERSTOOD AS EXPLORING IN THREE DIMENSIONS HIS EARLIER PREOCCUPATIONS: HIS INTIMATE AND POETIC EXPERIENCE WAS ENDOWED WITH A PUBLIC FORM AS A BRONZE SCULPTURE.

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LLUNA, SOL I UNA ESTRELLA, 1968

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“It is in sculpture that I will create a truly phantasmagoric world of living monsters; what I do in painting is more conventional...”

“With only rare exceptions it would be a great mistake to cast my sculptures in metal; that would be the work of a sculptor, a *specialist*... Cast in metal, my sculptures would, with rare exceptions, be dead things or museum pieces.”

Joan Miró, Notebook, c. 1941-42.

Bronze sculpture became a central preoccupation for Miró in 1966. During the years 1956 and 1960, Miró turned away from painting to ceramics, print-making and book illustration. All of these activities were collaborative efforts, and collaboration would dominate his work in bronze. For the latter half of the 1950s Miró scarcely painted, returning to a lyrical and free form of painting in 1960. Miró's first project in sculpture of the 1960s was the collaboration with Adrien Maeght and Josep Lluís Sert in the making of the labyrinthine gardens for the Maeght Foundation in 1962. There Miró combined ceramic, bronze and cast iron sculpture. There, arguably, he first conceived of the idea of large-scale public bronze sculpture and the idea of sculpture as an environment, although both of these ideas had been broached in the previous work in ceramic. In 1966 he turned his attention to making several series of

sculptures in a variety of different foundries in France, Spain and Italy.

In general during the 1960s and 1970s Miró worked more rapidly, leaving behind the methodical and deliberate working method of earlier periods. The objects included in the sculptures were found by a random process of wandering, and only later were they combined to form sculptures. Miró often returned to the same objects again and again. The drawings were not finished drawings in any sense of the word, nor were they meant to be exhibited as such, although they shed light on Miró's working method and thought processes. Miró's later bronzes might be understood as exploring in three dimensions his earlier preoccupations: his intimate and poetic experience was endowed with a public form as a bronze sculpture.

A poetic distinction can be made between the sculptures composed of objects and the sculptures moulded from clay. In the first class an inert object is transformed into a living being, and in the second place the primordial substance of the earth is given life. With the first category, a distinction can be made according to whether the bronze is painted or patinated. If painted, the paint hides the rich surface texture of the metal, and the painting serves to emphasise the disjunction between the objects which compose the sculpture. Here there is a tension between the discrete assemblage of recognizable things and

their presence as a single figure. If patinated, with either the dark, traditional surface patina or a rough, seemingly 'unpatinated' surface, the patina suggests the association of the different objects into a whole. Here the objects are revealed in the presence of the figure.

Miró's bronzes subvert the apparently obvious fact that they are works of art. From an empirical point of view they are made from bronze, a technique closely associated with the history of sculpture. Moreover, they have a distinct and definable commercial place within the contemporary art market, and they are frequently bought and sold as works of art. But on the level of the image, it becomes increasingly difficult to consider them in such terms. Not only do they take their point of departure in heterodox materials, things which under ordinary circumstances have little or no meaning, but the choice seems entirely dependent on the artist's imagination. The objects of which these sculptures are composed appear to have no central focal point; it becomes impossible to speak of composition as it is traditionally understood. The placement of each object within the sculpture is apparently as arbitrary as the original selection. The ultimate paradox lies in the conflict between the medium and the image, the substance of bronze and the poetic presence, and at every turn of the path Miró has set a trap in order to capture and subvert his medium: bronze. ■