

The Circus
Joan Miró Joan Miró, Spanish, 1893-1983
1937, Oil and tempera on Celotex, 59 5/8 x 47 7/8 inches
The Algur H. Meadows Collection, Meadows Museum, Southern Methodist
University, Dallas, Texas

About the Artist

In Spanish, the word “miró” means “he saw.” What an appropriate name for an artist! Joan (zhoe-ahn) Miró was born April 20, 1893, in Barcelona, Spain, but he spent much of his youth on the family farm at Montroig. Beginning in 1921, he lived in Paris, but he frequently returned to visit Spain. Historians tell us that when he went to Paris, he took a handful of dried grass from the farm at Montroig as a reminder of one of his favorite places. While living in Paris he was a friend of Pablo Picasso and was influenced by the major art movements of the time, Fauvism, Cubism, Dadaism, and Surrealism, but his unique style of painting makes categorization of his work difficult.

Much of his work is playful and cheerful with many organic forms dancing and floating. These shapes are sometimes accompanied by geometric shapes, squares, circles, and triangles. During his long and productive life, Miró produced ceramic pieces, important murals, and etchings and lithographs, two types of prints. In his eighties, he began to experiment with the techniques of stained glass. He died on December 25, 1983, at the age of 90.

About the Art

Miró painted this work to raise his spirits at a time when he was depressed about the Spanish Civil War. The cheerful shapes and colors of *The Circus* communicate the joy and excitement of being at a circus. The texture of the board on which Miró made the painting can also remind us of that experience. This painting is in Miró’s unique and imaginative style, though his work is sometimes associated with Dada or Surrealism.

Additional Information

The Circus is painted on a board that is not a traditional material used in art works. Sometimes artists use unusual materials to produce their works, and Miró has used a common building material for this piece. The material is called Celotex and was often used as an insulation material in buildings. Celotex was made of compressed sugar cane fibers sometimes with a binder of sizing or varnish. Because of the nature of this material, the Meadows Museum of Southern Methodist University has taken special precautions whenever shipping the painting to another museum.

We call the special care that museums give to the works of art in their collections conservation. Great care is taken to be sure that artworks are not damaged in any way, because the destruction of these important objects would be a great loss to those who wish to see them preserved for future generations. One of the dangers for the painting is the possibility that the panel might crack. If the painting were to be dropped or receive a

severe blow, it might break apart, and because of the nature of the material it could not be repaired. A second area of concern is the flaking of the Celotex if it rubs against the frame when the painting is moved. To avoid either of these problems, experts have recommended that *The Circus* be maintained at a constant temperature of 75 and a relative humidity of 50% whenever the painting is transported. The most critical concern is that the humidity and temperature be constant since the board could expand or contract with dramatic changes.

About the Time and Place

The Circus was painted in 1937 while Miró was still spending much of his time in Paris. In 1940, he returned to Spain because of the German invasion of Paris.

The late 1930s, were very turbulent years in Europe. Aggression by Germany, Italy, and Japan eventually led to World War II, which lasted from 1939 until 1945.

The United States Congress and President Franklin D. Roosevelt tried to keep the U.S. out of the conflict in Europe, and in 1935 and 1936, Congress passed neutrality laws that prevented the United States from selling arms to countries involved in the war. President Roosevelt condemned Hitler's actions, but refused to join the alliance of anti-German countries. On December 7, 1941, Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor, an American naval base in Hawaii, and the next day President Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war on Japan. Their declaration was immediate, and three days later, Germany and Italy, Japan's allies, declared war on the United States.