

Again Montroig reached out to me with all its light, all its life, and I wanted to capture that whole period that I could see so clearly from Montroig and I painted *The Farm*. Nine months of constant hard work! Nine months of painting every day and wiping it out and making studies and destroying them all. *The Farm* was a résumé of my entire life in the country. I wanted to put everything that I loved about the country into that canvas—from a huge tree to a tiny little snail. I don't think it makes sense to give more importance to a mountain than an ant (but landscape artists just can't see that), and that's why I didn't hesitate to spend hours and hours making the ant come alive. **Joan Miró, 1928**



Joan Miró, *The Farm* (detail), 1921–1922, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mary Hemingway

What? *The Farm*

The painting is a portrait of a cherished place, an inventory of Miró's life on the Catalan farm.

LOOK CLOSELY TO FIND

- A large eucalyptus tree, its black leaves silhouetted against the brilliant blue sky
- Footsteps along a path
- A dog barking
- A woman washing clothes at a trough, her baby playing nearby
- A donkey plodding around a millstone
- Mountains
- Families of rabbits and chickens in the coop
- A pig peeking through an open door
- A goat with a pigeon perched on its back
- A lizard and snail crawling amid grass and twigs
- An array of buckets, pails, and watering cans littering the yard
- A farmhouse with a horse resting inside and a covered wagon propped outside

WONDER

- What time of day is it? Is that the sun or a full moon in the sky?
- Whose footprints are those? Why do they suddenly end?
- What might the dog be barking at?
- What are some sounds you might hear when visiting this farm?
- What are some things you might smell?
- What would it feel like to visit this place?
- Invent a story about this picture: What will happen next?
- How might this place look different in the winter? In summer?



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Who? Joan Miró

Joan Miró (1893–1983) was born, educated, and trained as an artist in Barcelona, Spain. Although the city's art scene was lively, he moved to Paris in 1920, seeking a more cosmopolitan environment. There Miró met fellow Spaniard Pablo Picasso, whose cubist works, with their interlocking shapes and facets, inspired him. Miró's contact with Parisian avant-garde circles, particularly Dada and surrealist poets, were key influences as he searched for his own artistic style.

Miró remained deeply attached to his native Catalonia, a region in the northeast corner of Spain. Each summer he returned to his family's farm in Montroig, a village near Barcelona. Throughout Miró's long career, elements of the Catalan landscape—plants, insects, birds, stars, sunshine, the moon, the Mediterranean Sea, architecture, and the countryside—inhabited his work. He began *The Farm* in Montroig in the summer of 1921, continued work on it in Barcelona, and completed it nine months later in his Paris studio.

In 1925/1926, Ernest Hemingway, Miró's friend and occasional sparring partner at a boxing gym in Paris, purchased *The Farm* as a birthday present for his first wife, Hadley. The painting hung in Hemingway's homes in Key West, Florida, and Havana, Cuba. The author wrote of it that "Miró was the only painter who had been able to combine in one picture all that you felt about Spain when you were there and all that you felt when you were away and could not go there." In 1987, the writer's widow, Mary Hemingway, donated *The Farm* to the National Gallery of Art.

above left: Joan Miró in his Barcelona studio. Photo by Francesc Serra, 1914, Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona – Arxiu Fofogràfic.

next page: Joan Miró, *The Farm*, 1921–1922, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mary Hemingway

The picture represents all that was closest to me at home, even the footprints on the path by the house. . . I am very much attached to the landscape of my country. That picture made it live for me. **Joan Miró, 1948**



3

How surreal!

Though Miró never officially joined the surrealist group, its founder André Breton remarked, “Miró is the most surrealist of us all.” Surrealist artists tried to release the creative power of the subconscious mind, creating images in which the familiar meets the fantastic. Miró wanted to depict the images he saw in his mind as well as those he saw with his eyes. This way, he could demonstrate the power of imagination to transform reality.

The Farm is an example of how Miró made the ordinary extraordinary. The scene is both real and unreal. It feels familiar, yet strange. Events of daily life in the farmyard are meticulously rendered, each element carefully observed and precisely described, yet the overall effect is strangely dreamlike. Miró’s style—fanciful and playful, while wonderfully detailed and thoughtfully arranged—creates a kind of magical realism.

book nook

These books about Joan Miró and surrealist artists can be found at your local library or bookstore.

Sticker Art Shapes: Joan Miró
By Sylvia Delpech and
Caroline Leclerc | ages 4–8

Magritte's Imagination
By Susan Goldman Rubin | ages 4–8

Dinner at Magritte's
By Michael Garland | ages 6–10

Dali and the Path of Dreams
By Anne Obioli, illustrated by
Joan Subirana | ages 6–10

**Imagine That! Activities
and Adventures in Surrealism
(Art Explorers)**
By Joyce Raimondo | ages 6–12

**Rene Magritte:
Now You See It—Now You Don't
(Adventures in Art)**
By Angela Wenzel | ages 8–12

**The Mad, Mad, Mad World of
Salvador Dali (Adventures in Art)**
By Angela Wenzel | ages 8–12

**Salvador Dali and the Surrealists:
Their Lives and Ideas, 21 Activities
(For Kids series)**
By Michael Elsohn Ross | ages 8–12

**Miró: Earth and Sky
(Art for Children)**
By Claire-Helene Blanquet | ages 9–12

Surrealism (Art on the Wall)
By Anna Claybourne | ages 9–12

try this!

activity

Touch-Drawing Exercise

At the Barcelona School of Fine Arts, Miró studied with José Pascó, who encouraged his young pupil to experiment. In 1948, Miró recalled, “Pascó was the other teacher whose influence I still feel. . . . Color was easy for me. But with form I had great difficulty. Pascó taught me to draw from the sense of touch by giving me objects which I was not allowed to look at, but which I was afterwards made to draw. Even today. . . the effect of this touch-drawing experience returns in my interest in sculpture: the need to mold with my hands, to pick up a ball of wet clay like a child and squeeze it. From this I get a physical satisfaction that I cannot get from drawing or painting.” Pascó was trying to stimulate Miró’s other senses to make him more aware of his surroundings. He wanted his student not to rely only on what he saw, but also to work from what he felt and imagined.

Experiment: Make a drawing of something that you cannot see!

You will need:

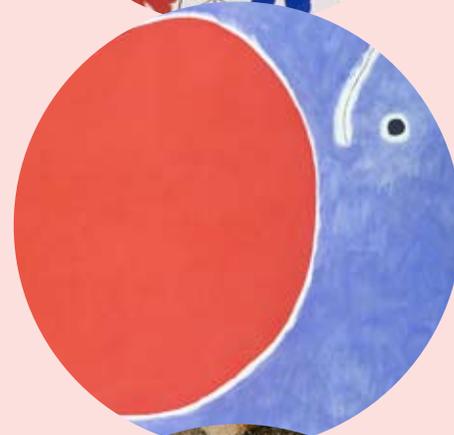
Two large paper bags (a grocery bag will do)

Paper

Colored pencils, crayons, or markers

This activity takes two people: work with a family member or friend. Each of you should secretly choose an object—a stuffed animal, toy, flower, hairbrush, remote control, spoon, keys, item of clothing—and place it in a paper bag so that the other person cannot see it. (Don’t choose an object with sharp edges or anything dangerous.)

Taking turns: Let your partner reach in and explore the object in your bag. Then, use your hands to explore the object in the other bag. Remember: use your hands and imagination, not your eyes. Be sure to feel the entire object—front and back, top and bottom, side to side. Think about the size and shape of the object. Describe the textures of the object: Is it smooth, bumpy, soft, rough, hard, feathery, or a combination of textures? Imagine what this object might be.



Next, without looking in the bags, each person should draw what he or she felt. Don’t overthink—just draw without stopping to worry about the result. Let your imagination and feelings run free. Surprise yourself!

Reflect: How did this process make you feel? Was it difficult to draw something without being able to see it? Did this experience help you think about the object differently?

top: Joan Miró, *Figure and Birds* (detail), 1948, color lithograph, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine

middle: Joan Miró, *The Flight of the Dragonfly before the Sun* (detail), 1968, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

bottom: Joan Miró, *Shooting Star* (detail), 1938, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Joseph H. Hazen