

Of museums increasingly managed as true business enterprises. Of the difficulties of organizing exhibitions with “cultural and scientific ambitions” because it is becoming ever harder to arrange for the loan of the

Shows and museums: art and economic enterprise

ART & BUSINESS

a cura di Simone Cofferati

works needed. But in our interview with Tomàs Llorens, curator of the exhibition “Miró: the land” now open until May in Ferrara, we also spoke of Miró’s ties to Catalonia and peasant culture

Mr. Llorens, you are the curator of the exhibition “Miró: the land” now open at Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara (see box). Does the title refer to the artist’s strong ties to his native Catalonia or, rather, to the land as representing the ideal of a “pastoral life”?

The two things certainly go together, though the second is dominant. For Miró, the idea of Catalonia was closely tied to peasant culture – that is why I don’t believe we can speak of nationalism in his case – an ancient culture, which served as a necessary counterweight to the development of modern, industrial, urban and rationalist society.

Miró enjoyed a very long artistic career: from his first solo exhibition in 1918 to his death in 1983. Which part of his career is highlighted in the exhibition?

The show covers almost the whole of his career: the works on display, in fact, date from 1923 until the final years of the activity and life of Miró. The exhibit does place a particular accent on the work of the last period, which, as I believe, has not been sufficiently appreciated.

Is it, then, because it covers such a long

period of the artist’s activity that the show presents works using so many different techniques and materials: paintings, drawings, collage, terracotta, bronzes, stone sculpture, lithographs, etc.? Or is it because Miró was keen on such wide ranging experimentation?

For both of those reasons in this case.

Among the great protagonists of the 20th Century, Miró was certainly one of the artists with the greatest curiosity for experimentation. At the same time, beginning with the first avant-gardes until the ‘70s-’80s, Twentieth century art underwent a crisis of painting both as a form of representation and as an aesthetic. The crisis also impacted abstraction and it was Miró’s lot to live and work at the center of the storm. The research into other forms of expression was Miró’s response to the crisis. His research also expressed an intention to reach a wider public – this was a central theme of Miró’s work during the ‘30s – and evidenced his wholehearted attachment to peasant culture, for a culture, that is, for which the image must have a concrete referent, as in the case of religious images, the fetishes of primitive societies or of the relics of Christian Europe, and the image in itself has no value, or may even be a deception. The impulse to





experiment with other materials may derive from all the above, and from the additional motive that, as Miró believed, art must be connected with a concrete “making” and must possess a kind of “magical capacity” to transform reality.

The works come from a great number of collections, both public and private, and from all over the world: the Guggenheim Museum and New York’s Museum of Modern Art, Washington’s National Gallery, Canberra’s Gallery of Australia, the Van Abbemuseum of Eindhoven, Paris’ Centre Pompidou and, naturally, from Spain, like the pieces from the Fundació Joan Miró of Barcelona and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza and Museo Reina Sofia, both of Madrid. Are such wide ranging international collaborations, with an exchange of works on such a wide scale, simultaneously involving so many institutions, the norm in the world of art exhibitions or, rather, is there a prevailing attitude of: “this work can only be seen here”?

The path of collaboration is always more difficult. One reason for this is that there is

_Paysage catalan (Le Chasseur) [Catalan landscape (The Hunter)], 1923-24, oil on canvas, New York, The Museum of Modern Art. Digital image © 2007 MoMa, New York/Scala, Florence.

Previous page: *La masovera* (The Farmer’s Wife), July 1922-Spring 1923, oil on canvas, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne. © photo CNAC/MNAM Dist. RMN/© Jean-François Tomasian

an increasing demand for exhibitions, while the works of art that really count are limited in number. Secondly, the great museums are always under pressures of a commercial nature that require them to adopt management strategies that are similar to those of for profit corporations, and their constant search for new sources of revenue. One of the ways within relatively easy reach of museums for purposes of turning a profit consists in the organization of “low profile” exhibitions in which they show a part of their respective permanent collections. These shows have a very low, or almost non-existent scientific value, but they are shows that sell satisfactorily, that generate proceeds

The show

Miró: the land

February 17 – May 25, 2008

Palazzo dei Diamanti, Corso Ercole I d'Este 21 - Ferrara

Hours: every day, Sunday to Thursday
from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Friday and Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Information and reservations: Tel.: 0532.24.49.49

E-mail: diamanti@comune.fe.it Internet:

www.palazzodiamanti.it

The exhibition illustrates Joan Miró's artistic development from the early 1920s to works created in his Palma de Mallorca studio in the 1970-80's, underscoring the role played by the artist from Catalonia in the development of important 20th century artistic currents. Approximately 80 works using various techniques are on show – mostly paintings, but the show also includes drawings, collage, assemblages, "constructions", ceramics, terracotta, bronzes, stone sculpture and lithographs – on loan from public and private collections worldwide.

and that the communications media often fail to distinguish from those with real scientific and cultural content. All of this adds to the difficulty of obtaining works on loan and of holding exhibitions such as "Miró: the land".

What does it take to organize a show such as this? How much time is needed for its preparation?

As I was saying earlier, the most difficult part is to succeed in obtaining the loan of the works, that is for the "movement" of the works for purposes of a project with historical, artistic and cultural ambitions.

The project for "Miró: the land" took shape a little over two years ago. Naturally the basic idea had been brewing for a much longer time, but let us say that the project on paper, complete with a list of the works, only saw the light of day more or less two years before the exhibition opened its doors.

After Ferrara, the exhibition will travel to Madrid in June, to the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, is this correct?

Yes, correct.

How long will it be open in Madrid?

For three months, as for the Ferrara show: it will close in September of 2008.

What do you believe to be the advantages and disadvantages of such a formula – let's call it an "itinerant exhibition" – compared with shows of the type "one shot big event" as Anglo-Saxons would term it?

In fact we could say this show is "minimally itinerant", since it only calls for two exhibition venues... In general, there are two practical advantages to – as you call them – "itinerant exhibitions". One economic advantage consists in the fact that costs are shared. I believe that this is not a decisive advantage, but it undoubtedly has its importance. The second advantage is that there is a joining of forces of two or more organizations, each having its own resources and respective contacts for purposes of obtaining loans of the works from other institutions or collections. In my judgment this second advantage is the more important one for collaborations among the great museums. If, for example, New York's MoMA and Paris' Centre Beaubourg jointly organize an exhibition, they have a greater total capacity for convincing other museums, as well as private collectors, to grant loans of their respective works of art.

There is a third advantage that may well be the most important: that with "itinerant exhibitions" one succeeds in reaching a vastly greater public. Our estimate, for example, is that the "Miró: the land" exhibition will have 100-120,000 visitors in Ferrara and add to these the approximately 200,000 expected in Madrid. All of this obviously results in greater effectiveness for the initiatives of the museum organizing the show and, if they are great museums, let us not forget their greater capacity for promotion and communication of the event.

Beyond their undoubted cultural value, and from a purely economic perspective, do exhibitions such as this succeed in covering their costs and producing a profit? In other words, are culture and the great cultural events capable of generating economic benefits, or is it a "conceptual error" to even think of them in these terms?

Direct proceeds of exhibitions are measured in terms of sales of tickets,



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Who is Tomàs Llorens

Tomàs Llorens Serra was born in Almassora (Castellón – Spain) in 1936, earned a degree in Philosophy, and was a docent on Aesthetics at the Valencia School of Architecture (Polytechnic) between 1969 and 1972. From 1972 to 1984 he taught theory and history of modern architecture at the School of Architecture of the Portsmouth Polytechnic (Great Britain).

Upon returning to his native Spain in 1984, he began to work for the Generalitat Valenciana as Director-General of Artistic Heritage. From 1986 until his retirement in 2005, he was principally involved with museums: he was the first director of the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (1986-1988) and of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (1988-1990) and was also conservator-in-chief of the Museo Thyssen Bornemisza of Madrid (1990-2005).

He has been curator of over 60 exhibitions and has published over two hundred articles on aesthetics, theory and the history of 20th century art.

At present he is compiling the catalog raisonné of the sculptures, paintings and drawings of Julio González and is curator of the exhibition “Miró: the land” currently on view at Palazzo dei Diamanti of Ferrara which will travel to Madrid’s Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in June.

merchandising and sponsorships, yet, normally, they do not cover all of the costs connected with organizing them. Indeed, in the case of a not so culturally “ambitious” exhibition, it is sometimes possible to break even or produce a profit: this is because the pieces belong exclusively, or almost, to one museum, and need not be brought, for example, all the way from Japan, Australia or the United States, and this significantly reduces transportation costs.

When, however, we set aside the budget of the organizers and enter the perspective of general interest and of the public economy, an exhibition is without a doubt one of the most effective mechanisms of all to attract tourism, especially cultural tourism. In this respect the benefits are indirect and ancillary, and this is why support by public administrations for cultural events of this type makes good sense. What is needed is a type of support similar to that which such administrations would give, for example, to an industrial enterprise to induce it to set up

factories in a given district, or to sporting events – such as those for the Americas Cup at Valencia – on which local administrations spend huge sums of money.

For example, in terms of economic vitality, it is undeniable that New York would not be New York without its great museums, and Florence would doubtlessly not be what it is in economic terms without the Uffizi.

I have learned that you are now working on a catalog raisonné of the sculptures, paintings and drawings of Julio González. Is an exhibition out of the question or do you have a project in the planning stage?

I’m working on a number of ideas...

Can we talk about it soon, in another interview...

Con mucho gusto...