Fundació Joan Miró

Researchers at the Fundació Joan Miró discover a portrait of Dolors Ferrà i Oromí, Joan Miró's mother, beneath the work *Painting* created by the artist between the years 1925 and 1927

- *Painting* (1925–1927) is an oil on canvas that Joan Miró gave to his friend Joan Prats, who kept it in his home until 1975, at which point it became part of the collection of the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona.
- The Fundació Joan Miró's team of researchers has conducted a scientific and technical study using the very latest non-invasive methods to study cultural heritage, which have revealed an image of the underlying portrait and have made it possible to identify the subject as Joan Miró's mother, Dolors Ferrà i Oromí, thanks to the information provided by X-ray analysis, infrared photography and hyperspectral imaging.
- In order to share this historic discovery, tomorrow the Fundació Joan Miró will be presenting the documentary *El secret de Miró* (Miró's Secret) and the exhibition *Under the Layers of Miró: A Scientific Investigation*, both of which not only provide an opportunity to view *Painting* (1925–1927) first hand but also explain the scientific and technical study that made this discovery possible.
- The documentary *El secret de Miró*, being premièred today, 27 March, reveals the entire research process, making it an indispensable tool for understanding this discovery in depth and for appreciating its significance.
- The presentation of the exhibition and the documentary fulfil the Fundació Joan Miró's aim to raise the public's awareness of these working processes and to make them more accessible by providing insights into the methodology and research involved in studying the artist's works.

Barcelona, 27 March 2025. - The Fundació Joan Miró's team of researchers, led by Elisabet Serrat, has discovered a portrait of Dolors Ferrà i Oromí, the artist's mother, beneath the work *Painting* (1925–1927), an oil on canvas that Joan Miró gave as a gift to his friend Joan Prats. This discovery was made possible thanks to the foundation's researchers' use of non-invasive scientific techniques such as radiography, infrared photography and hyperspectral imaging.

In order to raise awareness of this discovery and to make it more accessible to the public, the Fundació Joan Miró is presenting the documentary *El secret de Miró* (Miró's Secret) – a Fundació Joan Miró production in collaboration with the Fundació "la Caixa" – accompanied by the exhibition *Under the Layers of Miró: A Scientific Investigation*. Both these proposals

explore in detail this underlying portrait and the innovative scientific methods employed to reveal it. This initiative reinforces the Fundació Joan Miró's commitment to publicising the institution's work and research by making them more accessible, in particular by highlighting the efforts of its Department of Preventive Conservation and of the Collection by giving the public insights into its methodologies, research and study of the works. This discovery once again confirms that Joan Miró is an artist about whom there is always something new to appreciate, an artist whose work continues to open new horizons of analysis and interpretation in the scientific and academic realm.

Scientific research

Between the years 1925 and 1927, Joan Miró painted *Painting*, a work done in oils on canvas that he gave and dedicated to his friend Joan Prats, who kept in his home until 1975, at which point it became part of the collection of the Fundació Joan Miró. A restoration report dated 1978, held in the foundation, describes the poor state of conservation of the work due to the presence of small losses and microfissures. Also kept with this report was the first X-ray done, which revealed the presence of a portrait beneath the surface that at that time could not be identified.

The team of researchers at the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona has recently carried out a new scientific study using state-of-the-art non-invasive techniques employed to analyse cultural heritage. This research furnished an image of the underlying portrait in such detail that it has been possible to identify the subject as Dolors Ferrà i Oromí, Joan Miró's mother. A number of organisations contributed to the research, among them the Centre de Restauració de Béns Mobles de Catalunya (CRBMC) and the Universidad Pablo de Olavide (UPO) in Seville, as well as the Fundació Mas Miró and the Fundació Miró Mallorca.

The non-invasive analysis was conducted primarily using imaging techniques that study various wavelengths on the electromagnetic spectrum, among them photography using visible raking and transmitted light, ultraviolet light and infrared light (front and back), radiography and hyperspectral imaging. To ascertain the materials present in the pictorial layers, the study was complemented by Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR), scanning electron microscopy – energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (SEM-EDX), X-ray fluorescence (XRF) and gas chromatography/mass spectrometry (CG/MS).

This study revealed new details of Miró's creative process, confirming that the artist used as his support for *Painting* a canvas with a portrait already on it painted by another artist. This is not the only work in which Miró overpainted paintings by other artists, as he did so in the 1940s and fifties on portraits and between the 1960s and seventies on landscapes. In both cases, he always left evidence of the underlying paintings, academic works that he

unfailingly left partly exposed in order to clearly demonstrate his critical position vis-à-vis this type of painting, which he regarded as devoid of content.

Art historians believe that these actions indicate that Miró's criticism of imitative painting continued from the time in the 1920s when he expressed to Maurice Raynal his desire to 'assassinate painting'.

Using raking light, the Fundació Joan Miró team of researchers detected certain reliefs visible in the surface of *Painting*, which have been identified as the brooch and earrings in the underlying portrait of Dolors Ferrà i Oromí. These are reliefs Miró could easily have eliminated but which he chose to preserve as a manifestation of the material rising from underneath. The reuse of the canvas could simply have been a matter of practicality. Nonetheless, Miró's desire to deliberately cover up the academic painting prompts us to wonder whether his intention might have been to deal a decisive blow to 'easel painting'.

Complementing the information gleaned from the use of radiography and infrared photography, hyperspectral imaging added to our information about Miró's creative process by studying the direction of his brushstrokes in the application of both his preparatory layer (vertical) and the blue paint (horizontal).

The stratigraphic studies showed that the work is made up of at least seven layers. Analytical techniques ascertained the materials in each one. The five lower layers consist of a preparatory layer based on lead white and four pictorial layers that mainly contain earth pigments, cadmium yellow, carbon black, cobalt blue and zinc white. Miró overlaid these with a preparatory layer of zinc white and baryte and an outer layer of colour based on cobalt blue with a little cadmium yellow. The binder used is oil.

The stylistic and technical resemblance to another portrait held at Son Boter suggests that this portrait could have been painted by Cristòfol Montserrat Jorba (1869, Vilanova i la Geltrú – 1935, Barcelona), a Catalan painter who specialised in portraiture.

El secret de Miró documentary

The research process was filmed and the resulting documentary has become an indispensable tool, enabling us to understand this discovery in depth and appreciate its significance. The documentary *El secret de Miró* follows the research by Elisabet Serrat, Head of Preventive Conservation and Restoration at the Fundació Joan Miró. Using advanced analytical techniques, she discovered that beneath the visible pictorial layer was a hitherto unseen portrait of Dolors Ferrà i Oromí, Miró's mother.

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This discovery has opened up new perspectives regarding the painter's evolution at a time when he was abandoning academicism. The documentary, directed by Lluís Jené and with Valti Roda as executive producer, takes a close look at this enigma and explores the possible reasons that may have led Miró to conceal the image of his mother.

The documentary premières today, 27 March, on the CaixaForum+ platform and on the digital channels of the Fundació Joan Miró.

Exhibition: *Under the Layers of Miró: A Scientific Investigation*

In order to share this discovery with the world, tomorrow the Fundació Joan Miró will be opening *Under the Layers of Miró: A Scientific Investigation*, an exhibition that provides visitors with an opportunity to view *Painting* (1925–1927) first hand, as well as an explanation of the study and research process. In addition, it furnishes a new and surprising understanding of the history of the painting before Miró's intervention and reveals previously unknown aspects of its conservation. The exhibition will be displayed in Room 14 of the Fundació Joan Miró and will be open to the public from 27 March to 29 June 2025.

The exhibition will include the *Portrait of Dolors Ferrà i Oromí* (1907) by the artist Cristòfol Montserrat. There are considerable similarities between this work and the image hidden beneath *Painting*, a fact that made it possible to identify the concealed portrait. The display will also feature the preparatory drawings Miró did between 1924 and 1926 for *Painting*, as well as the artist's original notes, with lists of the materials he had in his study that name the pigments found in this work. The exhibition will also provide an opportunity to view the images obtained using infrared photography and radiography, as well as a screen that demonstrates how the hyperspectral camera makes it possible, as it advances along different wavelengths, to see what is otherwise invisible to the human eye.

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