

01 / FROM THINGS TO SIGNS

MIRÓ, PLACE + SYMBOLIC VISUAL LANGUAGE

How recognisable forms become signs, and how context changes what they can mean.

A form can change without losing its source

Miró's paintings can appear highly simplified, but his forms often remain connected to things he had observed: people, animals, plants, landscape and elements of everyday life.

The Guggenheim describes Miró's imagery as a personal system in which schematised forms carry symbolic meanings that can shift according to their context.

"For me a form is never something abstract. It is always a sign of something."

JOAN MIRÓ, 1948

A form may change considerably and still carry a connection to where it began.

OBSERVATION → SIMPLIFICATION → SIGN → VISUAL LANGUAGE

MONTROIG

Place becomes part of the visual language

Miró repeatedly returned to the countryside around his family home at Montroig in Catalonia.

The Guggenheim describes how observations from this landscape entered his work and were transformed. In *Landscape (The Hare)*, an encounter with a hare in the countryside became the starting point for a painting in which observation, imagination and symbolic form coexist.

Miró's Montroig landscapes bring together recognisable references with expressive line, colour, rhythm and increasingly simplified forms. The Guggenheim describes line and colour as articulating a complex symbolic imagery.

Place is not simply represented. It can be transformed through visual language.

CONNECTION TO STUDIO GUIDE 03

While looking at *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)*, consider which forms still seem connected to the world Miró knew and which have moved further towards signs.

The Guggenheim's discussion of Miró's Montroig practice provides supporting context here; it is not a specific analysis of The Hunter.

READING VISUAL LANGUAGE

A sign does not carry meaning on its own

The same form can take on different significance depending on its position, relationships and context.

Miró developed recurring forms and a personal system of imagery, but interpretation depends partly on how those forms operate within each work.

This means that reading visual language involves more than identifying what a symbol resembles.

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- What can you recognise?
 - What appears to have been transformed?
 - What has been kept from the original form?
 - What changes when one sign is placed beside another?
 - How does knowing something about place alter your interpretation?
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The Guggenheim teaching material itself encourages students to distinguish between elements that appear observed from life and those that appear imagined.

FROM THINGS TO SIGNS

Visual language develops through transformation

something observed



form transformed



sign developed



relationships created



meaning shaped through context

Miró's work offers one example of how observation can move into a personal visual language.

The useful idea is not to imitate his forms.

It is to recognise that an artist can begin with something experienced or observed, transform it considerably, and still maintain a relationship with its source.

Return to The Hunter. What becomes visible once you begin looking for that movement between observation, sign and context?

[VIEW / THE HUNTER \(CATALAN LANDSCAPE\) / MOMA ↗](#)

[READ / ORIGINAL GUGGENHEIM TEACHING GUIDE ↗](#)

SOURCE

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Spanish Painting from El Greco to Picasso: Time, Truth, and History: A Guide to the Exhibition for Teachers.

This Learning by Design extension reading summarises selected ideas from the Guggenheim teaching resource for use alongside Studio Guide 03.