LOT 32
PROPERTY OF A GENTLEMAN
JOAN MIRÓ
1893 - 1983
PEINTURE
Signed Miró (lower left); signed Miró, dated 1953 and titled (on the reverse)
Oil on canvas
77 1/2 by 28 3/4 in.
197 by 73 cm
Painted in 1953.

ESTIMATE 4,000,000-6,000,000 USD
Lot Sold: 4,340,000 USD

PROVENANCE
Pierre Matisse, New York (acquired from the artist)

Acquavella Galleries, New York (acquired from the estate of the above)

Kazumasa Katsuta, Japan

Acquired from the above in 2009

EXHIBITED
Yokohama, Yokohama Museum of Art, Joan Miró, Centennial Exhibition: The Pierre Matisse Collection, 1992, no. 72, illustrated in color in the catalogue

Barcelona, Fundació Joan Miró, Joan Miró. Equilibri a l’espai, Obres procedents de la collecció Kazumasa Katsuta, 1997, no. 3, illustrated in color in the catalogue & in detail on the front cover

Barcelona, Fundació Joan Miró (on loan)

LITERATURE
Jacques Dupin, Miró, Paris, 1961, no. 833, illustrated p. 547

Jacques Dupin, Joan Miró. Life and Work, New York, 1962, no. 833, illustrated p. 563


CATALOGUE NOTE
Miró’s enchanting Peinture is an evocative composition which captures some of the artist’s most emblematic motifs and illustrates his clear passion for color and forms. Painted in 1953, the present work combines Miró’s famous figurative abstraction with his characteristic brushstroke using a limited palette of bold and expressive colors, which explored the capacity in which fields of unblended color respond to one another. The blue background used in the present work harkens back to the “dream paintings” of the late 1920s (see fig. 1). In 1925 Miró began a series of pictures in which he abandoned the more figurative manner of representation he had used and concentrated on a new visual idiom. The use of one or two intensely rich colors became a hallmark of the period, and in Peinture-Poésie (a series in which Miró combined symbols with text to create works that reflected his interest in dreams) Miró declared that blue was the color of his dreams. The blue used in many of the “dream paintings” is the quintessential feature of works from this period and became highly influential for a later generation of artists such as Mark Rothko and Yves Klein (see fig. 2).

Born in Barcelona, Miró split his time in between Paris and his hometown. He came in contact with many of the most influential contemporary artists of the time and at points worked with them in collaboration. He was highly regarded by his contemporaries; Giacometti once said of Miró’s art: “For me, it was the greatest liberation. Anything lighter, more airy, more detached, I had never seen. In a way, it was absolutely perfect. Miró could not put down a dot without it being in just the right place. He was so much a painter, through and through, that he could leave three spots of colour on the canvas and it became a painting” (quoted in Joan Miró, 1917-1934 (exhibition catalogue), op. cit., p. 212). Nevertheless, Miró remains unique in his ability to resist characterization into a singular style or artistic movement. By
not settling into a particular school he was able to work towards overturning aesthetic hierarchies and to create his own pictorial idiom by ignoring traditional precepts of representation. As art critic Laura Cummings wrote, "When Miró died in 1983, at the age of 90, he had long been cherished as the last of the modernist stars. His pictorial language was singular, instantly recognizable and—quite rightly—no longer perceived as some Catalan dialect of Surrealism" (L. Cummings, "Joan Miró: The Ladder of Escape" in The Guardian, London, April 16, 2011).

Miró’s compositions straddle the line between allowing the painting to be led by an unconscious drive and a carefully executed plan. Miró advised that painting should be “conceived with fire in the soul but executed with clinical coolness.” Miró balanced the kind of spontaneity and automatism encouraged by the Surrealists with meticulous planning and rendering to achieve finished works that are representational despite their considerable level of abstraction. Widely considered one of the leading Surrealists (though never officially part of the group) Miró used color and form in a symbolic rather than literal manner.

Miró is singular among artists for his insatiable appetite for experimenting with new mediums and techniques and challenging himself to create new work. For a period in the 1950s he focused almost exclusively on printmaking and ceramics, and his prints were honored at the 1954 Venice Biennale, receiving the grand prize for graphic work. Peinture is monumental in size and comes from a time when Miró was experimenting with various scales and thinking of the effect that a monumental work would produce. Only a few years after the completion of Peinture, Miró created enormous ceramic murals (see fig. 3), demonstrating the continued expansion of his oeuvre. Like Duchamp, Miró retired from painting at several points in his career, though never for quite so long as the famous Dadaist. The paintings Miró produced at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s are a fascinating response to new trends in abstraction, especially by the American Abstract Expressionists who had so admired and, in fact, responded to Miró’s own work. But they also show Miró’s allegiance to his own artistic pursuits; Miró pioneered a wandering linear style of Automatism—a method of “random” drawing that attempted to express the inner workings of the human psyche—and maintained the primacy of line throughout his long career.

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Fig. 1
Joan Miró, Peinture, oil on canvas, 1927, Tate Gallery, London

Fig. 2
Yves Klein, Archisponge, natural sponges, pebbles and dry blue pigment in synthetic resin on panel, 1960, sold: Sotheby’s, New York, November 11, 2008, lot 12 for $21,362,500

Fig. 3
Joan Miró, Mur du soleil, earthenware, 1957, Unesco, Paris