

English

SERRAVES
MUSEU DE ARTE CONTEMPORÂNEA

EXHIBITION

joan miró

MATERIALITY AND
METAMORPHOSIS

01 OCT 2016 – 04 JUN 2017

CONFERENCE

01 OCT (Sat), 6 p.m.

JOAN MIRÓ: PAINTING AND PROCESS

With Robert Lubar Messeri

Professor and Director of Càtedra Miró na Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
Serralves Auditorium

GUIDED VISITS

09 OCT (Sun), 11.30 a.m.

Museum Educators
(English)

15 OCT (Sat), 3.30 p.m.

Guided visit in Portuguese sign language
By Laredo, Associação Cultural

16 OCT (Sun), 11.30 a.m.

Museum Educators
(Spanish)

29 OCT (Sat), 4.30 p.m.

Museum Educators
(Portuguese)

30 OCT (Sun), 12 p.m.

Museum Educators
(English)

12 NOV (Sat), 4.30 p.m.

Museum Educators
(Portuguese)

13 NOV (Sun), 11.30 a.m.

Museum Educators
(Spanish)

20 NOV (Sun), 11.30 a.m.

Museum Educators
(Spanish)

26 NOV (Sat), 4.30 p.m.

Museum Educators
(Portuguese)

27 NOV (Sun), 11.30 a.m.

Museum Educators
(English)

03 DEC (Sat), 4.30 p.m.

Museum Educators
(Portuguese)

10 DEC (Sat), 4.30 p.m.

Museum Educators
(Portuguese)

11 DEC (Sun), 11.30 a.m.

Museum Educators
(English)

17 DEC (Sat), 4.30 p.m.

Museum Educators
(Portuguese)

18 DEC (Sat), 11.30 a.m.

Museum Educators
(Spanish)

TOURS FOR SCHOOLS

Two-week advance booking is required.

For further information and booking, please contact:

Cristina Lapa: ser.educativo@serralves.pt

Tel: 22 615 65 46

(Monday to Friday, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. and 2.30-5.00 p.m.)

Fax: 22 615 65 33

Online booking at www.seeralves.pt

WORKSHOPS FOR FAMILIES

23 OCT (Sun), 11 a.m.

Visit-cum-workshop 'From one thing comes... many!'

Museum Educators

27 NOV (Sun), 10 a.m.

Workshop 'Cali and Graphy'

Museum Educators

11 DEC (Sun), 10 a.m.

Workshop 'Cali and Graphy'

Museum Educators

08 JAN 2017 (Sun), 11 a.m.

Visit-cum-workshop 'From one thing comes... many!'

Museum Educators

CONVERSATION

19 NOV (Sat), 5 p.m.

FEATURED WORKS

By Ana Paula Machado,

Curator of the Soares dos Reis National Museum, Porto

THEATRE

10 DEC (Sat), 5 p.m.

Mira! Mira! Miró Mirando!

By Teatro Art'Imagem

joan miró MATERIALITY AND METAMORPHOSIS

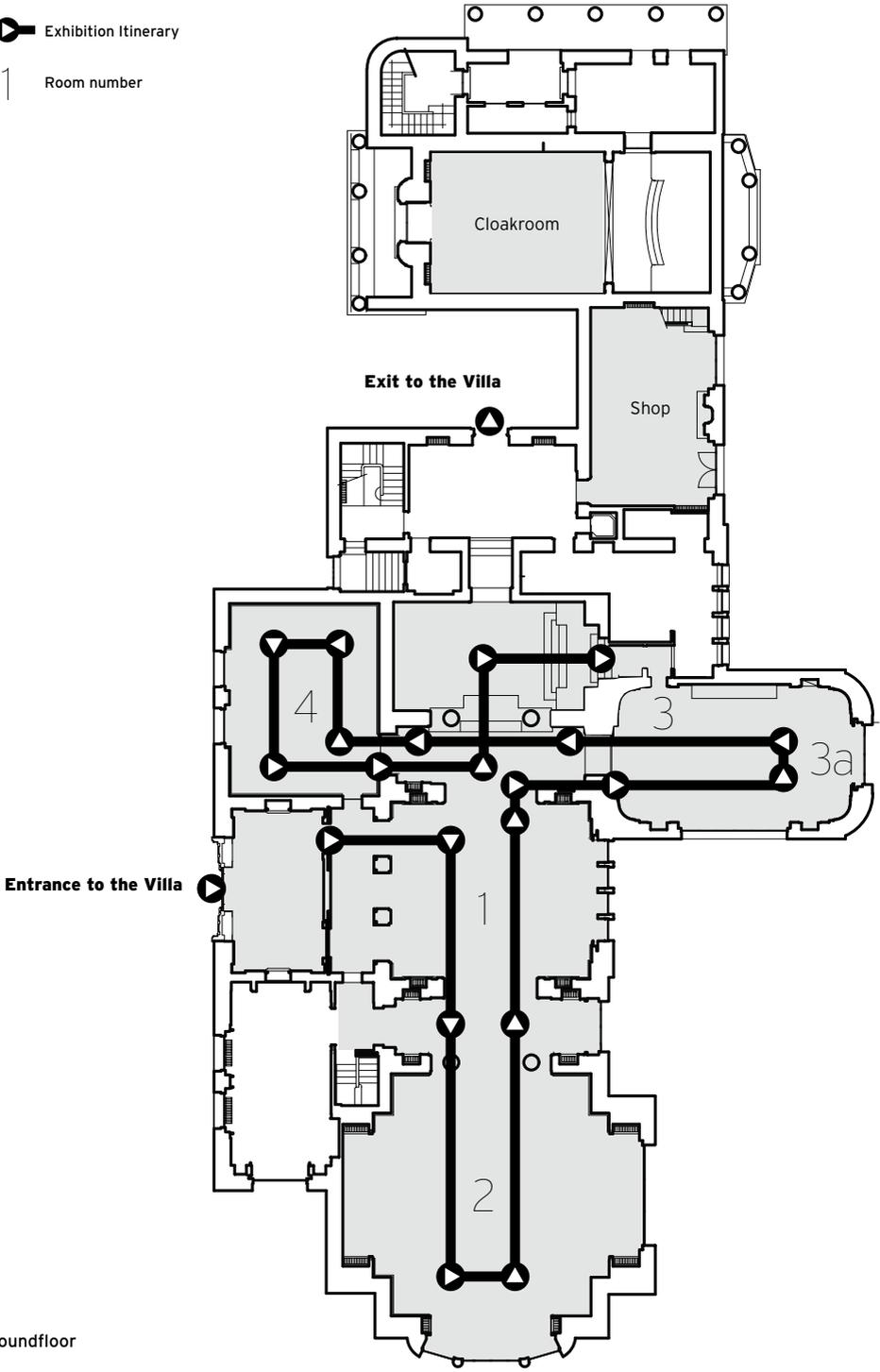
'Joan Miró: Materiality and Metamorphosis' brings together seventy-eight paintings, drawings, sculptures, collages and weavings from the Portuguese State's exceptional collection of work by the Catalan master. Spanning six decades of artistic activity the exhibition focuses on the physical nature of the artist's supports and his elaboration of materials as the basis for his visual practice. Rivalled perhaps only by Paul Klee in his exploration of materiality, Miró expanded the technical boundaries of artistic production in the twentieth century.

Alongside his examination of materials Miró developed an innovative language of visual signs that altered the course of modern art. In a process of morphological transformation objects in Miró's art achieve the status of visual signs: skeins of yarn in his weavings may function as surrogates for drips of paint; wire in his early collages often stands in for the drawn line; and paper at times recapitulates the physical characteristics of the canvas support. In the broadest terms morphology is the operating principle of Miró's work: everything is in a state of constant flux and alteration as Miró explores equivalencies across media.

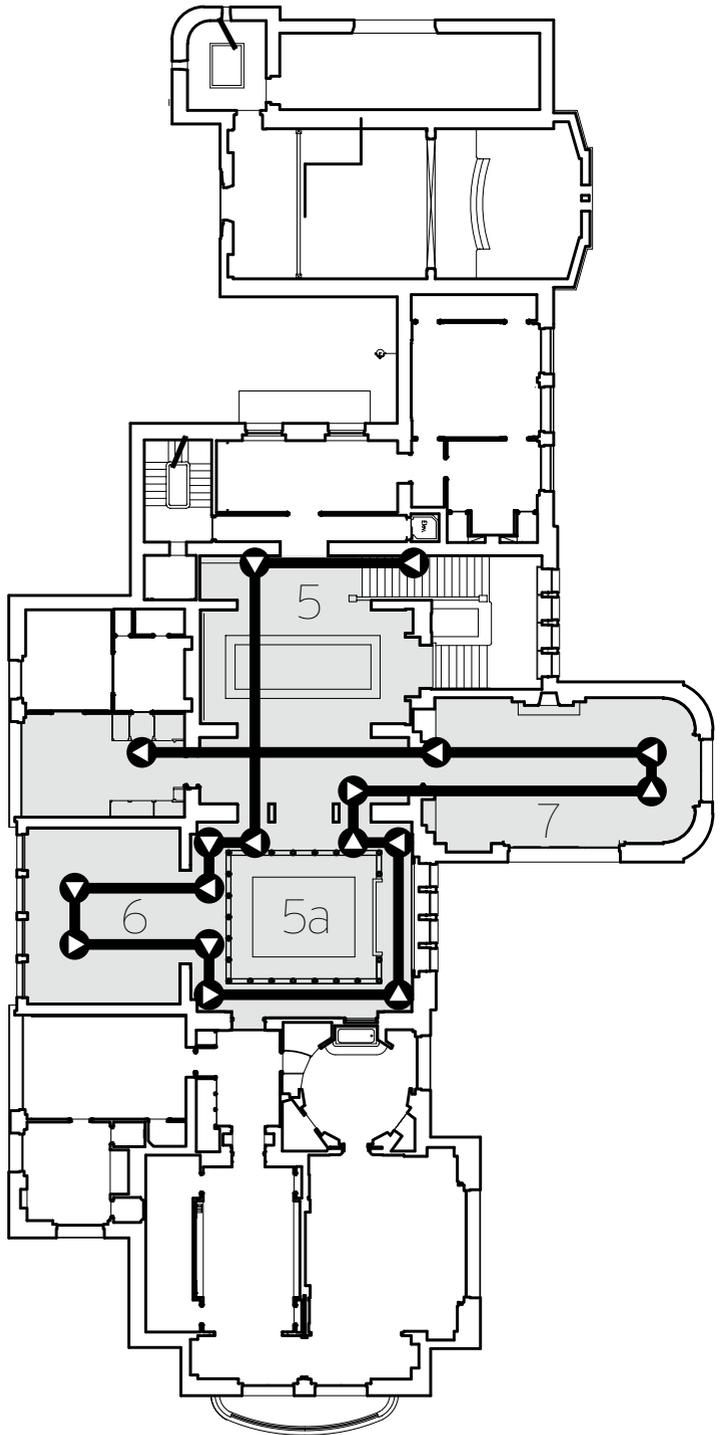
If morphology is defined as a change of physical form, substance or structure, however, it is not in science or biology that we must look to understand Miró's art but in the transformation and internal logic of his working methods. In his dual status as a form-giver and outlaw of twentieth-century modernism – both a painter and an anti-painter – Miró challenged the very notion of medium specificity.

 Exhibition Itinerary

1 Room number



Groundfloor



Floor 1

1

INTRODUCTION

The principle of collage – the yoking together of disparate and heterogeneous elements – was foundational for Miró's artistic practice. Expanding upon Picasso and Braque's innovations of 1912-14, Miró raised the stakes of the game. Repurposing common materials and/or recycling found objects, Miró established new identities for things in the world: a crumpled piece of paper is transformed into a fantastic personage soaring through the night skies; a piece of felt attached to a bucket becomes a sign for liquid paint; and a worn piece of wood with string and cloth is converted into a peasant wearing a red *barretina*, the traditional Catalan hat. Despite these metamorphoses, the original identities of the objects and materials used remain in place. In this movement back and forth between the use value of things and their poetic exchange value, Miró engages in a deeply ironic practice of alchemical transformation.

2

THE FIELD OF THE SIGN

Beginning in 1924 Miró developed an innovative language of signs that transformed his art. In the broadest sense a sign is a surrogate, a stand-in for an absent object, or for an idea or concept. Reconceiving his painting as a linguistic operation, Miró began to think of the pictorial surface as a site for marks and inscriptions, including lines, words and letters. For Miró, however much the sign was polyvalent and open to multiple interpretations, its meanings were often conditioned by context: a Spanish dancer, a small village, a woman going for a stroll on the Ramblas in Barcelona, etc. At times Miró explored the territory of pictographs and ideograms, opening language to the full play of signification. At other times he used ready-made sign systems, which he then disrupted and/or embedded in secondary systems of meaning. Flirting with abstraction but never making the move into non-objectivity, Miró's signs appear as pure graphisms in which meaning appears to be suspended *in potencia*.

By the 1950s and 1960s, Miró's sign language became increasingly rudimentary. A few summary lines might serve to define movement across the visual field; a sign might mark space and the physical character of Miró's support as much as it might define an object or serve as a form of cryptic writing. Stripping language down to its component parts, Miró explored the building blocks of signification.

METAMORPHOSES

By the 1930s the principle of metamorphosis had increasingly become a condition of Miró's work in series. In discrete suites of drawings Miró imagined a world of monstrous figures whose contorted bodies seem to morph continually. Responding to the precarious political realities of his day, Miró gave form to a world of terrifying creatures.

In a series of six mixed-medium works entitled 'Métamorphoses', the distended and distorted anatomies of the figures give expression to the artist's rage, as an incipient eroticism yields to terror. With spindly necks barely strong enough to support their swollen heads, the figures gesticulate in open space as if oppressed by forces beyond their control. In other works from this period, Miró seems to summon his monsters from the ground of the paper support itself, as amorphous patches of colour give rise to figures that seem to exceed their own corporeal boundaries. In a separate series of drawings executed at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris, a single, overriding idea is communicated: observed reality and external discipline as guarantors of expressive freedom. Striking stock poses familiar from long codified academic traditions the models are subjected to deformation. The artist's act of transcription as his stylus moves effortlessly across the page is already an act of translation and interpretation. Bodies strain to fit within the framing edges of the paper support; limbs swell and then collapse at the joints; and flesh hangs from or folds over the skeleton without any attempt at idealization.

IMAGINARY PORTRAIT

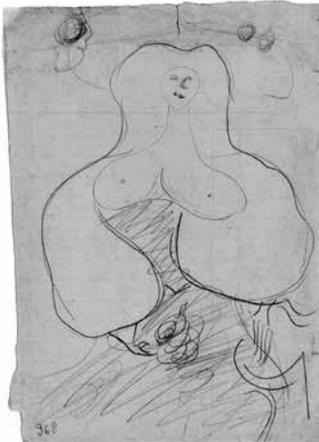
The mutation of reality that characterized Miró's paintings and drawings of c. 1924 was an essential element in the formal transformation of his art and in the metaphorical practices it engendered. In 1929 Miró made metamorphosis the subject of his art in a series of four 'Imaginary Portraits', of which *La Fornarina (After Raphael)* is the largest. Based on the Italian Renaissance master's portrait of a woman long thought to be his lover, Miró gradually purified the densely packed visual incident of Raphael's image: La Fornarina's body has been simplified to a mountainous black mass; her head and breasts have been reduced to bulbous protuberances; her turban, whose knotted ends have been translated into horn-like forms, is grossly exaggerated; and her eye has become a fantastic fish-like form. Even such subtle details as the bits of sky that appear through the foliage in the background of Raphael's portrait have been translated by Miró into a series of red flecks to the right of the figure. In a series of preparatory sketches Miró deformed his visual model as he increasingly turned away from anecdote. In one sketch he inscribed in French the words '*trop en pensant en mes choses précédentes*' (thinking too much about my earlier things) and '*trop réaliste encore*' (still too realistic). Undermining the traditional notion of portrait as likeness Miró tested the boundaries of mimesis.



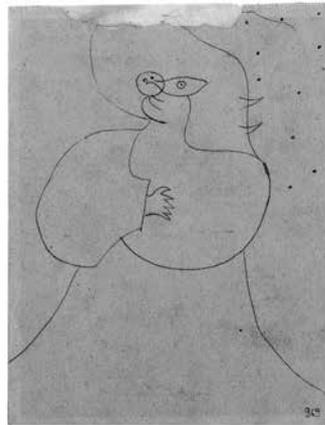
1.



2.



3.



4.



5.

1. Raffaello (1483-1520)

La Fornarina [(Portrait of a Young Woman (La Fornarina))]

c. 1518-19. Oil on wood. 87 x 63 cm

Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Roma.

© 2016. Foto Scala, Firenze – su concessione Ministero Beni e Attività Culturali

2. Preliminary drawing for La Fornarina (D'après Raphaël), 1929

Undated. Graphite pencil on paper. 15.9 x 10.2 cm

Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona. FJM 967

© Successió Miró / ADAGP, Paris, 2016

3. Preliminary drawing for La Fornarina (D'après Raphaël), 1929

Undated. Graphite pencil on paper. 16.1 x 11.7 cm

Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona. FJM 968

© Successió Miró / ADAGP, Paris, 2016

4. Preliminary drawing for La Fornarina (D'après Raphaël), 1929

Undated. Graphite pencil on paper. 21.8 x 16.8 cm

Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona. FJM 969

© Successió Miró / ADAGP, Paris, 2016

5. Preliminary drawing for La Fornarina (D'après Raphaël), 1929

Undated. Graphite pencil and ink on paper. 21.8 x 16.8 cm

Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona. FJM 970

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4

SAVAGE MATERIALITY

The violence and terror expressed in Miró's cruel anatomical distortions of the human figure in the years 1934-37 finds its corollary in the savage materiality that entered his work at this time. Building upon earlier experiments with collage and the fabrication of object-sculptures Miró began to think of the picture surface as a site of accumulation – of deeply encrusted matter and of objects from the world. Between mid-July and mid-October 1936 Miró produced a new series of twenty-seven works simply entitled 'Peintures' [Paintings] which he executed on the industrial material Masonite. Characterized by Miró's biographer Jacques Dupin as a surface 'somewhere between baked earth and hammered, flattened, slightly carbonized straw', Masonite is a particularly unforgiving ground. In at least half of the paintings in the series Miró worked on the course side of the boards, eschewing surface preparation to even out their texture. On top of this rough ground he added oil and enamel paints, casein, tar, sand and even pebbles, all in a direct challenge to the poetic lyricism he had achieved elsewhere in his work. In several instances he even abraded and punctured the surface, insisting on the object quality of his support.

The violence that Miró did to his own figuration in this series also represented a path of renewal. Speaking of the 'Paintings on Masonite' from the summer and early fall of 1936, Miró later wrote, 'you can see that I had already reached a very dangerous impasse from which I saw no possible way out.' Relief would come in the form of poetry – literally and figuratively – as Miró began to temper raw materiality with lyricism in a new series of paintings executed eight months later on Celotex, another commercial material. The rough texture of this industrial fibreboard provided a worthy opponent for Miró's transcendent vision in *Le Chant des oiseaux à l'automne* [Birdsong in Autumn], dated September 1937, which derives its force from the contrast between materiality and poetry, between a ground that is insistently physical and a desire for poetic evasion.

5

SOBRETEIXIMS

Between 1972 and 1973 Miró produced thirty-three tapestries collectively known as 'Sobreteixims' or 'overweaves'. Unlike traditional tapestry manufacture, the new works were not based on reproductions of pre-existing designs but were conceived as independent objects that grant the medium tapestry great autonomy. Working in close collaboration with a talented young weaver named Josep Royo, Miró pushed the boundaries of his practice to new limits. On the one hand the resolute materiality of the 'Sobreteixims' aligns them with Miró's collage practice, in which object and ground are often set in tension. On the other hand the 'Sobreteixims' are objects in themselves, relating to the artist's sculptural practice in their combination and reconfiguration of found materials that have been cast off and deprived of their functionality and original identities. Exploring the idea of metaphorical transposition, Miró allowed common objects like buckets, felt or skeins of yarn to stand in for the physical qualities of poured and dripped paint.

The 'Sobreteixims' have a retrospective function as the culmination of the artist's life-long interest in the material nature of his supports and surface structures. The same white grid that appears in several of the overweaves is also found in Miró's painting of this period. Large quadrants of coloured or white areas contained by this lattice are also found in Miró's late collages, in which expansive areas of black are interrupted by the presence of newspaper, and the relationship between positive and negative space, between figure and ground, is disturbed.

5a

TOILES BRULÉES

Working in the same abandoned flourmill in which he produced many of the 'Sobreteixims', Miró carried his practice a step further. In an act of destruction that was also an act of creation and transformation, he cut and set fire to five new canvases in an orchestrated operation of controlled chaos. The five 'Burned Canvases' that resulted were exhibited at the Grand Palais, Paris, in 1974, where Miró celebrated a major retrospective. As per the artist's instructions two of the canvases were suspended from the ceiling so that both the recto and verso of the objects were visible.

Miró conceived the 'Burned Canvases' as an attack on the body of art itself: its decorative qualities; its exchange value as a luxury commodity; its sacrosanct purity. Challenging his own facility as a master of form and technique, the artist allowed fire to determine the trajectory of his art in a process of alchemical transformation. Pitting vision against touch, distanced viewing against proximate, physical experience, Miró renewed and extended his artistic practice from within.

6

THE MATERIAL SIGN AND THE CALIGRAPHIC GESTURE

As was his practice Miró worked across media. The effects he achieved in etching and aquatint were carried over into his work in India ink on paper and in India ink and watercolour on canvas. Indeed, much of Miró's work of the late 1940s and 1950s has a strong graphic impulse, pointing to the novel effects he achieved as a printmaker. In the eighty woodblock prints he made to illustrate Paul Éluard's *À toute épreuve*, Miró was deeply sensitive to the physical characteristics of his medium, allowing the natural grain of the wood to remain visible. And as with his language of signs, which could be combined in endless variations, Miró's graphic practice often involved reversing, recolouring and/or recombining individual plates to establish new and productive formal dialogues.

As Miró explored new techniques in these decades he was increasingly responsive to process, which acquired a new immediacy in his work. Between February 1947 and April 1959 Miró made three trips to America, where he was deeply impressed by abstract expressionism. At the same time Miró remained a visible presence in Paris, where he saw the explosion of 'art informel' and 'matter painting'. Both of these movements deeply resonated with Miró and his own approach to art. Much of his work of this period is characterized by a new gestural lyricism in which the artist's working processes in establishing his ground generated his imagery.

SIGN/SURFACE/STRUCTURE

In the mid-1960s the grid reappeared in Miró's art as a visible structural agent, an armature through which he locked his forms in place. At times the grid appears as a readymade element in Miró's late work. At other times it appears as a secondary structure that spreads out across the surface of the page or canvas, assuming a descriptive identity in the form of a ladder that also functions as a lattice. In some late drawings and paintings the grid is so subtle that it barely registers, but it is nonetheless present and performing its task. In these works figure and ground – sign, surface and support – are equilibrated to such a degree that only shards of things, fragments of beings in space remain. The figure *is* the ground; it is a condition of the structural lattice that defines and exceeds it. In Miró's late work figuration is not only structure; it is a supplement that is summoned from the ground, into which it collapses.

Texts by Robert Lubar Messeri

EXHIBITION

Artistic Director: Suzanne Cotter
 Curator: Robert Lubar Messeri
 Exhibition Design: Álvaro Siza Vieira assisted by Maria Souto Moura
 Light Design: Alexandre Martins
 Consultant for Environmental Control: Raúl Bessa
 Additional Support on the Exhibition Design: Ana Maio
 Construction Team: Imagitecto
 Coordination: Marta Moreira de Almeida, Filipa Loureiro
 Registration and Conservation: Inês Venade; Filipe Duarte
 Installation Staff: Hugo Castro, Ricardo Dias, Carlos Lopes, Adelino Pontes
 Education Programmes and Schools: Denise Pollini, Diana Cruz, Cristina Lapa
 Film: Ana Amorim
 Sound: Nuno Aragão

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Robert Lubar Messeri, *Joan Miró: Materiality and Metamorphosis*, Porto: Fundação de Serralves, 2016



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Fundação de Serralves
Rua D. João de Castro, 210
4150-417 Porto – Portugal

serralves@serralves.pt

(+ 351) 808 200 543

(+ 351) 226 156 500

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