

“A New Phase of the Offensive”: The 1936 Joan Miró Retrospective at the Pierre Matisse Gallery

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When Joan Miró went to the United States for the first time in 1947, several of his works had already been acquired by major public and private collections. He discovered that he had become what Barbara Rose called “a hero of the American avant-garde.”¹ The interest was mutual, as Miró was openly enthusiastic about the explorations being carried out by young American artists.² Miró’s importance and influence in America, despite the fact that he remained in Europe during World War II (unlike many artists in exile), convey the scope of the work accomplished by Pierre Matisse as an art dealer, notably by creating and sustaining a market at a time when the New York art scene was rapidly, radically changing, spurred by certain critics such as Clement Greenberg.³

To interrogate the dealer’s work and his relationship to the artist, it has been decided to focus here on the retrospective show held in Matisse’s gallery from November 30 to December 26, 1936. The retrospective will be studied primarily through unpublished letters between the two men. Their close, extensive correspondence, made necessary by geographical distance, could sometimes be stormy, often due to delays in replies—the chaos of historical events sparked misunderstandings that had to be cleared up by constant reestablishment of mutual trust. This correspondence takes readers to the heart of the men’s collaboration, to

1 Barbara Rose, ed., *Miró in America*, exh. cat. (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1982), p. 5.

2 In an interview with Francis Lee, Miró stated, “I admire very much the energy and vitality of American painters. I especially like their enthusiasm and freshness. This I find inspiring. They would do well to free themselves from Europe’s influence.” Francis Lee, “Interview with Miró,” *Possibilities*, no. 1 (Winter 1947–48), reprinted in Margit Rowell, ed., *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), p. 204.

3 For that matter, Greenberg published a monograph on Miró as early as 1948. See Clement Greenberg, *Joan Miró* (New York: Quadrangle Press, 1948).

the making of artworks and exhibitions and how they were received.⁴ Addressing the Miró retrospective organized by Matisse in 1936 offers a glimpse of their alliance, their friendship, their conception of the profession of dealer, and their opinions on, for example, surrealism, as well as their strategies for ensuring the promotion and appropriate reception of an oeuvre whose reputation was still insecure.

Pierre Matisse, Joan Miró's dealer

Pierre Matisse met Joan Miró in 1930, two years after his Paris dealer, Pierre Loeb, had introduced Matisse to Miró's work by giving him a canvas titled *Painting (Peinture)*.⁵ At that time, Matisse was working with Valentine Dudensing, for whom he scoured Europe to buy canvases for resale in New York,⁶ and he organized Miró's first solo show in the United States.⁷ The following year, on November 4, 1931, Matisse opened his own gallery, in the Fuller Building on the corner of Fifty-Seventh Street and Madison Avenue, an address he never left (although he moved from the seventeenth floor to larger premises on the fourth floor in 1947). Matisse and Miró signed their first contract in 1934,⁸ remaining loyal to one another until the artist's death in 1983. The terms of the contract between Pierre Loeb, Pierre Matisse, and Joan Miró were summed up by the artist to his New York dealer in the following terms: "From *April 1, 1934*, onward, for a period of one year, I will turn over all of my output to you for *two thousand francs* (2,000 frs.)⁹ per month; you will share this output with Pierre Loeb, who will retain *one quarter* as against your share of *three quarters*." In the same letter, Miró wrote:

4 The forthcoming edition of unpublished letters will be titled *Pierre Matisse et Joan Miró: Ouvrir le feu, Correspondance croisée, 1933–1983*, edited and with an introduction by Élisabeth Sclaunick, published by François-Marie Deyrolle, Strasbourg. The correspondence is held in the Pierre Matisse Gallery collection at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

5 Joan Miró, *Painting*, 1927, oil on canvas, 28¾ × 36¼ in. (73 × 92 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, gift of Pierre Matisse in memory of Pierre Loeb, 1984. Sabine Rewald recounted how Matisse first reacted to the gift by putting the painting in a closet, only taking a new look at it much later. Rewald, "Pierre Matisse: Faithful Son, Fearless Dealer," in Sabine Rewald with Magdalena Dabrowski, eds., *The American Matisse: The Dealer, His Artists, His Collection*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009), pp. 3–23, here p. 11.

6 For details on the contractual relationship between Pierre Matisse and Valentine Dudensing, see John Russell, *Matisse Father & Son* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), p. 52.

7 The show ran from October 20 to November 8, 1930, and featured twelve oils on canvas by Miró. See Valentine Dudensing, ed., *Joan Miró*, exh. cat. (New York: The Valentine Gallery, 1930).

8 Miró refers to this contract in his letter dated April 29, 1934, quoted below (note 12). The broader context behind the signing of the contract is given in Russell, *Matisse Father & Son* (note 6), pp. 113–15.

9 Given the effects of inflation, the purchasing power of 2,000 French francs in 1934 was equivalent to roughly US \$1,700 in 2018.

“I am very happy, my dear Matisse, to let you have a share in my output. It is you who has always organized my shows in America, a land that seems to promise a happy future for us all. You also know that for a long time now I have had the friendliest feelings for you, as well as for your brother-in-law and Madame Duthuit, not to mention my admiration for Henri Matisse. I should be truly happy to share my output between you and Pierre Loeb, a close friend of long standing.”¹⁰

Friendship and esteem were the basis of Miró’s professional relationship with his dealers, who were workmates (he thus asked Matisse to behave as a beholder, and he awaited the dealer’s “personal opinion”¹¹ on works he sent him). They were also allies, because the arrival of Pierre Matisse marked the beginning of “a new phase of the offensive”:¹²

“I am well aware that it is not easy to handle my paintings. It calls for almost as much courage as it takes for me to paint them. Above all, we must all three—Pierre Loeb, you, and myself—be guided by an absolute faith. As the son of a very great painter, you know better than I what it means to lead the life of an artist. You have witnessed both the long struggle and the eventual triumphant success.”¹³

The metaphors of combat and struggle against adversity that populated their letters constituted a common ground among the three men. Miró stressed the difficulty of the task Loeb and Matisse would have to accomplish, namely to create a market and bolster recognition of his oeuvre.¹⁴ The American public found the Catalan artist disconcerting. During his first solo show at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in 1932, he was described as “a delightful and genuine artist whose work, up to this point, has proved unaccountably difficult to Americans.”¹⁵

10 Letter from Joan Miró to Pierre Matisse, April 29, 1934. [Translator’s note: The latter part of this English version is taken from Russell, *Matisse Father & Son* (note 6), p. 114.]

11 Letter from Miró to Matisse, November 16, 1936.

12 Letter from Miró to Matisse, April 29, 1934. As Russell explains (*Matisse Father & Son*, p. 113), “Times were bad, all over Europe. There was among thoughtful people an almost universal and well-founded fear that the entire continent of Europe would shortly be on the skids and quite possibly never recover. For this and other reasons, Miró was anxious to have a firm base in the American market. Pierre Loeb, for his part, could no longer bear the entire brunt of his contract with Miró.”

13 Quoted in Russell, *Matisse Father & Son* (note 6), p. 114.

14 Once again according to Russell (*Matisse Father & Son*, note 6, p. 113), there were very few Miró collectors in the United States at that time.

15 *New York Sun*, November 5, 1932, quoted in William M. Griswold, ed., *Pierre Matisse and His Artists*, exh. cat. (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library, 2002), p. 157.

The difficulties inherent in such a singular oeuvre were complicated by others related to the historical context of the day. The men's collaboration took place during a turbulent period that was marked by the Spanish Civil War: Pierre Loeb in Paris received the monthly payments made by Matisse in New York¹⁶ (which amounted to slightly over one hundred dollars in 1936¹⁷); Miró sometimes sent letters to one dealer, sometimes to the other, who thus had to share the information provided by the artist about his work¹⁸ in order to manage things despite the obstacles. By October 10, 1936, however, Matisse no longer wanted to effect financial transactions through Paris. He wanted to deal directly with the artist, freeing himself from Loeb as the go-between. He denied any "animosity" toward Loeb, explaining his position by the fact that he henceforth owned the "majority of [Miró's] works," and dangling the vision of America as the "largest market" for them even before World War II broke out.¹⁹ On several occasions, he assured Miró that he was "the linchpin of it all."²⁰ On August 29, 1936, he wrote, "My dear Miró, let me just say how happy I am to be handling your work. It is a joy for me, and a compensation for a profession that is not always pleasant. Rest assured that I will always act in your best interests in all things."²¹

When he wrote those lines, Matisse was enthusiastically preparing the Miró retrospective, his own gallery's fourth solo show of the artist's work.²² Epistolary exchanges between the two men show that Miró was heavily involved in the preparation of the show, from the choice of works to the way they were to be hung, and from the catalogue to the critical essays it contained. Even if Matisse had the final word, making unilateral decisions on most of these points—at the risk of irritating Miró—the two men were driven by the same desire to hit hard with a "sensational" exhibition. In order to do so, they attacked on several fronts.

16 Letter from Miró to Matisse, August 9, 1936.

17 Or roughly \$1,800 in 2018. Letter from Matisse to Miró, October 28, 1936.

18 Letter from Matisse to Miró, August 29, 1936.

19 Letter from Matisse to Miró, October 10, 1936. "There is every reason to believe that the largest market for your work is to be found here and that we can manage to expand it; it is here that the greatest effort should be made."

20 Letter from Matisse to Miró, December 26, 1936.

21 Letter from Matisse to Miró, August 29, 1936.

22 Prior exhibitions at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York were: "Joan Miró, Drawings and Paintings on Paper," November 1–25, 1932; "Miró, Paintings," December 29, 1933–January 18, 1934; and "Miró, Paintings and Works on Paper, 1933–1934," January 10–February 9, 1935. Two catalogues include a chronological list of exhibitions organized by Pierre Matisse at his gallery: William M. Griswold, ed., *Pierre Matisse and His Artists*, exh. cat. (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 2002, chronology by Alessandra Carnielli and Margaret Loudon); and Pierre Schneider, ed., *Pierre Matisse passeur passionné, un marchand d'art et ses artistes*, exh. cat. (Paris: Mona Bismarck Foundation, 2005, chronology by Élia Pijollet).

The retrospective: Attacking at the right moment

To start, the choice of date was critical for both of them. Miró viewed it from the standpoint of the work schedule he rigorously followed in his studio, thinking of the canvases he wanted to put on show. Matisse, meanwhile, moved the exhibition forward to late fall, aware of the publicity that could be generated around Miró's work by a group show, “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,” scheduled to open at the Museum of Modern Art in New York on December 7, 1936.²³ Seizing every opportunity, Matisse got ahead of the artist in trying to create a bang, since he could not “just wait, like French dealers, for a client to come in and decide to buy a painting.”²⁴ Furthermore, Matisse actively contributed to the MoMA show, and thereby to the institutional and public recognition of Miró. Indeed, one of the fifteen works by the Catalan artist on show—*Rope and People I (Corde et personnages I)*²⁵—had been donated in 1936 to MoMA by Matisse, who also lent three gouaches done in 1935–36. Matisse's letters describe the critical reaction to the MoMA exhibition, strategically stressing that people “greatly admired the artists who naturally outclassed that gang” (meaning the surrealists). He mentioned in passing that Miró's works were hung in the same room as those of Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, and Hans Arp.²⁶ These details are significant because the two men felt there was a negative side to the show, despite the high profile it gave to the works. Even though it had the advantage of providing a diachronic view that placed Miró in the tradition of old masters such as Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Hans Baldung, Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and Albrecht Dürer, the show was also, unavoidably, associated with the surrealist movement at a time when, they both felt, it was losing both steam and appeal. When Matisse first mentioned the show, on August 29, 1936, he immediately discussed his ambivalence about linking Miró to surrealism, which, he said, “had just about run its course” and was in danger of “falling into the hands of those who merely exploit it,” but which nevertheless represented “one of the most [interesting] movements in art since the end of the war.”

23 Organized by Alfred H. Barr Jr., the show ran from December 7, 1936, to January 17, 1937.

24 Letter from Matisse to Miró, October 28, 1936. In this respect, Sabine Rewald's comment on the difference between American and European collectors may be enlightening: “At Brummer, the proprietor's brother explained how American collectors differed from Europeans: they bought art because it appealed to them, not as an investment; they regarded the money spent on art as money lost; and they spent money on art in France, not in the United States.” See Rewald and Dabrowski, *The American Matisse* (note 5), p. 3.

25 *Rope and People I*, March 27, 1935, oil and rope on card mounted on wood, 41¼ × 29⅜ in. (105 × 75 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of the Pierre Matisse Gallery (Matisse's name was not mentioned in the catalogue).

26 Letter from Matisse to Miró, January 22, 1937.

Whereas, being an art dealer, Matisse might have been pleased at the high standing accorded to surrealist artists, he expressed his anxiety over how he could explain such work to the public. He therefore queried Miró about it, so that he could “give a sane and rational account” that would “head off misunderstandings.”²⁷ Their correspondence on the MoMA exhibition reveals that Matisse was party to the public and critical reception of Miró’s oeuvre, not only for the shows he organized at his own gallery, but also by making works available and explaining them. He was a key, privileged intermediary with the major American museums. Miró’s letters confirm Matisse’s legitimacy, because the artist praised the dealer’s “perceptiveness” with respect to his work, someone who was furthermore able to offer immediate commentary “as a *friend*” (Miró’s emphasis).²⁸ Thus the dealer’s view converged, indeed merged, with the artist’s in their letters. As Miró wrote:

“I agree with what you think about surrealism—that school has gone as far as it possibly can. Now the careerists and weak artists are moving in to profit from it, and it’s up to you, the worthy dealers, to be wary of them despite whatever short-term commercial advantages there may be. In fact, in all movements or schools, it is only the *man* that counts, everything else is stupid or a joke. It is only the *individual* with great human strength who stands out, all the others are just silly puppets.”²⁹

The retrospective: Stressing uniqueness

A few months previously, several of Miró’s works were included in MoMA’s “Cubism and Abstract Art” show.³⁰ MoMA was therefore a crucial institution in making Miró known in the United States. However, since the museum’s role was to place artists in a historic context, Miró always found himself linked to movements, even though his work could not properly be described as cubist or abstract (on the contrary, he asserted his attachment to reality), and even though his relationship to surrealism was complex. Miró and Matisse wanted to win recognition without tying the artist to any movement. Matisse wrote:

27 Matisse to Miró, August 29, 1936, quoted in Russell, *Matisse Father & Son* (note 6), p. 122.

28 Miró to Matisse, September 28, 1936.

29 Ibid. [Translator’s note: Here, as elsewhere, Miró’s French misspellings have been silently corrected in English. This passage is partially translated somewhat differently in Russell, *Matisse Father & Son* (note 6), p. 122.]

30 The exhibition ran from March 2 to April 19, 1936.

“My dear Miró, we must create a very big bang this time, in order to show that among all this fuss over schools and “isms,” only authentic things matter. The American eye is childish, allowing itself to be distracted by all that glitters. So let’s exploit that weakness, since it’s for the right cause. Your show will really shine, I guarantee it!”³¹

This game of being part of, yet standing aloof from, avant-garde movements bore fruit. Miró’s oeuvre acquired prestige by being linked to key moments in art history, but the unique path trod by the Catalan artist (who transcended categories and unsettled the beholder by constantly questioning and redefining his own style) was probably crucial in the long run. First of all, it meant that Miró emerged as an exceptional artist, like Salvador Dalí and Pablo Picasso; furthermore, his transcendence of all “schools” increased his importance in the eyes of young artists in the United States. According to Barbara Rose, his roots in his native soil of Catalonia helped turn him into a model for Americans seeking to produce an American art, despite Miró’s connection to the Paris scene.³² Mounting a retrospective exhibition therefore seemed the best strategy for reaching beyond movements and demonstrating an individual development, in what the artist described as “a *human* and *lively* way, not at all literary and intellectual, which is a sign of something stillborn, rotten, destined to swiftly die away.”³³ Matisse echoed Miró, describing the retrospective as a good move for “presenting the public with the natural development of [your] oeuvre up to its most recent expression.” It was also a tactical move: “With the retrospective nature of the museum’s exhibition and the Picasso retrospective [at the Valentine Gallery],³⁴ I thought this show would have much more impact, and its success confirmed my thinking.”³⁵ Matisse thereby exploited his knowledge of the American public and of current cultural events in order to turn Miró into an essential artist alongside Picasso and Dalí.

The hanging: Creating a bang despite disagreements

From November 30 to December 26, 1936, Matisse exhibited thirty-nine works by Miró (twenty-seven oils on canvas, eleven gouaches, one watercolor), from the 1918 portrait labeled *Man with a Derby* (*The*

31 Letter from Matisse to Miró, October 28, 1936.

32 Rose, *Miró in America* (note 1), p. 20.

33 Letter from Miró to Matisse, 28 September, 1936. [Translated somewhat differently in Russell, *Matisse Father & Son* (note 6), p. 122.]

34 “Picasso 1901–1934, Retrospective Exhibition,” Valentine Gallery, New York, October 26–November 21, 1936.

35 Letter from Matisse to Miró, December 26, 1936.

Chauffeur) (*Portrait d'Heriberto Casany* [*Le Chauffeur*])³⁶ to several recent works. He brought together works that were highly different in handling, revealing a clear development from the 1922–23 *Flowers and Butterfly* (*Fleurs et papillon*, listed in the catalogue as no. 5) to the 1933 *Painting* (no. 13), both of which were reproduced in the catalogue.³⁷ Only one catalogue entry (no. 27, *Painting* [*Peinture*], 1936) referred to Miró's works on Masonite, a technique using the application of tar and sand that the artist developed in the summer of 1936. Miró grappled with his materials in an embrace that was simultaneously loving and bellicose. Even before he made them, Miró suggested that Matisse wait for these works “of great material strength and expressive power, to be included in the exhibition.”³⁸ After shipping them, Miró made the following recommendations to Matisse: “As you can see, the material is very sturdy. Don't worry if stones fall off here and there. *This is what I intended*. Losses of that kind will make the paintings look less like “*objects of beauty*.” In exchange, they *will take on a whole new power*. The surface of the paintings will look like a battered old wall with a great potential for eloquence.”³⁹

For Miró, producing a handsome exhibition was not the point. He used a boxing metaphor when complaining about the absence of these new paintings in the show, writing to Matisse:

“Also, I am surprised that you have not included any of my recent pictures. Allow me to say that in my opinion this was a big mistake. ... I had worked with enthusiasm, and with complete faith in this exhibition, in the belief that the ensemble of the show would be simply sensational. I am very much hurt that you did not back me up by showing the full range of my work, thereby delivering the K.O. to that whole bunch of pansies and incompetents.”⁴⁰

Not having received them in time, Matisse couldn't include all those paintings in the catalogue, but he worked out a strategy for displaying them anyway. As he explained, “I always had two on show, which I changed often. That's how Chrysler bought his.”⁴¹ Walter P. Chrysler (a major collector who notably supported MoMA) also bought the *Por-*

36 Also known as *Portrait of Heriberto Casany*, 1918, oil on canvas, 27⁵/₈ × 24¹/₂ in. (70 × 62 cm), Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth.

37 *Flowers and Butterfly*, 1922–23, tempera on plywood, 32 × 25¹/₂ in. (81 × 65 cm), Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama. *Painting*, 1933, oil on canvas, 54¹/₄ × 63³/₄ in. (130 × 162 cm), private collection, USA.

38 Letter from Miró to Matisse, August 9, 1936.

39 Miró to Matisse, November 16, 1936, quoted in Russell, *Matisse Father & Son* (note 6), p. 123.

40 Miró to Matisse, December 14, 1936, quoted in Russell (note 6) p. 123.

41 Matisse to Miró, December 26, 1936.

trait of Heriberto Casany. Matisse reported to Miró what became of his works, here stressing the importance of the buyers. “I have just sold a second picture in the recent series to a Chicago collector. The canvas sold to Chrysler was sent to Chicago to be shown with the rest of his collection in the new premises of the Art Club [January 8–31, 1937].”⁴² Matisse thus justified his decisions by such sales, pointing out that “none of last year’s pictures on cardboard had been seen, and they, too, were very popular. It is strange, and also highly significant, that the pictures sold during the show cover your entire output 1926–1933–1935, and 1936.”⁴³ Miró’s works slowly entered major collections and big American museums. The financial magnate Armand G. Erpf gave *Still Life – Glove and Newspaper* (*Nature morte – Le Gant et le journal*, 1921) to MoMA in 1955, while *Personages Attracted by the Forms of a Mountain* (*Personnages attirés par les formes d’une montagne*, 1936) entered the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1951 thanks to a bequest by an American collector of the surrealists, Saidie Alder May. *Dog Barking at the Moon* (*Chien aboyant à la lune*, 1926) and *Painting (Fratellini)* (*Peinture [Fratellini]*, 1927) were given to the Philadelphia Museum of Art by art collector and dealer A. E. Gallatin.⁴⁴ On January 22, 1937, Matisse assessed the outcome of the retrospective:

“I sold many gouaches and am about to place the painting of *Figure Attracted by the Forms of a Mountain* in a major collection here. ... I think people are beginning to notice that in all the fuss over surrealism there are only a few important figures, who govern the scene, and that you are one of them.”⁴⁵

In order that Miró see for himself that the show was “very impressive,” Matisse sent photographs of the hanging, as well as press clippings of “divided” opinions.⁴⁶ Both men were alert to reactions to the retrospective, and Miró had even given instructions in terms of publicity. On November 16, 1936, he asked Matisse to send invitations to the show to “people of great interest” to him—friends, art critics, and collectors (including Ernest Hemingway, Alexander Calder, the photographer Carl

42 Matisse to Miró, January 5, 1937.

43 Matisse to Joan Miró, December 26, 1936.

44 *Still Life—Glove and Newspaper*, 1921, oil on canvas, 45 × 35¼ in. (116 × 89 cm), The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Armand G. Erpf, 1955. *Personages Attracted by the Forms of a Mountain*, 1936, tempera on Masonite, 12 ½ × 19 ¾ in. (32 × 50 cm), Baltimore Museum of Art, bequest of Saidie A. May, 1951. *Dog Barking at the Moon*, 1926, oil on canvas, 28¾ × 36¼ in. (73 × 92 cm), and *Painting (Fratellini)*, 1927, oil on canvas, 51¼ × 38¼ in. (130 × 97 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art, A. E. Gallatin collection.

45 Letter from Matisse to Miró, January 22, 1937.

46 Ibid.

van Vechten, *New York Sun* reporter and critic Henry McBride, Mr. and Mrs. Shaw McKean, Nadia Sokolova, and composers George Antheil and Edgard Varèse).⁴⁷ Matisse and Miró were particularly concerned about the opinions of influential people such as James Johnson Sweeney, the art historian and critic who curated shows at MoMA; Sweeney would organize the first MoMA retrospective of Miró's work in 1941, and the essay he wrote for that show had a lasting influence on reactions to Miró's work by the American public, notably artists.⁴⁸ His positive response to Matisse's retrospective was a measure of its success, as the dealer reported to Miró.

Publications: Creating a bang despite disagreements

In order that the retrospective have the desired impact—and perhaps to increase attendance, but especially to leave a lasting impression—both men expressed concern about publications that would appear around that time. Miró mentioned the magazine *Minotaure* and several times expressed his wish that Christian Zervos, editor of *Cahiers d'art*, would publish “a major article” on his recent work, probably so that the retrospective would make an impact on the Paris art scene.⁴⁹ Both men inevitably paid special attention to the catalogue of the show, on which they worked together. Matisse made two comparisons in order to enable the artist to picture the catalogue: he referred to the catalogue of the 1936 Picasso show at Zwemmer's in London, whose cover was black and white, and to the cover that Miró did for issue 25 of *Transition* (Fall 1936), in blue and black. Although the two men agreed, in theory, on these precedents, strong tensions arose. First of all, the adjectives they used to describe the project were diametrically opposed. Matisse wanted to make “a very big bang” by producing “a really alluring catalogue,”⁵⁰ which sparked certain reservations on Miró's part. The artist asked the dealer to “refrain from anything artistic” when it came to advertising (i.e., posters) and the catalogue. Although he said he trusted Matisse, Miró strongly recommended that things be done with “maximal simpli-

47 Letter from Miró to Matisse, November 16, 1936.

48 Rose, *Miró in America* (note 1), p. 20. (Sweeney, like Ernest Hemingway, had already written about Miró's work for the solo show held at the Pierre Matisse Gallery from December 29, 1933, to January 18, 1934.)

49 Letter from Miró to Matisse, August 9, 1936. “Before going you should talk to Zervos about doing a major article on me, perhaps published at the same time as the New York show, which would be good.” Miró reminded Matisse of this idea on September 28, 1936. Issue 8–10 of Zervos's magazine, *Cahiers d'art*, dated 1936 (but distributed in 1937) included an article by Jacques Viot (“Un ami, Joan Miró”) and an interview of Miró by Georges Duthuit (“Où allez-vous Miró?”).

50 Letter from Matisse to Miró, October 6, 1936.

city and *minimal artistic spirit*.”⁵¹ But Miró’s proposed design did not reach Matisse in time, so the dealer was obliged to make decisions. In the spirit described above, the cover was black and white, with a handprint against a white ground, being distinctive from the rest of the space in shades of gray. Miró’s name was written on it, not in “that lettering [used] by architects,”⁵² but in the form of a handwritten signature in red, on the upper right. Some of the works on show were reproduced in black and white against a background that was sometimes blue, sometime red, opposite a list of all the works on view. Matisse was aware that the catalogue he produced strayed from the artist’s expectations, as he conceded: “I think that, despite being somewhat elaborate, it remains dignified and unfussy.”⁵³ In order to win Miró over to these editorial decisions, Matisse reported in the same letter that Sweeney and their other friends liked the catalogue. Miró’s discontent was not assuaged, and was perhaps exacerbated by the delay in receiving his copies of the catalogue. On December 14, he expressed lively anger over the signature (too unlike his own) and the colors (“rather too reminiscent of the French flag”).⁵⁴ At the same time—too late—he sent his design for the catalogue, a poster, signatures, and long-awaited paintings. The two men’s collaboration on the retrospective was thus severely hampered by long delays in receiving correspondence and artworks, made worse by the political situation in Europe. Out of pragmatism, and in a rush, Matisse tried to reach Miró multiple times, in vain: Miró apparently not having received a letter sent to Barcelona, Matisse sent another to Paris (on October 6, 1936) and a telegram to Montroig del Camp (the following day) to urge Miró to send him the paintings and the design for the cover of the catalogue. The Catalan government took a long time to send the works to Paris, and then French customs took a long time to authorize their dispatch to the United States. Meanwhile, the date for the show was moved forward.

Given Miró’s harsh criticism, Matisse wrote a letter on December 26 in which, after explaining that he only received the material two days before the show opened, he replied to the artist’s complaints point by point:

“As to my choice of colors, it was based on impact rather than the colors of the French flag. ... As to the signature, I was forced to do one myself. I did not try to copy yours exactly for two reasons. It wasn’t necessary for the signature to be exact in order to have the

51 Letter from Miró to Matisse, November 16, 1936.

52 Ibid.

53 Matisse to Miró, December 8, 1936.

54 Miró to Matisse, December 14, 1936, quoted in Russell, *Matisse Father & Son* (note 6), p. 123.

intended impact, and I thought it would be better to have a made-up signature rather than something very close that would not go with the rest of the catalogue.”⁵⁵

His repeated use of the term “impact” shows that Matisse, like Miró, wanted to “hit hard.” They nevertheless differed on the way to do so, probably because they did not have the same ideal audience in mind, and also probably because Matisse could not ignore the financial repercussions or promotional aims of the catalogue. He therefore wrote like as an art dealer:

“If you think the catalogue lacks simplicity, I’d say I agree with you. ... This catalogue is a souvenir that people will keep on their bookshelves at home. ... And don’t forget that all this costs me a lot of money, which I spent unhesitatingly. It would have been much easier to make a simple card and hang the pictures the way they do on rue de Seine, unframed or with plain wood frames. That’s not my style. Artists and two or three art lovers might like that, but not here, and we have to reach whatever public there is, after all!”⁵⁶

Miró also made recommendations regarding the frames for his pictures, advising “maximum *simplicity* and *severity*. They should not look in any way ‘artistic.’”⁵⁷ Matisse defended his choices by reminding the artist—who had not yet set foot in the United States—that the art scene and art market were very different from those in Paris.⁵⁸ The dissension between the two men melted, however, once they deemed that the offensive had attained its goal. Matisse asserted that “the bang you wanted to create has been made, don’t worry. Not with the pictures you thought, but it has nevertheless been done. The museum has bought ‘the Catalan landscape’ for its own collection.”⁵⁹ Given the show’s success, Miró acquiesced:

“Based on what I’ve read, the show went very well; friends who saw it also told me that it was very well organized and excellently presented. If I was worried at first, that was because I was afraid that

⁵⁵ Matisse to Miró, December 26, 1936.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Miró to Matisse, November 16, 1936, quoted in Russell, *Matisse Father & Son* (note 6), p. 123.

⁵⁸ Matisse to Miró, December 26, 1936. “Do not forget, my friend, that New York is not the rue de Seine, and that an exhibition done with the modesty and simplicity of Pierre’s gallery would not have the same impact here.”

⁵⁹ Ibid. *The Hunter (Catalan Landscape)*, 1923–24, oil on canvas, 25½ × 30½ in. (65 × 100 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. This painting was exhibited at the museum (on loan from Simone Kahn), not exhibited at the Pierre Matisse Gallery.

the latest pictures wouldn't be exhibited, which I felt was of capital importance for reaching our goal, which we met. I was absolutely determined to hit hard in order to smash that gang of impotent men. You were a great help, and I hope we'll get them in the end.”⁶⁰

This retrospective could be considered exemplary of Matisse's efforts regarding Miró's work in the United States. As a man who was “active and far-seeing” (to borrow Miró's terms of praise),⁶¹ he employed his knowledge of the American market and of Miró's oeuvre in order to carry out offensives that landed it in the greatest private and public collections. He was also able to spur orders for monumental commissions—including the restaurant of a luxury hotel in Cincinnati.⁶² Matisse established links with influential players on the New York art scene and notably exploited the proximity of museums to skillfully write Miró into the history of art. Just as people were slowly coming to feel that “the School of Paris [was] over,” Matisse turned Miró into “the most important representative of that European school”⁶³ by, for example, seeing that “the first things to come from Europe since the start of the war”⁶⁴ were works by Miró in 1945, and by taking advantage of the aura of surrealism and its leader: in 1959, Matisse brought the names of André Breton and Joan Miró together in a publication he produced for the exhibition “Constellations,” in which the poet's parallel prose accompanied gouaches done by the artist during World War II.⁶⁵ The dealer thereby reinforced his own efforts by issuing, in addition to catalogues, fine art publications aimed at book lovers. Pierre Matisse thus emerges as a timely strategist, advancing on several fronts with Miró at his side. Indeed, the artist participated in every battle, and the two men's relationship—in the apt words of Jacques Dupin, who knew them well—was “a unique alliance and partnership.”⁶⁶

60 Letter from Miró to Matisse, January 12, 1937.

61 Miró to Matisse, November 16, 1936, quoted in Russell, *Matisse Father & Son* (note 6), p. 122.

62 In 1947 Miró was commissioned to paint a large mural for the restaurant of the Terrace Plaza Hotel in Cincinnati.

63 Letter from Matisse to Miró, August 16, 1946.

64 Matisse to Miró, February 2, 1945.

65 *Constellations*, with poems by André Breton opposite gouaches by Joan Miró, would be published by Pierre Matisse in 1959.

66 Jacques Dupin, “Joan Miró et Pierre Matisse,” in Schneider, *Pierre Matisse* (note 22), p. 53.