

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 11, 1992

CONTACT: Ruth Kaplan  
Tina Coplan  
(202) 842-6353

## NATIONAL GALLERY ACQUIRES RARE SCULPTURE BY JOAN MIRO

Washington, D.C. -- A monumental bronze sculpture, fourteen-feet high, by Joan Miró (1893-1983) has been acquired by the National Gallery of Art, J. Carter Brown announced today.

Entitled Personnage Gothique--Oiseau-Eclair, the sculpture was created in 1974. It sums up many of the lifelong concerns of the surrealist master. Displayed at the head of the main stairs, on the mezzanine level of the East building, Personnage Gothique has just been purchased with funds given to the Gallery by the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation. It is the first Miró sculpture to enter the collection.

"This majestic work," said J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery, "in its imposing proportions, rarity, and intriguing surface texture presents an almost spooky presence that is also humorous and appealing at the same time. It would make a major statement in the Gallery's planned National Sculpture Garden."

-more-

Personnage Gothique is an amalgamated creature composed of three parts: an arched body cast from a donkey yoke; a "head" cast from a cardboard box enclosing a circular form; and a small bird perched atop the head. It is one of Miró's largest sculptures. At once imposing in its scale and whimsical in its assemblage of found objects, the work blends childlike imagining with adult sophistication, intuition with improvisation--qualities characteristic of surrealist sculpture.

While Miró's first sculpture dates from the late 1920s and early 1930s, the major part of his work in that medium was produced after his seventieth year. More than one hundred and fifty bronze sculptures created during the last two decades of his life explore an extraordinary range of materials, textures, colors, and surface treatments. The artist's own work provided a constantly generative source for his sculpture, and the imagery that he developed in the 1930s and 1940s--birds, women, and quirky biomorphs (combined human and animal forms)--are found frequently in his later work.

Miró employed two techniques for his bronze sculpture, casting either from his own modeled forms or from assemblages of found objects. The assemblage approach, pioneered by Picasso, was used by other surrealists, notably Max Ernst, in objects such as the National Gallery's Capricorn (1948, cast 1970). Miró often combined the two techniques, assembling elements of his earlier sculptures with found objects, as in Personnage Gothique.

miró . . . page three

Personnage Gothique has the monumental proportions typical of Miró's public sculpture. Despite the great height of the sculpture as a whole, however, the arch of the body measures just over six feet, giving the object a surprising sense of human scale. It is the only cast of the work produced during the Spanish artist's lifetime and one of only two in existence. (A posthumous cast exists in Paris.)

The National Gallery collection includes five paintings by Miró that span his career. Among these are two of his most important paintings: The Farm (1921-22) and Head of a Catalan Peasant (1924), as well as one of his canvas murals, The Flight of the Dragonfly before the Sun (1968). The Gallery also owns a tapestry (1977) by Josep Royo, based on Miró's oil painting maquette created for it. The tapestry--measuring more than thirty-four feet high and nearly twenty feet wide--was commissioned by the National Gallery for the East Building, where it now hangs in the atrium as a gift from the Gallery's Collectors Committee.

#####