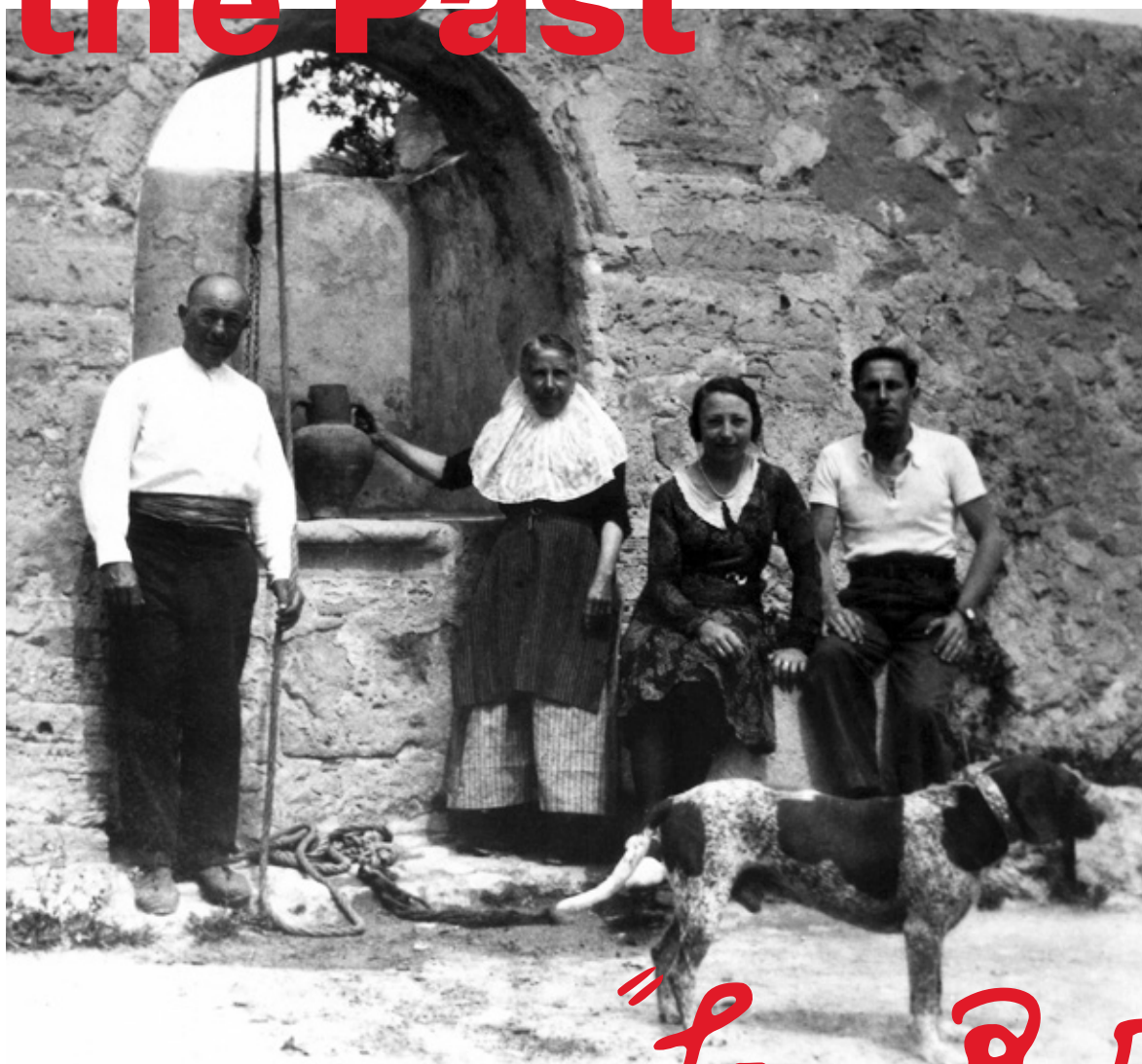


Miró's Son Boter. A Look at the Past



"Son Boter"

Amos de Son Boter

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Col·lecció Alejandro Ysasi

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“Miró’s Son Boter. A Look at the Past” offers a historical insight into the property Son Boter and the concept of a *possessió*.

By purchasing the property known as Son Boter in 1959, the Miró-Juncosa family could extend the land on which Son Abrines stood (a property they already owned), while also ensuring greater privacy for Joan Miró and a big space for creating and keeping large works of art. In about 1970, he set up a lithographic and an engraving workshop there, which are still active today.

Son Boter’s origins can be traced back to a rural property of the same name created in the mid 17th century. Later, in the 18th century, it was purchased and enlarged by Canon Martorell, and the architectural makeup and characteristics of its buildings took shape.

Son Boter appears for the first time on a map of the island of Mallorca owned by Cardinal Despuig, published by Julián Ballester in 1785 at the cardinal’s request and printed by Josep Muntaner.



Cardenal Antoni Despuig i Dameto; Josep Muntaner i Moner
Map of the Island of Mallorca, 1785

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Josep Truyol
View of Palma Bay, c. 1920

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1. Son Boter: the toponym and property

The toponym *Son Boter* dates back to the mid 16th century. The custom of naming *possessions* (country estates) after their owner's surname or, in this case, family nickname, preceded by the compound word *Son*—meaning *that of*—is very common in Mallorca and it can be traced back to the Middle Ages.

Son Boter was a rural property formed by grouping together four parcels of land purchased by the Moll family, known by the nickname *Boter*, from an old country estate called Son Vic. The purchase of this two-*quarterada* (14,200m²) piece of land by Bartomeu Moll from Martí Ferragut, on June 11th 1642, heralded the beginning of a string of owners.

Over the centuries, the property was owned by various different families. In the early 20th century, Rafael de Ysasi Ransome and his children inherited the property on the death of his wife, Catalina González Salvà. The Ysasi family owned it through to 1958.

Thanks to Rafael de Ysasi Ransome (a figure born in London, who received a military training and focused his attention on the fields of art and archaeology for over twenty years) and his scientific activities in Mallorca, a series of superb drawings featuring Son Boter now exist, offering both a general vision of the Bay of Palma and specific details of the house.



Rafael de Ysasi Ransome
Sketchbook *Son Boter Desde*
"Son Vent", 1911

©Hereus de Rafael de Ysasi
Museu de Mallorca



Rafael de Ysasi Ransome
Sketchbook of drawings made in
Son Boter, 1929

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Insular de Mallorca)

2. The concept of a *possessió* in Mallorca

The term *possessió* (roughly equivalent to a country estate) refers to a very extensive stretch of land, used for crop growing or pastureland, based around a small group of estate buildings known as *les cases*. In the late 16th century, the name *possessió* was used to denote big properties that were formed by uniting land; a name that continued to be used through to the second half of the 20th century. It is a word of Latin origin that virtually displaced the Arab terms *alqueria* (farmhouse) and *rafal* (rural property).

During the 17th and 18th centuries, these *possessions* were owned by big landowners, including the Mallorcan nobility. This is when the construction of large stately estate houses (also known as *possessions*) began, and alterations were made to existing earlier buildings to convert them into proper manor houses.

In the late 19th century, according to chronicles by Archduke Ludwig Salvator, there were about one thousand *possessions*.

From the second half of the 20th century, changes were made to these *possessions* for a variety of reasons: they were abandoned, they were bought by foreigners, they were turned into museums or rural tourism hotels, or they were used for other leisure activities, with just a few maintaining their former dignity, following costly conservation work by their owners.



Sebastià Mulet
Sa Granja d'Esporles, undated

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Farmer's house - *Clastra*

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Amos de Son Boter

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Farmers from a *possessió*

Biblioteca Lluís Alemany.
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Possessions are properties for working the land and controlling the local countryside. They had a triple goal:

- as an agricultural and livestock farm;
- as a processing centre for primary sector products, and
- as a home for the tenant farmer's family and place of recreation for the landowner's family.

A *possessió* always came with a set of *cases* or estate buildings. They were made up of a combination of different buildings with well-defined purposes: the landowner's house, the tenant farmer's house, the chapel, the olive oil mill, the winery, the hayloft etc. They were also designed to reflect the landowner's social status; that is, they acted as a symbol of power. The dimensions of the architecture, the façade, the furniture and the coats of arms were all signs of a feudal and post-feudal society.

The owners of these *possessions* were known as *senyors* and they came from the aristocracy, the local landowning class, or from wealthy sectors of the population. They received rental income from the land. The tenant farmers of the *possessions*— known as *amos*— were in charge of organizing the agricultural and livestock work, and they lived with their family in the rustic secondary house. Proper management of the *possessió* was the responsibility of the *amo*.

A good team of staff was needed to run these *possessions*, divided into two main groups:

- Farmhands, who worked all year round, carrying out different activities and earning a wage.
- Day labourers, hired depending on the estate's needs, as per the time of year or activity: unskilled rural workers; tree trimmers and pruners; dry-stone wall builders; olive, fig and almond pickers etc.

3. Son Boter's architecture

In the late 18th century and, above all, in the 19th century, these *possessions* had functions midway between those of an urban mansion and a country estate. The Son Armadans, El Terreno and Cala Major areas were perhaps most typically representative of this phenomenon. The Martorell family decided to build a house where they could spend the spring and summer. Its location, in the countryside close to Palma, made this *possessió* a privileged holiday home.

Son Boter's main house, a building of mixed characteristics, is an example of this kind of use.

SON BOTER'S ARCHITECTURE AND LAYOUT

Son Boter is made up of three separate volumes: the main building, the home of the *senyors* or owners; another much smaller one behind the main building for the *amos* or tenant farmer and his wife; and, lastly, a rectangular water storage tank (*aljub*).

The buildings were designed as part of the same architectural project, in traditional local Mallorcan style, using local materials. The shape of the windows and doors in the façade and the internal layout are also typically Mallorcan.

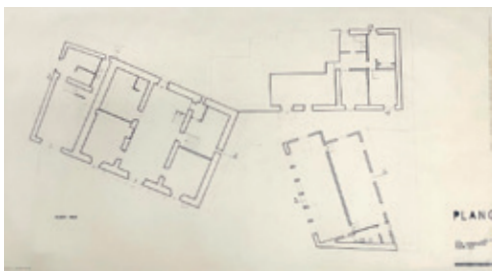
THE LEWIS FAMILY

Son Boter had always been a home. Joan Miró hardly altered anything even though he never lived there. In 1933, the Lewis family from America rented the property, living at Son Boter for almost a year and going on to conserve some records of their stay. Many years later, in 1983, George Lewis, one of Mr Lewis' sons, contacted Joan Miró to share some photos of happy moments at Son Boter. Thanks to his generosity, we can see the interiors of the house, with features typical of Mallorcan *possessions*.



Photo album of Son Boter, c. 1905

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Col·lecció Alejandro Ysasi



Eugenio de la Fuente i Pere Rabassa
Plans of Son Boter, 1988

Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró a Mallorca



George Lewis Jr.
Photo album of Son Boter, 1933

Arxiu Successió Miró



4. Miró's Son Boter

I just purchased 'Son Boter', the magnificent house that was just behind ours. Aside from being a good investment, it protects me against potentially annoying neighbors.

It will also be a good place for me to make monumental canvases and sculptures, freeing up my studio space.

I'm also thinking of setting up lithography and etching presses.

At Son Boter.

Son Boter is the name of the beautiful seventeenth-century [sic] house located at the top of Joan Miró's garden. It's a large farmhouse, the last vestige of what the outskirts of Palma were before the tourist invasion. Son Boter is another studio.

Spare rooms with whitewashed walls, with barely any furniture and dozens of canvases. As in all the places where Miró worked, there are photographs, newspaper clippings, postcards, and children's drawings tacked onto the walls.

The large door opens onto a huge hall that leads to other smaller rooms. The same layout is repeated on the upper floor. In a middle level, the old kitchen and the servants' quarters. A few folk art objects are scattered among the canvases, most of which are large and appear to be untouched. A powerful harmony of whites.

Joan Miró complemented and combined the functions of the Sert Studio, completed in 1956, with those of Son Boter. His Son Boter studio was initially designed to act as a sculpture studio, although it became a second painter's studio, mainly for large works, and a refuge and place for Joan Miró to meditate. Among other things, everyday objects, popular craftwork, press cuttings and statues by primitive cultures shared space with basic art materials, such as paint, frames and paint brushes.

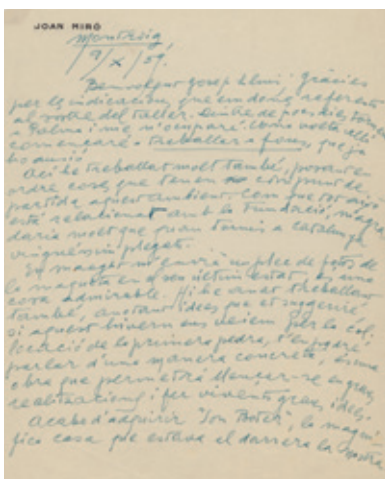
As if it were a magical realm where moments of creative inspiration by the artist had remained frozen in time, the whitewashed walls still bear his graffiti in the form of charcoal sketches and projects of sculptures, forming a fascinating universe of imaginary figures.

These are the uses that Joan Miró gave to his Son Boter studio, demonstrated through objects, photos and the artist's own words:

Letter from Joan Miró to Josep Lluís Sert (Mont-roig, October 9th 1959), from The Josep Lluís Sert Collection, Special Collections Department, Frances Loeb Library of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (ASH E65).

Georges Raillard. *Ceci est la couleur de mes rêves. Entretiens avec Georges Raillard*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1977.

Georges Raillard (Marseille, 1927), writer and literary critic. From 1964 to 1969, he was the director of the Institut Français in Barcelona. In Paris, he was one of the founders of Vincennes University (Paris-VIII) and a senior lecturer at the Department of Humanities. He also published numerous monographs on the subject of artists, in particular Joan Miró.



Carta de Joan Miró a Josep Lluís Sert, 1959



George Lewis Jr.
Photo album of Son Boter, 1933

Arxiu Successió Miró

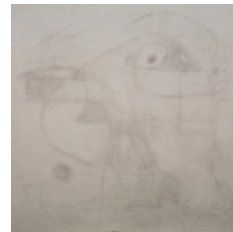
Painting

I never use the kind of blank canvas that you buy in an art supply store. I provoke accidents, a form, a spot of color. Any accident is good.

In the beginning, it's a direct thing. It's the material that decides. I prepare the ground—by cleaning my brushes on the canvas, for example. Spilling a little turpentine can also work quite well. If it's a question of drawing, I crumple the paper. I wet it. The water traces a form.

A scribble, for me, will be a point of departure, a shock. I attach great importance to the initial shock.

Radio conversation with Georges Charbonnier (Paris, January 19th 1951).



Joan Miró.
Untitled,
undated.
Charcoal on
canvas.

Fundació Pilar
i Joan Miró a
Mallorca

Sculpture

Build a large studio, full of sculptures, where the minute you walk in you are struck by a powerful impression of being in a new world; unlike the paintings that are turned around to face the wall or the images made on a flat surface, the sculptures must look like living monsters that inhabit the studio, a world apart.

Joan Miró's words in *Quadern d'apunts* (1941), kept at the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona.



Joan Miró. *Tête*,
1971. Bronze.

Fundació Pilar i
Joan Miró a
Mallorca, long-term
Joan private
collection.

Graffiti

One day, Picasso said to me, Pure creation is a graffiti, a small gesture on a wall. That's true creation. That is why the first stage is so important to me. It's the moment of true creation. What interests me is the birth.

Joan Miró to Georges Raillard. *Ceci est la couleur de mes rêves*, 1977.



Joan Miró.
Untitled,
undated.
Charcoal on
canvas.

Fundació Pilar
i Joan Miró a
Mallorca

Printmaking

When I make lithographs I lie down on the ground, stick my hands in the ink and get stained all over. I love stains. I go down to the studio with an old pair of shoes that are covered in paint. Those shoes are like a painting. I have to stick my feet in the colors, in the inks or whatever I'm working with.

Joan Miró to Georges Raillard. *Ceci est la couleur de mes rêves*, 1977.



Joan Miró. Plate
for *Els gossos IX*,
c. 1979.
Sugar-lift
aquatint on
copper plate.

Fundació Pilar
i Joan Miró a
Mallorca

Meditation

This is the room where I rest. It has remained as it was: the color, the built-in shelves. Here are Prats, Pablo and my parents.

Joan Miró to Georges Raillard. *Ceci est la couleur de mes rêves*, 1977.



Francesc
Català-Roca
Portrait of Joan
Prats i Vallès,
undated.

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F. Català-Roca
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Marie-Thérèse
Walter
Portrait of Pablo
Picasso, undated.

© Sucesión Pablo
Picasso, VEGAP,
Madrid 2023
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