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MIRÓ, VISUAL POET

by

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VOWELS

A black, E white, I red, U green, O Blue: vowels.

One day I will tell your latent births

A, black hairy corset of shinning flies

Buzzing, bursting around cruel stench.

Gulfs of shadow; E, candors of vapours and tents

Lances of proud glaciers, white kings, quivering fumbels,

I, purples, spit blood, laughter of beautiful lips

in anger or penitent drunkenness;

U, cycles, divine vibrations of viridian seas,

Peace of pastures sown with animals, peace of wrinkles,

Which alchemy prints on great studious brows;

O, supreme clarion full of strange stridors,

silences traversed by worlds and by Angels,

- O the omega, violet ray of her eyes!

RIMBAUD



INTRODUCTION

Joan Miró was an artist who pursued his artistic career with great conviction and he continued to experiment within the realm of the arts and explore the deeper nature of reality and the subconscious until the day he died on the 25th of December 1983.

By birth he was a Catalan, a native of the Provence of Catalonia which covers much of North Eastern Spain, and although he was based in Barcelona, he spent a considerable part of his early career in Paris, where the Surrealist movement was flourishing. It was here in the 1920s that Miró made a lot of his surrealist acquaintances such as André Breton and Tristan Tzara. These acquaintances were soon to become friends who shared similar ideas and interests, namely surrealism, which could be said to be the exploration of the subconscious, which began with Freud in the late 19th century.

This is an exploration of Miró's involvement in the surrealist movement and his relationship with poetry, the surrealist poets and his use of poetry as a source of inspiration for his own work and shows that Miró was a "Visual Poet".

Chapter 1 explores Miró's influences and his relationship with surrealism. This includes alignment of ideas with the surrealist poets and painters of the same era.

Chapter 2 looks at Miró's Constellation paintings, his use of symbols and his use of poetic titles which are perhaps embodiments of the subconscious and his own surrealism.



Miró formed strong links with poetry and the surrealist poets throughout his life. He engaged in painting “poem paintings” and paintings that were related to poetry, both in context and in the title, he wanted his work to be interpreted as a “poem translated into music by a painter”.

Chapter 3 examines this aspect of Miró’s work.



CHAPTER 1

INFLUENCES AND SURREALISM

Miró's earliest work shows a wide range of influences including Fauvism and Cubism. His early paintings are concerned with the use of bright colours which are a trademark of Fauvist painting. They are also linked to cubism by his use of broken forms. It could be said that he was also influenced by the flat, two dimensional Catalan folk art and Romanesque Church Frescoes of his native Spain.

It was in the 1920s that Miró first became interested in surrealism. During that time he made a trip to Paris where he met Picasso, he also made the acquaintance of André Masson who was a surrealist painter. He was to leave a lasting impression on Miró. Masson was connected to the Dadaist movement. He has also at this time made many friends who were involved in the surrealist poetry movement. It was through Masson that Miró met poets like Reverdy, Tzara, Artuad, Breton, Eluard and Aragon. Soon under the influence of surrealist poets and writers, Miró evolved his mature style.

“Masson was always a great reader and full of ideas, among his friends were particularly all the young poets of the day. Through them I heard poetry discussed. The poets Masson introduced me to, interested me more than the painters I had met in Paris. I was carried away by the new ideas they brought and especially the poetry they discussed. I gorged myself in it all night long.”

PENROSE, 1970, p.32.

Masson and the young revolutionaries were interested in ideas that were concerned with the arts and politics. This is how they came to meet André Breton, Paul Eluard and Louis Aragon, amongst others. These young poets and artists had just lived through the First World War and



its destruction and they had deep convictions which encouraged them to discover new ideas and new concerns about life. The Dadaists who preceded the Surrealists had changed the conventional conceptions of art, by using the idea of the irrational and they produced the breakdown of conventional ideas of what was art. They did this in poetry, painting and writing, and this was to lead to the birth of Surrealism. In 1924, Breton produced the first manifesto of Surrealism which argued that:

“Art is valid only when it has an equivalence with reality”

PENROSE, 1970, p.33.

They felt that all attempts at logical analysis of reality had failed. They wished to make a breakthrough by following the path that Freud had already gone down, to explore the unconscious mind. They were interested in the fusion of poetic and visual imagery. They wished to make every effort to widen their perceptions by exploring every possible realm of the cognitive workings of the subconscious and this is why they looked at the theories that Freud was working on, through the realm of dreams, hallucinations, hysteria and psychotic and neurotic madness. Freud observed that in the unconscious, fears were frequently the expression of unconscious desires; that the conscious fear is often expression of an unconscious wish. His solution to dreams and the unconscious was that all dreams represent the fulfilment of wishes. They are sometimes (but not always) sexual. These wishes are distorted in dreams and their meanings mostly hidden, as the dream uses symbols (now known as Freudian symbols). These symbols were to suggest that for sexual penetration or the phallus, symbols of swords, guns, umbrellas, snakes and so on, all represent the penis. Objects suggesting the receptacle, such as boxes, purses or caves, all symbolize the vagina. The Surrealists were to use this imagery in their paintings and poetry. Miró, however was not to use these symbols as obviously as his contemporaries. But with this in mind Miró began to apply the basis of the theory of the unconscious in his work.



“ He drew on memory, fantasy and the irrational to create works of art that are visual analogies of surrealist poetry”.

<http://www.bcn.fjmiró.es/joanmiró.angles.html>
JOAN MIRÓ FOUNDATION

The Farm, Plate 1, which was painted in 1921-22 is perhaps Miró's first Surrealist painting. It is full of symbols that border on the surreal. It contains numerous abstract elements that would be hard to explain without this new influence of surrealism. For example, there are the black circle and the white base of the tree in the middle of the painting, the red square to it's right defining the depth of the chicken coop. In The Farm, Miró uses a symbolic story that seems to be one of fertility, where everything appears alive and moving across the painting. If we follow the tiles and the small path with some footprints on it to the back, we find a well or a trough, a woman is leaning over it and there are a few pots and a bucket and a bottle near her. Behind her and positioned almost in the middle of the painting like its perspective point, is a squatting doll-like figure, hairless and naked, foetal and frog like with dark shadowing on one half of its body. It could be the woman's child. There is a dog which appears to be barking at the moon, a subject Miró was to use in later paintings. There are some sexual aspects to the work, with the rooster and the rabbits and the goat. They are all details from the farm at Montroig where Miró lived as a child. It is highly detailed and carefully constructed. The realism in the painting is metaphorical, as Miró is emotionally attached to this farm and yard. The tree in the middle can be seen as symbolic of the Catalan folk tradition of the area as it is in the centre of the painting.

The Tilled Field, Plate 2, which was painted in 1923-24 could be said to be the sequel to “the farm”, but here we find a different outlook on reality. The imagination is his sole concern here. Miró here has,



“Found a new pictorial language thus translating his detailed observation of nature into a freely poetic system of symbols and colours”.

ERBEN, 1993, p.32

In The Tilled Field, all of a sudden an eye is seen staring out of a tree top, an ear is growing out of the obelisk of the trunk, fruits and flowers resemble anatomical organs, the leaves look like prickles of marine plants. The sexual are allied with the naively burlesque, for in the foreground, the jack jumps out of his magical box, the tricolour flutters from a vague mast that towers up into the sky. At another point we see the crossed flags of Catalonia and Spain.

Despite the dream like quality of this painting, each shape is correctly placed to within a fraction of an inch. The background is divided by a horizon line. The figures of the snail, cock and fish resemble inflated rubber animals. The figure behind the plough echoes the figures in drawing of Altamira. The horse galloping in front of the farmhouse dissolves into baroque arabesque. In the distance there is a delicate comma-like sign amidst the turmoil: the crescent moon hangs motionlessly above the line of the horizon.

In The Tilled Field, Miró produced tensions by the juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. He raised the landscape painting to a surreal simile. Other artists had managed to do the same before the Renaissance, Hieronymous Bosch and Breughel had managed to give visible expression in “surreal monotypes”. Miró contemporaries like Paul Klee, Duchamp and Ernst used images of arrows, letters and figures, flying birds, flowers and stars. The viewer of these pictures ventures on a journey like a diver gliding down through undersea zones.



However the symbolic language of The Tilled Field was still in its early stages compared to that of The Catalan Landscape, Plate 3, which he produced in the same year. The objects he uses in this painting have been reduced to a few symbols. This painting is a display of a variety of geometric figures and some abstract shorthand which represent certain objects. There is only one object that can be identified, The Catalan Peasant and his pipe. Everything else is either wavy, dotted or angular lines. The geometric figures in the painting represent the inanimate and the inorganic and the vivid lines represent the animate objects. He also uses words in this painting and it is full of sexual symbolism.

A year later Miró painted The Harlequins Carnival, Plate 4. He had studied insects, birds and fish, and he used these as a basis for his form in this painting. In The Harlequins Carnival, he arrived at ideas brought on by hunger induced hallucinations. There dreamlike images have often got whimsical and humorous qualities, containing images of playful distorted animal forms, twisted organic shapes and odd geometric constructions.

In 1924, Miró painted Motherhood, Plate 5. This is also charged with symbols. These symbols are suspended precariously in an area consisting of delicate shapes of grey. There are little creatures which seem to be trying to wriggle away from a menacing pair of breasts. However, they are inextricably linked to them. This painting consists of a big black pendulum which is symbolic of a mother's womb. However, it does not evoke the association of a mother's maternal comfort, instead it expresses the fears and anxieties of early childhood. Here Miró is using symbolic language economically and because of this the feelings he wanted to express, which were the dependance and powerlessness of early childhood which have a more profound effect on us.



Miró forms become weightier and more decorative when they are grouped in the surreal monument of "the nude". They still have lots in common with dream paintings. They consist of a variety of different objects. They resemble the highly coloured and extremely simplified symbols of an anatomical chart on a black ground. The figures are display-like, at first glance they seem crude, but something playful and humorous is once more concealed in their exaggeration, which takes all ambiguity from the dialogue of erogenous zones. The woman's body is formed by a white fish shape. The left breast in profile is reminiscent of a pear, whereas the right one seen from the front, resembles an orange, and the pubic hair looks like a green leaf with black veins. The large suspended head with its green aura has a red eye with a fixed stare, above it there is her veil-like auburn hair, which seems to be blowing in the wind. The general compositional context makes the object seem ambiguous leaving only the erotic suggestiveness of the woman's body with its female attributes.

And so Miró's introduction to surrealism had begun with the production of these paintings, although he rarely attended surrealist meetings. He was more a fellow traveller than an active member. Breton however, who was the founder of the surrealist movement, believed Miró to be the most surreal of them all. The tumultuous entrance of Miró in 1924 marks an important point in the development of surrealist art. The surrealists were the first to recognise the immense importance of Freudian Theories on the psychological apparatus. What interested the surrealists above all was gaining access to the irrational by means of the dream, in a world and system of thought, that reason and rationalism had led to disaster. The war they had just lived through had left them 'sick' at heart and in desperate revolt. It seemed to them that the only valid reaction to the science and fine theories formulated by the same rationality that had led society into such horror, was first of all, to demolish everything through laughter and derision,



hence Dada. In the second phase they looked to a more constructive approach in which whatever had been censored and repressed, all the force and violence of freely expressed desires would be integrated into human life, hence surrealism. The union of night things and day things would give man a single aspect.

“I have always been amazed at the way an ordinary observer lends so much more credence and attracts so much more importance to waking events than to those occurring in dreams”.

WEELLEN, 1989, p.54

According to Breton,

“Surrealists have attempted to present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in a process of unification of finally becoming one. This final unification is the supreme aim of surrealism”.

BRETON, 1978, p.16

They gave themselves the task of confronting the two realities on every occasion without the predominance of one over the other.

Breton goes on to say,

“Acting on these two realities not both at once, then but one after the other, in a systematic manner, allowing us to observe their reciprocal attraction and interpretation and to give this interplay of forces all the extension necessary for the trend of these two adjoining realities to become one and the same”

BRETON, 1978, p.22

This part of surrealism was to lead to automatism and Breton goes on to say about it,

“Surrealism is pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing or by any other means, the real functioning of thought. The dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupation”.

BRETON, 1978, p.16



The surrealists willed inspiration, Miró also tried deliberately to provoke it by staring fixedly at forms,

“At the rough surface of an old wall, spots on the ceiling, the texture of a floor, or the disfigurements of clouds, and letting forms be suggested to him”.

DUPIN, N.D., p.162

The forms that occur most often are white hands seemingly inflated at the end of a long arabesque or arm, a flaming heart, a head that looks like a monstrous dried bean, a flaming moustache, an eye staring fixedly, the double swelling of the breasts and an excessively amplified phallus or foot. The white, black or dotted line is always lazily deployed winding, spiral or vernacular, it is still the arabesque but now it is not so much unfinished as lost, in the sense of having lost its way on the canvas. The line is full of the dream action, like in the paintings Bathing Women of Siesta.



CHAPTER 2

CONSTELLATIONS: THE NIGHT AND LADDER OF ESCAPE

In 1940-41, Miró created in painting a new artistic reality for himself which became known as the Constellations. He first started to paint these when he was in Normandy and he finished them in Spain. They are in a limited edition book with Miró's twenty-two gouache paintings and the equivalent "prose-parallels" by André Breton. An example of one of these, "prose-parallels" are

"The treble clef bestrides the moon. The crioceris sets in a leezel the point of the sword of consecration. A sailing ship borne by the trade winds opens up a pass in the woods. And the twelve drops from the philter extravasate in a wave of sap that imparadises hearts and pretends to bring out that marvel (it can only be glimpsed) which, on the side of happiness, would counter balance sobbing. The clear old quavers all afire lay down the cover of their cooking pot".

Breton saw the collaboration as a challenge for him, to translate what had been done in painting into words. Miró's Constellations revert back to his childhood when he watched the stars in the sky of Montroig through his father's astronomical telescope. In the Constellations Miró created a new reality for himself which was both magical and mystical. These paintings are loaded with poetic and lyrical references. He has shown here how he could work in a small scale with minute detail.

In the Constellations, there are vibrant dots, darting flames, peering eyes, crescent moons, faces with long noses and sexual symbols, mostly female. The difference here, to that of paintings such as The Harlequins Carnival, is that the pictorial language behaves less eccentrically. The outcome of combining diverse elements is painted poetry rather than a surrealist development.



In the Harlequins Carnival, the language of the painting is still hinting at the illusion of three-dimensional space, while in the Constellations everything is devoid of space and time. The rhythmic relationship of these paintings recalls the language of the music that Miró was influenced by at this time; primarily by Bach and Mozart. The Constellations were started with washes of diluted colours and soon became indulged in Miró's poetic language. The spirals, circles, squares and triangles drawn with precise detail, are illuminated with brilliant primary colours wherever the shapes interconnect. The poetic language is made even stronger with the use of titles, Woman Beside A Lake Whose Surface Has Been Made Iridescent by A Passing Swan or Pink Twilight Caresses the Genitals of Women and Birds or Women Encircled by the Flight of A Bird, Plate 6.

As with his previous paintings, Miró used symbols in the Constellations; he used a bold, formal sign for a woman's vulva. Breton writes

“He allows us to penetrate into the cosmic order, with all that is involved in going beyond our condition.”

PENROSE, 1970, p.105

Each gouache has signs which can be related to another and they all hold a related theme. Miró's method was to pay special attention to each surface by scraping, moistening, rubbing and polishing, etc. They contain subtle colours like velvety blues, degrees of white, nuances of grey which are all said to have similar qualities to music and poetry. Miró had an affinity with the poet, Stephane Mallarme, who was also admired and approved of by Breton. In a letter written in 1866 to Francois Coppée thanking the poet for sending him his volume, “Le Reliquaire”, Mallarme wrote:



“Chance does not bring about a line of poetry, that is what matters. We have several of us achieved that and I believe that once the lines are so perfectly delineated, what we should aim at above all is that, in the poem the words - which themselves already surface to no longer receive impressions from outside - should reflect each other until they no longer have colour of their own, but be only transitions on a scale. While there is no space between them and although they fit together marvellously well, I think that sometimes your words live a little too much their own life like the stones in a mosaic of jewels.”

WEELLEN, G., 1989, p.122

Mallarme indicated a relationship between poetry and painting. He described the effort to replace words with signs and the “transitions scale” and the reflection of one on the other, constitutes a tension common to both, painting and poetry, to poet and painter alike. Miró most certainly may have experienced this in his working on the Constellations.

The night theme is perhaps the most important theme in the Constellations, but is also dominant in Miró’s other works. Miró used the night emblem to captivate his audience. It was in the 1920's that he began to use the night phenomenon in his work. In these pictures he also used the dream phenomenon as well. In the Constellations Miró would go to the ‘underworld of the night’ and there he would bring to life mysterious signs and symbols of the unconscious. He brought the night or unconscious into the world of the conscious. He has joined together the world of the day with the sombre eerie realm of the night. Miró has persistently used this symbol which can present itself as a symbol of death and also a symbol of the womb of creation. While it can have a silent calming effect, the darkness can hide the terror of the night or give rise to the nightmare or demons of uncertainty. The night carries a more primeval note than the day.

“Our sensations are closer to the source of consciousness, to primitive fears, hopes and memories, than the rational control of our waking hours will permit”.

PENROSE, R., 1970, p.184



Miró, by using the night as a symbol of imagination and birth, lets us escape from everyday affairs. If we look at the titles of his paintings, we can see that the night enchants Him, A Dew Drop, Falling From the Wing of A Bird, Wakes Rosalie Asleep in the Shadow of A Spider's Web, Plate 7. Amorous encounters: Numbers and Constellations in Love with A Woman. Magic influences: People Magnetized by the Stars Walking on the Music of A Furrowed Landscape. Secret intimacies: Woman with A Blonde Armpit, Dressing Her Hair in the Light of the Stars. Romantic tenderness: The Nightingales Song At Midnight and Morning Rain and by Moonlight the Setting Sun Caresses Us.

Woman's presence is dominant in his work of the night. There are: Women and Kites Among the Stars, Woman and Little Girls Skipping by Night, and Woman with Dishevelled Hair Welcoming the Crescent Moon, and Birds and Shooting Stars Encircling A Woman in the Night and Women Hypnotized by Rays of Twilight Stroking the Plain.

All these titles give us an insight into the way in which Miró has examined nocturnal happenings. The night becomes a drama on a stage in which these creatures act; the snail, the bird of the night, the frog and spider. In the Constellations Miró has been preoccupied with the night. We also see the night in The Farm, 1921-22. In another painting, Dog Barking At the Moon, Plate 8, Miró treats the night as just an observed spectacle rather than a drama of the Constellations. In the lead up to the Constellations, Miró said:

“I felt the most intensive urge to break out, I deliberately shut myself off, music, the night and the stars began to play a bigger and bigger role in my pictures, as I envisaged them, I had always been attracted to music and at that time it began to be as important to me as poetry in the 1920s.”

ERBEN, W., 1993, p.111



An example of a music-related picture is Dancer Listening to the Organ in A Gothic Cathedral, Plate 9, 1945. The middle of this composition is occupied by a grey area on a surface which is otherwise black and carries as its central motif a broadly executed black symbol to indicate the female dancer, with several precisely drawn figures around her. The black surface is a swirl of stars and a creature with a large eye, sensations caused by music. The music is linked to the central motif by means of intersections. The white lines bordering on the grey centre turn into black ones, in order to remain visible, as was done in the Constellations.

Another prominent theme in Miró work would be the use of the symbol of the ladder, which Miró saw as the “ladder of escape”. It made its first appearance in “The Farm” 1920-22. Here it was a simple device to get above the earth, up to the trees. It was used in a way in a very literal sense, but in The Harlequins Carnival, 1924-25, it leads us into a world of fantasy, where creatures float around in a tree in an uninhabited fashion. In the painting Dog Barking at the Moon, 1926, the ladder leads up to a mysterious empty sky. While in other paintings, it is used to penetrate the unknown. In a painting like “Une étoile caresse le sein d’une Negresse” 1938, the ladder frees us from the trappings of the earth and allows us to escape the material world and enter the realm of the spirit. Also in Dog Barking at the Moon, 1926, the ladder leads up to the empty sky like a ladder from a cartoon. One of the ladder’s uprights glows chrome - yellow, the other a metallic white, the rings in between are vermilion. The slender structure shoots up in strongly foreshortened perspective across the chocolate-brown of the lower half of the picture, into a velvety black of the night. A dog shaped creature in the contrasting colours of a “Paris Metro poster” is gaping at the moon, whose crescent is equipped with the attributes of the female sex. Miró fascination with symbols, themes like the night, the stars and woman, the ladder of escape, etc., tries to extend our sense of reality and bring us to the higher regions of our perception. His imagination is rife with numerous images free from literal constraints and the ties that bind them, to escape into the realms of freedom and imaginary worlds.



CHAPTER 3

POETS, POEM PAINTINGS, POEMS

“My work is intended as a poem translated into music by a painter”

ERBEN, W., 193, p.227

Joan Miró had an affinity with poetry and likened himself to a visual poet. It was in Paris that Miró first began to become interested in using poetry as a visual language in his paintings. During these years, the 1920s Miró began to feel the attraction of themes that would align him to the surrealists. However Miró is perhaps more influenced and stimulated by the authors and poets whom he made the acquaintance of in Paris, than the pictorial artists of that period. Although he wrote some poetry, he remained committed to the visual language of painting until his death in 1983.

The avant-garde at the beginning of the twentieth century saw the dissolution of boundaries between the different genres and the merging of the arts as the beginning of a new era. Music, painting and poetry had a mutually evocative effect on one another and their influence was all the more powerful wherever the formal language of their own medium was particularly pure.

In a lecture in 1935, André Breton states,

“There exists at the present time, no difference in underlying ambition between a poem by Paul Eluard, by Benjamin Peret, and a canvas by Max Ernst, by Miró, by Tanguy”.

MATTHEWS, 1974, p.103

Breton as well as many other creative writers, poets and painters was interested in the alignment of poetry and painting.



A playful variant to the merging of poetry, painting and music was the “Tableau-poème”. For example poetic words and lines which had been put into picture. In the 1920s, for example, this was particularly popular with the painters Robert and Sonia Delaunay and their circle of Dadaist and surrealist poet friends. Sonia Delaunay had been inspired by Tristan Tzara to produce her “Robes-poèmes”. (Clothes designed in matching colours combined with poetic fragments of sentences). Robert Delaunay painted a water colour as early as 1914, entitled Black Art of the World in which he picked up, the vowel correspondence in Rimbaud’s poem, in a text of his own. Inspiration also came from Apollinaire’s “calligrams” and Marinetti, “parole in liberta”.

Miró was profoundly impressed by these poetic experiments, as can be seen in his own pictorial poems of the 1920-30s. Miró’s more concentrated attention on poetry in the 1920s inspired him not only to structure his painting as though they were a kind of free verse but even at times to inscribe poetic phrases on the field of the canvas. These written verses consisting of one or several lines not only evoked images such as snails or women but also articulated the painting visually. The poem-paintings show a complex interlacing of graphic signs and poetic allusions. On other occasions Miró would attribute poetic titles to his paintings, as in the Constellations, or even write words or stencil letters on to the canvas. An example of a poem-picture at this time is The Body of my Brunette, Plate 10. In this painting, two smears of white paint cover a spotty brown surface connected by two red arches with black dots. There are two breast-shaped blue eyes in the right half of the painting, with reddish yellow “tongues” that protrude from their sides and are linked to each other by a line of white paint. Another white line trickles down from above, forming a cross with the first line. The entire picture is covered with the handwritten words from a popular folk song, The Body of my Brunette.



The different elements of the painting form three levels of space which are related to each other in a way that fluctuates. Because of its vague colour structure, the brown surface seems to be the most spacious of all, followed by the icon-like, semi-transparent way in which the paint has been applied, and finally the firm black words which seem to be asserting themselves quite confidently. This economy of means makes for a stunning effect of spaciousness and an interesting overall structure. However, there is also the poetic dimension of the picture, because word and colour are mutually suggestive, just as colours and vowels are related to femininity in Arthur Rimbaud's famous poem, 'Voyells'.

Not only do Miró's picture poems form part of one of the most interesting traditions in modern symbolic languages but they are also among his most multi-faced and most beautiful paintings of the twentieth century. Another example of a poetic painting is The Gold of Azure, Plate 11, 1967. In this painting, set against a light yellow surface with a few white gaps to allow the canvas 'breath', a number of stars and lines have been distributed as well as some sombre black dots, partly connected by some very fine lines, also a huge black sweeping movement lunges into the blue shape on the right of the canvas. The red dot in the top left corner has been painted in the same way with a white edge around it. Thus these two colours keep their balance against the strong forcefulness of the yellow. A tiny green spot hovers above the blue oval shape, demonstrating a different method of painting - gentle merging into the paint while it was still wet so that the blurred effect could be achieved. Furthermore, the blue shape has been painted in circling movements of a semi-dry paint brush so that the white surface has remained faintly visible and is particularly in evidence around the edge. The painting refuses to yield to any further description of its content or any fixed interpretation. The poetic effect is dependant on the balance of its colours, the composition of symbols as well as its complex structure as regards artistic techniques.



In Swallow/Love, 1934, Plate 12, the figures and word elements are linked by twisting lines, the word “Hirondelle” and “Amour” stand in front of the blue background as if written in the sky by an aeroplane or the flight of a swallow. The free distribution of parts of the body and forms creates an effect of liberation and openness, birds flight and the free fall of one or two persons.

In his painting Snail, Woman, Flower, Star, Plate 13, Miró painted figures of intertwining lines that can be seen rising against the dark surface which consists of several colour zones. The overlapping shapes have been filled with strong colours, red, golden, ochre, orange, white and black. This drawing is full of verve and it seems that Miró was trying to enhance its effect by including a few written words. Here the words merge smoothly into the arabesque, enchanting the colours, lines and figures so that the general atmosphere becomes lighthearted and poetic overall.

Miró’s so called Letter Paintings of the 1960s, for example Letters and Numbers Attracted by a Spark, 1968, Plate 14, is also related to poetic theory, seen against a streaky surface, (which has been achieved with a piece of cloth to get the streaky effect). There are several black letters and smaller numbers dancing around the centre that is marked yellow. There can hardly be a more obvious way of demonstrating the theory of symbolism, which maintains that all manifestations of the human mind are related to one another and that they are nourished by common sources of creation which must be rediscovered in the creative process of art.

A painting entitled Dusk Music, Plate 15, must be seen in the same context. These are ‘calligraphic’ miniature paintings with blurred surfaces and several strong colourful accents shining through. Another series called Poem, Plate 16, consists of several paintings with small but emphatic symbols and letters against a white surface.



In the 1920's Miró met the poets in surrealist Paris. His encounters served to focus his priorities and exposed him to new processes for liberating images, but it did not change his course. Miró already shared with the poets a state of mind, open to receive and transmit all sensations, from the barest, most denigrated, most human, most real, to the most inconceivable, invisible, unknown and obscure. Like them he was convinced that art was primarily a moral and poetic activity, disinterested and anonymous, beyond rules or theory and certainly beyond the rules of any regimented social or artistic life.

Miró, through one means or another worked to achieve extreme states of concentration and thereby gain direct access to the realm of the imagination. This state of awareness was also found in the work of poets like Rimbaud and Mallarmé, who Miró admired. Both poets sought to achieve derangement of the senses by losing touch with mundane experience. Of all the poets Miró met in Paris, Tristan Tzara was a pioneering Dadaist poet. Miró met Tzara on the 'Rue Blomet' in the early 1920s and he immediately appreciated the poet's attitude and objectiveness which mostly paralleled his own ideas. In "L'arbe des Voyageurs", there are four lithograph line drawings and they show complete harmony of spirit between the graphic images and poetic verse.

Miró had great admiration for Tzara and said:

I have long considered his poetry to be of great spiritual value and his Dada position has always been extremely appealing to me, as clairvoyance and as a method of action. It was therefore all very simple, I accepted gladly without batting an eyelid".

ROWELL, MARGIT, 1986, p.113

An example of a poem by Tzara from the collection 'Parler Seul' is in keeping with Miró's imagery:



- que le matin opaque - j'ai laisse mon enfance
- je rirai laderniere!
 - me prenne pour racine - aux autres petits -
 - seule et sourle!
 - je perds mon regard - ceut dontonrira
 - prends - moi parla main!
 - par les yeux de feuilles - le bouche pleine
 - de laine molle!

Miró also had an affinity with Arthur Rimbaud. In a letter to Henri Matarasso, Miró says,

“I always have a volume of Rimbaud at my bedside, and another in my studio. I only judge artists by those who have a divine spark and those who do not. I am categorical on this point, everything else is nothing but a joke”.

RAILLARD, GEORGES, 1989, p.21

Rimbaud's work was seen as an attempt to retain a childhood vision of the world. He attempted to salvage from childhood the energies of on-going existence. He also wished to escape from the confines of reality. His poetry is lived intensely from within. It embodies in compelling form, the fundamental human concerns - origins, being, ecstasy, vision, vulnerability, loss, violence, continuity and hope. Miró interpreted a poem by Rimbaud called 'Voyells' into a painting called Vowell Song, Plate 17. This painting was executed in the 1960's and shows affinity to symbolist poetic theory.

A wide variety of suggestions have been put forward as to why Rimbaud should have associated certain colours with five vowels in this poem. A. is associated with black (noir). E. with white (blanc). I. with red (rouge). U. with green (vert) and O with blue (bleu), and colours with



certain images. Some have argued that Rimbaud was transposing into poetry the colours and pictures of a spelling book he had as a child. Others have claimed that he dabbled in alchemy and that the colours he uses and the order in which they occur have some alchemical significance. One critic felt that it was the shapes of the letters that were of prime importance and that if we took the liberty of tipping the letter 'I' on its side it could be readily metamorphosed into Rimbaud's image of a jet of blood, or the line of a mouth, just as the prongs of the letter 'E' lying on its back could conjure up his images of tents or glaciers and flowers. Another critic radically modified this explanation, and by rounding out the corners of the letter 'E', saw it as evocative of a woman's breasts, with the remaining letters referring to the other parts of the female body and the sonnet as a whole, evoking sexual experience.

C. Chadwick suggests that the colours Rimbaud uses are black in association with,

“Death and decay, white with purity, red with violence, green with peacefulness and blue with a sense of eternity and infinity”.

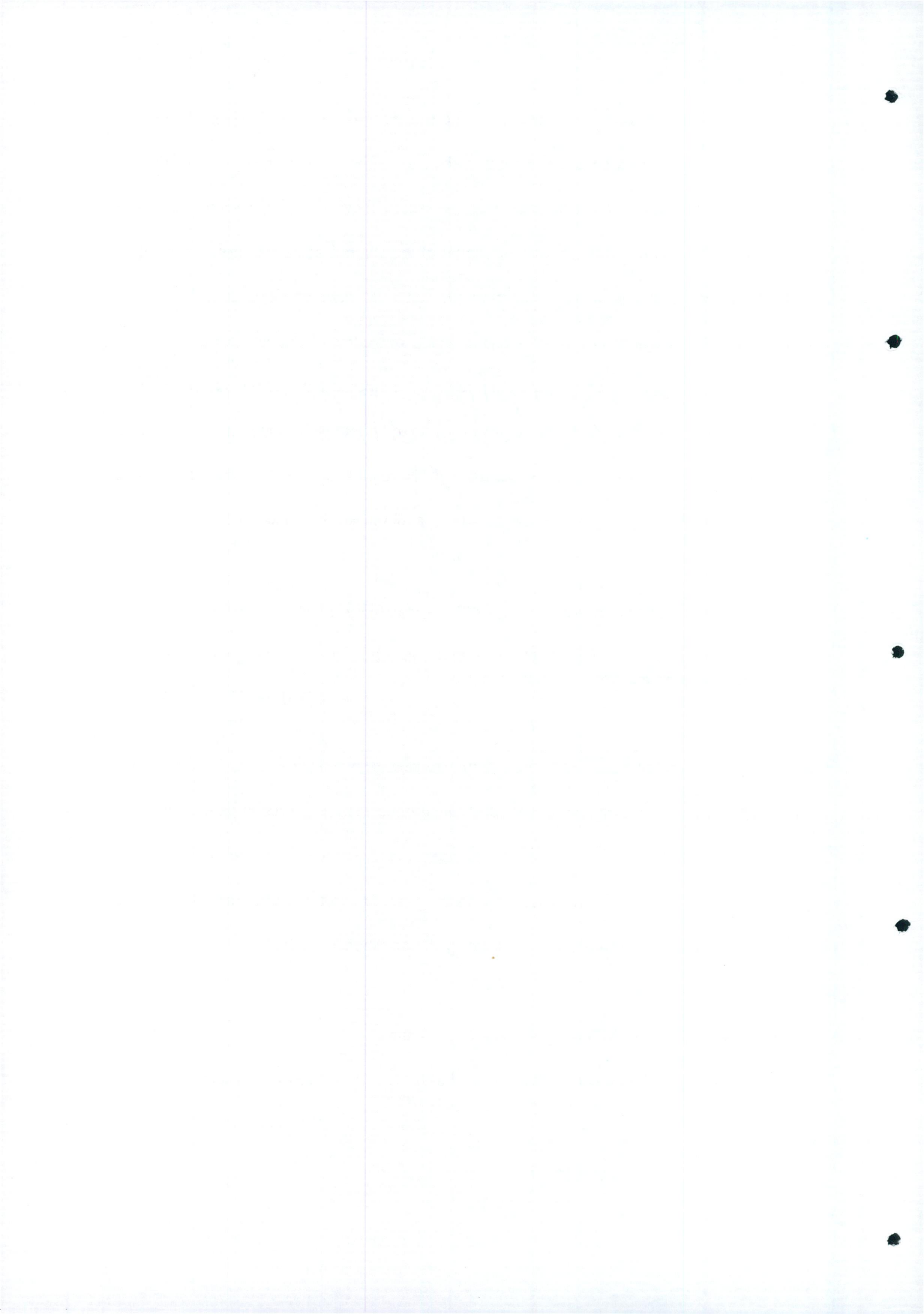
CHADWICK. C., 1979, p.27

In Miró's 'sister' painting called Vowell Song, we can see a shower of round and lance like shapes of glowing colours against a dark blue background. These are accompanied by further dots and lines in white. It relates visually and poetically to Rimbaud's 'Voyelles', 1871. The painting is therefore not an unrelated purely abstract piece of work within Miró's Oeuvre, but is deriving its meaning from precisely this theory of correspondences.

Miró always maintained that poetry was essential to him.

“Miró always held poetry to be essential to his life. His drugs were poetry and music”.

WEELAN, GUY, 1989, p.13



Borrowing the title of the book by Breton and Soupault, Margit Rowell organised a major exhibition in 1972 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, called "Joan Miró, Magnetic Fields".

In the catalogue, Rowell and Rosalind E. Krauss went deeply into the question of the rapport between poetry and Miró's painting, exploring the entire network (both certain and uncertain) of the encounters the painter could have had, the acquaintance acquired and the likely influences admitted, such as poets. Rosalind Krauss's very elaborate studies of Miró, structures and divides his art into different coherent groupings. She questions the equivalence of Miró's painting with poetry as not convincing, asking does it exist at all?

Talking to Peter Watson, Miró commented on the question Krauss raises:

"Poetry, plastically expressed, speaks its own language".

WEELLEN, GUY, 1989, p.16

And in an interview with George Duthuit, 1936, published as "Qu'allez vous Miró", Miró talked about his use of poetry:

"Moreover, as you see, I attach an increasingly great importance to the subject matter of my pictures. A rich and vigorous content appears to me necessary in order to give the viewer that head-on blow which must strike him before reflection intervenes. Thus, poetry, expressed plastically, speaks its own language for a thousand men of letters, find me one poet. And I make no distinction between painting and poetry."

ROWELL, 1986, p.257-66

Miró went on to tell Georges Duthuit:

"What counts is stripping our soul bare, painting or poetry are made like one makes love, an exchange of blood, a total embrace, with no prudence whatsoever, no protection at all".

ROWELL, 1986, p. 257-66



In short, Miró's painting is full of revolt. Miró even went so far as to write his own poems. In November 1936, he filled pages of a notebook drawing pad with poems. The poems are similar to that of his paintings. His poetry is written in loose irrational clusters of abrupt, vivid images. The poems are written in French, which was Miró poetic language, as in the words used in his paintings. In the notebook Miró writes "reproduce paintings with very poetic titles, parallel between poetry and painting like that between music and poetry".

The style of Miró poetry is similar to that of the surrealist poetry he was familiar with. All the poetry is derived from automatic writing, the stream of consciousness idiom practised by the surrealists, where one word triggers another, one image calls up another, with no attempt at coherence, logic or reason. Miró's images are a painter's set of images. An example of a poem from 1937 is "Summer":

A woman burned by the
flames of the sun catches a butterfly who
flies off pushed by the breath of an ant
resting in the shade rainbow
of the woman's belly before the sea
the needles of her breasts turned toward
the waves which send off a white
pink smile to the
crescent
moon



Another poem he wrote entitled "Poem", 1976:

A scent of jasmine

music of hair

Japan

Calligraphy of insect wings

circles of a river going round

stem bamboo body

of woman

sash of joy.



CONCLUSION

Although Miró may have not been the first “visual poet”, he was perhaps one of the more successful artists who took on the task of translating verbal poetry into visual poetry by his use of symbols and poetic devices, such as in “The Night”, “The Ladder of Escape”, and also in his use of poetic titles.

Miró was encouraged greatly by his relationships with the surrealist poets and one wonders had he not been around in the 1920s when surrealism was flourishing in Paris, what might have happened. It is perhaps safe to say that he was in the right place at the right time, and that influences played a big and important part in his development. However, his contribution to surrealism and 20th century art remains undisputed. Joan Miró created his own universal language that was unique, despite being part of the surrealist movement. It was a combination of his own personal dreams, human experience and his own invented imaginary world, which embodied numerous symbols and devices. It expressed his love of poetry and his fascination with words. He strove to create a visual language that could be interpreted like poetry.

This universe is neither childish, infantile nor immature, nor it is abstract or inaccessible. It relates to the fundamental nature of human existence and although sometimes deeply personal, Miró’s work is essentially universal.

In Miró’s art we embark on an adventurous journey into the realm of the imagination. There is a pureness of heart and an innocence about his work that makes it accessible to all. Throughout



his career, Miró experimented with many different art-forms, however, the poem-paintings and the relationship between poetry and painting preoccupied him throughout most of his life. Twentieth century art owes a debt to Miró for the breakthroughs he made between painting and poetry, just as Kandinsky explored the relationship between music and painting before him.

Joan Miró died on Christmas day 1983 at the age of 90 years. Most of those 90 years were devoted to artistic endeavours. These endeavours were of great importance in the development of modern art.



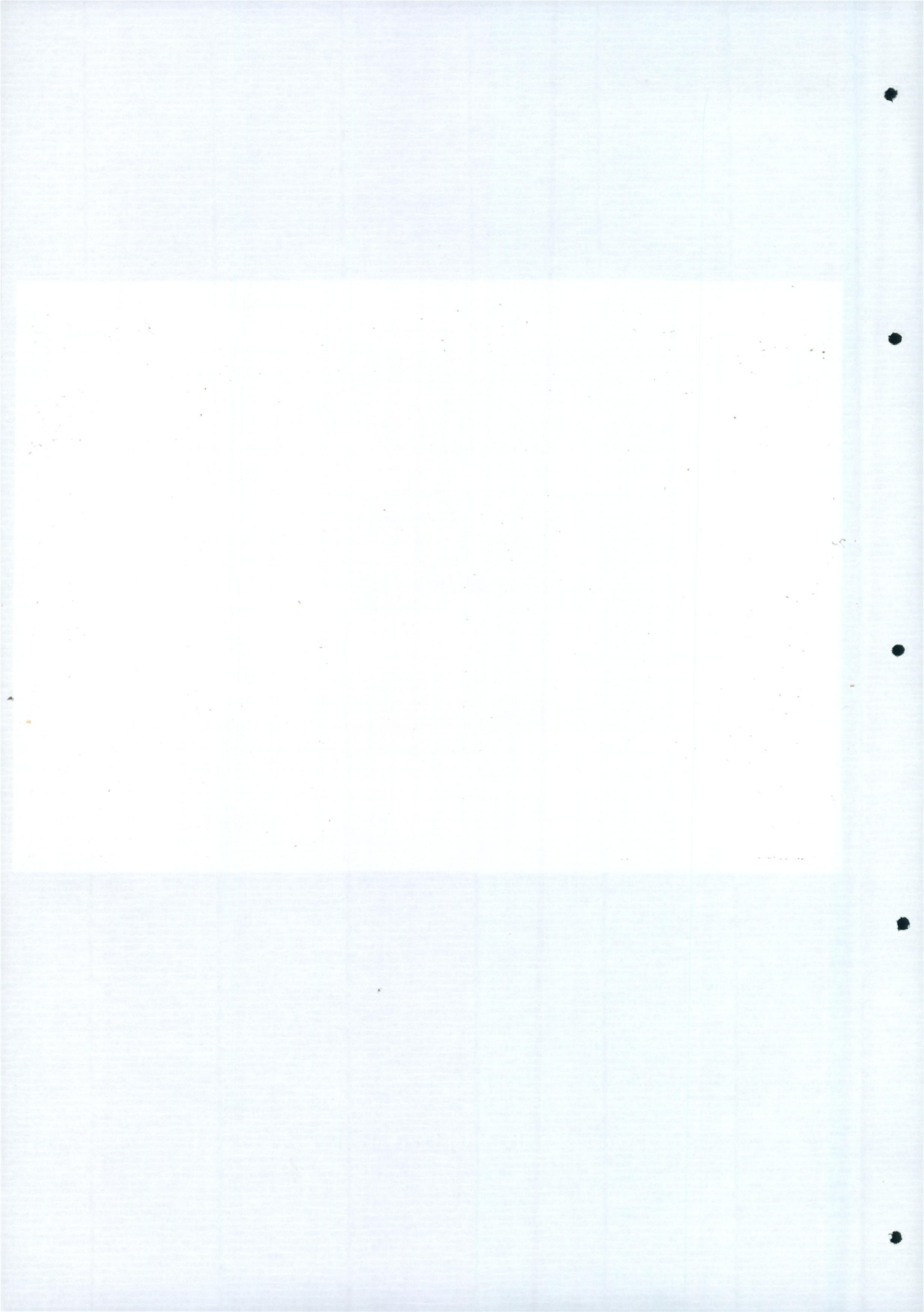


PLATE 1 - THE FARM. 1921/22





PLATE 2 - THE TILLED FIELD. 1923/24



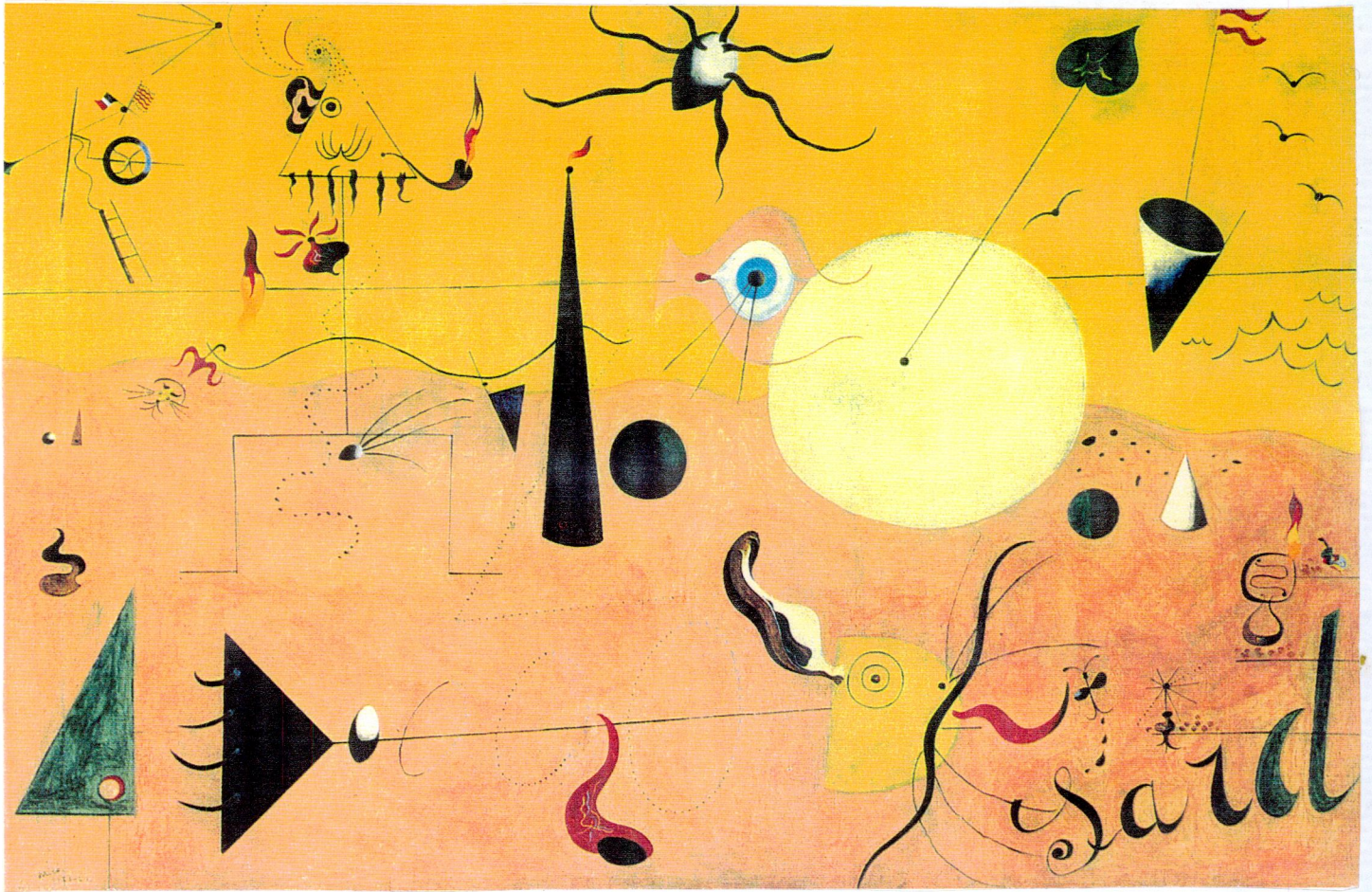


PLATE 3 - THE CATALAN LANDSCAPE. 1923/24

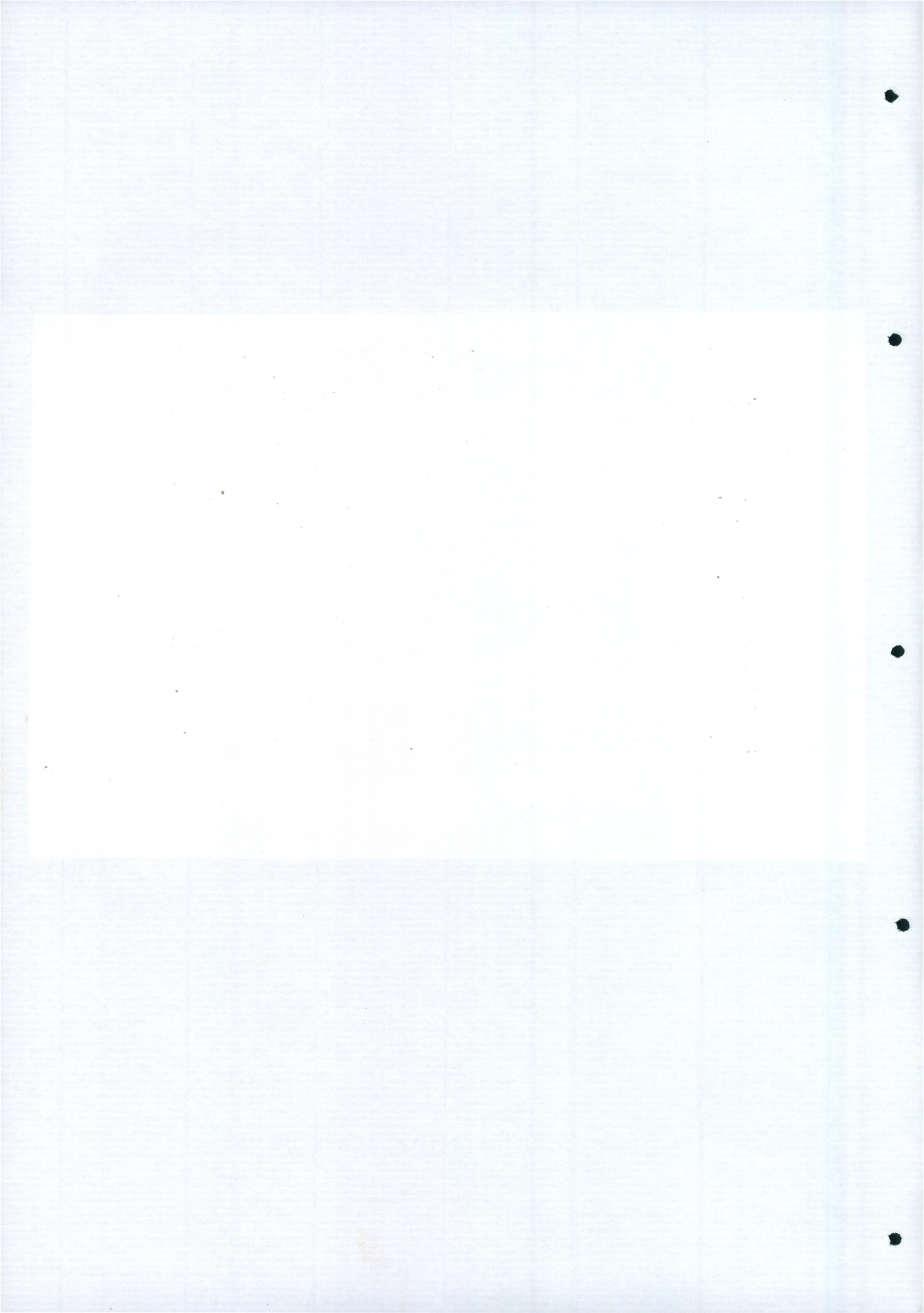
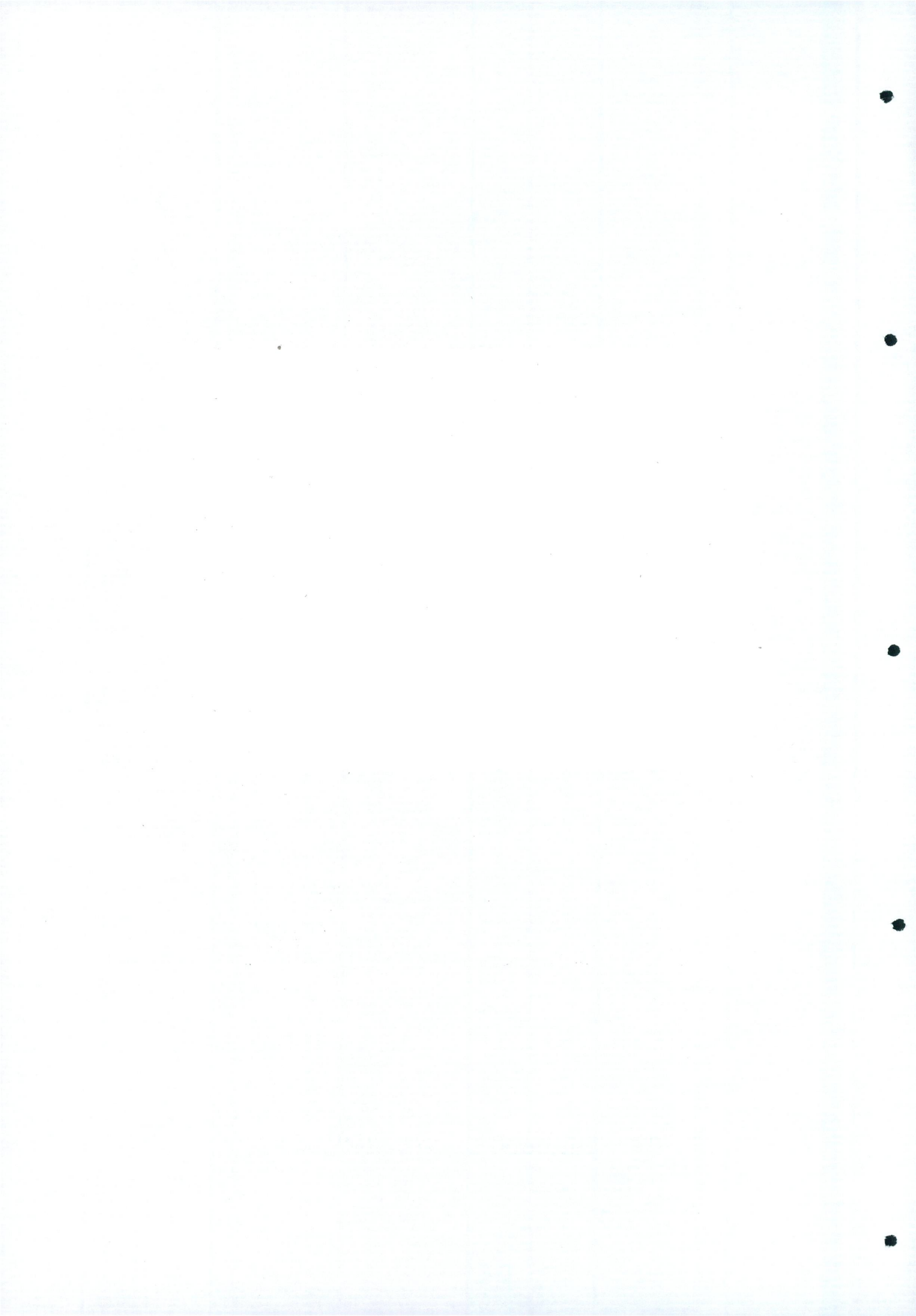




PLATE 4 - THE HARLEQUINS CARNIVAL. 1924/25



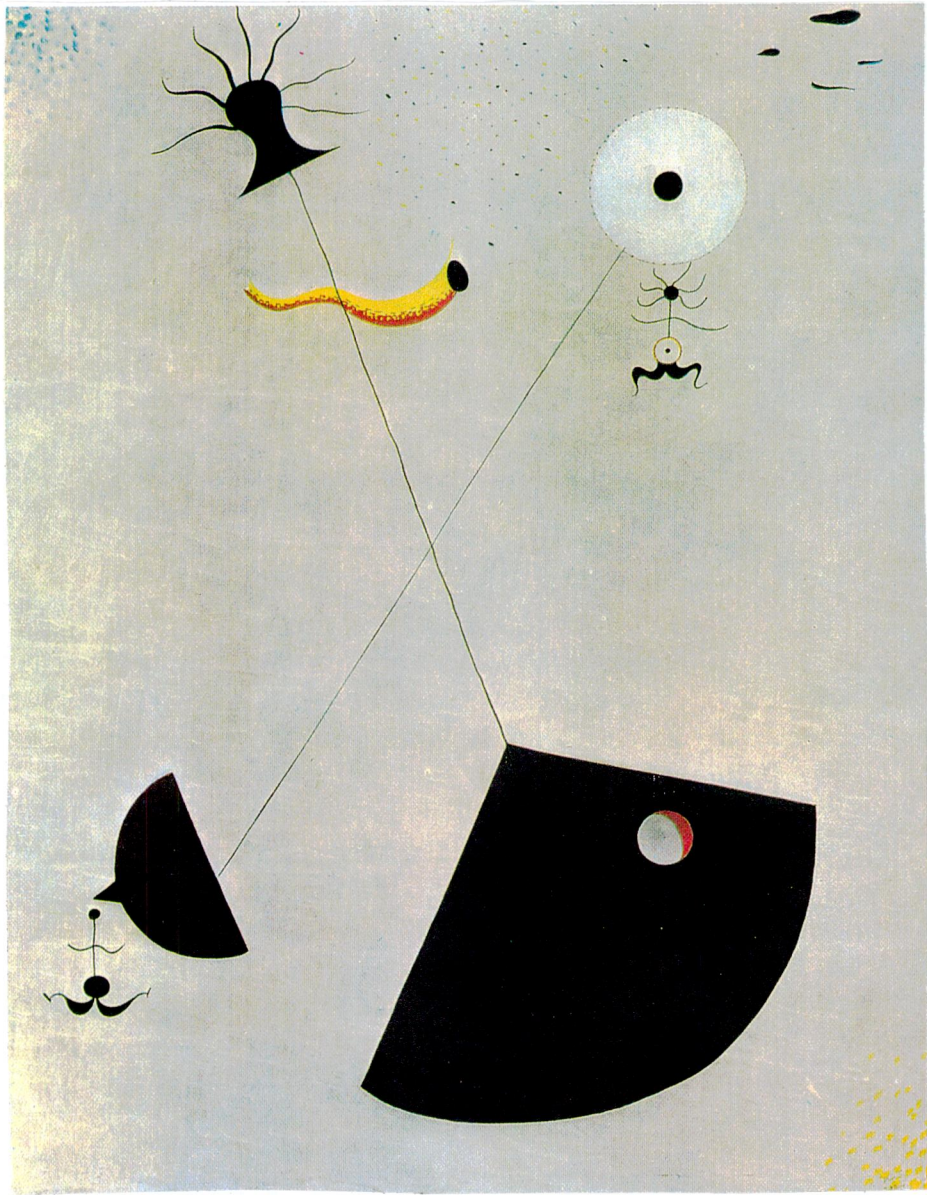
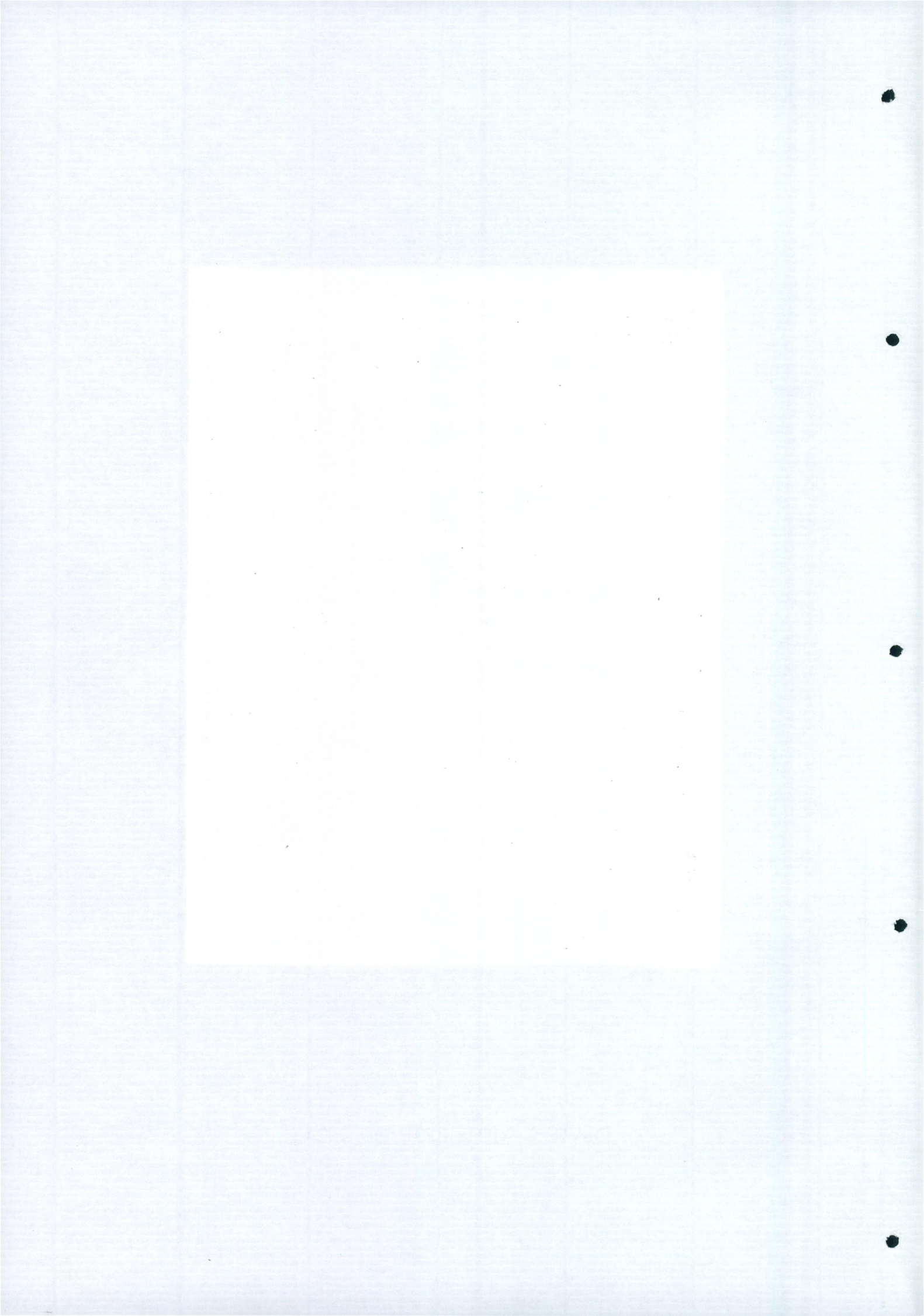


PLATE 5 - MOTHERHOOD. 1924



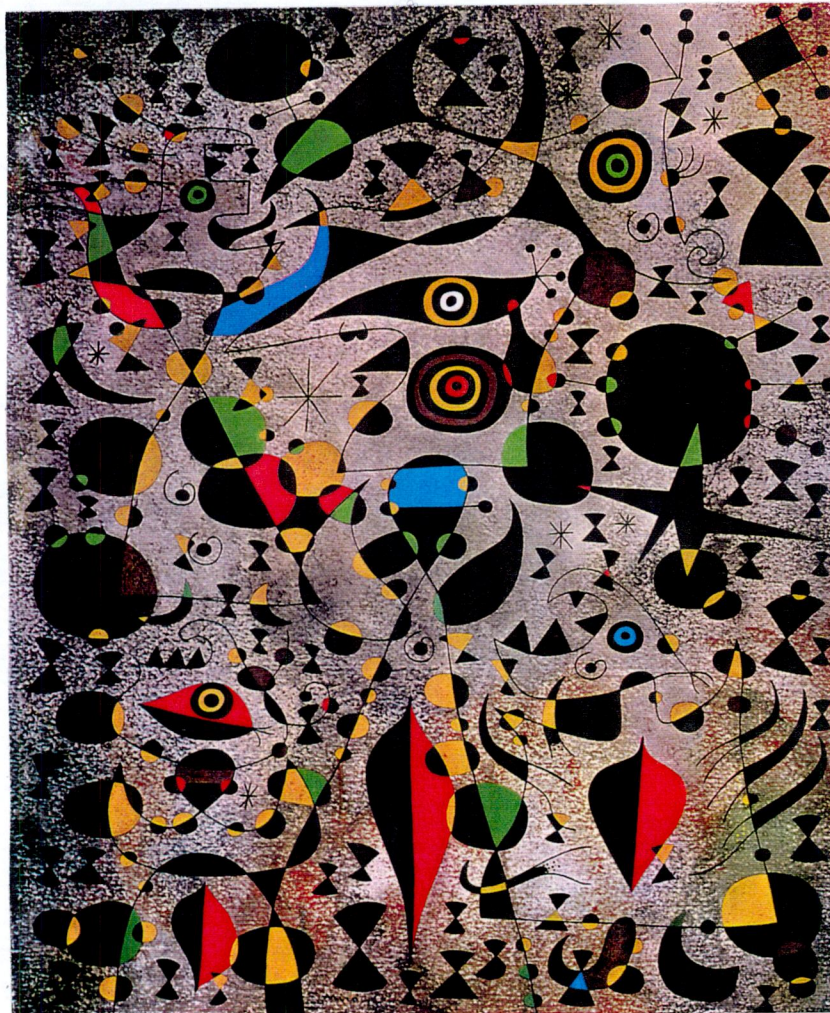
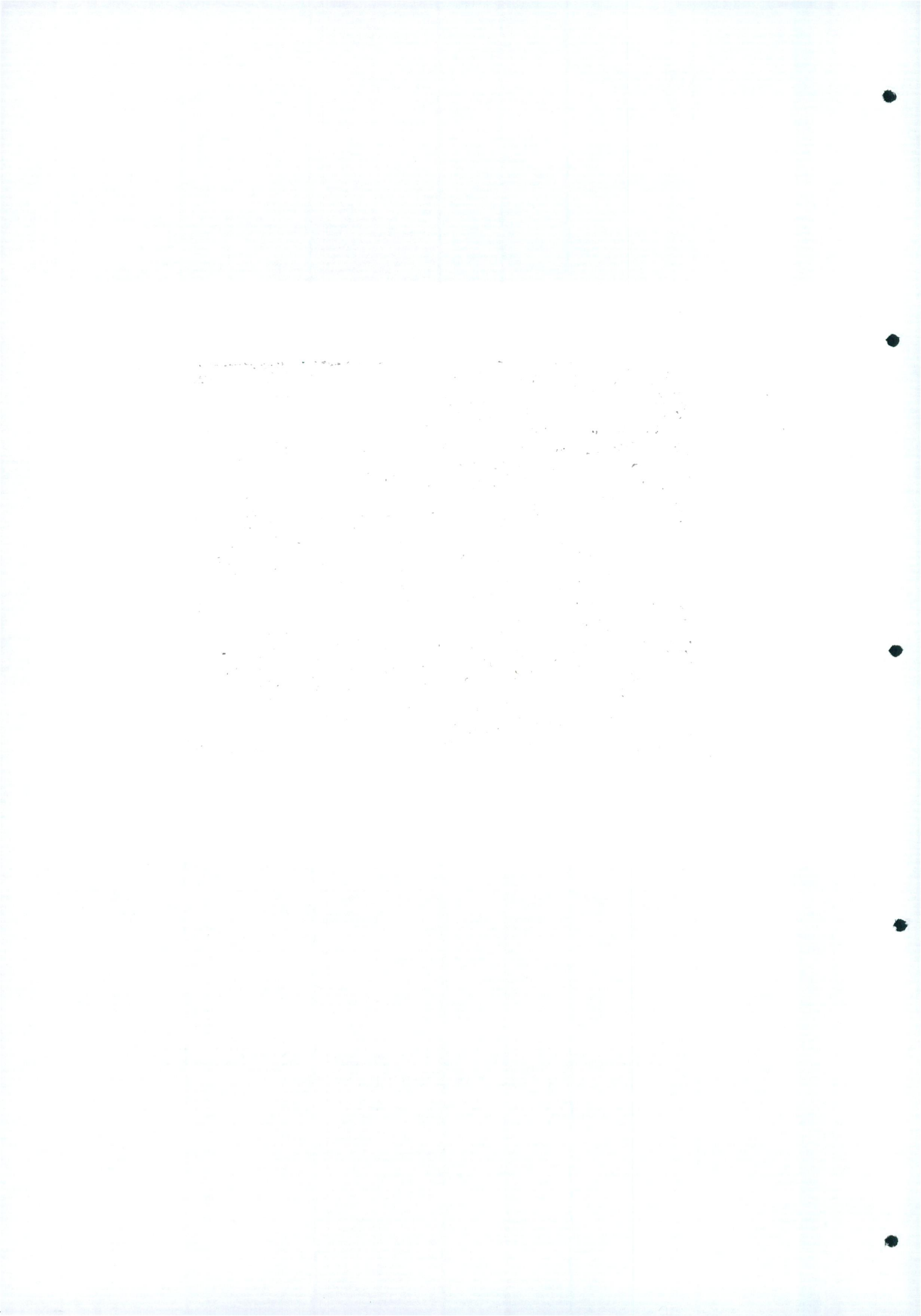


PLATE 6 - WOMAN ENCIRCLED BY THE FLIGHT OF A BIRD. 1941





PLATE 7 - A DEW DROP FALLING FROM THE WING OF A BIRD
WAKES ROSALIE ASLEEP IN THE
SHADOW OF A SPIDER'S WEB. 1939



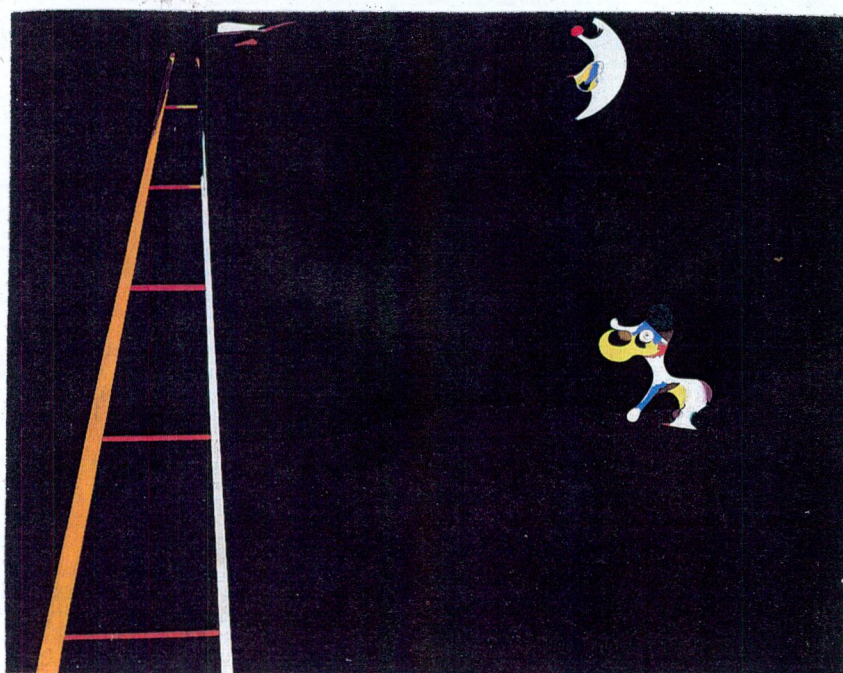


PLATE 8 - DOG BARKING AT THE MOON. 1926

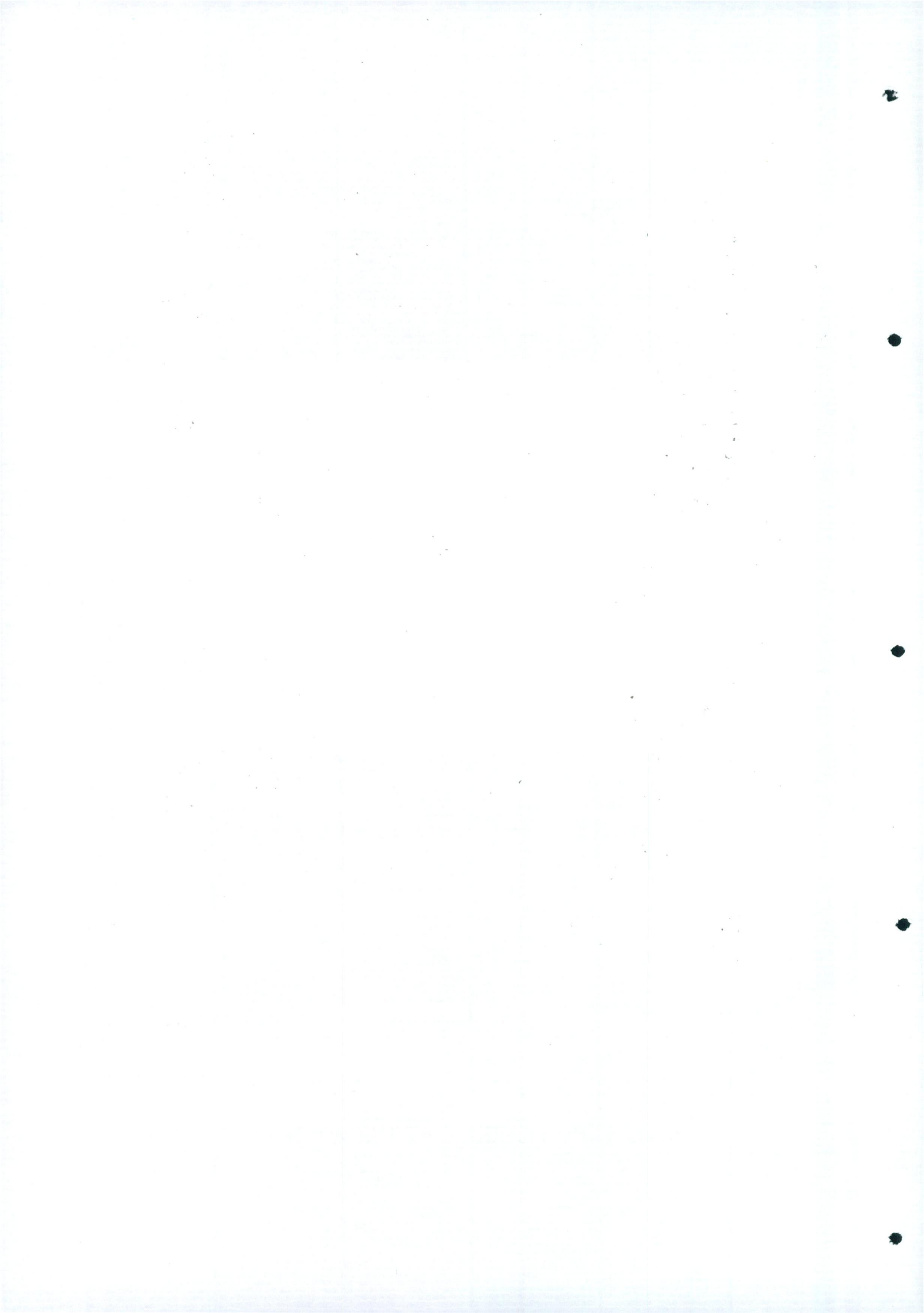




PLATE 9 - DANCER LISTENING TO THE ORGAN
IN A GOTHIC CATHEDRAL, 1945

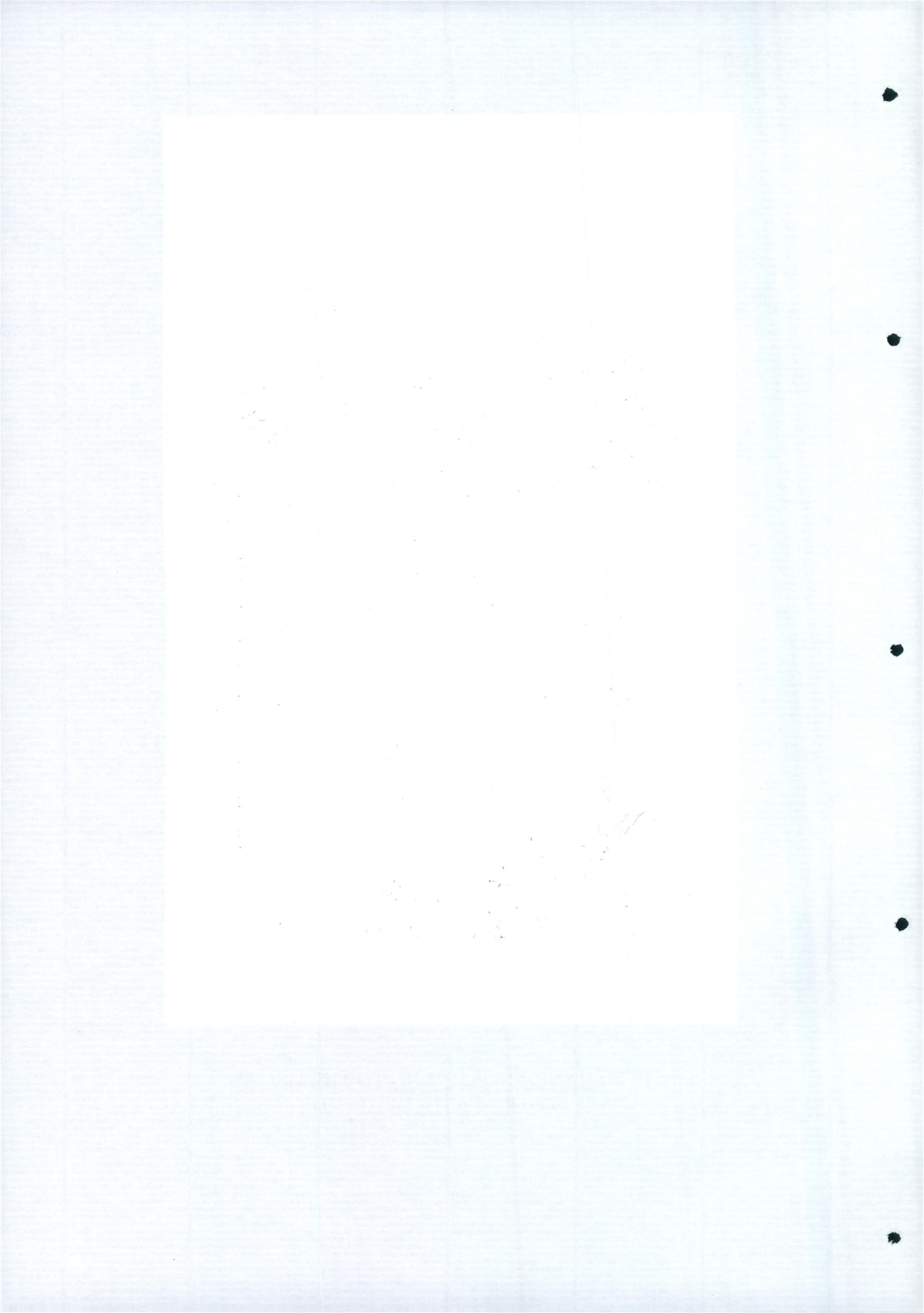




PLATE 10 - THE BODY OF MY BRUNETTE. 1925



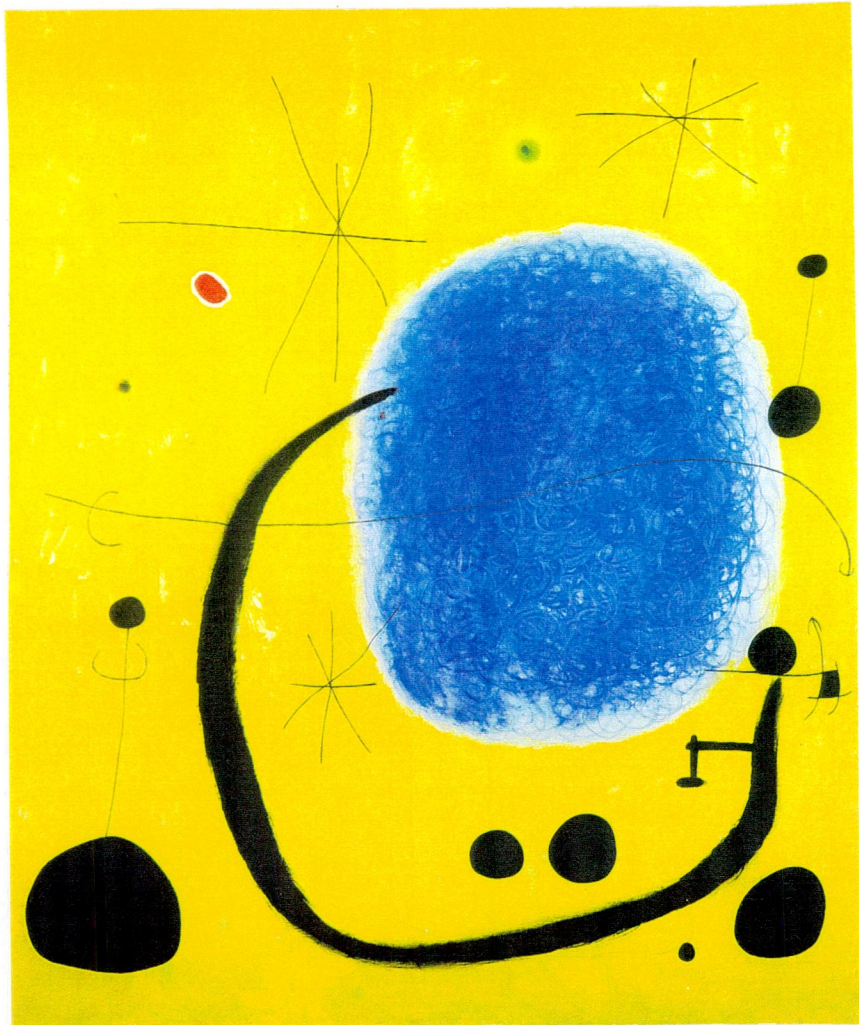
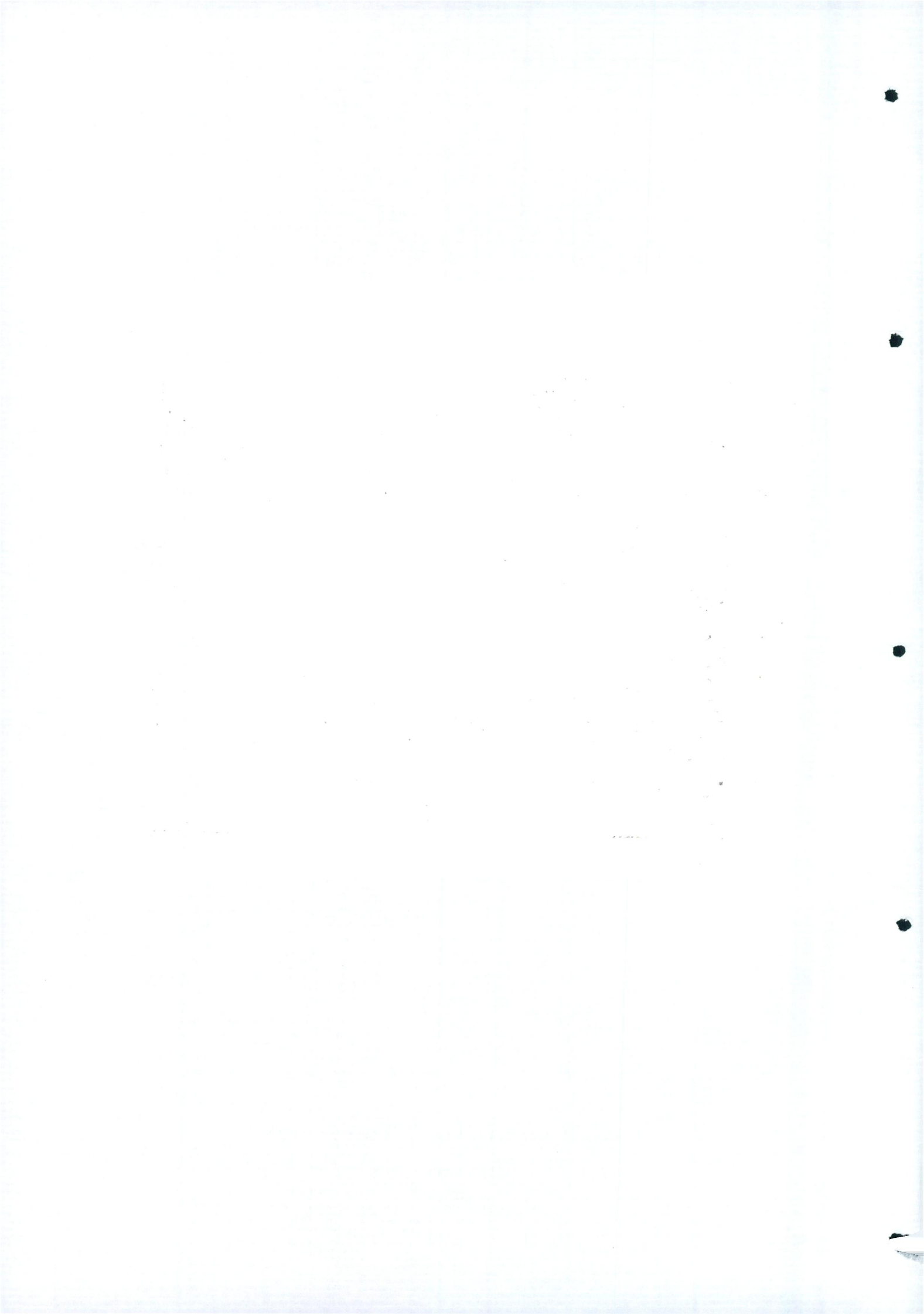


PLATE 11 - THE GOLD OF AZURE. 1967



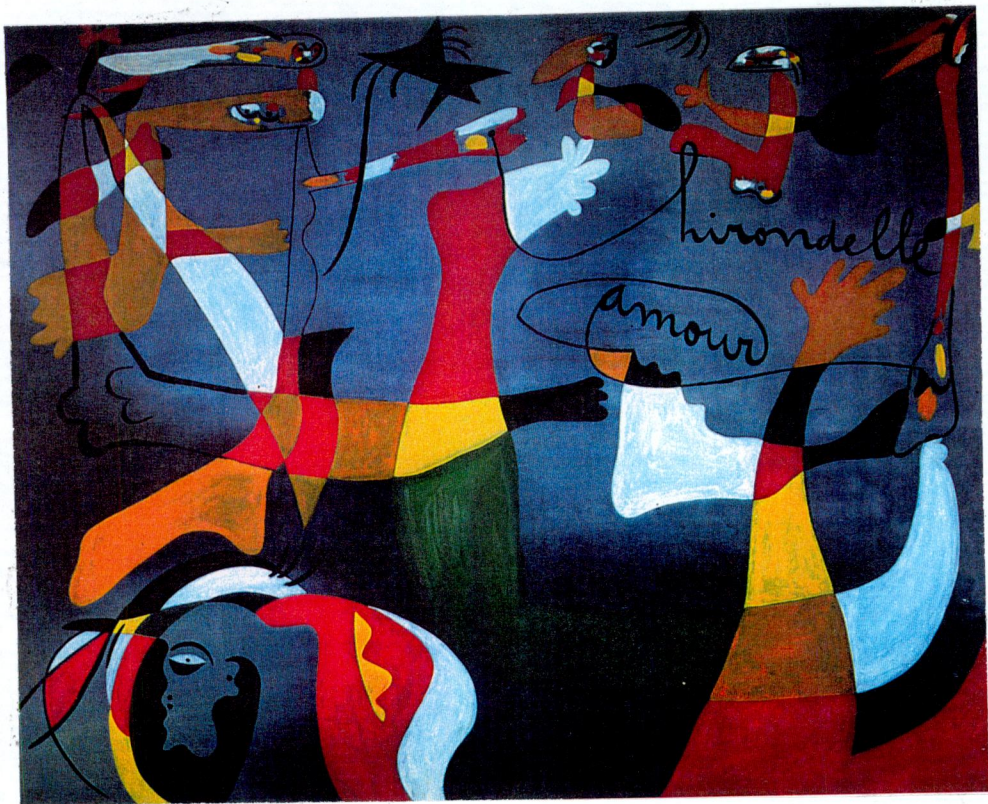


PLATE 12 - SWALLOW/LOVE. 1934



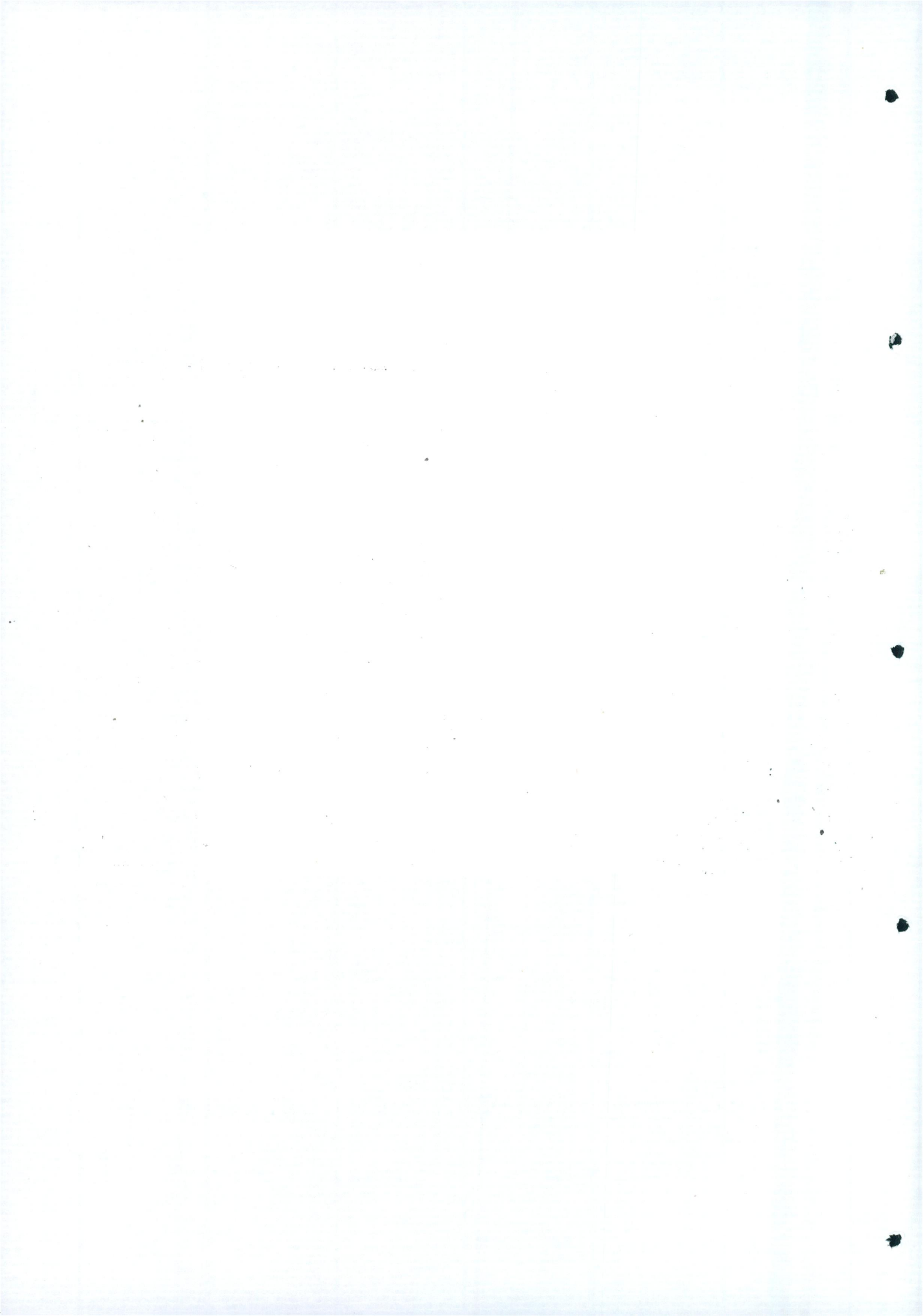


PLATE 13 - SNAIL, WOMAN, FLOWER, STAR. 1934





PLATE 14 - LETTERS AND NUMBERS ATTRACTED BY A SPARK. 1968



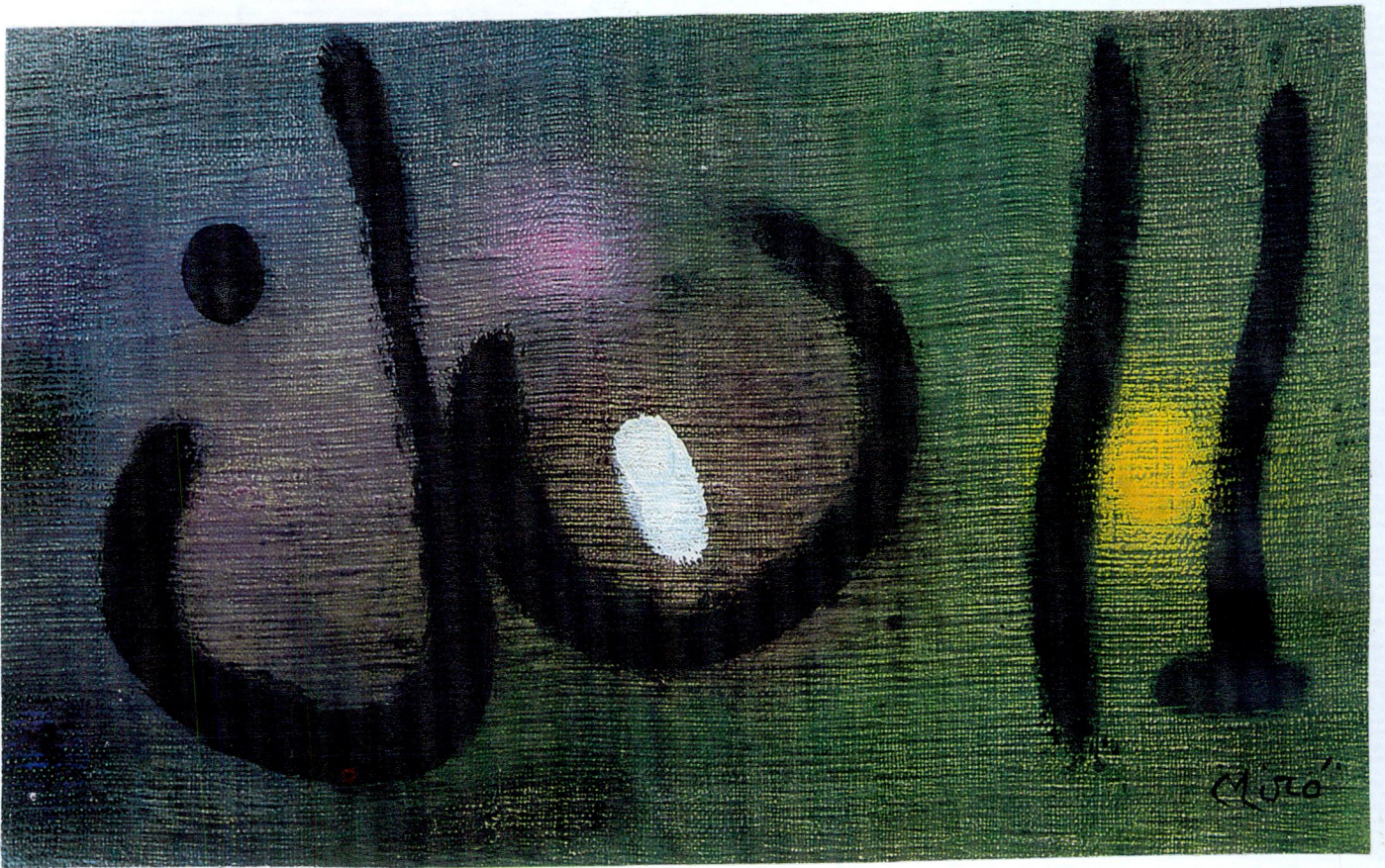
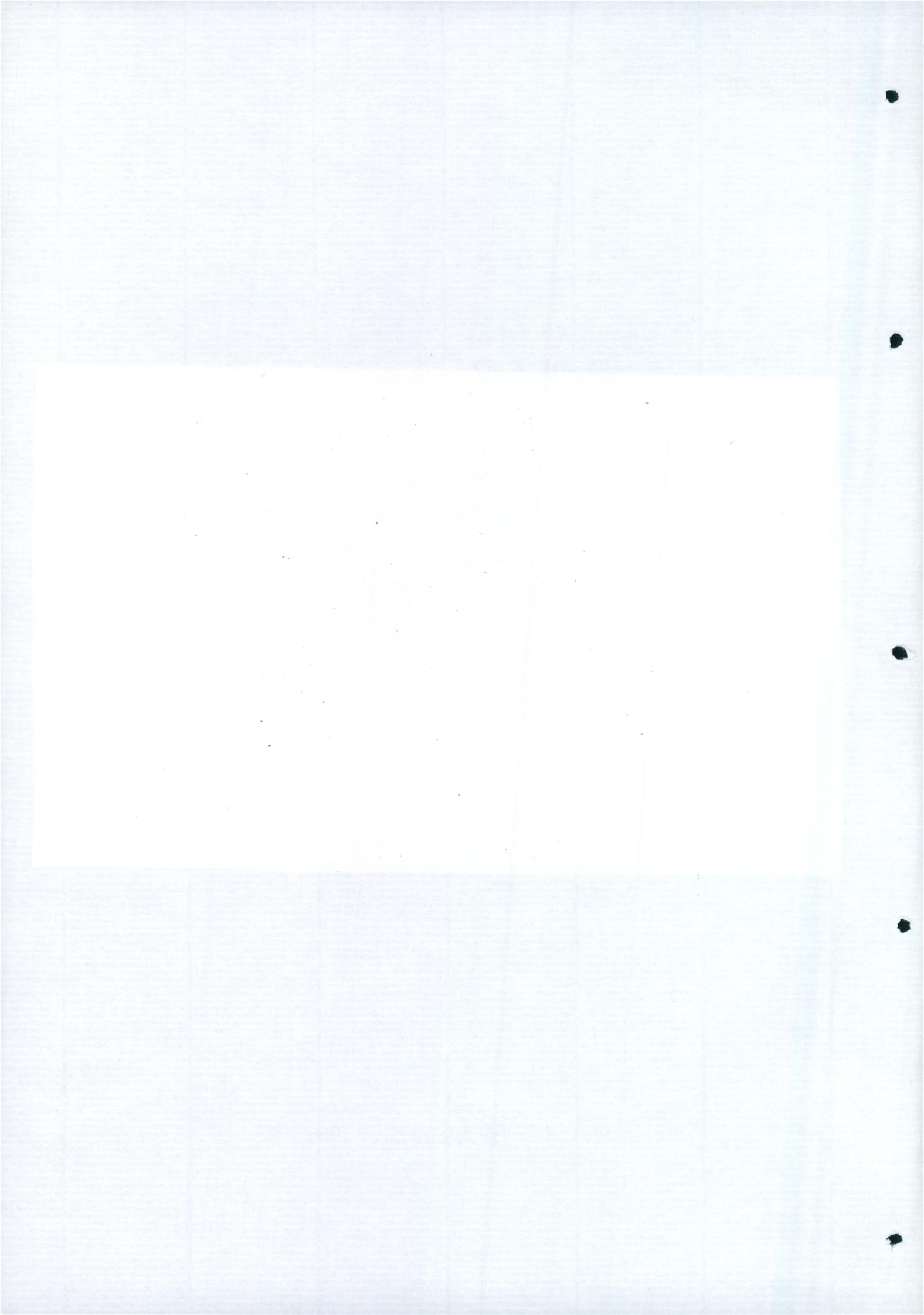


PLATE 15 - DUSK MUSIC. 1966



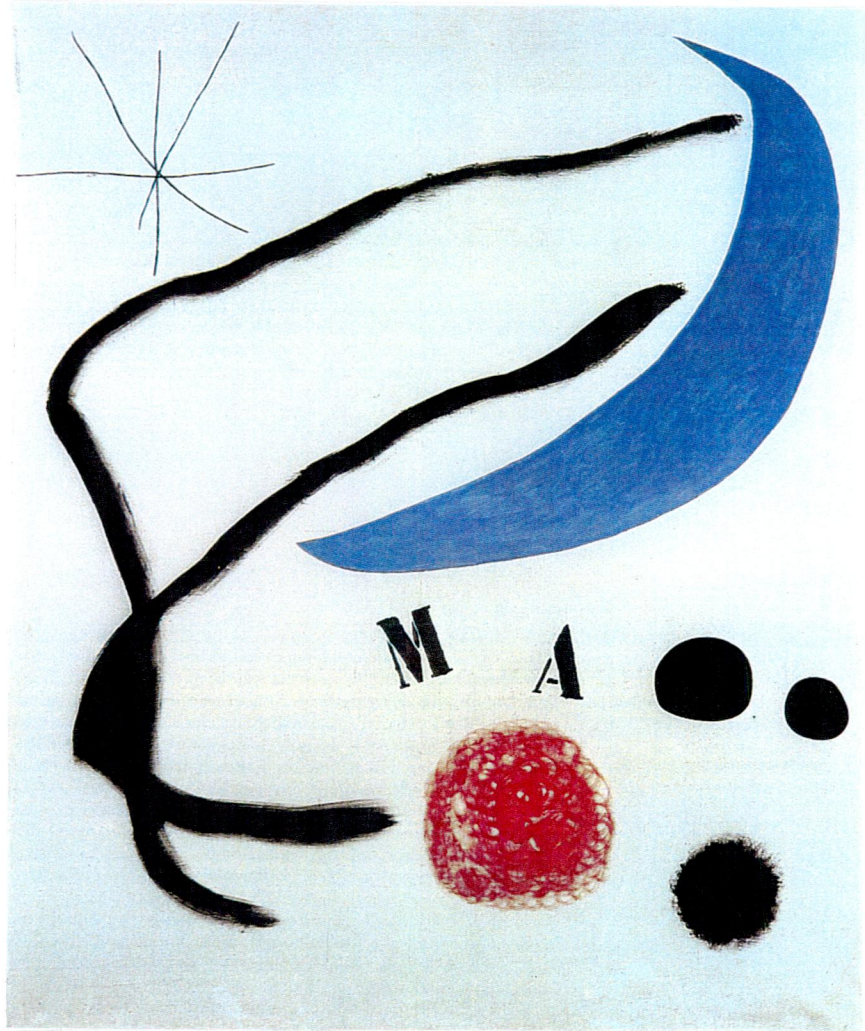


PLATE 16 - POEM. 1968



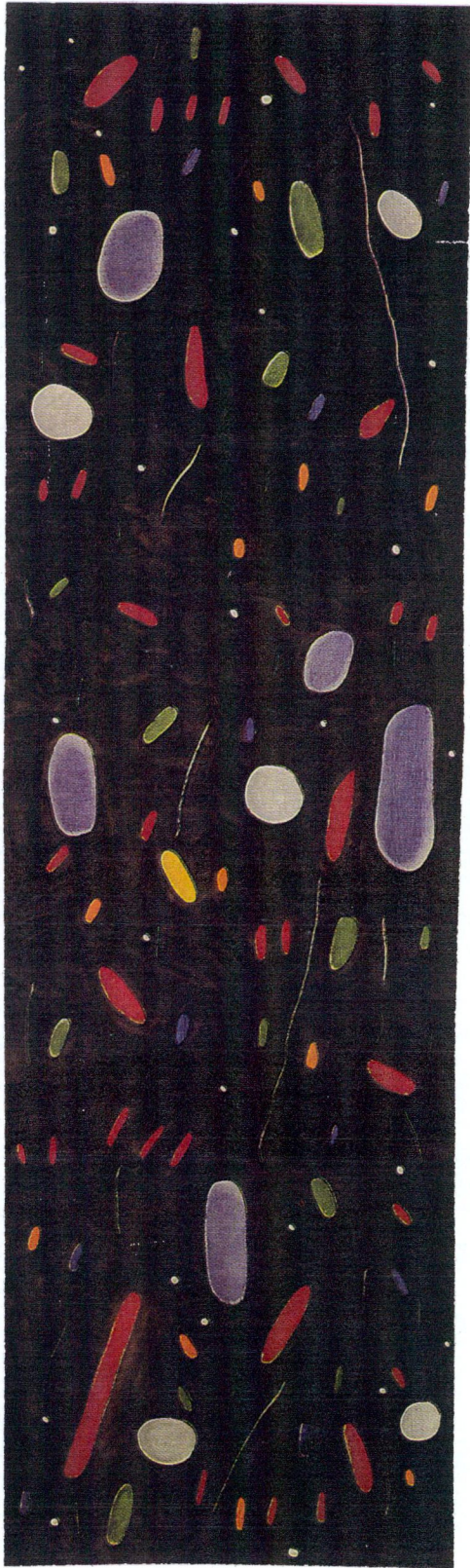


PLATE 17 - VOWELL SONG. 1967



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