

## **Roberta Griffith – PowerPoint Presentation for IAC 47<sup>th</sup> Congress in Barcelona – 15 minutes – September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

1. Josep Llorens i Artigas and Joan Miró i Ferrà were born in the Catalan city of Barcelona, Spain; Artigas in 1892, Miró in 1893. As young men, they met in 1912, while both were attending art schools in Barcelona. Their collaboration in ceramics from 1944 through 1970 produced unique vessels, plaques, sculptures and large ceramic tile walls. These works by painter/printmaker Joan Miró and ceramist Josep Llorens Artigas, along with his son Joan Gardy Artigas, were unprecedented in the history of ceramics, transcending the conventional limits defining ceramics up to that time.
2. What follows is an overview of the remarkable collaboration of Artigas and Miró. Artigas became professor at the Massana School of Arts and Design in Barcelona in 1941. and retired in 1969. He was my mentor during my Fulbright grant from 1962 through 1964. First, I will illustrate how Artigas changed the face of European ceramics; and second, I will present highlights of the 30-year collaboration between Artigas and Miró, assisted by Joan Gardy Artigas, focusing on their ceramics in public places, and lastly on their impressive architectonic murals.
3. In 1947, Artigas published *Formulario y Prácticas de Cerámica*. While working with him I used the 1961 edition. I used to meet with Artigas at the Massana Art School of Art in a special "master class" with three Catalan classmates, Maria Bofill, Ramón Carreté, and Elisenda Sala, as well as individually at the school, and at Gallifa.
4. Early ceramics by Artigas were decorative like those of other European potters. In 1921 Artigas visited Paris on a scholarship to study art. In 1922, he published work on Egyptian pastes and glazes, enhancing his reputation as a potter, and by 1923, he had become known as a master craftsman in Europe. He moved to Paris in 1924. The lives of Artigas and Miró followed somewhat parallel trajectories in the 1920's and 1930's. They shared mutual friends in Barcelona, and later while living in Paris.

5. In 1927 Artigas created "Claro de Luna" a vase that he considered his masterpiece. While Miró was becoming established as an original inventive painter with important exhibitions in Barcelona, Paris and New York, Artigas was becoming established as a talented master ceramist with exhibitions in Barcelona, London, Brussels, New York and Paris. By the 1930's, ceramics by Artigas were so highly regarded that in 1931 the Museum of Modern Art in Barcelona and the Metropolitan Museum in New York City each acquired one of his vases.

6. The formal, elegant simplicity of Artigas' vases with glaze surfaces that rivaled the Song Dynasty aesthetically set his ceramics apart from the heavily decorative ceramics in Europe. Artigas threw his own vases on the wheel, used no decoration other than his own prepared glazes, and fired his ceramics himself in high-fire, wood-burning kilns he had built. This was revolutionary in Europe, and the contrast benefited Artigas artistically. He patiently and scientifically explored the forms, process and materials he worked with throughout his life.

7. While teaching at the Massana School, Artigas set up his Jules Verne Street studio and built his kiln in 1942. He settled into a routine of working in his studio with friends gathering around him for afternoon visits. Artigas was gregarious and friendly, in contrast to Miró who was serious and formal. After Miró saw an exhibition by Artigas in Barcelona in 1942, he was determined to learn to make ceramics. In 1944, because of Miró's persistence, and their friendship, Artigas finally agreed to work with him. He gave Miró some broken refractory pieces to paint on, and some low-fire glazes to paint with. Miró often painted on the front and back, and the collaboration had begun.

8. There are double dates with the signatures on their first works from 1941 through 1946. Before Artigas had built his own kiln in Barcelona, he had saved broken refractory pieces and defective, glazed vases fired by his friends Manolo Reguant and Antoni Cumella in 1941. Miró painted on these leftovers, signing his name in black just below, or beside the signature of Artigas. From the beginning everything they made together was signed jointly. The two had complete respect for each other.

**9.** In 1951, Artigas had moved his family from Barcelona to Gallifa, a village about 20 miles north of Barcelona, to an old dwelling he called "El Racó," where he also set up his studio and built his wood-fire kiln, "Nikosthenes." He continued making ceramics and teaching at the Massana School, maintaining careful records in notebooks of his kiln firings and glazes. As Miró and Artigas renewed their collaboration in 1953, Miró made frequent trips to the isolated farm to work intensively in preparation for their 1956 exhibitions at the Maeght Gallery in Paris and the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York. Miró settled in at Gallifa and made Artigas' 15-year old son, Joan Gardy Artigas, his apprentice. The three worked side by side at the farm.

**10.** The less-expert apprentice enthusiastically urged on the other two men when particular forms presented problems. Thus, the sculptural forms evolved as they were constructed. It was an experimental period and they tried everything. If Miró or Artigas had a doubt about a work it was discarded. The more complex forms were made separately and mounted together with wood, metal and plaster. The poetic associations with nature coupled with the formal qualities resulted in a primitive intensity of feeling. The 232 sculptures, or "Firestones" ("Terres de Grand Feu"), exhibited in 1956 in the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York seldom had dates on them, so the three agreed to date all of them 1956. These inventive artworks were impressive and influential on modern art.

**11.** From 1954 through 1958, Miró worked almost exclusively with his printmaking, and with Artigas in ceramics. In 1956, the monumental ceramic arch, "Portico," was commissioned by the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. The approximately eight-foot-high arch continued to expand Miró's ceramic vocabulary. Strong black Mironian symbols marking the front side differ from the pebbles encrusted onto the backside. Themes reappear in Miró's ceramics not only with the symbols he uses, but also during his surrealist days in the 1930's, he had made several small sculptures with painted stones and found objects. The central block contains an oculus that permits light to pass through.

**12.** In 1958, Artigas added a downdraft wood-burning kiln at Gallifa that he named "Song." In 1962, Artigas and his family had traveled to Mashiko, Japan, for the marriage of Joan Gardy Artigas to Mako Ishikawa. Shoji Hamada served as godfather for the wedding. After the return to Gallifa, Artigas built a different type of wood-burning kiln, the large 3-chamber Korean-style climbing-kiln that he named "Mashiko" in honor of Hamada. Artigas told me, when I was studying with him, that they needed it because the middle chamber could be built up and taken down around Miró's larger sculptures in order to fire them.

**13.** Throughout the 1960's Miró and Artigas, along with his son Joan Gardy Artigas created ceramic object-sculptures using kiln bricks, wood and other materials with an intensity and sense of invention that was extraordinary. From 1962 through 1964, while I was studying with Artigas, they made and installed 14 ceramics and six sculptures of marble, iron, and cement in the "Labyrinth" created for the Maeght Foundation Gardens in Saint-Paul de Vence, France. Artigas took being my mentor quite seriously. In 1963, he shared photographs with me of their sculptures at one of our meetings, and after firing a chalice for him, he sent me a portfolio of Miró's lithographs.

**14.** In addition to continuing with sculptures in the 1960s, back in 1956 Miró had embraced a new challenge, that of making murals. The evolution of Miró into the ceramic mural seemed to be a logical progression for the painter. Possibly, the mural he painted on a wall at Harvard University back in 1951 also influenced him. In any event, a group of artists were invited to decorate the new UNESCO headquarters in Paris in 1956, and Miró's proposal to build two freestanding walls with Artigas was accepted. The pair visited well-known mural sites in Spain and Barcelona for inspiration. For their first two murals Miró painted actual size paper models outdoors at Gallifa. "Mural of the Sun" is almost 50-feet long.

**15.** “Mural of the Moon,” the second UNESCO mural, is about 22-feet long. The blue crescent moon was hollowed out below the surface of the clay to make it more noticeable. Tons of clay and many wood-firings took place at high and low-fire temperatures to take these two murals to completion. They were installed in 1958. The large UNESCO "Wall of the Sun" won the Guggenheim International Award for Murals for them in 1959 and generated extraordinary international acclaim. Such resounding success resulted in more mural commissions, one after another.

**16.** Harvard University commissioned Miró to re-create a ceramic mural of a wall painting he had made in 1951. Rather than copy the original, Miró changed his technique drastically, creating a new, original ceramic wall, "Mural of the Harvard Graduate Center." He painted, and threw paint directly onto the clay, without a paper model, developing the painting as he worked. They received more mural commissions, one in St. Gall, Switzerland, in 1964, and from the Guggenheim in 1965.

**17.** Artigas and Joan Gardy Artigas prepared the tiles and glazes for the "Wall of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum," commissioned in memory of Guggenheim's wife, Alice, who died at 56 years of age. As with the "Harvard Mural," Miró continued painting directly on the clay tiles with complete freedom before it was fired. In addition, the strong black letters of the name Alice, or Alicia, were incised into the clay. Miró had become a potter working with clay.

**18.** In 1968, they made and installed the "Wall of the Foundation Maeght" for the Maeght Foundation in France. It complimented the "Labyrinth" in the foundation gardens of ceramics and sculptures from 1964. This mural wall was the first one built in the expanded workspace called "The Hanger," constructed in 1968 at Gallifa to better accommodate the large murals.

In another part of the world, the powerful Osaka Gas Company invited them to make a large ceramic mural in 1969 for a pavilion at the Osaka International Exhibition in Osaka, Japan. It was installed in 1970. This mural is distinguished by a large number of repetitious eyes framed in black. Ultimately, the mural was transferred to the Folk Art Museum in Osaka, Japan.

**19.** Back in Spain, the "Wall of the Barcelona Airport" was their largest mural at 164 feet in length, and among the last of the murals produced and installed by Miró, Artigas, and Joan Gardy Artigas as a team in 1970, with help from another potter. It took almost two years to complete. Large, clean areas of color distinguish its horizontal, flowing, yet powerfully imposing composition of interlocking "Mironian" flattened shapes defined by strong black lines.

**20.** The last two murals, "Wall of the Kunsthhaus of Zurich" and "Wall of the Paris Film Archive," both from 1971-72, are signed Miró/Artigas. However, by the early 1970's Artigas was in very poor health, so Joan Gardy Artigas worked with Miró to take these two murals to completion. Then, Joan Gardy Artigas worked exclusively with Miró for the majority of Miró's later ceramic murals.

**21.** Artigas passed away in 1980, Miró in 1983. On the one hand, the ceramic vases of Josep Llorens Artigas changed the face of European ceramics with his re-establishment of the studio ceramic tradition in Europe. On the other hand, the synthesis of the collaboration of ceramists Josep Llorens Artigas and his son Joan Gardy Artigas with Joan Miró mark a milestone in the history of ceramics. The 441 innovative vases, plaques, ceramic sculptures and murals speak to us with mystery and passion. This new visual language made a significant and indelible contribution not only to modern art, but also to the world of ceramics, as we know it today.

**Roberta Griffith**