



APRIL 2011

## An Owl in the Garden

Joan Miró | *Head (Tête)*



**VISIT THE BMA's**  
Sculpture Garden  
and find the owl!

Joan Miró (Spanish, 1893-1983). Detail,  
*Head (Tête)*. 1974. Bronze. 33 x 43 x 49 inches.  
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Ryda  
and Robert H. Levi, Baltimore, BMA 1987.220.  
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In the BMA's Sculpture Garden there is a most unusual bird who never flies, never chirps, and never blinks. If it weren't for his enormous eyes, you might mistake him for a rock. His blockish face is bumpy but his long pointed beak is polished smooth. Unlike real birds that fly through the Garden, this owlish creature is all head and no body.

The Sculpture Garden is a calm and peaceful place but it presents certain challenges and dangers for an owl made of bronze. Dried leaves may blow all around his face. Falling branches might scrape his skin, and debris and puddles of water can easily collect in the deep grooves of his eyes. People sometimes put dirty hands on his elegantly-shaped beak or inadvertently scratch it with their jewelry or belt buckles. What's worse, pollutants in raindrops, snowflakes, and ordinary garden air can slowly corrode his bronze body, turning it an unfortunate shade of green.

To keep Joan Miró's owl looking his best, BMA conservators check up on him every week. When the weather is warm, they arrive in the Garden with a cart loaded up with a pail of soapy water, sponges, and soft brushes and carefully wash his face and back. Once a year they remove the old brown pigmented wax that protected his head and rub on a fresh layer. Then they polish him with soft cotton cloths and lots of muscle.

There are 33 other sculptures in the Sculpture Garden and some are big, bold, bright, and shiny. But visitors will always enjoy strolling down a footpath near the garden wall, turning a corner, and coming face-to-face with a small dark wide-eyed owl, sitting all by himself near the bushes.

### CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Draw a picture of how Miró's owl would look after a heavy snowfall.

Try a long-term experiment with old toys, discarded household objects, or empty containers to find out what happens to materials that are left outside in all kinds of weather. Include objects made of plastic, cardboard, metal, paper, wood, glass, ceramic, leather, fabric, vinyl, plaster, stone, and Styrofoam. Which materials fade, crack, rip, rust, corrode, break apart, get dirty, get moldy, or decompose? Which might be destroyed by insects? Photograph your objects at regular intervals to document the changes that occur. Decide which materials would be best for making long-lasting outdoor sculptures.

**PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.**





Joan Miró. *Head (Tête)*.

1974. Bronze. 33 x 43 x 49 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Ryda and Robert H. Levi, Baltimore, BMA 1987.220. ©2011 Successió Miró / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris