

The Fertilizer that Feeds the Soil Tàpies (1958-1988)

08.10.2022 - 30.04.2023



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The Fertilizer that Feeds the Soil. Tàpies (1958-1988)

Exhibition | 08.10.2022 - 30.04.2023

Curator: Núria Homs

Opening: Saturday, October 8, 2022, at 11.00 p.m.

Antoni Tàpies developed his work away from the centres of artistic production. In a local context far removed from modernity, his was a rebellious and defiant oeuvre constructed from the residues of consumer society, which he left exposed to the eyes of the viewers in an attempt to shake up their consciences. While he was often labelled an Informalist and abstract painter, this is not altogether true: his discourse coincided with that of a new generation of artists who, from the late 1950s, searched for other ways of addressing reality. Bruce Conner, on the west coast of the United States, in a city like San Francisco that was fast replacing New York as the centre of the Beat movement, with which Tàpies identified, was using the methods of assemblage with similar aims: found objects, uprooted from their everyday context, were assembled to form new constellations of meanings. His cinematographic work, from which the Fundació is currently showing a significant selection, was directly influenced by his assemblages: using found footage purposefully edited, Conner articulated a critique of U.S. society and artistic practices.

The Fertilizer that Feeds the Soil. Tàpies (1958-1988) focuses on the period between the late 1950s and the late 1980s, and shows the way the artist moved forward and established connections between his matter paintings, objects and varnishes.

Around 1958, Tàpies burst into international artistic circles with the so-called matter paintings, works of opaque surfaces that have the appearance of walls, painted in a limited range of colours in which grey, brown and ochre predominate. It marked the beginning of his mature period. The works resonated with phenomena typical of that time, such as the impact of the atomic bomb and the new discoveries in physics, the interest in children's art and that of the mentally ill, the fascination with the art of so-called primitive peoples, and attention to those most neglected and poor elements of immediate reality.

Under the influence of Marcel Duchamp, Tàpies sought to expand the notion of realism typical of the nineteenth century, and in the 1960s he exponentially increased his work with

objects as an extension of the primitivism of the matter paintings towards everything that was non-industrial, non-designed or rationalised. There is a political and rebellious attitude in wanting to give value to materials, objects and images traditionally despised by society.

From the late 1970s, more luminous works emerged, in which the varnish became more visible, sometimes alongside the material and objects. Varnish was not a new material in Tàpies' artistic practice, as he had already used it as a base for marble dust, sand, pigments and other materials. Sometimes, Tàpies scratched the material and left the varnish of the underpainting visible, which then became part of the composition; at other times it was hidden under the thickness of the material and was purely a structural element. But in the 1980s, varnish took centre stage, offering a transparency that was in stark contrast with the opacity of the walls. He continued to use varnish to represent images of body parts or physiological functions that are considered unpleasant and repulsive.

There is undoubtedly a spiritual aspect to all Tàpies' work that runs parallel to his spirit of rebellion: by valuing the simplest materials – straw, dust, a wooden drawer, the least attractive body parts –, Tàpies pushes and incites us to the struggle, while also inviting a reflective, meditative attitude and a spiritual introspection. Tàpies related the notion of matter to medieval mysticism, seeing it as magic and alchemy from this point of view. For him, the artist takes on the role of the magician or conjurer who, through tricks, transforms matter, as an alchemist would, turning it into an artwork. In the same way, the varnishes express the unity between the universe and the beings that compose it, the confluence between matter and spirit, and a denial of the dualism of Western thinking.

Although the opacity of the walls and the humbleness of the objects are in marked contrast with the luminosity of the varnishes, all these works follow the same logic: the re-valuation of prime matter, of the natural and the ordinary, of all those things that society rejects or hides out of shame, but that for Tàpies are not only endowed with spirituality but above all are where the origin and force of life lies, the fertiliser that feeds the soil.



Biography

Antoni Tàpies (Barcelona, 1923-2012)

Antoni Tàpies' first artistic attempts began during a long convalescence following a serious illness, after which his increasing dedication to painting and drawing led him to abandon his university education. By the 1940s, he was already exhibiting work that distinguished him among the artistic scene of the moment. Co-founder of the magazine *Dau al Set* in 1948, and influenced by Miró and Klee, he became increasingly interested in iconographic and magical subjects. He gradually began to incorporate geometrical elements and colour studies leading to an interest in matter through the use of heavily textured canvases of great expressive and communicative possibilities.

With these works, Tàpies achieved international recognition by the mid-1950s. In the 1960s, he began incorporating new iconographic elements (writing, signs, anthropomorphic elements, footprints and references to the Catalan situation), and new technical methods (new surfaces, use of everyday objects and varnish). Tàpies' pictorial language has continued to develop ever since, resulting in a creative and productive body of work that is admired throughout the world.

His work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Institute of Contemporary Art and the Serpentine and Hayward Galleries, London; the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; the Kunsthaus, Zurich; the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Jeu de Paume and the Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Valencia; and the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, among many other prestigious institutions.

In parallel to his artistic production, Tàpies is also the author of numerous publications: *La pràctica de l'art* (1970), *L'art contra l'estètica* (1974), *Memòria personal* (1977), *La realitat com a art* (1982), *Per un art modern i progressista* (1985), *Valor de l'art* (1993) and *L'art i els seus llocs* (1999).

Antoni Tàpies created the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in 1984 with the aim of promoting the study and knowledge of contemporary art, paying special attention to art's role in forming the conscience of modern man.

Its possible to consult the biography of Antoni Tàpies focusing on the period between 1958 and 1888 on the website <https://fundaciotapies.org/en/biography/>

List of works:



1
ANTONI TÀPIES
Composició amb sorra blanca. N. LXXX, 1958
(Composition with White Sand. No. LXXX)
Mixed media on canvas
162 × 97 cm
Fundació Suñol, Barcelona

The uncertainty experienced in Europe after the Second World War led to a certain nostalgia towards the primitive and archaic as a way of escaping an unpalatable reality. Artists tried to practice a different type of art, one that could assume the liberating role played by religion in times past. With the matter paintings, Tàpies searched for an art that would break away from the established artistic canons, the limitations of traditional genres and the matter-form duality. In these works, the quality (in this case, a surface of white sand) and the incidents of the matter (wrinkles, grooves, protuberances) were combined in order to allude to reality through the expressive capacity of the materials and to evoke in the mind of the viewers images of a wall, a beach, a desert, snow...



2
ANTONI TÀPIES
Forma negra sobre quadrat gris, 1960
(Black Form on Grey Square)
Mixed media on canvas
162 × 162 cm
Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

Tàpies' mature work is associated with the idea of the wall. The mural character of the matter paintings allows a plurality of readings. A wall can deny access or prevent us seeing through it. It can reflect the passage of time, or be the ideal place for graffiti. But above all, the wall is the alter ego of the artist, with whom he is identified by his surname, Tàpies meaning a certain type of wall in his native language.



3
ANTONI TÀPIES
Pintura rosa i blava, 1959
(Pink and Blue Panting)
Mixed media on canvas
162 × 97 cm
Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

Tàpies wanted viewers to perceive matter as existing in a state of constant movement and change. Therefore, what is important is not that we can identify the forms inscribed in the painting, but the perception of a being or object in the process of formation or deformation. In this work he makes no distinction

between matter and form. They are united by a relationship of contiguity and resemblance that, to a certain extent, renders them indistinguishable.



4

ANTONI TÀPIES

Blau emblemàtic, 1971

(Emblematic Blue)

Mixed media on wood

162 × 130 cm

Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

In this work we see a cloud floating on a blue background. A cloud is something that 'is' and yet 'is not', that is in constant change while being part of the blue background. Some Tàpies scholars, such as José Luis

Barrio-Garay, have interpreted the A as the beginning of all things, and B as the relationship between the four elements. Thus, what this painting is saying in an emblematic way is that everything is one.



5

ANTONI TÀPIES

Ocre i taques blaves, 1972

(Ochre and Blue Stains)

Mixed media on canvas

130 × 162 cm

Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

In Tàpies' work, we often find a series of images that keep reappearing throughout his career, such as parts of the body (mouths, ears, feet...), or everyday objects (chairs, doors, beds...), but also intangible elements (rain, imprints, shadows...). In this painting, rain, symbolising fertilisation, falls on what seems like a female body on a rugged surface surrounded by representations of other parts of the body, while the fraction A/D and the symbol of infinity lend a cosmic and universal dimension to the work.



6

ANTONI TÀPIES

Pintura lligada, 1964

(Tied Painting)

Mixed media on canvas

100 × 81 cm

Private Collection, Barcelona

One of the strategies to broaden the notion of reality was to transform the painting into an object, such as in this tied painting that, in surpassing bi-dimensionality, adopts an almost sculptural, objectual character.



7
ANTONI TÀPIES
Quatre forats, 1963
(Four Holes)
Mixed media on canvas
100 × 81 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona



8
ANTONI TÀPIES
Roig i negre amb zones arrencades, 1963-1965
(Red and Black with Tears)
Mixed media on canvas
162.5 × 162.5 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona

A recurring image in Tàpies' work is the armchair. It is the image that seems to be distinguished in this painting. However, the armchair in this work would not be that typical of a bourgeois milieu, but a worn-out, dirty and tattered armchair that belongs to a deprived environment; evoking hard-wear and poverty, but also the need for nonconformity, rebellion and struggle.



9
ANTONI TÀPIES
Superfície gris-rosada amb traços negres, 1962
(Grey-Pink Surface with Black Lines)
Mixed media on canvas
193 × 130 cm
IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat Valenciana, València



10
ANTONI TÀPIES
Palla i fusta, 1969
(Straw and Wood), 1969
Assemblage on canvas
150 × 116 × 18 cm
Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

Tàpies explained this work in relation to a Vedic myth according to which a spark of the sun fell on a bundle of straw, thus bringing fire to Earth. In this way, a 'poor' material such as straw becomes essential, and Tàpies used it to talk about the importance of humble and simple things. For the artist, straw evoked the origin of life and the creative force. It also symbolically alludes to the most disadvantaged who live in precarious conditions or deprived of their liberty – the beds of a miserable shack or a prison. The wooden bar that divides the work in two suggests the dialectic between opposites, struggle and movement, including the class struggle. This duality is resolved with the white background, the colour that represents both the beginning and the end.



11
ANTONI TÀPIES
Caixa d'embalar, 1969
(Packing Case)
Object-assemblage
171 × 125 × 20 cm
Collection GUILLERMO CABALLERO DE LUJÁN, València



12
ANTONI TÀPIES
Gran paquet de palla, 1969
(Large Straw Parcel)
Paint and assemblage on canvas
195 × 270 × 30 cm
IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat Valenciana,
València



13
ANTONI TÀPIES
Cadira i roba, 1970
(Chair and Clothes)
Object-assemblage
94 × 76 × 63 cm
Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

Another way of evoking reality is to substitute the painting by an object. While not a totally new way of working, from the late sixties onwards, Tàpies incremented the use of objects in his work. This renewed interest in the objectual coincided with the emergence of *arte povera* in Europe and post-Minimalism in the United States. However, unlike these movements, Tàpies did not show objects

as they appeared in reality, rather, he left his mark on them and incorporated them into his own language.



14
ANTONI TÀPIES
Fusta i finestres, 1976
(Wood and Windows)
Paint on wood and assemblage
203 × 348 cm
Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona



15
ANTONI TÀPIES
Blau i canya, 1973
(Blue and Bamboo)
Mixed media and assemblage on wood
162 × 147.5 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona



16
ANTONI TÀPIES
Marc de porta i blau, 1976
(Door Frame and Blue)
Paint and assemblage on wood
232 × 195.5 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona



17
ANTONI TÀPIES
Drac, 1980
(Dragon)
Acrylic paint, pencil and varnish on wood
89 × 146.5 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona



18
ANTONI TÀPIES
Gran X amb grafismes, 1979
(Large X with Graphic Signs)
Acrylic paint on cloth mounted on canvas
202.5 × 230.5 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona

According to Tàpies: 'X can be a sign of mystery, of the unknown. It can be a way of crossing out something, eliminating it, and it can be a signal that draws the viewer's eye to a particular place in the painting' (Manuel J. Borja-Villel, 'Converses amb Antoni Tàpies, 1985-1991', *Tàpies. Comunicació sobre el mur*. Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies; Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio González, 1992). X is a recurring sign in Tàpies' work, one that, appearing in ancient cultures, assumed a very powerful meaning for him.



19
ANTONI TÀPIES
Peu sobre blanc, 1981
(Food on White)
Mixed media on wood
162 × 97 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona

The set of themes that Tàpies deployed in his works often refer to what is unpleasant, dirty, even repulsive. Everyday objects, but also parts of the body traditionally considered unattractive, such as an armpit, a defecating anus, a foot, were treated with the desire to show the value of all things, even if they were simple or 'poor'. The image of the foot is especially important. He represented it in different ways, from the iconic representation of the foot and the footprint, to the actual sock or shoe.



20
ANTONI TÀPIES
Efecte de cames en relleu, 1979
(Legs Effect in Relief)
Mixed media on cloth mounted on canvas
130 × 162 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona

From the end of the 1970s, Tàpies resumed two procedures that, while not entirely new in his work, are now given a very special prominence. The first of these procedures consists of spraying objects hidden under a canvas, as here, where Tàpies worked from the legs of his daughter Clara. The second consists of staining the canvas or the wooden support with varnish that takes various forms when manipulated by the artist, but which never loses its formless character. This is the

case with *Sinuós de vernís sobre negre* (Wavy Line in Varnish on Black, 1983), exhibited in this same room.



21
ANTONI TÀPIES
Sinuós de vernís sobre negre, 1983
(Wavy Line in Varnish on Black)
Paint and varnish on wood
195 × 170 cm
Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona



22
ANTONI TÀPIES
Blanc i cadira, 1987
(White and Chair)
Mixed media and assemblage on canvas
225 × 300 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona

The chair is a characteristic motif in Tàpies' work. In the text "El joc de saber mirar" (The game of knowing how to look) Tàpies used it to explain the universe it comprises, from the sap that feeds the tree to the fire where it will finally burn once it is no longer useful. The chair also evokes a meditative and thoughtful attitude, as in *Núvol i cadira* (Cloud and Chair, 1990), the sculpture that crowns the building of the Fundació.



23
ANTONI TÀPIES
Marró i blanc amb graffiti, 1985
(Brown and White with Graffiti)
Paint on wood
275 × 250 cm
Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

Tàpies' iconography is made up of a relatively limited number of images that he repeated throughout his artistic career. Often these images are taken from his immediate surroundings, such as a bed or a door. In part, this is because the objects of everyday life are easy to find, but it also follows the desire to magnify what is small and insignificant. The bed

is the place where we are born and die, and it is often the place of sexual intercourse. It is, then, an image that alludes both to life and death.



24
ANTONI TÀPIES
Blanc, negre i vernís, 1985
(White, Black and Varnish)
Paint and varnish on canvas
170.5 × 200 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona



25
ANTONI TÀPIES
Portes i fletxes, 1987
(Doors and Arrows)
Paint, varnish and assemblage on canvas
195.5 × 330 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona

Tàpies explained the meaning of the motif of the door, which is often found in his work, in this way: 'Some of my images want to express an approach to the mystery of existence. To do this, I used simple elements: the image of a closed door, a door ajar, a door torn from the frame, or a lacerated door, full of scratches, as if someone had wanted to open it but couldn't' (Manuel J. Borja-Villel, 'Converses amb Antoni Tàpies, 1985-1991', Tàpies. *Comunicació sobre el mur*. Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies; Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio González, 1992).



26
ANTONI TÀPIES
Concert, 1985
(Concierto)
Paint on newsprint glued on canvas
225 × 300 cm
Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

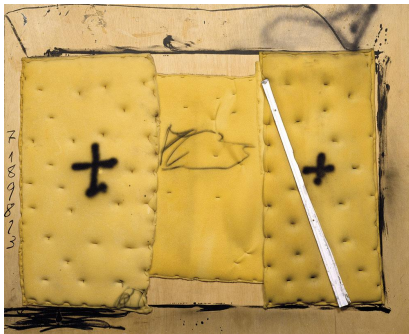
Music was an important influence for Tàpies. He often used to listen it, especially the great Romantic composers: Beethoven, Schubert, Wagner, Bruckner, Brahms. Also

more modern composers such as Mahler, Schönberg and Webern. He was also interested in concrete and electronic music, especially concrete, since it used materials from everyday life.

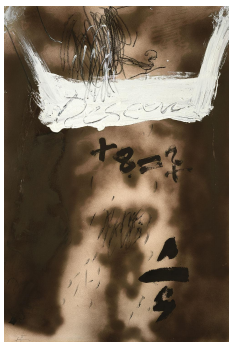


27
ANTONI TÀPIES
Oval negre i vernís, 1985
(Black Oval and Varnish)
Paint and varnish on wood
170 × 195 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona

For Tàpies, ladders connect two worlds or two realities: everyday life, which we perceive through the senses and through reason, and the world of dreams and symbols. Ladders allow us to get from one to the other.



28
ANTONI TÀPIES
Capitonat, 1986
(Padding)
Mixed media on wood
130 x 162 cm
Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona



29
ANTONI TÀPIES
Vertical amb signes negres, 1987
(Vertical with Black Signs)
Paint and pencil on paper
120 x 80,5 cm
Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona



30
ANTONI TÀPIES
Cames rosades, 1988
(Pink Legs)
Mixed media on canvas
130 × 162 cm
Private Collection, Barcelona



31

ANTONI TÀPIES

Díptic de vernís, 1984

(Diptych in Varnish)

Paint and varnish on canvas

220 × 542 cm

Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

In this work, the varnish stain takes the form of a body with its legs wideopen towards the viewer, showing what might be a female sex or an anus. An inverted cross at the bottom of the painting seems to want to penetrate it, lending the cross a phallic character. Also included is the image of a foot in its most iconic representation, the outline of a footprint and a sock.

Film

DANIEL HERNÁNDEZ

Alfabet Tàpies

(Alphabet Tàpies)

Production: ALEA docs & films, BCNmultimedia, TVC

Year: 2004

Duration: 52'

Language: Catalan

Catalan, Spanish and English consecutive subtitles

Activities around the exhibition *The Fertilizer that Feeds the Soil. Tàpies (1958-88)*

The programme of activities around this exhibition of works by Antoni Tàpies includes:

-**The dynamic visits for school pupils** *Des de Tàpies* and *Cartografia Tàpies*, and a visit for teachers on 13 October.

-As usual, every Saturday we offer **Approximations**, a guided visit to the current exhibitions with an introduction to the history of the building.

-In the context of the exhibition *The Fertilizer that Feeds the Soil. Tàpies (1958-88)*, we are **collaborating with La Pedrera - Casa Milà** with the activities *Tied Painting. Tour, dialogue and drink* and *Other Art: new music for a new painting*, a musical intervention by ESMUC students.

-Another significant activity is the **reading club**, run in collaboration with local bookshops, around three novels that deal with some topics linked to the historical, social and cultural context in which the works in the exhibitions were created.

-As a part of the new exhibition of Tàpies works, we will launch a **family activity** designed for children from three to six years old.

-Finally, on 23 October, and 6, 13 and 20 November at noon, the **Autumn Vermouths** will take place, with a visit to the exhibition followed by an aperitif on the terrace of the Museum.

For more information on the programme of activities around the exhibition: www.fundaciotapies.org.

Graphic material for press

The press section of the Antoni Tàpies Foundation's website can be accessed via the menu at the top of the screen, under the Foundation's logo, in the 'Museum and Library' section. In the 'Press' section you will find the dossier and images for the press.



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