

Tàpies. Wood, Papers, Exhibition
Cardboards and Collages 12.5 – 22.11.2023



Tàpies. Wood, Papers, Cardboards and Collages

1. Joan Teixidor. *Antoni Tàpies. Fustes, papers, cartons, "collages"*. Barcelona: Sala Gaspar, 1964.

2. Tàpies. *Cartons, papers, fustes i collages del 1946 al 1964*, Sala Gaspar, Barcelona (November 1964).

3. See Jacques Dupin, *Antonio Tàpies* [sic]. *Papiers & cartons*. Paris: Berggruen, 1963; Joan Teixidor. *Antoni Tàpies. Fustes, papers, cartons, "collages"*. Barcelona: Sala Gaspar, 1964; Antoni Tàpies, Manuel J. Borja-Villel, Peter Bürger, Xavier Antich. *Tàpies. El tatuatge i el cos: papers, cartons i collages*. Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1998.

The title of the exhibition comes from a book by Joan Teixidor published in 1964,¹ in the context of an exhibition of cardboards, papers, wood works and collages at the Sala Gaspar, Barcelona.² Although some critics and writers have shown an interest in this kind of work,³ this aspect of Tàpies' production has been largely overlooked. And yet, given the importance of these materials within the totality of Tàpies' work, and the currency of the message that he wanted to convey through them, we feel it necessary to revisit it. Featuring around thirty drawings and wood works from the 1960s and 70s belonging to the Fundació's Collection, together with some national and international loans, the aim of the exhibition is to show works that have been scarcely seen and remain mostly unknown to this day, including some exhibited here for the first time.

Tàpies' early works were essentially drawings and cardboards, and he never gave up working with paper, even when his attention was mainly focused on the so-called matter paintings. While normally associated with academic training, drawing allowed Tàpies to dissociate himself from the traditional practice of painting with



Antoni Tàpies. *Tàpies. Cartons, papers, fustes i collages del 1946 al 1964*, 1964. 77 x 55 cm. Poster to announce the exhibition at the Sala Gaspar, Barcelona (November 1964). © Comissió Tàpies / VEGAP, 2023. Photograph: © FotoGasull, 2023



Joan Teixidor. *Antoni Tàpies. Fustes, papers, cartons, "collages"*. Barcelona: Sala Gaspar, 1964. Litograph by Antoni Tàpies on brown paper (book cover). © Comissió Tàpies / VEGAP, 2023



Antoni Tàpies. *Botons i lletres* (Buttons and Letters, 1974). Paint, wax crayon, ballpoint and relief on paper. 77 x 58 cm. Private Collection, Barcelona. © Comissió Tàpies / VEGAP, 2023. Photograph: © FotoGasull, 2023

a brush – and therefore to transgress it –, from the brushstroke, which he hated so much. Partly because that was what everyone else was doing, but mostly because he preferred to work with harder tools such as pencils, burins, scissors and spatulas, which enabled him to have a more physical relationship with the surface of the work. From drawing, Tàpies went on to scratch works made of cardboard, and from there to the matter paintings.⁴

Tàpies' reflections on matter – a subject very much in vogue in the scientific and philosophical worlds at the time when he began working as an artist – prompted him to experiment with all kinds of supports and to systematically challenge the limits between the traditional artistic practices. He would use paper pulp, in much the

4. Manuel J. Borja-Villel. 'El tatuatge i el cos. Conversa amb Antoni Tàpies', *Tàpies. El tatuatge i el cos: papers, cartons i collages*, op. cit.

5. Ibid.

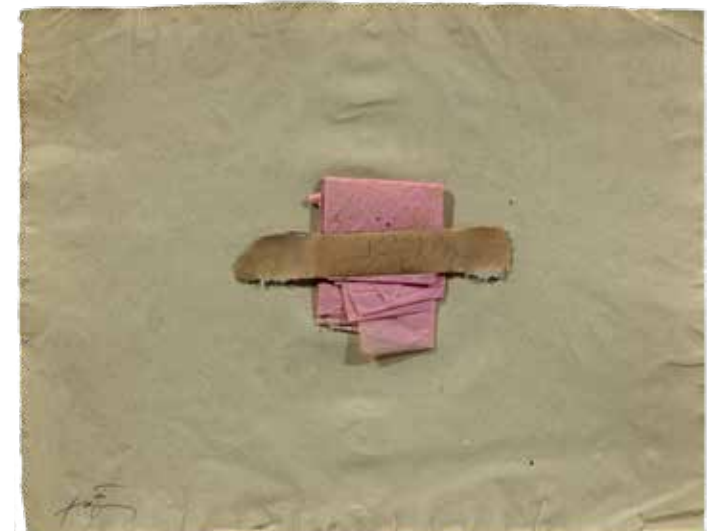
6. Ibid.

7. Antoni Tàpies. "Res no és mesquí", *La pràctica de l'art*. Barcelona: Ariel, 1970.

8. Ramon N. Salanova (text), Josep Maria Roset (photographs). 'Un pintor abstracto provoca una polémica en Barcelona. El arte de Tàpies sometido a juicio', *La actualidad española*, 1961.

same way as marble dust, varnish or wood. As the artist explains: 'The fact that wrinkled or folded paper tears easily, or that wet paper becomes soft and organic, are phenomena that attract me as much as the material properties of marble dust or varnish.'⁵

Tàpies believed that all materials have within themselves the power to transmit all sorts of concepts and, therefore, he chose them depending on what he wanted to communicate. In the type of works included in this exhibition, Tàpies let the material become the protagonist of the work, intervening only to emphasise its idiosyncrasy: cut-out cardboard, a found piece of wood, wrinkled paper. Paper and cardboard in particular evoked themes that he considered important, such as humility, fragility, poverty, simplicity, degradation and pain. Through drawing, he found a more experiential and expressive form, albeit not so spectacular.⁶ As he explained: 'Even its *ephemerality* is important [...] for it encourages us to be extremely careful and vigilant, to love things for their mortality, to understand that everything is forever changing.'⁷ This attitude is also present in the matter paintings. 'I paint with earth and colouring,' Tàpies said in 1961, 'to express through humble and poor materials the things I find beautiful in life.'⁸



Antoni Tàpies. *Collage del paper de seda* (Silk Paper Collage, 1967). Ballpoint and collage on paper. 30.5 x 39 cm. Private Collection, Barcelona. © Comissió Tàpies / VEGAP, 2023. Photograph: © FotoGasull, 2023

Paper, cardboard and collage were already there at the beginning of Tàpies' artistic practice, especially in the works made from 1946 to 1947, when the artist was in his early twenties, but it was not until 1958 when the use of these materials became increasingly important, alongside the famous matter paintings. Under the influence of Marcel Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters, Tàpies experienced at that time 'the necessity of insisting on and going deeper into that message of the insignificant, of things worn out, dramatised by time.'⁹ Why then precisely? In the late 1950s, on both sides of the Atlantic, a new generation of artists was reacting against the hegemony of Informalism and Abstract Expressionism and looking for new ways of representing reality. The use of new materials, of collage and assemblage, became fairly generalised and in 1960 the landmark exhibition *New Forms, New Media* was held at the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York,¹⁰ with the participation of around seventy artists, Tàpies among them. The aim was to reflect the substantial changes that were taking place in the art world, and which would soon explode with the arrival of Pop Art, performance and Minimalism. In Tàpies' works of the 1960s and 70s, drawing is very closely linked to collage, assemblage, grattage, tearing, folding and manipulating materials to put them at the centre of



Antoni Tàpies. *Paper amb plecs i signes* (Paper with Folds and Signs, 1964). Pencil on folded and torn paper. 50 × 68 cm. Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona. © Fundació Antoni Tàpies / VEGAP, 2023. Photograph: © FotoGasull, 2023

9. Antoni Tàpies. *Memòria personal. Fragment per a una autobiografia*. Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2010.

10. *New Forms - New Media I, II*. Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, 1960.



Antoni Tàpies. *Violeta i forat rectangular* (Violet and Rectangular Hole, 1971). Paint and assemblage on cut-out canvas. 105 × 146 cm. Collection Isabelle Maeght, Paris. © Comissió Tàpies / VEGAP, 2023. Photograph: © Maeght, 2023

the artwork itself. Then, in the 1980s, drawing changed once again, with Tàpies recovering the brushstroke, not to return to traditional painting, but to associate it with inscription, writing and ideograms, thanks partly to the growing influence of Chinese culture.

The exhibition features a selection of wood works, papers, cardboards and collages from 1959 to 1975, in a dialogue with paintings from the same period that Tàpies treats like pieces of paper or cardboard, by cutting, perforating, sticking or folding them in exactly the same way and jumping indistinctly from one support to another. Thus, the folds in *Paper amb plecs i signes* (Paper with Folds and Signs, 1964) echo *Roba plegada* (Folded Clothes, 1974); the torn and perforated papers in *Paper esquinçat* (Torn Paper, 1959), *Cadena* (Chain, 1965), and *Creu foradada* (Perforated Cross, 1975) coexist with *Violeta i forat rectangular* (Violet and Rectangular Hole, 1971); and *Cartó amb fustes i draps* (Cardboard with Wood and Rags, 1973) mirrors *Diptic* (Diptych, 1971). Another obvious link is



Antoni Tàpies. *Cartó, fustes i draps* (Cardboard, Wood and Cloths, 1973). Assemblage on cardboard. 114 x 105 cm. Collection Adrien Maeght, Saint Paul de Vence. © Comissió Tàpies / VEGAP, 2023. Photograph: © Maeght, 2023

established with the artist's book *El pa a la barca*, jointly created by Joan Brossa and Antoni Tàpies. Published in 1963 by Sala Gaspar, the book combines Brossa's ironic text (with its bureaucratic, journalistic, academic, ordinary tone) with the poor materials chosen by Tàpies (a wrinkled piece of paper with two black stains, a page from a notebook, a torn and stained newspaper cutting, a fragment from an envelope). In line with the type of works featured in this exhibition, it stands against the preciousness of the traditional illustrated book conceived as a luxury object.¹¹

The exhibition concludes with the screening of the documentary *Malir Tàpies* (Tàpies the Painter) (1969) directed by Joan Acarín and produced by Czechoslovakian television. The film shows Tàpies in Campins, a village in the Montseny where the artist spent his summers from 1960 onward, and where he produced most of his works.

11. Guillermo Solana. 'La biblioteca segellada', in *Tàpies. Escriptura material. Llibres*. Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2002.

Joaquim Gomis. Antoni Tàpies' studio with the sketches of the book *El pa a la barca*, Campins, 1961. Fons Gomis. © Hereus de Joaquim Gomis. Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, 2023.

Against the voice of a narrator reading texts by Tàpies in which he talks about the sources of his work, we see images of the landscape around Campins, and of the artist surrounded by his family and the poet Joan Brossa. We see Tàpies working on *Negre simètric i matèria* (Symmetric Black and Matter, 1969). It also includes the documentary *Att ge människan ett tema. Antoni Tàpies* (Give Men a Topic. Antoni Tàpies, 1967) directed by Rolf Wohlin for a Swedish television channel (STV, Stockholm). Filmed in Barcelona, the documentary shows the artist walking round the streets of Sant Gervasi, the area where he lived, accompanied by a voiceover of him reading his thoughts



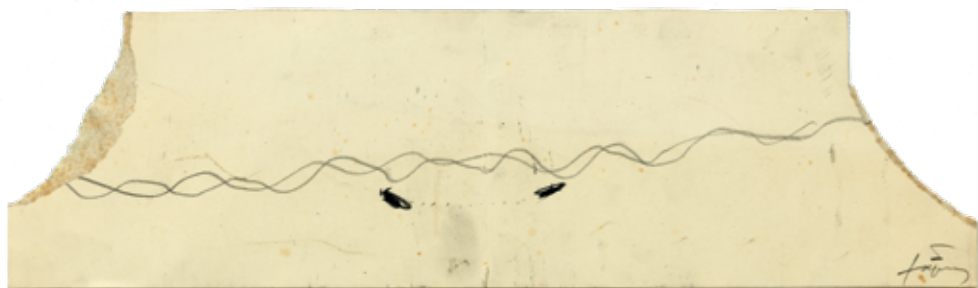
on the meaning of his work. The walls of the buildings, encrusted and eroded by the passage of time, reference the works produced by Tàpies at that time. In the film we can also see the artist's book *Novel·la* (Novel), created by Joan Brossa and Antoni Tàpies in 1965, and Tàpies working on *Rectangle i oval* (Rectangle and Oval, 1969).

The exhibition focuses on the precariousness of materials, the imprint left by the artist and the message he wanted to communicate, because it was through this type of work that Tàpies could more accurately transmit the anxiety he felt when faced with the excesses of contemporary culture, the abundance of ambient noise, the superficiality and triviality, the pounding impact of commercials, the lack of time for reflexion. In a text written in 1970, Tàpies commented: 'To begin with, today we do not know how or have time to see things. Our senses slide over the excess of preoccupations, neons, muddles and noises that always surround us. We must conquer and understand the most primordial things: to be able to contemplate, to learn to reflect, to concentrate on what we are doing, to have time to meditate, to have a minimum of decency and freedom in our lives, with enough hours of repose to be able to practise them.'¹²

Tàpies, the centenary of whose birth we will celebrate at the end of the year, used the tools of art to make us aware of the world around us and to invite us to imagine another possible world. Time has gone by, but the urgency is still the same. Those tools, perfectly calibrated, can still be useful to us.

12. Antoni Tàpies. 'Res no és mesqui', *op. cit.*

Antoni Tàpies. *Cadena* (Chain, 1965). Pencil on paper. 14 x 50 cm. Private Collection, Barcelona. © Comissió Tàpies / VEGAP, 2023. Photograph: © FotoGasull, 2023.



Antoni Tàpies. *Cadena* (Chain, 1965). Pencil on paper. 14 x 50 cm. Private Collection, Barcelona. © Comissió Tàpies / VEGAP, 2023. Photograph: © FotoGasull, 2023.

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Cover: Antoni Tàpies. *Creu foradada* (Perforated Cross, 1975). Paint on burned cardboard. 44 x 59.5 cm. Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona. © Fundació Antoni Tàpies / VEGAP, 2023. Photograph: © FotoGasull, 2023 DL: B-9235-2023