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Antoni Tàpies: The "matter paintings". (Volumes I and II)

Borja, Manuel Jose, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1989

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A

ANTONI TAPIES: THE "MATTER PAINTINGS"

by

MANUEL J. BORJA

Volume I

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1989

1989

MANUEL JOSE BORJA

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 19, 1989
Date

Robert Pincus-Witten
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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The importance of Antoni Tàpies as a key figure, both in the Spanish and European art world from the postwar period to the present, has been widely noted in all the pertinent literature. The historic significance of his art has almost totally been identified with the matter paintings, the type of work which projected him into preeminence in European avant-garde circles during the late fifties and early sixties. The matter paintings became symbolic of a period and an artistic attitude; and in consequence, Tàpies' art was no longer perceived exclusively in artistic terms, but was transformed into a model to be followed or attacked.

Given this model-like role, the interpretations of the matter paintings have varied periodically according to changes of taste and historical events in Spain as in Europe. If, during the late fifties, the matter paintings had an Existentialist character, they were perceived during the seventies as works of social protest.

Although interpretations of Tàpies' art have, for the most part, had a contextual value, art historians have subscribed to such readings and accepted them without questioning their origins and functions in specific historic situations. Ironically, throughout the popular and widely-read literature on Tàpies the position of the art historian has been un-historical.

Therefore, there has not been any attempt to study the linguistic origins of the matter paintings: that is, to understand Tàpies' position in relation to artistic languages in existence when he came to terms with the matter paintings. On the contrary, through one of those ironies so characteristic in art history, earlier periods of the artist's work have been understood in terms specific to the matter paintings, and considered important not because of what the matter paintings reveal of the previous works, but because of what these previous works reveal of the matter paintings.

My study is divided into three sections. First, in chapters I and II, I study Tàpies' preeminence, and how his art seemed to suit prevailing needs and anxieties, if not real ideas of opposing factions in Spanish as well as European artistic, and even political, circles. Second, in chapters III and IV, I study the development of the notion of matter painting among avant-garde critics and artists. I have analyzed the extensive literature on

Tàpies not as a means of understanding specific works of art, but as a historical phenomenon in its own right. Third, in chapters V and VI, I study these works from a generative point of view, assessing their linguistic sources in Surrealism.

Since the artist lives, I have been able to compare my ideas with his own. Thus, I include an appendix which consists of a summary of my interviews with Antoni Tàpies since 1985. In expanding upon some points, and even in trying to hide some others, his responses give insight to the meaning and sources of the matter paintings.

As the bibliographic element is so important in the first two sections of my dissertation, I have included a thorough bibliography on Tàpies, beginning in 1947, when the first article on him, by Sebastià Gasch, appeared. The bibliography is arranged chronologically, and within each year according to the kind of literature in which Tàpies and his work have been approached: books, exhibition catalogues, articles, reviews, poetry, or news items.

I am extremely grateful to my adviser and friend Robert Pincus-Witten, who suggested the topic, encouraged its development, criticized its content and supported the author all the way through. I am also very grateful to Eugene Goosen, Marlene Park, and

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In all my work, I have been personally assisted by Antoni Tàpies who has supported my project since the beginning, opening his archives to me and carefully answering the many questions my research raised. This study would not have been possible in its present form without his unfailing co-operation. My gratitude is extended to the members of his family. In particular, I wish to thank Sandra and Miquel Tàpies whose friendship and help have been extraordinary. Miquel's keen appreciation of his father's work has been of inestimable value.

A Samuel H. Kress Foundation Fellowship in Art History and a grant from the Program for Cultural Cooperation between Spain's Ministry of Culture and the United States' Universities allowed the completion of my research.

Finally, to Margarita and Manolo I offer my profoundest thanks, and much more, for their understanding and tolerance.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	Alexandre Cirici-Pellicer, <u>Tàpies, Witness of Silence</u> , 1970.
ANYS 80	<u>Tàpies, els anys 80</u> , Barcelona: 1988.
BONET	Blai Bonet, <u>Tàpies</u> , 1964.
COMBALIA	Victoria Combalia, <u>Tàpies</u> , 1984.
GALFETTI	Mariuccia Galfetti, <u>Tàpies. Obra Gráfica 1947-1972</u> , 1973.
GIMFERRER	Pere Gimferrer, <u>Antoni Tàpies i l'esperit Català</u> , 1974.
LLORENS	<u>Tàpies. Obra 1956-76</u> , Barcelona: 1976.
MEAC	<u>Antoni Tàpies. Exposición Retrospectiva</u> , Madrid: 1980.
PENROSE	Roland Penrose, <u>Tàpies</u> , 1977.
PRATS	Francesc Vicens, <u>Antoni Tàpies o L'Escarnidor de Diademes</u> , 1971.

CHAPTER I

ANTONI TÀPIES' PREEMINENCE

With the death of Joan Miró and the decline of Salvador Dalí into senility, the perception that Antoni Tàpies was Spain's greatest living artist took hold.¹ The distinction of Tàpies' art, his many prizes received both in Spain and abroad, his recognition by prestigious art critics and art historians, and his representation in leading museums and private collections reinforced this impression. As Spain's most prominent painter, many artists representing different trends have at one time or another either appropriated his methods or used his work as a prototype for their own efforts. In fact, Tàpies influence on his contemporaries is evident in every stage

¹In 1960, Mr. Vallés Rovira already praised Tàpies for continuing the line of Gaudí, Picasso, Miró and Dalí, and considered him a historical milestone of the new values (J. Vallés Rovira "En torno a Tàpies", Canigó, October 1960).

in the development of Modern Spanish Art.²

From early on, Tàpies was acclaimed. A continuous succession of exhibitions and awards unceasingly established Tàpies' privileged position. Thus, in 1950, scarcely more than two years after having exhibited for the first time in a group,³ Tàpies had his first one-man show at Galeríes Laietanes in Barcelona. It was organized by the scholar José María Gudiol.⁴ That same year Tàpies was invited to have another solo show in the Museo de Mataró, near Barcelona, and Joan Brossa and Joan Josep Tharrats published texts about him.⁵ In addition, Tàpies received an award from the French Institute of Barcelona to study for a year in Paris. In October, the director of the Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh saw his Barcelona exhibition and selected him for inclusion in the Carnegie

²His influence is still strongly felt today, and artists such as Miquel Barceló, José María Sicilia or Ferrán García Sevilla acknowledge their debt to him. See, for instance, Kevin Power, "Conversación with Ferrán García Sevilla" (extracts reprinted from K. Power, Conversaciones con..., Alicante, 1985), in Ana Vázquez de Parga, ed., España en la XLII Bienal de Venecia, 1986 (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Ministerio de Cultura, 1986), pp. 56-57.

³He exhibited two paintings (Painting and Collage of the Crosses both of 1947. Fig. 5) in the Saló d'Octubre, in Barcelona. See Josep M. Junoy, "De Espaldas a la Realidad," El Correo Catalán, October 17, 1948.

⁴Antoni Tàpies, Memoria Personal (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1983), p. 254.

⁵Brossa wrote "Oracle sobre Antoni Tàpies" Dau al Set, November 1950; and Tharrats wrote "Tàpies o el Dau Modern de Versailles," Dau al Set, 1950.

International. In 1952 he was invited to exhibit in the 26th Venice Biennial, and yet again in the Carnegie Institute. That same year he was offered a one-man show at the Marshall Field Art Gallery in Chicago.⁶ 1953 proved equally important --he exhibited at the prestigious Martha Jackson Gallery.⁷ For that event, Tàpies flew to New York City.⁸ The trip gave him the opportunity to investigate the burgeoning Abstract Expressionist scene first hand and to meet some of its artists.⁹ In Spain that same year, he had a one-man show at Galería Biosca of Madrid and was awarded a prize at the São Paulo Biennial.

The following years continued to generate an increasing series of exhibitions in galleries, biennials and group shows. His paintings were acquired by influential collectors, including Philippe Dotremont and Count Panza di Biumo. His work was studied by the most

⁶The show took finally place in 1953 and although not a success it received press reviews (See, for instance, Copeland Burg, "Spaniard's Paintings at Field's," Chicago American, April 6, 1953, p. 14). Tàpies recall those years as extremely harsh (Memoria ..., p. 292). However, the significance of having his work seen outside of the Spanish borders cannot be overestimated.

⁷The exhibition was presented by Washburn from the Carnegie Institute.

⁸Memoria ..., p. 317

⁹Not by chance the titles of some of his paintings of the period recall titles of works by Pollock, such as Epicurean Meditation of 1953 (ACP cat. no. 112; fig. 28).

important critics and art historians, and numerous articles, essays and books were published. In 1954 his works were selected for the 27th Venice Biennial, for the Nebraska Art Association's 64th Annual exhibition, and for the exhibition Reality and Fantasy 1900-1954 organized by the Walker Art Center of Minneapolis.

In 1955 Antoni Tàpies met Michel Tapié, who was an important figure in Paris art circles of those years and whose name is curiously enough almost homonymous with Tàpies. With his help, Tàpies signed a contract with the Galerie Stadler in Paris where he had his first one-man show in 1956. Michel Tapié, who had shortly before written a monographic essay on the artist,¹⁰ wrote the text to the exhibition.

In 1956 as well, Tàpies participated in the exhibition Recent Abstract Painting at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, England, which included works by Karel Appel, Alberto Burri, Sam Francis, Hans Hartung and others; and again he participated in the Venice Biennial, where two of the three works exhibited there were materias.¹¹

¹⁰"Antoni Tàpies et l'oeuvre complete," Dau al Set (November 1955), special issue. Reprinted in Francesc Vincens (ed.) Prolégomènes à une esthétique autre de Michel Tapié, (Barcelona: Centre International de Recherche Esthétique, 1960).

¹¹Tàpies recalls: "Uno de ellos era de gran formato, monócromo, gris-ocre, con relieve considerable, de aspecto decrepito, rascado por grafismos, mineral, una

In 1957 he was awarded the Lissone Prize for young artists,¹² and had one-man shows in New York, Paris and Düsseldorf. In 1958 he had a one-man show in Milan's Galleria dell'Ariete, presented by Jacques Dupin. He was also given an individual gallery at the Venice Biennial, and received the UNESCO Prize and the David Bright Foundation Award. Capping all these honors was the First Prize of the Carnegie Institute, which he was awarded in that year. The importance of that prize may be judged by the prestige of certain of its jurors, including Marcel Duchamp, James Johnson Sweeney, Lionello Venturi and others. The doors to international recognition had opened wide. In his Memoria Personal, Tàpies recalls how Duchamp's friendship and the Prize further introduced him into American and European art circles.¹³ By 1958 Tàpies' paintings had captured American and European

auténtica tapia, presente, descaradamente "figurativa", más contundente todavía que la que había expuesto en Barcelona el año anterior en la Bienal Hispano-Americana" (Memoria ..., p. 367).

¹²The jury was composed by U. Apollonio, G.C. Argan, M. Brion, W. Grohmann, F. Roh, and P. Restany among others.

¹³He wrote: "Su amistad y su contribución a hacer que yo mismo saliera del anonimato en los EE.UU. es, como ya se puede imaginar, uno de mis grandes orgullos. "Aquellos meses y los siguientes que, con la concesión de aquel gran premio Carnegie, que me pareció increíble ..., y con la solicitud de numerosas exposiciones en el extranjero y la publicación de diversos artículos importantes sobre mi obra, fueron, digamos, una época de 'éxito'...." (Memoria ..., p. 370).

taste. Suddenly, Spanish art had achieved what a few years before seemed a utopian fantasy, a rightful place among international artistic movements.¹⁴

Tàpies' rapid and definitive success outside of Spain singled him out for the almost mythical prominence he has since held there. True, his work was in many instances harshly criticized, but it remained, in terms of its validity and manifestations, always at the center of any Spanish critique on Modern art. It should be noted that from the outset Tàpies was supported by the most prestigious critics: Juan Eduardo Cirlot, Alexandre Cirici Pellicer, and José María Moreno Galván in Spain, Michel Tapié, Giulio Carlo Argan, Werner Schmalenbach and Jacques Dupin in Europe.¹⁵

Thus, Tàpies' position in modern Spanish art cannot be overstated. The way his work was understood both has conformed to and changed the way the concept of Modernity was understood in Spain. In fact, three of his works

¹⁴Not by chance, the element of international success was the one voiced by the Spanish press. See, for instance, Angel Zúñiga, "Triunfo de otro pintor Barcelonés," La Vanguardia, February 27, 1960.

¹⁵The first article on Tàpies' work was written by Sebastià Gasch, a historic figure in Catalan avant-garde of the pre-war period (Sebastià Gasch, "Unos Dibujos de Antonio Tàpies," Destino, 29 March 1947). Eugenio D'Ors also supported Tàpies' art very soon (Eugenio D'Ors, "Taine y el Salón de Octubre," La Vanguardia, 2 October 1949. Also by D'Ors: "De Tiendas," La Vanguardia, 5 January 1950; Idem, "La Jornada Electoral," La Vanguardia, 3 March 1950; Idem, "Tres en los Once," Arriba, 14 March 1950).

first exhibited in the III Bienal Hispanoamericana held in Barcelona in 1955 --the time the materias were made known publically-- provoked such powerful reaction that those works and the show itself are considered to be a turning point in the history of contemporary Spanish art.¹⁶

Not by chance, when the journal Revista conducted a poll inquiring which works in the Biennial merited a place of honor, most progressive art critics, artists and writers signaled those by Tàpies.¹⁷ The forms and compositions, the brown and grey colors and cement-like surfaces of his paintings at this first moment of

¹⁶Already in 1955, many art critics referred in their reviews to the importance of the Biennial in general, and of Tàpies' work in particular. See, for instance, J. Benet Aurell, "El Arte Español en la Bienal," Revista, October 6-12, 1955. A. del Castillo, "Esencia y honestidad de la Bienal," Diario de Barcelona, October 20, 1955. A. del Castillo, "La Pintura Española en la Bienal," Diario de Barcelona, December 14, 1955. J.E. Cirlot, "Explicación de Las Pinturas de Antonio Tàpies," Destino, October 15, 1955. J.J. Tharrats, "Tàpies y Togores," Revista, October 27 - November 2, 1955. Enrique Wyld, "Francia, Alemania, Arte Contemporáneo," El Imparcial (Guatemala), November 10, 1955. Two "Cartas al Director" (one by C. Pujol, the other by S.G.C.), published in Destino October 29, 1955, are also of interest to evaluate the polemic. The three works by Tàpies at the Biennial were: Grey (1955), Large grey painting (1955), and Painting (1955); ACP nos. 127, 128, and 129; figs. 30, 31, 32.

¹⁷The poll under the headline "Una Encuesta de Revista" was published in the following issues: 1955, 29 September - 5 October, p. 11; 6-12 October, p. 5; 13-19 October, p. 12; 20-26 October, p. 65; 3-9 November; 27 October - 2 November. Sartoris, E. Bechtold, Luc Peire, Brossa, Moreno Galván gave first position to Tàpies.

international success were eagerly imitated.

Indeed, in an article of 1959, J.E. Cirlot already noted Tàpies' ascension to a top position in the art world.¹⁸ Similarly, Francois Pluchart, writing of Tàpies' influence wrote a piece called "Tàpies Peintre aux 10,000 Suiveurs." In it, he noted that as early as 1958, Tàpies led a group of imitators not only among the painters of his generation, but also among those of older generations.¹⁹

The pervasiveness of this preeminence generated a theory of L'Informel which maintained that a painting's material qualities were its primary source of expression. In fact, exhibition catalogues, reviews and articles on Modern Spanish art written in the late 50s and early 60s seem completely absorbed with the physical attributes by which Tàpies's art was understood --matter, texture, richness of physical properties and wall-like qualities.

Juan Eduardo Cirlot, closely associated with Tàpies during the fifties and sixties and a champion of L'Art Informel in Spain, considered that Tàpies' work embodied the essential elements of this art. In fact, many of Cirlot's essays addressing the problem of L'Informel perfectly suit any description of Tàpies' works of the

¹⁸J.E. Cirlot, "La Pintura de Antonio Tàpies," Parallèl no. 4 (July-August 1959).

¹⁹Combat, 7 June 1966, p. 9.

period:

Así, la abstracción, a cambio de abandonar el mundo figurativo, aportó una nueva morfología relacionada con ciertas aspiraciones de la técnica. Y el informalismo, a costa de su destructividad furiosa, nos ofrece un nuevo interés por la materia, un redescubrimiento casi místico del sentido del detalle, de la fuerza integrada en la menor estructura, en la grieta, en la raíz retorcida.²⁰

The privileged position of Tàpies in Spanish art explains certain characteristics of the literature surrounding him, as the tone of passionate tribute with which his supporters have written about him. Joan Teixidor, for instance, did not hesitate to conclude his 1964 book on Tàpies with the following statement:

Si escribo sobre Tàpies con tan irreprimible admiración, que ha ido creciendo a través de los años, es porque desearía que quedara también muy claro hasta qué punto es grato en mi corazón que este hombre haya nacido y viva entre nosotros. Todo aquello que podría separarme de él en cualquier aspecto teórico de la vida no podría enturbiar, a mis ojos, este secreto manantial que me lo hacía objeto de tanta estima.²¹

Given Tàpies' preemience, the "artist" became for many critics more important than his work, which they perceived as inextricable from his biography. These critics did not perceive Tàpies' motifs such as the swollen foot or the excremental anus in the context of a

²⁰Juan Eduardo Cirlot, Informalismo (Barcelona: Editorial Omega, 1959), p 9.

²¹Joan Teixidor, Antoni Tàpies. Fustes, Papers, Cartons i Collages (Barcelona: Sala Gaspar, 1965), p. 32.

particular Surrealist tradition, that of Georges Bataille and Documents; rather, they explained these motifs in terms of Tàpies' personal experiences. Blai Bonet found the source for such a characteristic motif of Tàpies' paintings as the window, or such a characteristic color as grey, in the artist's experience of the world during his childhood and ill adolescence:

Durante la guerra española del 36, los muchachos de 14 años, y había uno en Barcelona que se llamaba Antoni Tàpies, crecían entre los muros de la cocina.... frente a las fachadas grises, a las molduras grises, a las guirnaldas de cemento, a los remates grises de mal gusto gris del edificio gris y negro que estaban frente a las ventanas de la calle La primera instalación, encristalamiento, de este muchacho enfermo de postguerra es la de los ojos. Tiene la vista tapiada, condenada a las formas de la ventana; de la moldura o fragmento de ventana, gris....²²

The selection and sequence of photographs made by Joan Prats for the book Antoni Tàpies o el Escarnidor de Diademes appear to place the origin of Tàpies' motifs in those ordinary objects which are part of this artist's

²²Blai Bonet, Tàpies (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1964), pp. 28-29. The references to Tàpies' adolescent illness has been a recurrent element in the literature around Tàpies. Josep Vallés Rovira established the origins of that which he considered the general mood of Tàpies' paintings in that illness which made him stay for a period in an asylum (José Vallés Rovira, "En torno a Tàpies," Canigó, no. 80 (October 1960). See also Carlos Barral, "Tàpies como Metáfora," Cambio 16, 13 August 1978, p. 57.

personal and quotidian experience²³ (figs. 69-73). The painting of an arch, for instance, is reproduced following the photograph of a niche of the local cemetery. A canvas representing a staircase in close-up follows a photograph of one of the staircases of his Campins house. Similarly, since "tàpies" means "walls" in Catalan, the wall which is the motif with which Tàpies' work has been more frequently identified was perceived as part of a personal diary. Early on critics noted this curious identification. Tàpies himself contributed to this interpretation:

Si tengo que hacer la historia de cómo se fue concretando en mí la consciencia de este poder evocador de las imágenes murales, he de remontarme muy lejos. Son recuerdos que vienen de mi adolescencia y de mi primera juventud encerrada entre los muros en que viví las guerras....

....Pero, cómo podía no marcarme a mí? Curioso destino de mi nombre. Parecía que se cumpliera en mí el extraño presagio que unos años antes había oído explicar a un adepto de las ciencias ocultas sobre la influencia de nuestro nombre en el propio carácter y en el propio destino.²⁴

The continuous presence in his work of the letters "A" and "T" (fig. 80), the artist's own initials, as well as that for his wife's first name (Teresa) has given a kind of signature to these motifs, which in turn

²³Joan Brossa and Francesc Vicens, Antoni Tàpies o El Escarnidor de Diademes (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1971).

²⁴Antoni Tàpies, La Práctica del Arte, (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1973), pp. 138, 140.

reinforced for many critics the biographical aspect of Tàpies' art. These critics have interpreted other motifs in the same manner. A ladder leaning against a piece of furniture has been interpreted as referring to the letter A, for the artist's first name.²⁵

The emphasis on the personal and biographical points to the notion of an art history as the history of the proper name. In this approach an artist's work is ultimately reduced to that which is personal. In general, this implies a reduction of the meaning to the identification of elements of the artist's identity. The works of an artist would then constitute representations that have extension but not intension, in the sense that the meaning of the name extends over the object to which it refers, but comes to an end at its boundaries.²⁶ It does not have connotation or intension, and it cannot be applied to a plurality of instances. It remains

²⁵"Que tout oeuvre s'avance vers la signature. En même temps que la signature s'efforce de faire sienne la chair du monde à recouvrer. On connaît ces toiles de Tàpies où jouent le T, le A, où la croix incline à se faire lire en T, où l'escalier et le meuble s'impriment en A, où la lettre s'incarne cesse son errance abstraite, marque" (Georges Raillard, "Tàpies à mots découverts," Derrière le Miroir, no. 12, June 1974, p. 9). Werner Schmalenbach gives a similar opinion. For him too, Tàpies' gestures have a signature character. See Werner Schmalenbach, Tàpies. Dibujos (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1974), p. 22.

²⁶Rosalind Krauss, "In The Name of Picasso," October, no. 16 (Spring 1981), p. 10.

meaningful only for a single example.²⁷

Although subscribing to the biographical approach, many critics have tried to overcome the limitation of meaning to extension by using a conception of realism in the arts related to the aesthetic ideas of the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács. For Lukács there are three types of experience: the singular, the universal and the particular. The first two refer to science, the third one is characteristic of the arts. While science forms universal essences out of singular experiences, creating an autonomous language, art, on the contrary, binds essence and experience together. Science creates a world of "universals" in which a type is general and generally applicable. Art, instead, creates a world which is based upon singular experiences out of which the artist does not form a unique universal type, but "a multiplicity of types" which reflect life's multiplicity. This kind of realism does not require "objective descriptions" --which lead to the Naturalism of Zola or Flaubert, writers disliked by Lukács--, but the expression of the artist's individual experience of life.²⁸

This approach has been common among several Spanish critics who, although seeing Tàpies' motifs as individual

²⁷Ibid., p. 9.

²⁸See, for instance, Georg Lukács, Studies in European Realism (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), passim.

and personal, read those motifs as symbolic "types" of a collectivity. In his introduction to a 1974 exhibition of Tàpies' recent work, José María Moreno Galván argued that Tàpies had found the solution to the apparent contradiction between an art for the people and an art of high artistic standards and originality. For Moreno Galván Tàpies had achieved his solution in the same way that Cervantes in Spain or Tolstoy in Russia did it before. This represents the selection of ordinary elements and experiences out of their personal reality and raising them to the value of collective symbols. Life is turned into testimony, and as such into collective symbol. Tàpies' paintings are not only testimonies of his own reality, but of ours as well:

El esplendor de todo eso viene del cordón umbilical que une todo eso con la vida, con el paso de la vida El esplendor de todo esto viene de que, es eso, la vida está ya transformada en testimonio, es decir, en obra de arte.²⁹

²⁹José María Moreno Galván, Introduction to Tàpies, exh. cat. (Madrid: Galería Juana Mordó, 1974), n.p. This was also the approach of Blai Bonet: "El hecho de aportar lo que cada uno sepa al informe general de la situación del hombre pertenece al realismo comunitario, revolucionario incesantemente. Pero el acto de integrar esta aportación en el movimiento de la pintura nueva nace de la aceptación de un previo depósito de arte poseedor de elementos que, para el pintor, sean un símbolo de un tiempo y le den, hecha ya pintura y pintura que ha prestado servicio, una imagen válida para su época" (Bonet, Tàpies, p. 32). Following this approach, Valeriano Bozal, who had been one of the strongest advocates in Spain for a realism in the arts and who had criticized L'Art Informel of being morally negative, revaluated positively Tàpies' art in

Also related to the biographical approach is the romantic view of the artist as a demiurge, a kind of Zarathustra, born with a superior virtue and destined not to be understood by his contemporaries; his spiritual superiority allows him to overcome the difficulties of an hostile environment.³⁰ The idea of the artist as a sort of génie maudit is so rooted in this approach that some critics have frequently associated an apparent lack of vital, social or economic worries with dull and facile art.³¹ In fact, the association of Tàpies' new artistic modes with his biographical circumstances has worked in two ways, to praise them or to criticize them as characteristic of an artist of already established reputation, one whose work has become self-imitative.

1977. Bozal valued Tàpies' work not as incentive to revolutionary action, but as testimony of a presence and a fight. Bozal reconsidered and gave a new social value to the work of Tàpies through the artist's realism, that is, through his capacity to present history. The history to which Bozal referred was a history lived and protagonized by the artist, a history written and kept in the walls and streets of the city, "real prolongation of our skeen." See Valeriano Bozal, "Introduction," in Imma Julian and Antoni Tàpies, Diálogo sobre Arte y Cultura y Sociedad (Barcelona: Icaria, 1977), pp. 7-11. See also Bozal, "El realismo plástico de los último años," Acento Cultural, no. 11 (April 1961), reprinted in ed. Vicente Aguilera Cerni, Documentos y Testimonios (Madrid: Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1975), p. 249.

³⁰An example of this view is Maria Lluïsa Borrás, "Antoni Tàpies o Una Nueva Cultura," Destino, 11 June 1971.

³¹See Chapter III.

Due to his superiority, the artist is able, according to this notion, to express himself in a natural, non-conventional language which allows him not only to communicate "naturally" his inner emotions, but also to resolve the duality of the inside-outside, cultural-natural (Descartes' res cogitans - res extensa) which has typified Western thought since the pre-Socratics. This notion comes out of the modernist belief in a man who would recover a natural primitivism, who would be free of any historical or cultural burden, and who would be able to apprehend perfect forms. According to this belief, these forms follow the laws of Nature and would be understandable by those who had regained a natural state. Contemporary philosophy and criticism have discredited this modernist conception, as laws are not "in Nature," but human constructions; and the idea of an "a priori language" is impossible.³² Blai Bonet embodied that Modernistic notion when he wrote:

Es realizar en vez de pintar No es que la pintura y la novela hayan evolucionado. Lo que pasa es nuevo definitivamente: la realidad, por fin, no muestra más que su presencia verdadera, lo que da de sí estrictamente. No es presentada ya por medio de representaciones (pintura).³³

Bonet's text reflects one of the paradoxes of what

³²See Alan Colquhoun, "Tipología y Método de Diseño," in Ch. Jencks and G. Baird, El Significado en Arquitectura, (Madrid: Blume, 1975), p. 307.

³³Bonet, Tàpies, p. 43.

Hal Foster has called "The Expressive Fallacy," which consists in a "type of representation that asserts presence --of the artist, of the real."³⁴ For Bonet, Tàpies' art can tear down the linguistic barrier existing between the self and reality. By doing that, Bonet denies Tàpies' art's status as a language, which is conventional, and therefore something cultural and not natural.³⁵

In their anxiety to mythologize that aspect of Tàpies' art associated with the physical attributes of his paintings, many writers neglected aspects of his work, especially that of the first and second periods (from 1946 to 1948; and from 1948 to 1952, respectively). Of the second, Surrealist period, for instance, Teixidor

³⁴Hal Foster, "The Expressive Fallacy," in Recodings (Post Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1985), p. 60.

³⁵In 1981, Alexandre Cirici Pellicer, who had previously analyzed Tàpies' art from an structural point of view, suggested that Tàpies' work was previous to any system of signification, and that his paintings were spontaneous configurations, product of an unconscious automatism: "Si llegamos a captar el carácter previo a las significaciones en el cual penetra su obra, habrá que interpretar esos signos como configuraciones espontáneas manifestación de esa voluntad de avance hacia la realidad primigenia Se trata, en suma, de una liberación y una aproximación al contacto directo del deseo, lejos de la sustitución de las cosas por los signos ..." (A. Cirici, "Antoni Tàpies o el arte del mundo no dicho," in Tàpies. Obra recent, exh. cat. (Barcelona: Galeria Maeght, 1981). These ideas prove mistaken when we consider that, as Lacan said, not only the unconscious is structured as language, but it is also the discourse of the other (See. H. Foster, "The Expressionist Fallacy," p. 62).

noted that it was the artist's own act of purification, his "descendimiento a los infiernos," in order to cleanse his soul, a preparative for the Informel about to appear in his work:

Con su historia más íntima se entrelaza otra historia que no es del todo la suya, aunque contara mucho en su formación. Me refiero, evidentemente, al "Dau al Set" Pero, al hablar de Tàpies, es preciso tener en cuenta que, en su caso, la alusión demasiado reiterada y cómoda al "Dau al Set", a que ha tendido tanto gran parte de la crítica, pueda distanciarnos del sentido más profundo de su personalidad Si bien es evidente que Antoni Tàpies se enriqueció durante aquellos años de amistad intelectual, de contactos y avides de toda clase, no podemos tampoco negar que se distrajo de lo que debía ser su camino más propio.³⁶

In writing about the Surrealist paintings, Cirlot did not refer to their narrative elements, but saw them instead as embodying elements which prefigured the matter paintings:

Dans certain oeuvres Tàpies recherche la texture des choses par des moyens imitatifs, telles d'irréelles visions lunaires. Ce style couvre la seconde période de la fin de 1948 au début de 1953. Mais Tàpies, tout en travaillant de cette façon, ne cesse de produire des oeuvres qui dénoncent la persistance d'un courant intérieur qui, lui, reste fidèle aux problèmes strictement plastiques mais non dépourvus toutefois de pouvoir symbolique.³⁷

In their zeal to contribute to the legend, some

³⁶Teixidor, Antoni Tàpies, p. 15.

³⁷J.E. Cirlot, "La Peinture de Tàpies," Quadrum, no.11 (1961), p. 84.

authors did not hesitate to place the early works even earlier, thereby promoting the idea of Tàpies as a "natural" artist whose works of youth already embodied the elements of his mature style. This predating allows them to consider him as the first Modern Spanish artist interested in matter. We see this mechanism at work in a piece entitled Figure of newspaper and threads (fig. 4), which Cirlot and Joan Teixidor dated to 1946. However, reading the text of the piece of newspaper and checking its date, we realize that 1946 is too early for that work since the newspaper dates from 1947.³⁸ Misinterpretations of this and other kinds abound.

³⁸Norman Narotzky, "Every Man his own Predecessor," Arts Magazine, 40 (January 1966): 73.

CHAPTER II

L'ART INFORMEL

How was the phenomenon of Tàpies possible? How is it that international dealers and art critics selected his work to exemplify the best produced in a new Spain, even in a new Europe, during the late fifties and early sixties? Why was he so widely imitated during those years? How was it that in a country where avant-garde activities were considered politically undesirable and suspicious and where the official aesthetic, if there was one, was summarized in the saying: "Good artists imitate nature, bad ones vomit it." After all, Tàpies' work was sent to the Venice Biennial under the sponsorship of the Franco Regime. In order to understand this irony, it is necessary to analyze the specific nature of Spanish Fascism in the arts --so different from that of Italian or German Fascism.

In Germany and Italy the arts were subject to laws issued by the party or by the dictator himself. By

contrast, the text written by professor Enrique Lafuente Ferrari for the XXVI Venice Biennial in 1952 illuminates a greater Spanish ambivalence.³⁹ Lafuente Ferrari's catalogue referred to the diversity of the artists chosen to represent the Spanish section, emphasizing the liberalism of a selection based, according to him, exclusively on aesthetic principles. The inclusion of five paintings by Tàpies confirmed a liberal intention, despite Fascist patronage.⁴⁰

While Hitler and Mussolini had placed great emphasis on the political nature of developed programs for the arts and architecture, Franco seems to have had none, with the exception perhaps of El Valle de los Caídos, his burial site outside Madrid. Franco was above all a military man and his cultural education was to all intents and purposes negligible.⁴¹ Franco's library was scant, comprising virtually no more than phone

³⁹XXVI Biennale di Venezia (Venice: Alfieri Editore, 1952), pp. 353-355.

⁴⁰The works by Tàpies listed in the catalogue had the following titles: Lo Scontro (ACP 85, fig. 23), Cortile Rustico, Il Monumento (ACP 80, fig. 21), Offerta, and Il Toro (ACP 76, fig. 20). Ibid.

⁴¹Juan de Avalos, Franco's official sculptor, affirmed once that "[aunque El Generalísimo] tenía un conocimiento de las cosas hermosas y grandiosas, no quiere decir que fuese un entendido de arte." Similarly, fray Justo Pérez de Urbel, abbot of El Valle de los Caídos, said of Franco that "no tenía preparación artística...pero tenía buen gusto." Quoted in Antonio Bonet Correa (Ed.), El Arte del Franquismo (Madrid: Editorial Cátedra, 1981), p. 41.

directories, official newsletters and testimonial books by official institutions.⁴² Franco's artistic taste was academically conservative and suspicious of anything revealing avant-garde inclinations. This view reflected that of the dominant classes in postwar Spain. As a political reactionary Franco astutely played the two countervailing groups in Spain against each other, the Falangistas and the Franquist bourgeoisie. In spite of the efforts of the Falangistas to create and promote a Fascist art, Franco personally favored the taste of the conservative bourgeoisie.

Following the Civil War and before the defeat of Germany by the Allies in 1945, there were attempts to create a National Spanish art in agreement with the early Fascist programs. The social and economic condition of Spain was, however, very different from that which led to the triumph of Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany and from the beginning a Fascist art for the new Estado Nacional-Sindicalista lacked a broad and solid foundation. As early as 1937, Franco diluted the Fascist party's original ideology by integrating Falange Española into Tradicionalismo.⁴³

As with certain aspects of Mussolini's Fascism or

⁴²Bonet Correa, El Arte del Franquismo, p. 42.

⁴³Jesús Ynfante, La Prodigiosa Aventura del Opus Dei (Paris: Ruedo Iberico, 1970), p. 299.

Stalin's Communism, at the beginning the art proposed by Falangistas artists had connections with avant-garde movements, but these were quickly seen as no longer necessary for a government which had already discarded any kind of revolutionary project. Thus, the important centers of artistic decision were out of the Falange's reach. The Academy of Fine Arts, for instance, was presided over not by Giménez Caballero, the fascist artist, but by the Count of Romanones, a conservative of aristocratic birth.⁴⁴

Various groups of "reformed Falangistas" stood for a more avant-garde art, one that better suited their ideology. They reacted against the Academy of Fine Arts, whose aesthetic standards best suited the art of Alvarez de Sotomayor, an academic painter in his own right. The art promoted by neo and ex-Falangistas groups was frequently that of a pseudo-avantgarde realist painting, typified by the cubist and fauvist stylizations of the work of Rafael Zabaleta and Benjamín Palencia.

On other occasions, however, former Falangistas, including Luis Vivanco, Cesáreo Rodríguez Aguilera and others, enthusiastically promoted avant-garde activities, and participated in events such as the Exposición Internacional de Arte Abstracto in Santander, celebrated

⁴⁴Francisco Calvo Serraller and Angel González, Crónica de La Pintura Española de La Postguerra: 1940-1960, exh. cat. (Madrid: Galería Multitud, 1976), p. 12.

in 1953, or the I Bienal Hispanoamericana, in 1951.

A main objective of these ex-Falangistas groups was to re-establish a modernist tradition in Spain, however dubious this modernism was. It should be noted that this was also the objective of younger, more solidly avant-garde artists as well, who irresistibly were dragged into the mêlée. During the second half of the 40s and first half of the 50s, the fight against conservatism was frequently a joint effort. Not by chance, then, the work of Tàpies was on many occasions supported in the pages of Revista, a journal founded by ex-Falangistas groups.⁴⁵

To re-establish modern art in Spain it was also necessary for Spanish artists to restore an artistic past that the regime had tried to erase. This led to the recovery of prewar avant-garde movements, notably Surrealism. In many instances, vanguard art was equated with Surrealism. This is logical considering that many of the survivors of pre-war progressive movements had

⁴⁵To a certain degree, Revista was related to the real Falangista magazine, Escorial (1941-1950), founded by Dionisio Ridruejo (See: José Carlos Mainer, Literatura y Pequeña Burguesía en España. Notas 1890-1950, Madrid: Cuadernos para el Diálogo, Edicusa, 1972, pp. 241-262). In his Memoria Personal, Tàpies recalls: "En aquella época se empezó a publicar en nuestra ciudad, financiado por Albert Puig Palau, el semanario Revista, en cierto modo imprimido por gente exfalangista o más liberal, como Dionisio Ridruejo, Tovar, Lain, etcétera, más o menos protegido por el grupo, también un poco liberal de Ruiz Giménez" (Antoni Tàpies, Memoria Personal, Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1983, p. 329).

been associated with Surrealism --especially in Spain when we recall the careers of Miró, Dalí, Ferrant, Westerthal, Foix, Gasch and others. Tàpies' art of the late forties, when he was one of the founders of Dau al Set, responded to that spirit. Through J.V. Foix, Joan Prats and Joan Brossa, Antoni Tàpies became acquainted with Surrealism and with its most significant advocates in Catalonia.⁴⁶ Of course, Tàpies was not alone. The foundation of the review Dau al Set together with Joan Brossa, Joan Ponç, Modest Cuixart and Joan Josep Tharrats was but a symptom of a broader phenomenon.⁴⁷

⁴⁶"Gracias a Brossa entré en relación con Joan Prats, con el cual establecí en seguida una amistad entrañable. De éste tendría que decir también muchas cosas. Para mí, fue el imprescindible enlace simbólico con la auténtica tradición cultural de nuestro país Tener acceso a la colección de obras de Miró que poseía Prats y más adelante visitar a Miró en su propio taller fueron acontecimientos que me han dejado un rastro perenne

... J.V. Foix encargó a cada uno de los pintores del Dau al Set una obra para su casa de Port de la Selva. Y, con objeto de que nos ambientáramos, incluso nos invitó a pasar unos días con él Nos gusto mucho aquel contacto con el escritor que había representado el movimiento surrealista Catalán con más autoridad que ninguno

... Una mañana quiso llevarnos a ver a Dalí, viejo amigo suyo." (Memoria Personal, pp. 216-17, 257). See also Antoni Tàpies, L'Art Contra l'Estètica (Barcelona: Ariel, 1974), pp. 79-85.

⁴⁷"La Vanguardia que entonces emerge, en cambio, no rechazará esos presupuestos teóricos-vitales. Se reconocerá tanto en la fascinación de las imágenes y poemas surrealistas, como en la rebeldía subyacente a esas imágenes. Las revistas se llenan de artículos sobre Artaud, ... de versiones de Eluard, de entrevistas con Breton, de reproducciones de Max Ernst o de Miró." (Juan Manuel Bonet, "De una vanguardia bajo el Franquismo", in

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Owing to its early affiliation with the Axis powers, Spain found itself diplomatically isolated. However, the international problems generated by the competition for spheres of influence between the United States and the Soviet Union afforded Spain a new strategic importance.⁴⁸ In March 1950 the Truman administration re-established diplomatic relations with Spain and on the 26th of September of 1953, Eisenhower made the decisive step of reopening the Spanish borders to Western democracies with the signing of three Hispano-American joint agreements. Finally, in 1955, the United Nations recognized Franco's government. A consequence of this process of acceptance was a broader and more fluent interchange of information, even if big gaps and limitations still remained. To all intents and purposes --at least in the arts-- the regime of total autarchy was over, despite the fact that Franco's regime would yet survive another twenty years.

The end of the autarchy generated a crisis in the regime that had its most acute moments during 1955 and 1957, most apparently in the moment of resignation of the

Arte del Franquismo, p. 214.

⁴⁸Carlos María Rama, La Crisis Española del Siglo XX (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976) p. 365.

Minister of Education Joaquín Ruiz Giménez as a result of student riots. As a consequence, there was a reorganization of the different ministries by which diehard conservatives lost their influence. They were replaced by a new cast of politicians who had no defined ideologic programs, who though European in outlook still maintained close ties to the Church, specially to the Opus Dei.⁴⁹ The "governmental style" of the new force was pragmatic; it aimed at efficiency. It resolved to ignore all the utopian goals of a "Falangista Empire," but kept the authoritarian principles of Franco's regime.⁵⁰ It added to them a modern technical inflection and viewed the adoption of any ideology as obsolete.⁵¹ Of course, in practice if not in principle its pragmatism itself was its ideology.

Franco's new government was attempting to project an image of liberalism, one that was urgently needed due

⁴⁹In a report of December 20th 1956 for the Consejo Nacional, the General Secretary of El Movimiento Nacional wrote: "De la situación de nuestra patria no puede ser responsable la Falange, ya que el número de cargos ocupados por miembros procedentes de ella es muy reducido" (C.M. Rama, La Crisis Española del Siglo XX, p. 390).

⁵⁰Their ideology has been defined by Jesús Ynfante as "Clerical-Totalitario-autoritaria." La Prodigiosa Aventura del Opus Dei, chap. 7, passim.

⁵¹The book by Gonzalo Fernández de la Mora, significantly entitled El Crepúsculo de Las Ideologías (Madrid: Rialp, 1965) became the reference text of the moment.

to the political developments outside of Spain and the failure of the policy of autarchy. Since the image that Spanish officials sought was that of a "free" country in which artists and intellectuals were at liberty to pursue their activities without impediment, the promotion of vanguard art outside of Spain became part of the expressed governmental policy. This policy led outsiders to assume that this freedom was available within Spain, though that was hardly the case.

A text by Alfredo Sánchez Bella, director of the Instituto de Cultura Hispánica, written for the catalogue of the III Bienal Hispanoamericana of 1955 is exemplary in this ambivalence, as it referred to the open-mindedness and liberality of Franco's government:

Intencionalmente quiero huir de los juicios valorativos. Ante vosotros, supremos jueces, va a mostrarse todo. A vuestro veredicto van a acogerse nuestros artistas. El nuestro claro está desde el principio; es, en primer lugar, un grito de fe en la calidad de nuestros artistas que está ya dado con el mero hecho de esta exposición. Fe en los artistas hispánicos y en su obra, fe en España, en el Gobierno de Franco que por su amplitud de miras, por la liberalidad de su patrocinio, por el aliento y ayuda con que siempre nos ha asistido ha hecho posible tanta fe en la capacidad y trascendencia de esta obra; en los artistas hispanos....⁵²

⁵²Alfredo Sánchez Bella, "Prólogo," III Bienal Hispanoamericana de Arte, exh. cat., (Barcelona: n.p., 1955), pp. 8-9. When we consider that some of the paintings submitted by Tàpies to the Biennial were rejected, then we realize the real extent of this new liberality. We must recognize, nevertheless, that there was a new, more open attitude towards the arts.

The ultimate avant-garde manifestation in the Europe of those years was L'Art Informel, which became the virtual International Style of the 50s, the common artistic denominator of most of the so-called Free-World. Thus, the new Spanish government supported Spanish Informel artists abroad. Since these artists' aesthetic achievements were similar to those found in other Western countries and, as a consequence, Franco's government promoted the idea that they worked with the same political and democratic ambiance.

The stylistic characteristics of L'Art Informel nicely suited the need of the regime. The impenitent Expressionism of this art and its Existentialist connotations were associated with an attitude of rebellion against social constriction and were cleverly used by the regime to promote a false idea of liberty in Spain. This was particularly insidious since the libertarian connotations of rebellion did not have clear referents nor did they point to specific historic situations in Spain.⁵³

The opportunism of Franco's regime did not go

⁵³Tàpies refers to the anecdote that on his visit to the III Bienal Hispanoamericana Franco answered to somebody who qualified the more progressive art in the galleries as revolutionary: "-Mientras hagan la revolución así ya está bien." (Imma Julián and Antoni Tàpies, Diálogo sobre Arte, Cultura y Sociedad, Barcelona: Icaria, 1977, p. 55).

unnoticed, and soon was denounced by the Western press.⁵⁴

Tàpies and many other artists and art critics inside

Spain were aware of this manipulative condition:

Yo lo conocí [a Luis González Robles] en 1958 con motivo de la Bienal de Venecia. Gozaba de cierto prestigio por su eficiencia. A mi me cayó mal desde el primer momento porque fue entonces cuando empecé a tener la impresión de que me utilizaban. Observé que las cajas que enviaba a Venecia iban marcadas con el rótulo "Material de propaganda de España" Caí del burro, como vulgarmente se dice, y me di cuenta de que aquella gente nos estaba utilizando de una forma insoportable. Entonces decidí que no participaría nunca más.⁵⁵

Although Franco's regime did not, by any means, support avant-garde activities inside Spain, its new government effusively promoted avant-garde art abroad.⁵⁶

This was a period when Modern Spanish art was literally discovered by many art critics and artists from

⁵⁴John Russell, for instance, wrote in 1962: "Much remained, however, to be thought out on the Spanish question. Did the triple consecration confirm the emergence of a coherent, definable 'Spanish School' or was it rather a politico-financial putsch? Were the Spanish authorities genuinely behind their artists, or were they merely out to turn the international prestige of Tapiés, Cuixart, Feito and Muñoz to their own advantage?" (John Russell, "The Spanish Succession," The Sunday Times, 14 January 1962).

⁵⁵Julián and Tàpies, Diálogo, p. 62.

⁵⁶Tàpies mentioned to me that an article about his work was published in the the International Edition of Madrid conservative newspaper ABC, but not in its national edition. Interview with the author, Barcelona, June 1986.

Europe and America.⁵⁷ In some instances, the access of several artists to international recognition was facilitated by the regime's functionaries, who at times did not hesitate to attempt to alter the votes of international juries.⁵⁸ This is not to say that the recognition of these artists was in all cases underwritten by the regime, or that these artists voluntarily put themselves in the hands of clever functionaries such as Luis González Robles. However, it is apparent that for a few years historic circumstances were parallel to one another and that very different interests coincided. In the case of Tàpies, his 1953 exhibitions in Chicago and New York coincided with the

⁵⁷Spanish officials worked, indeed, very hard to promote the new art all over the world, and many of the exhibitions that they organized went to Paris, Munich, Rome, Oslo and New York. Some of them were: 13 Peintres Espagnols Actuels (1959, Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs), Junge Spanische Maler (1959, Basel, Kunsthalle) Before Picasso and After Miró (1960, New York, Guggenheim Museum) New Spanish Painting (1960, New York, MoMA). Gabriel Ureña has called these exhibitions "embassies of Spanish art." See Gabriel Ureña, Las Vanguardias Artísticas en La Postguerra Española 1940-1959 (Madrid: Ediciones Istmo, 1982), p. 135. Cfr. "1961: Más de Ochenta Exposiciones en el Extranjero (La amplia protección del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores a nuestro arte)," La Vanguardia Española, January 20, 1962.

⁵⁸Tàpies has referred to this: "En la Bienal era una especie de 'pasteleo' que organizaban los comisarios. En realidad, eran comisarios políticos y todo lo manipulaban entre ellos: 'si tú votas a éste, yo votaré a aquél...' No se miraba demasiado la calidad de las obras de arte En realidad, era un puro arreglo diplomático, en el que debía de jugar su papel el problema de la guerra fría y la coexistencia" (Julián and Tàpies, Diálogo, p.70).

1953 treaty between Madrid and Washington, which allowed among other things an American military presence in the Iberian Peninsula in exchange for American financial assistance.

During this period of internationalization of Spanish art, the unceasing efforts of avant-garde artists and intellectuals to overcome the suffocating cultural situation of Spain cannot be minimized. The effort was intensified due to the then new accessibility of news from abroad. A stronger desire to form ties with international avant-garde groups grew among Spanish artists.⁵⁹ However, the new governmental programs were virtually the only ones available. Considering the stunted Spanish art market of those years, an opportunity to exhibit abroad, even if through official channels, certainly was the sole "realistic" choice for an avant-garde artist to make. Such was the case with Tàpies.⁶⁰

⁵⁹In this respect, Tàpies has said: "Más que la 'apertura oficial' lo que pesó fue el esfuerzo de las individualidades por salir del marasmo cultural. Esfuerzo que es evidente en los medios de la oposición. Una de las cosas que me ayudó a introducirme en Estados Unidos fue la invitación del Instituto Carnegie y la conseguí gracias a la ayuda del Josep Gudiol, que en aquel momento era una personalidad muy postergada y castigada por el régimen franquista" (Julián and Tàpies, *Diálogo*, p. 60).

⁶⁰ Tàpies himself stated in 1977: "En principio, más que una apropiación por parte del Régimen fue un aprovechamiento por parte de los artistas de algunas plataformas oficiales. Yo creo que nos aprovechamos en cierto grado. La manera de salir al extranjero era participar en las bienales, que permitían ir a Venecia o

Eventually, Tàpies and other artists expressed their opposition to participate in any governmentally sponsored event.⁶¹ In the 1964 Venice Biennial, for example, Tàpies chose not to exhibit in the Spanish Section, but agreed to show as part of the International Selection.⁶² By the same token, when non-official curators organized exhibitions in opposition to Franco's regime, Tàpies did not hesitate to collaborate with them. Thus, also in 1964, he participated in an exhibition organized by Valencian art critic Vicente Aguilera Cerni, España Libre, which was openly anti-Franco.⁶³

The process of internationalization of Spanish art embraced other artists besides Tàpies. The exhibition checklists mention time and again the names of Tharrats, Cuixart, Guinovart, among the School of Barcelona; Saura, Millares and Feito, among the School of Madrid; Chillida, Oteiza and Sempere among the artists from other artistic areas, such as the Basque and the Valencian. A

a Sao Paulo. Nosotros pensábamos que si los comisarios nos daban la oportunidad de salir al extranjero no debíamos desaprovecharla" (Ibid. p. 91).

⁶¹See John Gale, "Spanish Artist Pleads: Don't Show my Paintings," The Observer (London), 14 January 1962.

⁶²Tharrats, Vilacasas, Marcel Martí, Martín Chirino, Viola and Casas constituted the official representation of Spain. See: Carlos Antonio Areán, "Cinco artistas catalanes en la XXXII Bienal de Venecia," La Vanguardia Española, August 5, 1964, p. 16.

⁶³Lea Vergine, "España Libre," Arte Oggi 6 (September 1964):57-59.

review of the prizes obtained by Spanish artists during the second half of the fifties shows how often Tàpies was the recipient of prizes, but it also shows that he was not the only one. Luis Feito, for instance, obtained in 1955 the 3rd prize for painting in the Biennial of Alejandría, in 1960 the Bright Foundation Prize in the Venice Biennale (the same one that Tàpies had obtained a year before), and in 1959 the Lissone prize.⁶⁴

Even though Tàpies was not alone in employing an avant-garde vocabulary he was one of the first to develop a personal style. Manolo Millares and Antonio Saura were two other artists who also developed their mature style early, and who also had, as Tàpies did, international reputations. Still, though Millares, Saura and the other members of the group El Paso were about the same age as Tàpies,⁶⁵ the latter's mature art preceded theirs by three or four years.

The controversy over the Tàpies materias shown in the III Bienal Hispanoamericana was really the first avant-garde "scandal" in Spain since the Civil War. Neither Millares nor Saura, despite their connections

⁶⁴La Pintura Informalista en España a través de Los Críticos (Madrid: Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales, 1961), pp. 77-79.

⁶⁵Millares, Saura, Feito, Suárez, Viola were born in 1926, 1930, 1929, 1923 and 1919 respectively. See Laurence Toussaint, El Paso y El Arte Abstracto en España (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1963), pp. 159-172.

with the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York or the Stadler Galerie in Paris, were as appreciated by international avant-garde circles as Tàpies was.

Similarly, Tàpies' Catalan peers, such as Tharrats, never attracted major repercussions, despite the apparent similarities of their vocabulary to that of Tàpies. Tàpies' art, then, was not only acclaimed by leading dealers, scholars and critics in America and in Europe because of the situation surrounding it, but because of the self-evident quality of his work, about which consensus waxed even as support for the other Spanish artists waned.

By the second half of the 50s, many critics on both sides of the Atlantic perceived a crisis in the avant-garde. By 1956 the forms and attitudes that a decade earlier had revolutionized the art world were by now widespread in the younger generation. The discoveries of the Abstract Expressionists in the United States, and of L'Informel artists in Europe, were turned, in many instances, into "formulas". Within a decade the new art seemed unable to renew itself. French art critic Françoise Choay saw the new artistic modes of 1958 as dead-ends because the experimental character of Post-War abstract art had merely turned into an anxious search for

innovation, "au detriment parfois dela signification."⁶⁶
 Choay was not the only European art critic who maintained
 this position. She shared the idea of the exhaustion of
 the creative powers of the first generation of Informel
 artists with other critics, including Michel Tapié.
 Consequently, Michel Tapié wrote in his Prolégomènes à
une esthétique autre:

Mais cette évidence n'est pas si simple:
 après le zéro historique dada, la possibilité
 sinon le droit à l'anarchie a vite mené à
 l'académisme de l'anarchie. L'art de choc,
 de coup de poign, ne joue qu'une fois, au
 moment du choch premier.⁶⁷

In a first moment, L'Art Informel was a reaction
 against geometric abstraction, which had been important
 in Europe before and immediately following the IInd World
 War,⁶⁸ and which was based on a geometry embodying the
 ideals of a utopian pre-established universe created to

⁶⁶"La plupart des grandes expériences récentes ont
 ceci de particulier qu'elles ne comportent pas de
 développements. Wols, Pollock, Tobey, Dubuffet sont à eux-
 mêmes leur propre fin." Françoise Choay, "La XXIX
 Biennale de Venise," L'Oeil, no. 45 (September 1958), p.
 35.

⁶⁷Michel Tapié "Prolégomènes à une Esthétique
 Autre," Dau al Set (1956), special issue. Reprinted in
 Vicens (ed.), Prolégomènes à une Esthétique Autre de
Michel Tapié, p. 192.

⁶⁸See Renato Barilli, "La forza e i limite
 dell'Informale storico," in Renato Barilli and Solmi
 Franco, L'Informale in Italia, exh. cat. (Milan:
 Mazzotta, 1983), pp. 11-13. See also Sylvain Lecombe,
 "Vivre une peinture sans tradition," in Pontus Hulten et
 alt., Paris 1937 - Paris 1957 (Créations en France), exh.
 cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1981), pp. 216-220.

balance actual social disorder. Informel artists reacted against an art produced by "logical categories" as if made in a laboratory. They confronted the structured order of former geometric art with an "automatic" activity inherited from Surrealism, one which tended to break any rule of consistent structure. The expression of a personal "artistic writing" came to dominate the "constructive values" of the new art⁶⁹ to a point that by 1956 the plea for a more structured art was widespread.⁷⁰ In that situation many art critics dynamically promoted a new generation of artists to whom structure as well as meaning were important. Tàpies was regarded as predestined to have leading role in this new fusion of values:

Après dix ans des découvertes si excitantes pour les quelques-uns qui ont été capables de les suivre au jour le jour, créateurs, collectionneurs et esthéticiens, l'expérience devient une attitude saturée, un académisme inutile de l'expérience pour l'expérience, et sa non-nécessité nous fait espérer des œuvres moins extrêmes (l'habitude des extrêmes les rend inefficaces) mais plus complètes, plus ouvertes sur un panthéisme à la puissance de cet autre. Maintenant: j'ose déjà citer Sallé, Morani, Hultberg et Tàpies.⁷¹

The case of Art Informel against geometric art

⁶⁹Michel Tapié, "Antoni Tàpies et L'Oeuvre Complete," pp. 168-170.

⁷⁰See Guy Habasque, "Au-delà de L'Informel," L'Oeil, no. 59 (November 1959), pp. 62-68, 75.

⁷¹Tapié, Antonio Tàpies et L'Ouvre Complète, p. 169.

notwithstanding, during the second half of the 50s European art was still divided into two antagonistic tendencies; one included geometric artists such as Schoeffer or Vasarely, the other the existential painters such as Dubuffet. The first lent itself to optical research and emphasized a dynamic, even constructivist order; the second was tactile and imagistic. The first was deliberately detached; the second emphasized automatic expression of the artist's inner feelings. Tàpies' work inevitably was taken to be an outstanding synthesis of both tendencies; and, therefore, he began to be perceived as having reconciled what was perhaps an antagonistic dichotomy from the outset. While his works relied heavily on material effect, these were at the same time characterized by a strong and austere structure, specially evident in his compositions based on cross and square configurations. It is not by chance, that Guy Habasque called Tàpies the Malevitch of L'Informel.⁷² Tàpies' synthesis was already evident in paintings as early as 1952, in which complementary colors were used to produce some optical effects (i.e.: Composition of

⁷²"Il y a chez lui aussi du Malévitch informel, mais la structuration spatiale qu'il nous propose se révèle à la réflexion fort différent de celle des constructeurs (...) Car Tàpies est tout le contraire d'un automatiste et c'est justement en raison de la nécessité interne qui caractérise ses oeuvres que l'on peut espérer de lui un renouvellement de l'abstraction non constructive." Guy Habasque, "Confrontation Internationale," L'Oeil, no. 57, (September 1959), p. 24.

complementary colors, 1952, ACP 101, fig. 26; Composition of blues and reds, 1952, ACP 100, fig. 25; Linies i formes, 1952, ACP 109, fig. 27). By the second half of the 50s this synthesis was inescapable. Michel Tapié described Tàpies' work from 1954 and 1955 as "structural textures," that is, as organically built upon a personal expression.⁷³

Spanish art critics shared this opinion with their European counterparts. Thus, following his dismissal of collectors, artists and critics who had unanimously adopted Tàpies as symptomatic of the period, Carlos Antonio Areán located the success of Tàpies' work precisely within its inherently synthetizing character. He situated Tàpies' paintings mid-way between L'Art Informel and Abstract Geometric Art; both traditions had, according to Areán, reached dead ends:

La aportación inicial de Tàpies ... consiste en lograr la síntesis entre la pintura abstracta y la de la forma fluctuante, impropriamente denominada informal ... ambos tipos de pintura se hallaban en un callejón sin salida.⁷⁴

In her review of the 29th Venice Biennial,

⁷³Michel Tapié, Expressions et Structures, exh. cat. (Paris: Galerie Stadler, 1956). In the same line, Pierre Restany was one of the first to refer to a Neoplasticist component in Tàpies' work (P. Restany, "Tàpies," Cimaise, October-November 1958, p.2).

⁷⁴Carlos Antonio Areán, La Escuela Pictórica Barcelonesa (Madrid: Publicaciones Españolas; 1961), p. 110.

Françoise Choay used the concept of pseudomorphosis to explain the practice of mimetically appropriating forms taken from different historical contexts purely for their condition of seeming up-to-date.⁷⁵ Because of this international pseudomorphosis art had become alienated, according to Choay, and had been transformed into a commodity.⁷⁶

Many other European critics and artists of the period also found that the lack of any specific national character in avant-garde art was another symptom of the malady of Modern Art. By the mid-50s, the general search for an international language with national roots began to be felt in European art. Here too, Tàpies' work fulfilled the hopes of a generation. Consequently, during the late 50s and early 60s, an international public came to see the works of Tàpies as typically Spanish. The "empty" surfaces of matter, for example, recall walls, not just the walls of peasant houses, but the walls of a post-war Spain. These "walls" connoted for foreign art critics concepts of solitude and mysticism, an imagery of desert-like regions where technology was yet to arrive. These "walls" fitted nicely the romantic image they held of Spain. Even such

⁷⁵Francoise Choay, "La XXIXe Biennale de Venise," L'Oeil, no. 45 (September 1958), p. 28-35.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 34.

an intuitive collector of Tàpies' work as Count Panza di Biumo⁷⁷ reflected this general view and, in 1957, he wrote:

Tra i giovani spagnoli prediligo Tapiès,
artista di forte temperamento drammatico. Il
suo mondo è tragico e triste, arido e nudo
come le terre desolate del suo paese,
solitarie e piene di una mistica attesa.⁷⁸

In his review of Tàpies' exhibit at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, Paul Grinke referred to the artist's preoccupation with decay, a conception he found specifically Spanish. Similarly, he associated some of Tàpies' motifs, such as the sackcloth and ashes, with the Spanish Inquisition; and he related "the completed canvas, with its scuff marks, grooves and dark sand ... [to] the arena of an especially bloodthirsty bull

⁷⁷Some paintings by Tàpies in his collections, dated from 1955 to 1959 were exhibited at The Museum of Contemporary Art of Los Angeles. The Museum of Contemporary Art: The Panza Collection (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1985).

⁷⁸G. Panza di Biumo, "La Pagina del Collezionista," i 4 Soli 4 (November-December 1957): 13. Today Count Panza di Biumo refers to Tàpies as "a Spanish artist related to the Spanish tradition and psychological situation of El Greco, but also closely related to what happened in Europe after the second World War." Kerry Brougher, "Interview with Dr. Giuseppe Panza di Biumo," (The Museum of Contemporary Art). Similarly, in a recent interview, Panza di Biumo also said: "Tàpies si distingue degli altri per un legame a degli aspetti specifici della sua terra d'origine, la Spagna." Il Giornale dell'Arte, "Panza di Biumo: Com'era il Tàpies che piaceva a me", June 1985, p. 10.

fight."⁷⁹

Other critics saw in Tàpies' paintings references to old Spanish masters --to whom Tàpies has undoubtedly referred in different periods of his career, especially to Ribera and Zurbarán.⁸⁰ Francis Hoyland, in a review for the small exhibition of Tàpies' work at I.C.A., also wrote that in his restraint, in his use of light, in his knowledge of the painter's materials Tàpies evoked the tradition of Spanish painting as embodied in Goya and Velázquez:

The exhibition of the Spanish painter Antoni Tàpies at the ICA is as characteristically Spanish as the bed covers are American, but it is hard to say why Perhaps the light of Spain and the dignity and restraint of the

⁷⁹Paul Grinke, "Writing in The Sand", Financial Times, 25 June 1965, p. 24.

⁸⁰The colors and light of works such as The legerdemain of Wotan (1950, ACP 63, fig. 16), The barbershop of the damned and the chosen (1950 ACP 71, fig. 18), refer to the tenebrismo of Ribera or Ribalta. Similarly, in recent years, Tàpies has made variations on Zurbarán's works (First Zurbarán variation, 1981, PER 22; Third Zurbarán variation, 1981, PER 24). Recalling his visit to El Prado in 1949, Tàpies wrote: "También algunas obras de Zurbarán me han impresionado en ese mismo sentido. Su amoroso tratamiento, con una luz 'metafísica,' de los aspectos sencillos, de la naturaleza muerta con piezas de cerámica, es un canto a aquello que se considera pobre; como una elevación a lo cósmico de lo que es pequeño y cotidiano, actitud que siempre me ha entusiasmado Algunas obras de Ribalta, que también se han de considerar como unas de mis raíces catalanas, me han seguido durante años. La conquista de la visión iluminada a través de la renuncia y del ascetismo." (Memoria Personal, pp. 250-251). The references to the old masters included also non-Spanish works such as Leonardo da Vinci's Saint John the Baptist (Souvenir, 1982), fig. 76.

Spanish character have given his painting their specific "local" quality But despite this difference of media it was of Velázquez that Tàpies reminded me. Both artists create a tranquil mood out of clear, telling proportions and a decent respect for their materials.⁸¹

Although this point of view is commonplace and superficial, it is not entirely false. This localist reading of Tàpies' work has continued to the present. Recently, other aspects of Tàpies' painting have been associated with the Spanish tradition. Thus, Tàpies' use of worn-out and humble objects, his emphasis on matter, and his compositions (on which he confers exquisiteness and beauty) all have been considered as "a personalized form of abstraction rooted in the classic Spanish art tradition (universal humanitarianism and spiritual values à la Velázquez and Goya)...."⁸²

This "humanitarianism" is embodied, according to this interpretation, in "a realism whose strength is drawn from the country and its people."⁸³ Tàpies' use of humble objects is seen as related to Velázquez's paintings of dwarfs or to Picasso's Guernica or to Goya's

⁸¹Francis Hoyland, "Tranquil Sand," The Listener, 17 June 1965, p. 904.

⁸²All Morch, "Common Symbols Provoke Curiosity," San Francisco Examiner, 25 March 1987, sec. B, p. 17.

⁸³David Winter, "Powerful Works Showing Hope and Despair from Spain's Tàpies," The Peninsula Times Tribune, 17 October 1981, sec.C, p. 4.

graphic protest of the innocent victims of the war.⁸⁴

In their desire to discover Spanish elements, foreign critics soon began to relate Tàpies' work to the mysticism of Santa Teresa and San Juan de la Cruz. This element was frequently over-emphasized. By 1964, Joan Teixidor pointed to the dangers of this type of association.⁸⁵ True, there is an element of mysticism in Tàpies' work. If so, then, the origin of this mysticism is not only from Castilian baroque mystics, but from Catalan medieval mystics, including Ramón Llull. Granting Tàpies' preeminently Catalan concerns, the latter came more naturally to the painter. Catalan mysticism differs from the Castilian. In the former, alchemy and mystical experience function organically together; the relationship between matter and spirit was symbiotic. In the latter, the mystical experience was achieved by the abnegation of everything material.

In a moment when international art critics encouraged a search for national peculiarities, the exhibitions officially promoted by Franco's government emphasized the "Spanishness" of Spanish artists; those elements traditionally considered typically Spanish were

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵ "... y, siempre, las peligrosas alusiones a nuestra mística a que han sido tan aficionados ciertos críticos extranjeros." Joan Teixidor, "La Etapa Informalista," Suma y Sigue, no. 5-6 (October-March 1964), p. 15.

constantly emphasized. Thus, their paintings of this period were considered austere and spontaneously simple; and their artistic position was regarded as ethical rather than aesthetic. González Robles, the ubiquitous curator of Franquismo and after, significantly wrote in the exhibition catalogue of the 1958 Venice Biennial:

...la loro singulare problematica, di evidente discendenza iberica in tutti, e quindi fondata su una concezione del mondo strettamente etica.
...esiste una costante di rigore, di austerità, di spontanea semplicità in tutta la grande arte spagnola.⁸⁶

The tendency to relate stylistic features to national peculiarities was expressed by both the right and the left. In contrast to González Robles, José María Moreno Galván, whose conception of historical analysis was progressive, and whose political position was one of opposition to the regime, also dwelt on these qualities. When he analyzed the cultural reality of the Catalan nation, Moreno Galván saw its art as intrinsic to Surrealism. The reasons for this specificity of Catalan art were, according to him, social, as in fact Surrealism was a product of the bourgeoisie's criticism of its own rational ideals;⁸⁷ and Barcelona was then the only city

⁸⁶Luis González Robles, [Introduction to the Spanish section]. XXIX Biennale Internationale d'Arte (Venice, 1958), pp. 331-332.

⁸⁷José María Moreno Galván, "El Surrealismo en Cataluña," Suma y Sigue, no. 5-6 (October-March 1964), pp. 7-10.

in Spain which had developed a bourgeoisie and bourgeois culture. We may even go so far as to say that the same city of Barcelona was the product of the Catalan bourgeoisie. This Catalan Surrealism spanned from Gaudí's Modernisme, which constituted the origins of Modern Barcelona, to Dalí and Miró, and finally to Dau al Set. In this process, Moreno Galván reserved for Tàpies the role of continued embodiment of Catalan Surrealism, bringing it to a new resolution. Tàpies was then the only artist from the Dau al Set group who developed Catalan Surrealism to its ultimate achievements, criticizing not only logical thinking but the mechanisms of logical or rational form as well.⁸⁸

Curators, entrepreneurs and art critics associated with Franco's regime hailed the new Spanish artists, in general, and Tàpies, in particular, as symbols of the new Spain because the new art so nicely fitted government needs. Ironically, the same sector of the art world in the opposition also hailed the new art, and that of Tàpies especially, as the symptom of a new vitality among Spanish artists and intellectuals, a vitality that ultimately was supposed to be a tool in destabilizing

⁸⁸"Y su presencia [that of Tàpies], por cierto, sería decisiva para una dimensión posterior de la actitud "surrealista", que fue la actitud disgregadora de la forma ... esa crítica de la forma razonable que se inicia con Tàpies es, en el fondo, una última consecuencia de su actitud 'surrealista'; que el aformalismo de base Tàpies es 'surrealismo' transcendido" (Ibid., p. 10).

Franco's oligarchy. Thus, González Robles saw in Tàpies' works the characteristics of la raza, an ethical attitude towards life and a mystic vision of the world; of the Spanish land, aridity, austerity, Antonio Machado's estepa castellana; and of the Spanish artistic tradition embodied in what he thought constituted its main elements: realism, earth-like textures and dark colors and low tonalities. Simultaneously, Moreno Galván saw in Tàpies, the ultimate expression of Surrealism, its transcendence. Surrealism, to Moreno Galván, was the artistic movement that materialized not only modernity and progress, but also actualized political and social revolution. Tàpies' art had entered the scene at the perfect moment.

CHAPTER III

L'INFORMEL IN CRISIS

Coincident with the changes in the cultural policy of the Spanish government during the second half of the fifties, Spanish art seemed to have regained the strength and vitality of its past, an impression strengthened by the fact that Spain's isolation was diminishing. In the late fifties and early sixties Spain won a place among international art centers, and the standards of the Spanish artists were in many instances similar to artists from other Western countries. Many art critics from abroad noted this good moment.⁸⁹ This cultural and artistic "rebirth" happened at a moment when a young generation of artists embraced L'Art Informel and

⁸⁹See, for instance, Frank O'Hara, New Spanish Painting and Sculpture, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1960), pp. 7-10.

dynamically voiced its principles.⁹⁰ Consequently, L'Informel was regarded as the first Spanish avant-garde, because avant-garde before the Civil War was thought to have been exclusively the province of Paris.⁹¹ L'Art Informel became, then, the mandarin taste of the period.

By the late fifties and early sixties, Spanish avant-garde artists realized that their art had been, and continued to be, manipulated by Franco's government. Then too, they began to be aware of the new political situation brought by the regime's reorganization and by the country's new economic developments. As we have seen, the end of autarchy and the promulgation of plans for the economic stabilization and expansion generated the

⁹⁰In their "Última Comunicación" the El Paso artists proclaimed: "El hecho de que una gran parte de los componentes del grupo sean hoy encuadrados en las corrientes informalistas no presupone dato de significación en el sentido de una escuela, sino más bien a que tales modos de expresión constituyen para todos los componentes la forma acorde con una auténtica necesidad, arraigada profundamente en nuestro país" Quoted in Laurence Toussaint, El Paso y El Arte Abstracto en España (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1983), p. 257.

⁹¹"La evolución de la pintura española, en los últimos años ha experimentado cierta mutación. Mientras en la primera mitad del presente siglo, su cauce proseguía dentro de las fórmulas tradicionales, y los grandes creadores de vanguardia, como Picasso, Gris, Miró tenían que trabajar en la escuela de París, justamente la modalidad más audaz del arte del siglo XX, el informalismo, ha logrado extenderse en España y encontrar una serie de adeptos cuyas cualidades justifican su posición" (Juan Eduardo Cirlot, "Tápies y La Escuela Española Actual," Destino, October 10, 1959).

formation of a new bourgeoisie. In turn this group favored a liberal economy and tried to move Spain towards the Western capitalist system although the totalitarian machinery of Franco's regime was kept intact. The objective was not to replace it, but to make it compatible with a capitalist economy.

In Spain, during the forties and fifties the very practice of modern art had been considered revolutionary for the objective of avant-garde groups then had been the re-establishment of modern artistic traditions. In the sixties, as those modernist traditions were re-established, granting the contradictions of a regime which seemed to foment artistic liberties while restricting political freedom, new avant-garde groups opted for a more politically oriented art. As the new governmental forces tried to render avant-garde art compatible with a totalitarian regime, the new artistic groups tried to make totalitarianism and avant-garde incompatible, precisely by concentrating on the arts' political dimension.⁹²

Within a few years, L'Art Informel had achieved official status. By the mid-sixties yesterday's Informel heroes were regarded as carriers of official artistic

⁹²See Tomás Llorens, "La Represa de L'Avantguarda com a Dissentiment," in Tomás Llorens, Art i Modernitat als Països Catalans, exh. cat., (Barlin: Staatliche Kunsthalle, 1978), pp. 237-240.

values and their role as models became targets to attack. In addition, L'Art Informel's subjectivity and romanticism were considered politically inappropriate and its goals too vague. Many artists and art critics began supporting the creation of a more "objective" art, which they hoped would have aesthetic as well as social and political repercussions in society, and which they thought would not be so easily manipulated.⁹³

One such language was based on constructivism and geometric abstraction; the other derived from iconic conventions and mass-media grammar. They were known, respectively, as Arte Normativo and Realismo Crítico.

Due in part to his preeminence during the period of L'Art Informel, Tàpies was associated with Informel artists and his work interpreted on many occasions according to the aesthetic principles of that period's style. In consequence, when Arte Normativo and Realismo Crítico were gaining in prestige among Spanish avant-garde artists, Tàpies' work did not entirely suit the new artistic taste. Significantly, the very arguments posed a few years earlier by Michel Tapié to characterize Tàpies as one of the leading artists were now used to dismiss Tàpies' manner as irrelevant.

⁹³Especially interesting is José María Moreno Galván, Autocrítica del Arte (Madrid; 1955), p. 152. Quoted in Francisco Calvo Serraller, España: Medio Siglo de Arte de Vanguardia (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1985), p. 72.

Mercedes Molleda, in a 1964 article entitled "Últimas tendencias de la pintura catalana contemporánea," publicly stated the case.⁹⁴ She characterized Tàpies's work as "aformal," and as such, she argued it lacked artistic relevance when compared to the new art's concern with iconic representation and constructed form. Molleda lamented the generational "fatigue" caused by an art which was based on subjectivity and expression, and which depended so heavily on technical innovations of "matter." The controversy raged for a good part of the sixties, going beyond the limits of specialized journals and into the pages of the daily press and popular magazines where the dissemination of the conflict trivialized the arguments.⁹⁵

This critical attitude had a particular moment of intensity in the mid-sixties, especially during the winter of 1964 and 1965, when Tàpies had a one-man show in Sala Gaspar and two important monographic works about

⁹⁴Mercedes Molleda, "Últimas Tendencias de La Pintura Catalana Contemporánea," Suma y Sigue, 5-6 (October-March 1964) : 20-21.

⁹⁵Even a humor magazine such as La Codorniz so inadequate for any in-depth discussion of any artistic matter took part in the public argument. See Villagómez, "Plásticos y Plastas," La Codorniz 6 March 1966.

him were published.⁹⁶ On previous occasions, the criticism had mainly come from conservative factions intrinsically opposed to any avant-garde manifestation, but now it grew to include a broad spectrum of artists and art critics associated with the defense of Modernity.⁹⁷ They regarded Tàpies' work as repetitious, and claimed that his style had become academic. If during the decade of the fifties Tàpies' art was considered surprising and challenging, during the sixties a number of art critics considered it as déjà vu, something incapable of surprising anymore. That which was once seen as aggression and nihilism was now felt as decorous and ornamental. The title of an article by Norman Narotzky, an American-born painter working in Barcelona, summarizes the debate: "Spain: a disenchantment with 'Materia'".⁹⁸

⁹⁶Blai Bonet, Tàpies (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1964).
Joan Teixidor, Antoni Tàpies. Fustes, Papers, Cartons i Collages (Barcelona: Sala Gaspar, 1965).

⁹⁷In 1960 and 1961, the validity of Tàpies' work as abstraction had been already called into question by most Spanish newspapers. In that occasion, however, the criticism came from conservative factions. Though the criticism was set in motion by Tàpies' 1960 exhibition in Sala Gaspar it was exacerbated by the fact that a good number of the reviews focused on the purchase of three of his works by an official institution, the City Hall of Barcelona. See, for instance, Lluís Marsillach, "Carta a Joaquín Marsillach," Hoja del Lunes (Barcelona), 10 April 1961.

⁹⁸Arts Magazine, 39 (September - October 1965): 48-52. Similar arguments have been used in following years by other critics. See, for instance, E. Casanellas, "Arte

The myopia of these critics soon became obvious. By the mid-sixties, Tàpies had begun making new work characterized by an open "re-introduction" of the human figure and a more explicit representation. Then too, his work was criticized by other sectors of the art world less prone to stylistic change. They perceived in Tàpies' new work the danger of deviating from the artistic principles which constituted, according to them, the greatness of his art. To a certain degree, Tàpies became prisoner of his own style, one embodied in the so-called materias, and many art critics evaluated Tàpies' new production according to standards derived from their idea of what a Tàpies should be. This has been a constant feature of the Tàpies' literature. Almost any new mode in his development has been followed by a series of negative critiques, or, at the very least, controversies.

Tàpies 1966 show at Galería Biosca is exemplary. At the time he presented new work which was both more gestural and more representational than previously. Consequently, Juan Antonio Gaya Nuño wrote about the exhibition:

Hasta los homeros de la pintura dormitan de vez en cuando y, si no dormitan, se repiten. No podría quedar Antonio Tàpies al margen de esa constante, y no ha quedado, al menos en

Catalán en El Extranjero," ABC (Madrid), 14 December 1967.

la dicha exposición.⁹⁹

Similarly, a former advocate of Tàpies, Juan Eduardo Cirlot, referred in a 1967 article, to the danger of an excessive aesthetization of Tàpies' work. He re-affirmed not the need of change, but quite of the opposite, the importance of the material conditions of Tàpies' paintings over the "iconographic or stylistic ones."¹⁰⁰

Spanish avant-garde's change of objectives and methods during the sixties was related to the political situation of Spain as well as to a broad international changes. The sixties and seventies were decades of turmoil and protest in Europe and America. The United States and France especially lived this moment which peaked in the students revolt of May 1968. If only tangentially, Spanish society participated in this general movement.¹⁰¹

The situation was worsened as the artistic center

⁹⁹Juan Antonio Gaya Nuño, "Tàpies, al Cabo de Los Años," Blanco y Negro (Madrid), 12 March 1966, p. 33. From Barcelona, José Castro Arines picked the polemic up in "La Pintura de Tàpies," Diario de Barcelona, 12 February 1966, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰Juan Eduardo Cirlot, "El Problema de Tàpies," La Vanguardia Española, 6 May 1967, p. 52. Cirlot acknowledged not to be at that point following carefully Tàpies' career. In 1969, however, Cirlot's interest on Tàpies' work seemed to have acquired renewed vigor (J.E. Cirlot, "Explicación de la Pinturas de Tàpies," La Vanguardia, 27 December 1969, p. 15).

¹⁰¹Calvo Serraller, España. Medio Siglo de Arte de Vanguardia, pp.65-66.

had definitively gravitated from Paris to New York, where the avant-garde dominated the art market. In the United States the combination of nationalistic sentiment with an aggressive international presence propitiated a widespread search for a nationalist, specifically American art, one rooted in Modernist traditions but which, at the same time, would supersede them. The supremacy of an art based on non-European values was soon voiced by the two leading art critics, Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg.¹⁰² An art of action, an art in which "what was going on in the canvas was not a picture, but an event,"¹⁰³ was supported by Rosenberg. For him the difference between American and European painters was that the latter were still attached to the notion of style, to the finished and to the idea of the object, while the former were not. For Rosenberg, American painters addressed the issues of unStyle, the incomplete

¹⁰²"One has the impression --but only the impression-- that the immediate future of Western art, if it is to have any immediate future depends on what is done in this country. As dark as the situation still is for us, American painting in its most advanced aspects -- that is, American abstract painting-- has in the last several years shown here and there a capacity for fresh content that does not seem to be matched either in France or Great Britain." Clement Greenberg, "The Situation at The Moment," Partisan Review 5 (January 1948) : 82. Quoted in Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole The Idea of Modern Art, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 169.

¹⁰³Harold Rosenberg, The Tradition of The New (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), p. 25.

and action.¹⁰⁴ In a parallel Greenberg saw "American-type painters" as challenging a European tradition in which painting had too many non-pictorial elements. Greenberg's "American-type painters" prompted a reductionist art committed to the idea of purity. In painting, the distinctive element became flatness, which liberated it from sculptural, narrative or figurative elements.¹⁰⁵

American values differed from those considered specifically European. The ambiguity of Tàpies' iconography as well as the tactile qualities of his works related as much to sculptural relief, collage or assemblage as to painting. This synthesis went against prevailing ideas and was considered regressive by certain critics.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the natural elegance of Tàpies' works, the beautification of "le maladroit," considered characteristic of that European tradition of the "finished" and of the perfected style, did not suit the

¹⁰⁴Ibid. pp.21, 25.

¹⁰⁵See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," Reprinted in The New Art, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P.Dutton and Co., 1973), pp. 66-77.

¹⁰⁶Paul Grinke ("Writing in The Sand," The Financial Times, London, 25 June 1965, p. 24.) did not have any doubts in affirming the superior value of Olitski's art, one of Greenberg's favorite artists, over that of Tàpies.

American taste.¹⁰⁷

This dismissal affected a whole generation of European artists, including Alberto Burri and Karel Appel as well as Tàpies, who thereafter did not receive much critical discussion in the United States.¹⁰⁸ From that generation of European artists only Jean Dubuffet kept a solid and steady career in America.¹⁰⁹

The change of taste in the sixties reached not only those critics who studied Tàpies' art, but Tàpies himself. Although his output has always been coherent and personal, Tàpies has also proved to be sensitive to new movements, and his work has been affected by the fluctuations in the artistic taste of each period.

¹⁰⁷"In my opinion what defeated them was their skill. They were such extreme European professionals ... they did not see the American trees." H. Rosenberg, The Tradition of the New, p. 14.

¹⁰⁸See Hilton Kramer, "Catching up with The Career of Antoni Tàpies," Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 30 April 1978, sec. G, p.6. See also Thomas Albright, "Tàpies' Testament to Human Presence," San Francisco Chronicle, 8 October 1981, p. 64.

¹⁰⁹See William Rubin and Marcelin Pleynet, Paris-New York, Situation de L'Art (Paris: Editions du Chêne, 1978), p.67.

Tàpies had his moment during the late fifties and early sixties, during the heydays of the second generation of Abstract Expressionist artists and the moment of the coming to popularity of artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jaspers Johns. At the time, Tàpies had a one-man show at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and participated in an exhibition organized by Frank O'Hara at The Museum of Modern Art. The repercussion of his work was not comparable to the effect made by his American counterparts.

Similarities with works by contemporaneous artists are numerous and although these references do not necessarily imply a conscious appropriation of motifs or forms, not to mention the accepting of strange aesthetic principles, they do reveal an inclusive attitude on Tàpies' part towards new images and modes.

Thus, a recurrent motif in Tàpies' paintings such as the bathtub (Bath-tub 1975, Penrose no. 184, fig. 58; Silhouette of bathtub 1982, PER. no. 51) has its counterpart in Joseph Beuys' Bathtub of 1960 (fig. 118). Other parallels between Tàpies and Beuys are found in the pile of newspapers (Tàpies' Pila de diaris 1970, Gimferrer. no. 292; Beuys' Battery flat-high 1963, fig. 119) or the hanging trousers (Tàpies' Pantalones sobre bastidor 1971, Gimferrer. no. 325, fig. 67; and Beuys' Aquarius 1965, fig. 120). Similarly, the effect produced by Tàpies' paintings such as Efecte de cos en relleu, 1979 (fig. 79) or Nu de vernis 1980 (fig. 78) or Nude 1982 (PER. no. 37) remind one of Yves Klein's Anthropometries of the early sixties.

If this is true, Tàpies' artistic development may be characterized as a linguistic continuity accentuated in stages by historic discontinuities, including L'Informel, Pop Art and others.¹¹⁰ Thus, in the sixties

¹¹⁰Maurizio Calvesi ("Viaggio nella Città Morta," L'Espresso/colore, 3 December 1967). Somehow different is the thesis of Cirici ("Antoni Tàpies o l'art del mon

his paintings became openly representational; they incorporated elements from realist languages of the period as well as motifs, such as hats, arms, stairs, closets, chairs and others.

Since Tàpies' new work became more frankly representational, his paintings from previous periods took a different meaning because art critics perceived earlier work not as an end in itself, but as part of a process leading to Tàpies most recent developments. Tàpies' new mode, the generational change of taste of the sixties and the distance brought by the passage of time, all contributed to the changed readings of Tàpies' former work. It also led to a more defined formulations of the principles of L'Art Informel and to a more to discriminating application of these principles, since everything had previously been considered to be part of the same phenomenon. Consequently, Tàpies' so-called Informel period was called into question. The polemic was taken up by leading scholars and art critics; some, like Giulio Carlo Argan and Nello Ponente, denied that Tàpies was an Informel artist; others like Juan Eduardo Cirlot

no dit," in Tàpies. Obra recent, exh. cat., Galerie Maeght, Barcelona, 1981) who refers to the need of an "extra-historical" approach to Tàpies' work since, according to him, this artist follows only his own path and keeps indifferent to the consecutive artistisc trends, including Pop, Op, Minimal and Conceptual Art.

and Giuseppe Gatt, argued that he was.¹¹¹

In his preface to Gatt's book, Argan insisted that the only relation between Tàpies and L'Art Informel was occasional.¹¹² Similarly, in his contribution, Ponente wrote that Tàpies was not and never had been an Informel artist, since for him L'Informel had served only to provide a repertoire of forms in the way that Surrealism had served him before: "un alfabetario, comunque, di cui servirsi con la più ampia libertà."¹¹³ To both writers Tàpies' art is an art of the object, not so much in the sense of its representation, but in the sense of its reification.

According to them, Tàpies' painting was neither Informel nor realist since referentiality was perceived as reified in the painting's physical materials rather than in its illusionistic condition.¹¹⁴ For Ponente, the diffusion of a more "objective" and figurative art among avant-garde groups during the late fifties and early sixties, and the consequent crisis in which L'Art Informel found itself led many Informel artists to New

¹¹¹Giuseppe Gatt, Antoni Tàpies (Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1967). Cfr. Germano Beringheli, "Riconsiderazione dell'Arte Informale," Il Lavoro, 23 January 1968.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, p.8.

Figuration. However, for Ponente, Tàpies had not moved in such a direction because he did not suffer such crisis, his art had been "objective" from the outset.¹¹⁵

In light of Tàpies new approach to reality, during the sixties some critics associated Tàpies' paintings with the work of the French Nouveaux Réalistes, such as Yves Klein; and to that of the American Neo-Dadaists, namely Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. This latter association was generated by Tàpies' use of everyday materials, then seen in terms of Dada revival.¹¹⁶

For other critics, Tàpies' new art confirmed the Tachiste, Informel nature of his work, despite all similarities with Nouveaux Réalistes and Neo-Dadaists. Before the introduction of a more explicit representational mode, Tàpies' works were perceived as "peinture-empreintes," that is, as indices of a past

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 71. Curiously, Gatt in his role as editor and main author of the book unquestionably associated Tàpies with L'Informel: "... ma anche dal fatto che, filologicamente, il suo linguaggio offre scarsi spunti di innesto con i filoni della tradizione artistica europea, né si pone come logica continuazione di alcuno di essi ... il suo porre l'arte come gesto immediato di una pur oscura ed imprecisa presa di coscienza del mondo che permettono di ascrivere Tàpies alle ragioni più intime dell'Informale storico e farne un caposcuola assieme a Fautrier, Wols, Pollock, Gorky, Hartung, Dubuffet" (Ibid., p. 15).

¹¹⁶"influence de Dada, plus marquée chez Tàpies que chez aucun autre peintre européen de sa génération. Catherine Millet, "Tàpies, l'Art Pauvre en Question," Les Lettres Françaises, 29 October 1969. See also François Pluchart, Tàpies. Oeuvres Récentes, exh. cat. (Cannes: Galerie Jacques Verrière, 1966).

presence. Now, however, those same works were considered to belong to a more traditional trend related to Dubuffet's texturologies rather than to Yves Klein's more conceptually oriented Anthropometries.¹¹⁷ With these series of works Klein, like Tapiès, was trying to fix an instant of reality on the canvas, a unique moment. But in the duality "peinture-empreinte" it was the "empreinte" that mattered to Klein, not the "peinture" as in the case of Tapiès:

Tapiès passe brusquement d'une peinture-empreinte à une peinture représentative beaucoup plus classique. Est-ce un progrès? Tout ce beau matériel si dense, si lourd d'histoire humaine, le voici que sert à fabriquer des tableaux expressionnistes, des Dubuffet de la bonne époque -celle des 'corpes de dames' et de texturologies. Tapiès revient au point de départ ... il remet quelque peu en question sa démarche précédent: ce que nous avons pris pour des empreintes des murs et de sols, ce n'était peut-être que des compositions abstraites, des oeuvres tachistes, bref quelque chose qui a beaucoup servi.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷For a general discussion of Klein's Anthropometries see Pierre Restany, Yves Klein trans. John Shepley (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1982), pp.87-129.

¹¹⁸Christiane Duparc, "Le Dos au Mur," Le Nouvel Observateur (Paris), 29 November - 5 December 1967. Similarly, Catherine Millet said in 1969: "La plupart des pièces [those by L'Arte Pauvre artists] tiennent compte de la notion du temps, soit que leur précarité soit évidente, soit qu'elles soient elles-mêmes en mouvement [...] Le langage de Tapiès est au contraire un langage figé. Si le tas de sable d'un Mattiacci disparaît au term de l'exposition. Tapiès, lui, éternise la paille et le chiffon au moyen de laques et de colle. Il y a chez lui une volonté de préservation, le désir de fixer le temps, c'est-à-dire d'être responsable d'une valeur

For Klein it was the process that was important, and the resulting work served primarily as the testimony of an action. However, the new representational painting of the mid-sixties by Tàpies seemed to a certain sector of critics to follow traditional criteria of aesthetic composition and "referentiality." Since early materias had led to Tàpies' new art, the materias could not be understood as indices of an action but rather as formal compositions, characterized by the values of traditional Modernist abstraction.

Many writers continued to perceive Tàpies as an Informel artist, but one who had reacted against L'Art Informel's own excess of expressionism, gesture and subjectivity, and who had taken a natural evolution of the mode. This had already been implied in Michel Tapié's plea for "un art autre," which he considered to be embodied in Tàpies' work and which in its evolution naturally resolved, according to Tapié, the crisis of Abstract art.¹¹⁹

impérissable" (Catherine Millet, "Tàpies, l'Art Pauvre...").

¹¹⁹Taking up Tapié's ideas, Blai Bonet stated in 1964 that L'Informel of Tàpies had nothing to do with that of Mathieu or Onishi, since Tàpies gave a new image of the human being and was not interested in that Informel Impressionism which characterized Mathieu and Onishi: "Lo demás es lo otro, informalismo, sobre el que este catalán está solo, como un islote, agarrado a la realidad, que no lo parece de tan pavorosamente cercana como la muestra." (Bonet, Tàpies, p.33).

CHAPTER IV

THE DRIFT TOWARDS THE REAL:

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSION OF ART

For many Informel and Abstract Expressionist artists, the evolution away from the excesses of L'Informel signified the approach of "the real." The issue of "the real" was not new in the sixties, as it had already been addressed on both sides of the Atlantic during the heyday of Abstract Expressionism. The drift towards "the real" was as much a reaction against abstract art, made explicit when Robert Rauschenberg erased a drawing by de Kooning, as it was a natural evolution from within its own principles. Juan Eduardo Cirlot addressed the problem in a short statement of 1961:

Surge una investigación recentísima de la forma y también su reactiva, dentro del panorama informal, el acento realista de la materia, del trazo y del esquema. Este realismo puede no referirse a ningún modelo exterior, sino, de un modo más estricto, a la realidad neta del proceso técnico de la

propia creación.¹²⁰

Thus the real and the notion of realism was, in the sixties, characteristic of a part of the literature surrounding Tàpies. During the first half of the decade critics referred to a realism not so much "representational" as "perceptual" and related to Existentialist attitudes. They referred to a reality that was not exterior to the artistic object and was not based on iconic conventions. The reality to which these authors referred was the individual perception generated by the actual experience of an object's physicality, one which allowed the viewer to apprehend the difference between the object and his notion of it.¹²¹

This view of Tàpies' work was clearly not new since it was based upon the theory of perception basic to Existentialism. L'Art Informel emerged during the heyday of Existentialism, which aimed at destroying the myth of objectivity through emphasis on what Heidegger called the "Intervallessness of things."¹²² In order to do that,

¹²⁰Juan Eduardo Cirlot, "El Realismo Informalista," Correo de Las Artes, 33 (Agosto-September 1961): [1].

¹²¹At the base of these theories were the writings of Heidegger, then very popular, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Phénoménologie de La Perception (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

¹²²Neil A. Chassman, "Poets of the Cities: Levelling of Meaning," in Poets of The Cities. New York and San Francisco, 1950-1965 ed. N.A.Chassman, exh. cat. (New York: E.P.Dutton & Co., Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1974), p. 17.

Existentialists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty addressed the noetic quality of perception, seeing perception as an intentional process which confers meaning on the object perceived. L'Informel critics, then, stood not for a non-objective art, but for a new realism, beyond idealism and traditional realism. Renato Barilli wrote:

L'Informale ... si fonda su una gnoseologia totalmente rinnovata, posta al di là del realismo come dell'idealismo, una gnoseologia che è quella stessa delle più accreditate correnti speculative contemporanee, delle fenomenologia, particolarmente nei suoi svolgimenti francesi, dell' esistenzialismo....¹²³

Tàpies' work, so frequently associated in this context with that of Jean Dubuffet, was often discussed in terms of this existentialist realism.¹²⁴ Tàpies'

¹²³Renato Barilli, L'Informale e Altri Studi di Arte Contemporanea (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1964), p. 40. Similar opinions are given by Enrico Crispolti in his L'Informale, vol. I (Rome: Beniamino Carucci Editore, 1971), pp. 20-22.

¹²⁴"La chiave per intendere Pollock è Dewey; per spiegare Fautrier, Argan ricorre a Bergson; a Tàpies si può arrivare con Merleau-Ponty" (Italo Tomassoni, "Tàpies, al di qua e al di là della vita," in Gatt, Tàpies, p. 73). The references to Dubuffet in the literature on Tàpies are numerous. See, for instance, Lorenza Trucchi, Antoni Tàpies, exh. cat. (Rome: Il Segno Gallery, 1962). See also J.J. Sweeney "Foreword," in Tàpies. A Catalog of Paintings in America, exh. cat. (New York: Martha Jackson, 1961), p. 4. An interesting reference in the specific context of our argument is that by Werner Schmalenbach: "... Tàpies se abría a la realidad gracias al tertium comparationis 'materia' e incluso gracias a multitud de citas tomadas de la realidad --para no referirnos a Jean Dubuffet, mayor que Tàpies en una generación, quien negaba absolutamente los límites entre abstracción y realidad, traspasándolos con la mayor

paintings were regarded not as "objective" representations of an idealistic world but as acts of perception of the world, for there could be no knowledge of an object independent of the perception of that object. In consequence, matter and image were viewed as inseparable in Tàpies' paintings and the image seemed to be apprehended in the moment of its coming into being. The material qualities of Tàpies' works were not, therefore, intended to "spiritualize matter," but rather to apprehend matter in its state of permanent becoming, a view that revealed Existentialism's debt to Bergson. Jacques Dupin had already expressed these ideas in 1958:

Nous participons alors à cette expérience extrême de la peinture attirée par la vertige de sa fin, par la secrète tentation d'en finir, mais ne trouvant que la violente impossibilité d'en finir Ce mur n'est pas maconné ni construit, mais comme détaché d'un coup de la réalité Et avec lui, dans la structure, ce refus de la frontalité par quoi soudain le mur est aboli et nous découvrons la possibilité d'une lecture seconde de la toile, et sa dimension intérieure.¹²⁵

despreocupación la conciencia de la realidad es decisiva en el arte de Dubuffet y Tàpies" Werner Schmalenbach, Tàpies. Dibujos (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 1974), p. 10.

¹²⁵Jacques Dupin, Antoni Tàpies, exh. cat. (Milan: Galleria dell'Ariete, 1958). In 1972, Dupin repeated: "Les toiles les moins figuratives étaient encore des citations presque littérales de la texture d'un mur. La matière n'était jamais élaborée abstraitement pour servir des fins esthétiques, elle était la recreation d'un fragment de la réalité la plus proche." J. Dupin, "Tàpies Aujourd'hui, Assemblage et Objets," Derrière Le Miroir, 200 (November 1972): 6.

In this light, Tàpies' "Informel" work was not seen as abstract but as realist, and the artist's objectives were considered to be the enrichment of our perception of time and space. Tàpies himself agreed to these terms:

Je suis matérialiste, dit Tàpies. Je veux comprendre la structure de la matière, je veux l'imaginer à partir de la connaissance actuelle: passer d'une matière particularisée à une matière généralisée, changer la vision que les gens ont eu du monde Peindre, c'est un facon de réfléchir sur la vie --la réflexion est plus active que la contemplation-- c'est une volonté de voir et d'approfondir le réel, de collaborer à sa découverte, à sa compréhension. Peindre c'est aussi créer la réalité.¹²⁶

Although this Existentialist view of Tàpies' work was especially pervasive during the early sixties, it began in the late fifties and still continues to the present. Tàpies was the subject of a special issue of Papeles de Son Armadans in 1960, and the arguments brought up in that journal are a faithful expression of the polemics of those years. Part of the discussion dealt with the issue of whether Tàpies' paintings were realist or totally abstract. For those who argued in favor of a realist Tàpies, the dilemma was whether Tàpies' realism was based on a symbolic system or simply on a series of symbols without any system.

Michel Tapié, mantaining his earlier view, figured

¹²⁶Raoul-Jean Moulin, "Tàpies: Présence de L'Homme et du Temps." Les Lettres Francaises, 15 - 21 November 1967, p. 30. Cfr. Tàpies, Memoria Personal, p. 183.

prominently among the critics who insisted upon the "abstractness" of Tàpies' art. He opposed any "realist" considerations of the work and continued defending the validity of Tàpies' paintings as autonomous and self-sufficient:

El arte pictórico ha conquistado por fin una total autonomía, aunque ello no guste a los que no han amado a la pintura por sí misma, le buscan las coartadas de lo figurativo o de lo "poético" ... invocan un climax dichoso en el nombre de un sórdido neo-dadá oficial y folklórico.¹²⁷

Even in 1966 when he introduced an exhibition of Tàpies' new figurative work at Galerie Stadler, Tapié still insisted:

Avec Tàpies c'est heureusement de peinture qu'il continue d'être question. La continuité même de sa recherche, de son message, de ses moyens, le situe hors de ces modes dont l'essence est de changer pour changer, de dont l'art n'a que faire.¹²⁸

In his entry for the Tàpies issue of Papeles de Son Armadans, Herbert Read affirmed that Tàpies' paintings were realistic, not in the sense that human figures, flowers, animals or specific objects were identifiable but in the sense that the works, their textures, were a

¹²⁷Michel Tapié, "Una Profundidad Cualitativa," Papeles de Son Armadans, vol. 19, no. 57 (December 1960), p. 343.

¹²⁸M. Tapié, Continuité Artistique de Tàpies, exh. cat., (Paris: Galerie Stadler, 1966).

part of reality.¹²⁹

Giulio Carlo Argan, on the contrary, wrote in his essay that there was no reference to reality in Tàpies' paintings:

...para Tàpies, ya no existen cosas, no existe nada que constituya el objeto de una experiencia empírica.¹³⁰

According to Argan, Tàpies' paintings were symbolic, but they were "like mirrors that reflect other mirrors," and did not refer to any exterior reality.¹³¹ There are symbols in Tàpies' work but no symbology, because there was no fixed rule that could be applied to them. Argan argued that due to the absence of illusionistic space and lack of references to reality in Tàpies' paintings, symbols lost their essence: "ambiguity and ubiquity, to be one and the other, here and anywhere else."¹³²

Juan Eduardo Cirlot went a step further and identified not only Tàpies' symbols but an entire system

¹²⁹"... el cuerpo humano, el sol y las estrellas, los animales y las flores. Tales objetos no pueden nunca identificarse en una pintura de Tàpies, y sin embargo considero que sus imágenes se relacionan mucho más directamente con las de la naturaleza que las de Miró No hay deformaciones en la pintura de Tàpies. Sus texturas son naturales, incluso realistas" (Herbert Read, "Antonio Tàpies, su Arte," Papeles de Son Armadans, p. 370). Read's arguments are similar to those presented in Gatt's book.

¹³⁰Giulio Carlo Argan, "Historia sin Acción," Ibid., p. 277.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 280.

¹³²Ibid.

of symbols. Two years after the Papeles de Son Armadans issue he published a monographic work on Tàpies, which he proposed as a study of Tàpies' symbolic system.¹³³ Cirlot asserted:

La obra de Tàpies, precisamente, revela una orientación hacia la expresividad simbólica, desde sus orígenes hasta el presente, y acaso cuando creemos que más limitada se halla por las precisiones de la técnica y de un estricto sentido plástico sea cuando más transparencia adquiera a las emanaciones del significado.¹³⁴

Using elements borrowed from Jung's theories and from the Gestalt theory, Cirlot perceived Tàpies' mature work as, at least in part, a "realismo de campo restringido,"¹³⁵ in which an apparently non-objective work was actually part of a non-depicted whole. The depicted object took on altered meanings depending upon the interpretation placed upon the imagined context: the object placed in a different context brings to light meanings hidden from a common view.¹³⁶

Like Cirlot, Cirici asserted in his essay for Papeles de Son Armadans that Tàpies' notion of realism

¹³³Juan Eduardo Cirlot, Significación de La Pintura de Tàpies (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1962).

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 18.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 43.

¹³⁶In addition, Cirlot also considered any morphological and structured element as part of symbolic system (Ibid., pp.55-58).

derived in part from Existentialism.¹³⁷ According to Cirici, this philosophy led Tàpies to liberate his works from the constraints of traditional realism and to grow beyond the Expressionist trends of the previous decade, which had also been based on Existentialist philosophy, but had never succeeded in developing Existentialism's full perceptual premises.¹³⁸ Cirici, however, in opposition to Cirlot, added a social dimension to the "Existential realism" of Tàpies:

"el realismo, en efecto, es algo inseparable de los grupos sociales que mantienen un contacto directo con la producción y la vida económica."¹³⁹

* * *

In addition to Existentialist values, critics in the sixties gradually emphasized the social dimension of Tàpies' work as he evolved towards a more openly political art and began to express publicly his political

¹³⁷Alexander Cirici Pellier, "Tàpies, Realista," Papeles de Son Armadans, p.275.

¹³⁸"... desde unos puntos de partida distintos, el expresionismo abstracto, las Hautes pâtes, el dripping, la neo-caligrafía, el art brut o el espacialismo, en el fondo [Tàpies] ha asumido unas posibilidades latentes en el existencialismo, más completas que las de aquellos ensayos parciales y que han resultado eficacísimos como método de trabajo..." (Ibid., p. 274).

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 265.

ideas.¹⁴⁰ Admittedly, the social implications initially perceived in Tàpies' paintings were more general existential issues than specifically political problems.

Because of Tàpies' insistence on the material qualities of painting and his use of humble and corroded materials, certain writers during the sixties identified a critical attitude towards the contemporary human condition at the center of Tàpies' paintings. For these critics, Tàpies' materials conferred a sense of despair, of existentialist anguish, and of rebellion against a pre-established order.¹⁴¹

At the center of these descriptions was the wall, Tàpies' signature motif, intrinsically related to his materias and identified with his own surname.¹⁴² The graffiti and signs imprinted on his "walls" were viewed as indices of protest and rebellion:

S'obstinant dans l'austère et grandiose exaltation de notre paysage quotidien, Tàpies exhume de la mémoire collective des murs de misère, des facades lépreuses déchirées de cruelles lézardes, dans lesquelles il isole ces étendues desolées et meurtries, anonymes, exemplaires dans la souffrance qui les

¹⁴⁰Tàpies, un silence criant," L'Art Vivant, 1 (November 1968):9. See also Eugeni Ribalta, "Antoni Tàpies: un Testimoni de Solidaritat," Presencia 133 (20 January 1968) : 5. Cfr. Tàpies, Memoria Personal, pp. 389-409.

¹⁴¹See, for instance, Teixidor, Antoni Tàpies. Fustes, Papers, Cartons i Collages (Barcelona: Sala Gaspar, 1965), p. 30.

¹⁴²See p. 11.

éprouve et les rend représentatives de notre condition.¹⁴³

This point of view was a prolongation of the Existential interpretation of Tàpies' work. Gatt understood this clearly:

L'angoscia di Tàpies, il suo porsi di fronte al mondo (per negarlo, come vedremo), il suo tempo bloccato in un pietrificato nunc (entro al quale si dibatterà costantemente) ritrovano la loro occasione sensibile in questi fattori scatenanti Nella cultura europea assume un indubbio carattere centrale e riassuntivo: rappresenta infatti in un medesimo ciclo a circolo, il momento esistenziale e l'evoluzione fenomenologica.¹⁴⁴

The role of the artist in society was, therefore, to deploy an aggressive individuality against totalitarianism and repression and against the brutality of modern civilization. Tàpies' paintings were perceived as expressive of the anguish felt under the oppression of a society which increasingly restricted the liberties of the individual. Furthermore, anguish was regarded on many occasions as the only possible way of expressing that protest.¹⁴⁵ In consequence, Tàpies' works were not perceived as having an immediate political repercussion in a specific historical situation, but rather as

¹⁴³Moulin, "Tàpies, Presence de L'Homme et du Temps," p. 30.

¹⁴⁴Gatt, Tàpies, pp. 14-16.

¹⁴⁵Teixidor, Tàpies. Fustes, Papers, Cartons i Collages, p.23.

representing a more general condemnation of society at large.

When in the mid-sixties Tàpies began to create paintings more openly representational, the parts of the human body were more clearly perceived since they gave explicit form to the idea of anonymous man imprisoned in an arbitrary society. In Novel.la, which he executed in collaboration with Joan Brossa in 1965, the subject is the archetypal anti-hero, the alienated man reduced to a cipher, an identity number, a school diploma, or a birth or death certificate.¹⁴⁶

Critics noted that the parts of the body that Tàpies chose to depict were not those traditionally considered noble and beautiful: the low, passive, ugly parts such as feet, armpits, and hairy and wounded legs.¹⁴⁷ These critics, following the Existentialist principles which had given a social dimension to Tàpies' materias, understood the new iconography as a rejection of western technocratic societies. In the words of Cirici:

¹⁴⁶Some reviews of Novel.la were: Juan Perucho, "Antonio Tàpies y Joan Brossa en un libro," Destino, 27 November 1965. Juan Cortes, "Novel.la de Tàpies y Brossa," La Vanguardia 5 December 1965. Rafael Santos Torroella, "Tàpies-Brossa," El Noticiero Universal, 1 December 1965.

¹⁴⁷See Alexandre Cirici Pellicer, Antoni Tàpies, Witness of Silence (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1970). See also, A. Cirici Pellicer, "Tàpies, Talp," Serra d'Or, 123 (15 December 1969): 60-62.

The imprint of the hand sunk deep in mud or that of the foot, the bared belly, the knees marked with crosses, like the brands made on animals, the presence of the theme of the basin, so closely linked to the most disagreeable aspects of physiology, all complete the protesting vision of man transformed from outside himself into something ignoble.¹⁴⁸

During the second half of the sixties, Tàpies' status had grown considerably, especially in Europe, and he was represented by major galleries on both sides of the Atlantic. Some critics accused Tàpies of making art aimed at the bourgeoisie's consumption, of representing consensus taste on the art market.¹⁴⁹ His art, which had

¹⁴⁸Cirici, Tàpies, Witness of Silence, pp. 258-259. At this moment, Tàpies' works were seen as related to, even as a precedent of Arte Povera. See Maria Lluïsa Borràs, "Antoni Tàpies, una Nueva Cultura," Destino, 11 June 1971. See the reply by Juan Manuel Bonet and Francisco Rivas [Cartas al Director] "Tàpies o una Nueva Cultura," Destino, 14 August 1971, pp. 3-5. Counter-reply by Tàpies, [Cartas al Director] "Tàpies y y una Nueva Cultura," Destino, 11 Septiembre 1971. See also in relation to this polemic Rafael Santos Torroella, "Tàpies, una Nueva Cultura?" El Noticiero Universal, 15 Septiembre 1971, p. 15. Numerous references to Arte Povera appeared in the literature on Tàpies at this time, divided into different groups of opinion. Some critics accentuated the similarities between Arte Povera and Tàpies' works, while others emphasized the dissimilarities. Cirici (op. cit.) and Conil Lacoste ("Tapiès et Le Mortier du Temps," Le Monde, 15 June 1973) were among the first. Victoria Comballà, Poética de lo Neutro. Análisis y Crítica del Arte Conceptual, Barcelona: Anagrama, 1975), and José Luis Barrio-Garay ("Intention, object, and signification in the work of Tàpies," in exh. cat. Antoni Tàpies. Thirty-three Years of his Work, Buffalo: Albright-Knox Gallery, 1977) were among the latter.

¹⁴⁹Here too the criticism turned into polemics and spread into the general press that trivialized the arguments. A review of Tàpies and Brossa's exhibit at

been valued as a tool for social change, was now regarded in certain quarters as regressive.¹⁵⁰

This criticism erupted in 1973, when a group of Conceptual artists protested the social and political implications of Tàpies' artistic conceptions.¹⁵¹ Rather than criticizing the aesthetic qualities of Tàpies' work, which to them were of unquestionable achievement, the Conceptualists opposed Tàpies' vision of the role of the artist and the notion of that avant-garde that he now

Dau al Set gallery by Joan Segarra ("Redau," El Noticiero Universal, 12 December 1973) was exemplary as the author did not hesitate to call Brossa and Tàpies "botiguers," stating the conservative stand of an art done for the establishment, which reciprocally has made both Tàpies and Brossa millionaires. Examples of this criticism abound. See, for instance, Ana María Moix and Carmen Lases, "Cartas Envenenadas," Tele/exprès, 1 February 1975, p. 13.

¹⁵⁰Although this was not exclusive of this moment, for it already had precedents, it was significative of a part of this period's criticism. See, for instance, the reference --even if it is in a mild tone-- of Baltasar Porcel, "Antoni Tàpies, Testimoni de La Sordidesa," Serra d'Or, year 9, no. 2, February 1967, pp. 41-19. Already in 1957, Garcia Tella reviewing Tàpies' exhibit at Galerie Stadler referred to him as sold to American capitalism, through his mentor the French art critic Michel Tapié (Garcia Tella, [Tàpies], Solidaridad Obrera, Paris, July 1957).

¹⁵¹The group included Francesc Abad, Jordi Benito, Alberto Corazón, Alicia Fingerhut, Simón Marchán, Antoni Mercader, Jordi Morera, Antoni Muntadas, Carlos Pazos, Olga Pijoán, Pere Portabella, Manuel Rovira, Jaume Sans, Carlos Santos, Enrique Sales, Dorothée Selz, Lluís Utrilla.

embodied.¹⁵² In the Conceptualists' view, Tàpies represented the art market system that they sought to overthrow. He was detached from reality because of his links to "the mechanisms of cultural distribution of the system."¹⁵³ His personality had become an exchange value, his name a market brand. While Tàpies defended the social validity of the autonomous language of painting and believed in the possibility of changing society by pictorial means, the Conceptualists proposed that art should analyze the context which generated it.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵²"Nadie puede discutirle a Tàpies el derecho de apelación a la vanguardia, en su origen, tan evidente como el hecho de que hoy él es también exponente ejemplar de este proceso de integración y asimilación que, fuera de apreciaciones mecanicistas, implican la misma naturaleza de las relaciones económicas, la deteriorización ideológica del artista y la normalización de su 'obra' como mercancía cultural en el seno de la clase dominante." Grupo Conceptual Español, "Documento-Respuesta a Tàpies." Nueva Lente 21 (1973) : 22.

¹⁵³They referred specifically to the article that Tàpies published in La Vanguardia 14 March 1973, entitled "Arte Conceptual Aquí." Reprinted in Tàpies, L'Art contra L'Etètica (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1974), pp. 65-69.

¹⁵⁴It was no accident that Tàpies chose to side with those young artists grouped around the magazine Trama. In 1976, he sent his considerable prestige to their cause by writing an essay for the catalogue of their first group exhibition held at Galerie Maeght, in Barcelona ("Situació de La Pintura Catalana Recent," Per una crítica de la pintura, exh. cat. Barcelona, Galerie Maeght, 1976. Reprinted in Tàpies, La Realitat com a art, Barcelona, Laertes, 1982, pp. 65-74). For Tàpies, the work of these Trama artists proved a valuable alternative to those tendencies based on the autonomy of the artistic form or on a political ideology of art that rejected anything specifically formal.

Indeed, the critique became the art. They called for an art produced from within the social reality, not from without, demanding methods and modes associated with the media, which they regarded as beyond painting.¹⁵⁵ These methodologies were intended to undermine and displace the notion of the work of art as a sublimated object and prevent its assimilation into the system.

The reaction against Tàpies was restricted primarily to groups of Conceptual artists in Spain; most of the literature around Tàpies continued to maintain the earlier ideas. Most critics believed in Tàpies' work as a valid tool for social and political transformation. Ironically, this attitude was already evident in an essay which Cirici wrote in 1971 for the Tàpies' exhibition at Sala Pelaires in Palma de Mallorca, several years before his defense of Conceptual groups. Cirici expounded well-known ideas, such as Tàpies' use of humble materials being expressive of his opposition to consumerist society and to man's determination by social forces. Cirici also recognized the explicit political dimension of Tàpies' work stating that Tàpies' art leads the viewer beyond individual alienation into class struggle. Cirici referred to Tàpies' work as a "little motor for social

¹⁵⁵Grupo Conceptual, "Documento-Respuesta," p. 22.

change, fed by the knowledge of reality."¹⁵⁶

A few years later, Werner Schmalenbach proclaimed the political character of Tàpies' use of humble materials and images:

Sin embargo, la pobreza no reside aquí en la circunscripción de un principio artístico, como sucede con los rectángulos de Mondrian o en los ademanes activistas de Jackson Pollock. Más bien, se concibe como una actividad espiritual, como expresión de la dignidad humana y como alternativa a la realidad dominante Tàpies demuestra el gran poder espiritual de la impotencia frente a la ampulosa y uniformada presencia del poder. Al brutal activismo le opone él la pasividad de sus cuadros mudos Pues, en él, pasividad significa rechazo, repulsa, protesta e impugnación --sólo en esta medida deja de ser una actitud monacalmente apolítica.¹⁵⁷

During the early seventies, Tàpies' works dealt more openly with the political situation of Spain. These references were generally recognized, and those materials and colors that had earlier been interpreted in Existentialist terms as a general cry against modern society acquired a more overtly political message. For example, Georges Raillard wrote of brown color so characteristic of Tàpies' works:

Du titre général de l'invitation [assassins]
... sur fond brun, d'insomnie et d'excrément,
à ce monotype délavé de suie qui recueille et
répète le graffiti furtif des murs de
Barcelona, la fureur bâillonnée

¹⁵⁶Cirici Pellicer, Tàpies i Els Petits Motors exh. cat. (Palma de Mallorca, Sala Pelaires, 1971), p. 24.

¹⁵⁷Werner Schmalenbach, Tàpies. Dibujos, pp. 7-8.

A l'origine, ce cri de rage et de demi-impuissance face aux Ubus embrenés pris d'un dernier accès de déraison dans ce printemps fou qui saigne de la signature légalisée de leur politique gâteuse ("gâteaux", dit le dictionnaire attentif ici au détail: "aliéné chez lequel l'intelligence est profondément affaiblie, et qui se salit aussi d'urine et de matière fécale"). Ce fond brun, c'est le leur; c'est eux qui l'ont produit ¹⁵⁸

In addition to this drift towards politics, certain sectors of the critical world further perceived Tàpies' art as having resolved the false dichotomy between a formalist avant-garde and a politically committed one.¹⁵⁹ To this latter group there is no neutral language, but only a system of signs in which any question supposes a pre-determined reply. The interdependence of any linguistic system with forms of oppression and dominance is basic to the ideology of these critics. The tyranny from which Tàpies' works attempted to liberate man was not only the actual Franco dictatorship, but also a system of concealed signs masquerading as an aseptic language and pretending to be confused with the nature of things.¹⁶⁰ When Alain Jouffroy analyzed the motifs of Tàpies' recent productions, he recognized their political

¹⁵⁸Georges Raillard, "Tàpies a Mots Découverts," Derrière Le Miroir, 210 (June 1974): 1-3. See also, G. Raillard, "Comme d'une Langue à Venir," Derrière Le Miroir, 253 (June 1982): 1-5.

¹⁵⁹See Alain Jouffroy, "Les Deux Libertés d'Antoni Tàpies," XX^e Siècle, 40 (June 1973) : 36.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 6.

nature¹⁶¹ but also pointed to their linguistic dimension which confronted not only oppression itself but also the language of oppression:

La paire de menottes, telle qu'elle est placée là, dénonce à la fois l'emprisonnement intellectuel et moral du couple regardeur/peinture, habituellement incapable de se libérer à partir de l'art, et celui qui fait de l'art lui-même la masque esthétique d'une société fondée sur la séparation, le compartimentage répressif des désirs.¹⁶²

* * *

Political readings of Tàpies' work have often been accompanied by strong Catalanist feelings. Tàpies, like many Catalan artists, is a champion of the history, language, and culture of Catalonia. During the Franco dictatorship, this attitude had a clearly political dimension, as one of the objectives of the regime was to outlaw Catalan culture and that of other nationalities of the Peninsula. Tàpies' Catalanisme has long been recognized in the critical literature, but it received particular attention in the seventies both before and immediately after the death of the dictator. Tàpies'

¹⁶¹Referring to Drap Noue, 1970, he observed: "Elle embarrassait certains visiteurs par sa présence accusatrice, car le plus ignorant regardeur des choses de l'art sait encore qu'un drap noué ne peut servir qu'aux évasions de prisonniers" (Ibid. p. 35).

¹⁶²Ibid., p. 36.

Catalanisme has been viewed as a constant in his career that gives unity and continuity to his art. In his book Antoni Tàpies i l'Esperit Català, Pere Gimferrer spoke of the "sentido de la actividad de Tàpies, y el examen de su vinculación con determinadas peculiaridades del espíritu catalán. Ambos temas coinciden: tales peculiaridades son, precisamente, las que caracterizan la originalidad de la aportación de Tàpies."¹⁶³

Many motifs appearing in the works of Tàpies have been recognized as references to his Catalan roots, but this Catalanisme has also been explained on a deeper technical and formal level. The significance of craftsmanship in his works, especially his profound knowledge of the materials he employs, has been associated with Catalonia's traditional craftsmanship. Ultimately, Tàpies' intellectual attitude towards mysticism, the esoteric, and the magical has been explained through his Catalanisme.

A prominent issue in the Tàpies literature during the present decade has been the artist's interest in and references to the art and culture of the Orient.¹⁶⁴ Some of the artist's interest in Catalan things, such as

¹⁶³Pere Gimferrer, Tàpies y el Espíritu Catalán (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1974), p. 6.

¹⁶⁴It has become the subject of monographic work: Lluís Permanyer, Tàpies i les Civilitzacions Orientals (Barcelona: Edhasa, 1983).

mystical and esoteric thought and the "spiritualization" of matter, have been related to parallel concepts in Oriental culture.¹⁶⁵ Tàpies' recent work has demonstrated a conscious adaptation of Oriental philosophical and aesthetic principles, and critics have recognized as typically Oriental such elements as elegance, lightness, sobriety, and continuous flow. But these attributes have been projected onto work of previous periods. Tàpies' use of humble and everyday materials, for instance, which had been successively associated with L'Informel, Neo-Dadaism and Arte Povera, have now been perceived as a consequence of the artist's interest in Oriental art.¹⁶⁶ Ironically, what was conceived a decade ago as automatic gesture and was associated with graffiti and social protest, has now been characterized in the eighties as a personal handwriting and related to oriental calligraphy and personal meditation.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵Gimferrer, El Espiritu Catalán, pp. 31-46.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 109-113.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 127-135. Cfr. Donald Kuspit, "Antoni Tàpies," Artforum, 21 (October 1982): 72.

CHAPTER V

TAPIES AND THE SURREALIST PAINTERS

During the years 1954-55 Tàpies created his first matter-paintings, such as White with red marks (1954), Grey (1955) or Large grey painting (1955).¹⁶⁸ These paintings --characterized by thick surfaces and over-worked textures painted in a limited range of colors, predominately grey and brown or ochre that gave them the appearance of walls-- marked the beginning of Tàpies' mature art:

A partir de aquellos cuadros, digamos, "epicúreos" y "musicales" de mi momento anterior, a base de ir profundizando en el análisis de los espacios y los materiales plásticos, llegué a resultados sorprendentes Y fue entonces cuando fui de descubrimiento en descubrimiento, en especial cuando un día todo aquel hervor de elementos cuantitativo dio un cambio cualitativo y no sólo se transformó en superficies unidas (o lisas, como he dicho), sino que se convirtió

¹⁶⁸ACP nos. 120, 122 and 127 (fig. 29, 30, 31).

a mis ojos en muros, en "tapias."¹⁶⁹

Even though Tàpies' art developed in terms of its imagery from forms still rooted in the abstract principles of L'Art Informel, such as Painting no. 27 (1955, fig. 34),¹⁷⁰ to others forms related with the modification of Informel and Abstract Expressionist values which took place on both sides of the Atlantic during the late fifties and early sixties, and even though his motifs turned progressively more recognizable during the sixties, critics and art historians failed in general to see the Surrealist nature of many of the motifs of the matter paintings.

Since the matter-paintings came to light during the heyday of L'Art Informel, most of the critics perceived material qualities or the symbolic elements of Tàpies' work through those principles and characteristics of L'Art Informel of the second Post-Tachiste generation.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹Antoni Tàpies, Memoria Personal (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1983), pp. 333-334.

¹⁷⁰ACP no. 133. This painting has still some similarities with others of the immediately preceding period, including the years 1953 and 1954, characterized by abstract works executed in a formalist line. Tàpies called these paintings epicúreas and musicales (Ibid.).

¹⁷¹Tàpies himself wrote about these paintings: "Es evidente que nada sale de la nada que, lógicamente, fatalmente, me condujeron a eso todas las influencias anteriores y las propias experiencias. Fue la culminación, tal vez, de la necesidad de salir de un fácil tachismo que ya proliferaba entonces por el mundo?]Fue una reacción para huir de muchas disoluciones amorfas que se estaban poniendo de moda? Fue el cansancio

Consequently, previous periods which did not correspond to this tendency were considered a deviation from Tàpies' "true" style. Such was the case with the paintings of his Surrealist period (1948-1952). Many critics did not perceive the oneiric or the primigenial elements of this work but rather the "material" qualities which preceded in their view the matter paintings of the second half of the fifties.¹⁷² If Surrealism was forgotten for Tàpies' "Surrealist" works, it was even more forgotten for the matter paintings, a type of painting which paradoxically is deeply rooted in Surrealism.

An examination of Tàpies' paintings from the fifties and sixties brings motifs to our attention that were characteristic of many Surrealists. One of these motifs is the ear, whose symbolic connotations as a surrogate for the vagina is widely established in Surrealist art. The ear is an important image in Tàpies' oeuvre, appearing in works of the mid-sixties, such as Relief in grey and three small holes (1964) or Lacerated relief (1966),¹⁷³ as well as in recent paintings such as Cobertes de llibres (1987) or Fauteuil (1985). The ear is also central in the works of Dalí, Miró and Ernst.

de un arte demasiado abstracto y la salida hacia lo concreto?" (Ibid., p. 334).

¹⁷²See Chapter I, p. 18.

¹⁷³ACP, nos. 263 and 279 (fig. pp. 47, 48).

Thus, we see it in Dalí's Le phénomène de l'extase of 1933 (fig. 112) as well as in his The Sistine Madonna of 1958. In the case of Ernst, we also find the 'ear' motif in works such as Nettoyage des carreaux (1922) or Le reveil officiel du serin (1923). Ernst created these two works in close relation with the poet Paul Eluard: the first piece was an illustration for a book of poetry, Les Malheurs des Immortelles, in which both collaborated; the second piece was a mural panel that Ernst painted for Eluard's house at Eaubonne. For Miró, who given his close friendship with Eluard had probably known these works well,¹⁷⁴ the 'ear' was an ubiquitous motif; he painted it in relevant places in many works, such as The tilled field (1923-24, fig. 84) or Carnival of Arlequin (1924-25, fig. 87).

Together with Klee's work, the work of the Surrealist painters Miró, Ernst and, on a different level, Dalí constitutes the source of many of the most relevant motifs of matter painting, and of its characteristic approach to materials. A study of these artists' work and its relationship to that by Tàpies is therefore essential.

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¹⁷⁴See Rosalind Krauss and Margit Rowell, Joan Miró: Magnetic Fields, exh. cat. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1972), p. 73.

Joan Miró

Arguably, Joan Miró was the Surrealist artist whose role in the development of Post-War art proved to be the most important and historically decisive. His work has been perceived as a forerunner of such European movements as L'Art Informel or Tachisme,¹⁷⁵ and his influence upon American artists, from Arshile Gorky to Jackson Pollock or Lee Krasner, is extraordinary.¹⁷⁶ In Spain too, even if knowledge of his work was suppressed by Franco's regime, his role as catalyst of the first avant-garde groups after the Civil War was unquestionable. Logically, his influence was first felt in Barcelona, where he was living at the time.

In opposition to the conservative and anti-modern art favored by the regime, at least during the forties and fifties, young artists, interested in recovering avant-garde values, turned to Surrealism.¹⁷⁷ Surrealism

¹⁷⁵Werner Schmalenbach, "Drawings of The Late Years," in Joan Miró: A Retrospective, exh. cat. (New York and New Haven: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Yale University Press, 1987), p. 50.

¹⁷⁶Barbara Rose, Miró in America, exh. cat. (Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, 1982), pp. 1-65.

¹⁷⁷Cirici mentions that his book on Surrealism, published by Gabriel Paricio in a collection devoted to modern art (Poliedro), went out of print in a very short span of time, since "la curiositat envers ell [Surrealism] era el signe dels millors" (Alexandre

had been the last avant-garde movement to fully develop in Spain before the outbreak of the Civil War, especially in Catalonia, and many of its members were still active virtually to the present.

Not surprisingly, one of the first avant-garde reviews of the Post-War period, Algol, had a clear Surrealist bias. The group associated with the review included the philosopher Arnau Puig, the painter Joan Ponç, and the poet and leader of the group Joan Brossa. Similarly, other painters such as Jordi Mercadé or Boadella collaborated with the Surrealist poet Josep Vicenç Foix, whose relations with Surrealist painters and poets, both French and Spanish, and his knowledge of Surrealist techniques were well known.¹⁷⁸ Later on, in 1948, Puig, Ponç and Brossa, together with Cuixart, Tharrats and Tàpies, formed a loose group around the

Cirici-Pellicer, L'Art Català Contemporari, Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1970, p. 192).

¹⁷⁸Tàpies wrote: "Se'm va confirmar aleshores l'autoritat qu'ell ja tenia respecte a tantes coses que nosaltres, joves, tot just anàvem temptejant. Vaig conèixer la seva relació amb el bon moment dels surrealistes, el seu paper d'animador ..." (Antoni Tàpies, Per un Art Modern i Progressista, Barcelona: Editorial Empuries, 1985, p. 92. In reference to Foix's relations to Surrealism see Mercè Tricàs i Preckler, J.V. Foix i el Surrealisme (Barcelona: Edicions Anglo-Catalanes, 1986), especially chapter III, pp. 65-104; see also, C.B. Morris, Surrealism and Spain (1920-1936), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 52-55. Before the Spanish Civil War Foix wrote texts on Miró and Dalí. See J.V. Foix, KRTU, ed. J. Vallcorba Plana (Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1983), pp. 81-91.

review Dau al Set, whose name "the seven face of the die" recalls Georges Hugnet's work of the same title. The formation of this group marks the beginning of Tàpies' Surrealist period.

For the young Spanish artists of the Post-War period in general, and for Tàpies in particular, Miró was a symbol of that past which the Franco regime tried to erase. His art embodied Surrealism's modern and progressive artistic values. Although Tàpies has some doubts about the exact year of his first meeting with Miró, he probably met Miró in 1948.¹⁷⁹ The impact of the Surrealist artist on him was so strong that twenty-five years later Tàpies still remembered what paintings he had seen during his first visit to Miró's studio.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹Tàpies' memory and that of literature about him are confused in this respect. In a 1973 article on Miró published in Destino (reprinted in Tàpies, L'Art contra l'Estètica, Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1974, pp. 81-85), Tàpies is said to think that he had met Miró in 1949. Today, however, he is not sure. Considering the evolution of his art, the year of 1948 given by Alexandre Cirici Pellicer in the "Biographical Data" of his Tàpies, Witness of Silence (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1972, p. 354) and by Miquel Tàpies ("Chronology," Lluís Permanyer, Tàpies and The New Culture, pp. 207) appears more accurate. Curiously, while in the Biographical Data section of his book Cirici refers to 1948 as the year of the Miró-Tàpies meeting, in the main text of the book he wrote that "1947 was the year in which Tàpies became friendly with Brossa and visited Miró" (Cirici, Witness..., p. 73). Nonetheless, Tàpies had direct access to actual paintings by Miró through the collection of Joan Prats, whom Tàpies befriended in 1947.

¹⁸⁰Among others: The Moon (1948), Painting (Palm Beach Art League), and Painting (Kunstusum Basel). See Tàpies, L'Art Contra L'Estètica, p. 82.

Significantly, Tàpies' paintings of 1948 and 1949 are similar in many aspects to those by Miró, as can be perceived by comparing, for example, Miró's The birth of the world (1925, fig. 91) with Tàpies' UGB (1949, fig. 11),¹⁸¹ or with Eel¹⁸² (fig. 7) or with Magic (1949, fig. 8).¹⁸³ All these paintings depict a characteristically undefined space in which small triangular and square shapes float. The effect is one of continuous movement and change. Like the paintings by Miró, many paintings of those years by Tàpies are loosely brushed fields of color which incorporated spilling and handwriting.

The relation between Tàpies' Surrealist works and those by Miró goes beyond painting into collage. We see an affinity in the use of rope in Miró's Rope and people I (1935, fig. 97) and Tàpies' Collage of the rice and strings (1947, fig. 3),¹⁸⁴ which, in addition, includes

¹⁸¹ACP no. 57. Cirici entitled this painting as Composition.

¹⁸²ACP no. 50. Cirici, Penrose (Roland Penrose, Tàpies, New York: Rizzoli, 1979, p.33), and others entitled this work as Sofar.

¹⁸³ACP no. 52. Cirici erroneously entitled this painting: Inks and paint on opaque paper.

¹⁸⁴ACP no. 20. Although this painting is dated in the lower right section, Cirici and Tharrats dated it as of 1948 (Alexandre Cirici-Pellicer, "Tàpies o la Transverberació, Dau al Set, 1954; J.J. Tharrats, "Antoni Tàpies o el Dau Modern de Versailles," Dau al Set, 1950). Perhaps Tàpies knew already this type of work by Miró through reproductions or through Joan Prats' collection. The fact is that another work of 1947, Collage of the crosses (ACP no. 37) has a similar treatment of the

a characteristic Miró motif, the star shape.

There exist, to be sure, marked dissimilarities between the Surrealism of Miró and that of Tàpies. We see this contrast, for instance, in the way both artists use written signs; this element which is known as peinture-poesie characterizes Miró's "official" Surrealist works, from 1924 to 1927.¹⁸⁵ Although Tàpies had already employed written elements in early works such as Dibujo (1947), these calligraphic signs were systematically incorporated in his works of 1949 such as Inscriptions to the East of the garden (1949, fig. 9).¹⁸⁶ Tàpies' calligraphic signs, however, seem not to signify anything specific, as they did in Miró's peinture-poesie. In general, Tàpies' use of calligraphic signs and other Surrealist techniques was, during his Surrealist period, merely visual rather than actually structural.

Certainly, Miró's influence on Tàpies cannot be reduced only to the latter's Surrealist paintings. It

materials (see figs. 5 and 98). The awkward pieces collaged to the cardboard and purposely glued in a casual manner so to leave a relief of crinkles and folds allowing the edges of these pieces to pull away from the ground (See William Rubin, Miró in The Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973, p. 50).

¹⁸⁵William S. Rubin, Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968) p. 64. See also, Rosalind Krauss and Margit Rowell, Magnetic Fields, p. 39.

¹⁸⁶ACP no. 53. Cirici entitles this work as Mudrc.

appears that what in Tàpies' works of the late forties began as borrowings of formal elements, developed in the matter paintings into a more personal assimilation. When recalling his meeting with Miró, what Tàpies appears to remember most is Miró's use of materials, which is the most important feature by which the matter paintings are traditionally identified:

Les variadíssimes tècniques i materials emprats per Miró, d'una riquesa que encara sembla inesgotable --pintures sobre quitrà, sobre paper de vidre, sobre tela de sac, collages amb cordes, materials ceràmics, etcètera--, van tenir aleshores una gran influència sobre la meua obra, com sobre la de tants altres artistes des del punt de vista plàstic, Miró era, indiscutiblement, el més ric, fort, contundent, el que millor sabia treure partit dels materials emprats, a gran distància de tots els altres pintors de la seva generació.¹⁸⁷

Although a good number of the matter paintings motifs could be traced back to Miró's works, we cannot necessarily assert that they always derived directly from Miró. Instead, some of these similarities can be explained by the fact that they had common roots, historical as well as cultural. Both being Catalan they experienced the same environment and the same artistic sources, notably Romanesque Art and Modernisme, easily the two most important manifestations of Catalan

¹⁸⁷Tàpies, L'Art Contra..., p. 84.

culture.¹⁸⁸ But, then too, Tàpies was conscious of Miró's Catalanisme, of his references to Catalonia and Catalan art, which no doubt encouraged him in that direction since for Tàpies Miró's work embodies "the Catalan spirit:"

Es el seu testimoniage contant pel país, el seu amor a la terra i la seva creença que per fer alguna cosa gran hem de tenir unes arrels el més fondes possible.¹⁸⁹

A motif consisting of a series of parallel flowing curves reflects the common Catalan ground of both artists. This is central to Miró's 1925 painting The tilled field (fig. 84). In this painting as well as in the Catalan Romanesque frescoes, an acknowledged source of inspiration, the heavy shading and flowing curves are a stylistic convention signifying "water."¹⁹⁰ Similarly, the motif of parallel flowing curves centered Tàpies' attention in 1956, as we find it in many paintings of that year, including Relief (fig. p. 53) and Grey and

¹⁸⁸In actuality, the reference to these two moments in the history of Catalan art have been a common place among modern Catalan artists including a Surrealist as far afield from Miró as Dalí, who --as we will see-- was instrumental in Tàpies' revaluation of Gaudí's Modernisme. Miró's friend Joan Prats also pointed Gaudí's work to Tàpies: "También debo a Prats el que prestara más atención a la obra de Gaudí, por quien siempre he tenido un interés creciente ..." (Tàpies, Memoria..., p. 218). Similarly, the references to Romanesque and Modernisme are common in the literatures on Miró and Tàpies.

¹⁸⁹Tàpies, L'Art Contra..., p. 85.

¹⁹⁰Krauss and Rowell, Magnetic Fields, pp.71-73.

black. (fig. 35)¹⁹¹

Tàpies' paintings of 1956 do not have the stylistic conventions which directly refer to Catalan Medieval art as Miró's The tilled field does. Tàpies' waving lines remain universal in character, a motif easily found in the art of any period, be it Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek or Roman. Yet Tàpies' use of parallel and flowing lines to represent water does relate to a Catalan tradition, that of alchemical symbolism.¹⁹² Thus, although other paintings of 1956 presenting compositions based on parallel bands such as Grey furrows or Undulating grey relief¹⁹³ appear to refer to a tilled field¹⁹⁴ --a motif

¹⁹¹Penrose, no.29; ACP no. 146.

¹⁹²This symbolism was, at its time, intensively studied by Cirlot, who noted that a series of paintings of 1957 and 1958 presenting an all-over composition in relief of bland circles like bubbles of matter at boiling point, represent the alchemy moment of Solve et Coagula (Juan Eduardo Cirlot, Significaci3n de La Pintura de Tàpies, Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1978, pp. 91-93). Some of the works representing this motif are Grey relief no. VIII (1957; ACP no. 172, fig. 38), Blackish ochre relief (1958; ACP no. 176, fig. 39).

¹⁹³ACP no.178 (fig. 40); Penrose no. 27 (fig. 52).

¹⁹⁴In "Black Prince" (Time, vol. 73, no.11, 16 March 1959, p. 34), Tàpies was quoted as saying that Grey furrows reminded him of a well-raked garden in a Zen Buddhist temple, Grey furrows was exhibited in Martha Jackson in 1959 and reproduced in Time magazine. It is interesting to note that Frank Stella was creating during 1958 and 1959 his first stripe paintings, including Coney Island (1958), Astoria (1958), or Die Fhane hoch (1959). Both Stella and Tàpies had the precedent of Robert Motherwell's Little Spanish prison (1940-44) (William Rubin, Frank Stella, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970, p. 151, note 10).

of Miró's The Farm (1921-22, fig. 86) and The tilled field-- these bands may also be read as imprints left by a snake. The snake is associated in Eastern and Western symbolist traditions with water.¹⁹⁵ Interestingly, a snake-like shape is a principal element of the 1956 painting entitled Serpent (fig. 54).¹⁹⁶

Letters and calligraphic signs which were considered so important in Miró's "official" Surrealist period and which Tàpies had incorporated in his art of the forties, became during the fifties an essential part of the matter paintings.¹⁹⁷ One of these signs is the letter "A," which frequently stands for the artist's first name initial and which could be seen in Tàpies' A (1961, fig. 62)¹⁹⁸ as well as in Miró's Automaton (1924,

¹⁹⁵Cirlot, Significación ..., pp. 90-91. See also Idem, Diccionario de Símbolos (Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1978), p. 407.

¹⁹⁶Penrose no. 31. Penrose dated this painting as of 1956-58. Cirlot, however, dates it in 1956 and the only title he gives to it is Pintura (Ibid., p. 91).

¹⁹⁷These signs appear as early as in an untitled drawing of 1943, now in the collection of the Museu de l'Empordà (Figueres), which has an inscription that read: "BALTVREST RODASTREIK."

¹⁹⁸Gimferrer no. 201. Tàpies recalls to have used this letter for the first time in the 1949 painting La tercera transformació nocturna d'un lleó en J. Arromoc (written communication of Miquel Tàpies to the author, 21 October 1988). However, The "A" motif became a more important part of Tàpies' iconography in the late sixties and early seventies. The "A" does not always stands for Tàpies' name. Among other meanings it could also refer to the beginning of all things, as in Emblematic blue (1971; Gimferrer no. 309. fig. 74). See José-Luis Barrio-Garay,

fig. 88). If Miró gave to the ladder and stool of The farm a characteristic "A" shape, so did Tàpies in La escalera (1968, fig. 77).¹⁹⁹ In addition, the form of some of Tàpies' "A's," with their large horizontal line on top, as seen in a lithograph of Poems from the Catalan book (1973),²⁰⁰ is very close to the shape of The Farm's stool.

The "M" is another letter very important in both artists' work. Tàpies' M (1960, fig. 61)²⁰¹ and Miro's The Potato (1928, fig. 96) are two distinctive examples. This letter appears, however, to have different meanings for Tàpies and Miró. In the case of Tàpies, although the "M" has been interpreted as signifying matter and the primordial ocean,²⁰² it was intended to refer to death: death in Catalan is "Mort." ²⁰³ Tàpies picked up the folkloric superstition that everybody has an "M" drawn in the lines of the palm of their hands, and an "S" in their feet. The two letters would read M[ort] S[egural]

Antoni Tàpies, Thirty Years of His Work (Buffalo, N.Y.: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1977), pp. 14-16.

¹⁹⁹Galfetti no. 160.

²⁰⁰Gimferrer no. 129.

²⁰¹Gimferrer no. 188.

²⁰²Cirlot, Significación..., p. 108-111.

²⁰³It is not farfetched to consider "M" as a sign for merda, considering the many scatological references in Tàpies' work.

(certain death).²⁰⁴ In the case of Miró, the "M," which curiously appears depicted on the palm of The Potato's subject, stands for the artist's surname.²⁰⁵ But, then, we know that Tàpies also used the initials of his name in his paintings.

The consistent use that both artists have made of letters and numbers indicates a common root. Roland Penrose's suggestion that Miró's interest in the appearance of words and their magical powers stems from the Catalan tradition --evident in the Catalan peasant decoration of carts with arabesques, their names and various inscriptions-- could be applied to Tàpies.²⁰⁶

These parallels go beyond the use of letters and numbers; they include the depiction of everyday objects and of certain parts of the body traditionally considered non-aesthetic. Among the first we find shoes, umbrellas, hats and ladders. While 'shoes' and 'umbrellas' appear in Tàpies in the seventies and eighties --and therefore outside the scope of this study--, 'hats' and, above all, 'ladders' are an important part of the iconography of the

²⁰⁴Interview with the author. Barcelona, June 1985. Cfr. Cirici, Witness..., p. 180.

²⁰⁵See, for instace, Rose, Miró in America, p. 25. Also, Penrose, Miró, pp. 63-64.

²⁰⁶Roland Penrose, "Introduction," Joan Miró (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1964), p. 7. Cited in Krauss and Rowell, Magnetic Fields, p. 96.

matter paintings during the fifties and sixties.²⁰⁷

Although the hat appears as a strong image in Tàpies' Matèria grisa en forma de barret (1966, fig. 83), or Capell capgirat (1967, fig. 75),²⁰⁸ and although they are of capital importance in Miró's Homage to Prats (1933) and even in Object (1936, fig. 100), this motif takes a secondary place to the 'ladder'. In Tàpies, we find the motif of the ladder as early as 1959 in a painting entitled Medieval (fig. 60).²⁰⁹ Later on he painted other ladders: they always meant escape and ascension to a superior and more elevated estate.²¹⁰ This is also the meaning of Miró's 'ladders' in The Farm (fig. 86), The Hunter (1923-24), Dog barking at the moon (1926, fig. 92), Landscape (1926), A star caresses the breast of a blackwoman (1938, fig. 89), and others:

Another recurrent form in my work is the ladder. In the first years it was a plastic form frequently appearing because it was so close to me --a familiar shape in The Farm. In later years, particularly during the war,

²⁰⁷Miró's 'shoe' of Still life with an old shoe (1937) could have a counterpart in Tàpies' Fond and form (1985). Similarly, Miró used the umbrella in sculptures such as Personnage au parapluie (1931, fig. 99), and could see the use of this motif in Tàpies' Paraigua (1972; Gimferrer, no. 311, fig. 63).

²⁰⁸Gimferrer no. 228; and Llorens no. 41.

²⁰⁹Gimferrer no. 167.

²¹⁰Cirlot, Significación..., p. 75. See also Barrio-Garay, Tàpies..., p. 16. A later example is L'escala (1974, fig. 81) which has parallels with Klee's The snake and the ladder (1929).

while I was on Majorca it came to symbolize
"escape."²¹¹

It is in the selection of certain parts and aspects of the human body that the similarities of motifs prove more striking. Both Tàpies and Miró tend to represent elements traditionally considered unesthetic or even ignoble, such as hair, hairy legs, and feet. Hair is an important image for Miró.²¹² It appears in one way or another throughout his career; when depicting a bear (Head of Catalan peasant, 1925, fig. 90) or, since hair is a secondary sexual characteristic, the feminine sexual organs (Sourire de ma blonde, 1924). For Tàpies this motif was very important, too. Not only had Tàpies already emphasized the hair of the figures in many of his paintings before the matter paintings,²¹³ but we also find it depicted in numerous works dating to the fifties, sixties and after, such as Figure landscape in red (1956, fig. 55),²¹⁴ or Rose (1960), or in Flesh color (1961,

²¹¹James Johnson Sweeney, "Joan Miró. Comment and Interview," Partisan Review (1948), reprinted in Rose, Miró in America, p. 117.

²¹²See Robert Motherwell, "The Significance of Miró," Art News, 58 (May, 1959): 65.

²¹³Cirlot noticed the importance of the 'hair' in the paintings of the 1948-52 period, interpreting it as expressing the idea of growth and vitality (Cirlot, Significación..., p. 79).

²¹⁴Penrose, no. 33. The marks of the figure could be read both as hairs or lacerations.

fig. 46).²¹⁵

In addition, Tàpies recalled having first employed actual hair in a painting of 1963.²¹⁶ Significantly, the one painting by Tàpies in Miró's personal art collection was Armpit (1968)²¹⁷ which depicted the close-up of an armpit and its hair. Similarly, Miró's hairy leg of The statue (1926, fig. 93) finds its counterpart in Tàpies' In the shape of a leg (1968, fig. 51);²¹⁸ and Miró's almost fetishistic insistence on feet (The farmer's wife, 1922-23, fig. 85; Sourire de ma blonde, 1924; Person throwing a stone to a bird, 1926, fig. 94; or Woman in revolt, 1938, fig. 95) is paralleled by Tàpies' works since 1958, having a more apparent presence in paintings of the sixties such as Material in the shape of a foot (1965, fig. 64).²¹⁹

In the common selection of motifs characterized by their baseness, both Miró and Tàpies address a discourse of transgression, not unlike that proposed by Georges Bataille in Le Gros Orteil. This transgression is vividly exemplified by Miró's Woman in revolt. The painting represents a naked woman running away from a

²¹⁵ACP no. 252.

²¹⁶Tàpies, Memoria...., p. 342.

²¹⁷ACP no. 326.

²¹⁸ACP no. 308.

²¹⁹MEAC no. 70.

burning village, which refers to the Spanish Civil War. As she raises her right fist and carries a sickle in her left hand, she expresses a feeling of rebellion against the atrocities of the war. However, the small size of her head and hands render this protest futile. Instead, her gigantic and phallic left foot seems to be able to reverse the course of destiny. "Flight and rebellion merge; the leg rises up and grows larger, becoming monstrous in order to confront monstrosity, blithely transgressing the process. It stretches out behind a terrified body and denies that body its femininity, its weakness The phallic leg lifts a prohibition."²²⁰

The above parallels notwithstanding, Miró's influence on Tàpies was more general than specific, and his role in the shaping of Tàpies' notion of the matter paintings had more the character of incentive than of catalyst. For Tàpies as for the other artists of his generation, Miró's work meant, above all, the avant-garde and modernism. Thus, the balance between structure and accident, the distinction between representation and resemblance, and even that sense of elegance and "finish" so characteristic of Tàpies can be seen in Miró. However, in spite of the similarities of some motifs, such as feet and hair, in spite of Miró's acquaintance

²²⁰Jacques Dupin, "Miró's Woman in Revolt, 1938," in Miró: a Retrospective, p. 45.

and friendship with Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris,²²¹ Miró never created works around the notion of baseness, materiality and transgression; Tàpies did. Instead, Miró's references to elements traditionally considered non-poetic generally speaking refer to his down-to-earth humor, a personal character that has been related to his being Catalan.²²² Thus, while we hardly find any depiction of the rotten or of the human body's physiological needs in Miró, Tàpies recalled that he had painted from 1954 to 1960, among other topics: "coitos, figura deshaciendose, ropa interior, pulmones, vientres y sexos, cuerpo carbonizado, lavabo, nariz, corazón, falo, vientre preñado, instrumento de tortura, pierna, óvulos, excrementos, pie[s], culo defecando, nalgas castigadas, suciedad, cuerpo abierto, cuerpo torturado, glande...."²²³

Similarly, even though Miró experimented with a great variety of materials and techniques, his paintings are not created around that materiality as is the case with the matter paintings. In most of his "classical" Surrealist paintings of the twenties and thirties, Miró

²²¹Joan Miró, "Memories of the rue Blomet," Miró: a Retrospective, p. 31.

²²²James Johnson Sweeney, "Joan Miró: Comment and Interview," Partisan Review, vol. 15, no. 2 (February 1948), pp. 212.

²²³Tàpies, Memoria...., pp. 340-341.

used of burlap, sandpaper, copper and other materials as the support of the painting, so that they contribute only to the space of the picture. The material qualities are felt underneath, if not in, the painting.²²⁴ We cannot conclude, then, that Tàpies derived directly the fundamental notions of matter paintings, such as materiality, baseness and transgression from Joan Miró. Nevertheless, we must assert that Miró, the man and his art, contributed greatly to putting Tàpies on that track, favoring a very special sensibility for the material:

Amb aquesta actitud Miró ens posa admirablement sobre la pista de dos problemes que avui semblen fundamentals en la creació artística. Un és el de la necessària acceptació, no resignada sinó vitalment dinàmica, del diàleg amb la matèria que escull el creador.²²⁵

* * *

Paul Klee

During his Surrealist period Tàpies' art was also indebted to the art of Paul Klee, whose influence was

²²⁴Clement Greenberg, Joan Miró, (New York: Quadrangle Press, 1949), p. 22. A different view is expressed by Gloria Moure, Miró, Escultor (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 1986), p.49.

²²⁵Tàpies, L'Art contra..., p. 90.

great on both sides of the Atlantic during the forties.²²⁶ Klee never joined the Surrealists but his art inspired many of them, including André Masson and Joan Miró. Although Klee was not primarily interested in the uncounscious or in applying Freud's ideas to his art, there are similarities between his pictorial thinking and that of the Surrealists. Besides a common interest in naïve and unselfconscious paintings, we perceive a shared sensibility for line conceived as a calligraphic expression, sensitive to the most delicate suggestions of the nervous system, and responsive to the most subtle associations.²²⁷ Klee, together with Picasso, Ernst, Miró and others, was mentioned by André Breton in the First Manifesto of Surrealism (1929);²²⁸ and in 1946

²²⁶In his 1944 book, Abstract and Surrealist Art, Sidney Janis reported: "... if there is any artist after Picasso, the character of whose work runs through twentieth-century American painting ... like a recurring theme, it is Klee." Quoted in Carolyn Lanchner, Paul Klee (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1987), p. 106. Tàpies himself was conscious of Klee's popularity in Europe during those years (See Tàpies, Memoria ..., p. 220).

²²⁷James J. Sweeney, "The place of Paul Klee," in Paul Klee, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1945), p. 19. See also, Alfred H. Barr, "Introduction," in Paul Klee, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1930), p. 8; Idem, Cubism and Abstract Art, reprint (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 180. Also, Werner Haftmann, The Mind and Work of Paul Klee (New York: Praeger, 1954), pp. 139-142.

²²⁸Breton did not consider Klee, as well as the rest of the above mentioned artists, fully Surrealists: "I would like to stress this point: they are not always Surrealists They were intruments too full of pride, and this is why they have not always produced a

Georges Bataille wrote:

J'ai beaucoup d'intérêt pour l'oeuvre de Klee, l'un des peintres contemporains qui m'ont le plus attaché.²²⁹

Around 1949, a year after his first meeting with Miró, Tàpies "discovered" Klee's work, especially through the issue of Cahiers d'Art devoted to the Swiss artist in 1945-46. Tàpies wrote:

Paul Klee era prácticamente desconocido en nuestro país. Hacía relativamente poco que había muerto y precisamente entonces empezaba a ser realmente famoso en París. Aquel volumen que le consagró Cahiers d'Art y que pude ver en casa de los Gomis fue para mí una revelación sensacional. Tal vez no hay ningún otro artista, aparte de Miró y Picasso, que yo no apreciara tanto, y estudiara con tanta atención y constancia, como a Paul Klee.²³⁰

Coincidentally, during 1948 and 1949 the work of Tàpies presented many similarities with that of Klee and Miró. To what degree or in what way one influenced Tàpies more than the other is difficult to determine, because during the twenties Klee exercised a strong influence on Miró, for whom Klee's work had a liberating

harmonious sound." André Breton, Manifestoes of Surrealism, Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane trans. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1986), p. 27.

²²⁹Georges Bataille, [Klee], Cahiers d'Art, year 20-21 (1945-46), p. 52. Curiously enough when Klee, attracted the attention of the Surrealists his work was not published in La Revolution Surrealiste the magazine that Breton edited, but in Documents, the magazine directed by Bataille.

²³⁰Memoria..., p. 219.

effect from the constrictions imposed by Cubism.²³¹

Tàpies could have assimilated Klee's stylistic constituents directly, or indirectly through Miró.

When we compare Tàpies' Surrealist paintings of 1949 such as The fire of the thorns (fig. 10) or The eyes of the foliage (fig. 12)²³² with Klee's works like Irma Rossa, the animal tamer (1918, fig. 102), Moribundus (1919, fig. 101) or Adventure between Kurl and Kamen (1925, fig. 103), we understand how Tàpies assimilated Klee's use of line and of a romantic space in which signs and non-descriptive lines appear to be floating. Like a part of Klee's works of the Bauhaus period (1920-31), the paintings by Tàpies of 1949 present an undefined abstract space which is the space characteristic of Miró's Surrealism as well as of Rodchenko's or El Lissitzky's Constructivist paintings.²³³ This space is never flat because there is a simultaneous conception of the painting as surface and as depth. We see it in the superposition of flat triangular forms, dots, or lines

²³¹Lanchner, Klee, p. 88. According to Brassaï, Miró stated: "My encounter with Klee's work was the most important event in my life. My painting was freed from all earthly bonds by his influence. Klee enabled me to realize that a single spot, a spiral, even a dot, could form the subject of a painting ..." (Brassaï, The Artists of My Life, trans. Richard Miller, New York: Viking, 1982, p. 143).

²³²ACP nos. 56 and 58.

²³³Jim M. Jordan, Paul Klee and Cubism (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 172-191.

over the receding grid of the floor tiles of Tàpies' The fire of the thorns.²³⁴ Like Klee, Tàpies freely appropriated modernist styles --primarily Surrealism, but not exclusively. Constructivism is also a source. Like Klee, these stylistic appropriations do not necessarily mean the absorption of the philosophies animating these styles. Thus, whatever we see is not correlated with any interest of the artist in the unconscious, nor in architecture nor in the applied, functional arts.²³⁵

The depiction of a fantastic fauna and flora, not from outside, but from within, is another element in common between Klee's work and Tàpies' paintings of 1949. Beyond the restraints of opticality, the artists seem to have intuitively felt and expressed the inner world, one that Klee called "visible penetration,"²³⁶ of the animal or flower. Thus, in Tàpies' The fire of the thorns, the figures are schematically drawn with lines which appear to respond to the figure's inner structure rather than to their outer configuration. It is interesting to compare

²³⁴A similar ambiguity is to be found in Lunar disconsolation (ACP no. 55, fig. 24) or Parafaragamus (ACP no.48, fig. 6) both of 1949.

²³⁵Both artists have in common a mistrust for mechanization and the machine which is alien to Constructivism and closer to Dadaism (In reference to Klee see: Jordan, Klee, p. 181).

²³⁶See Richard Verdi, Klee and Nature, (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), p. 17.

this painting with Klee's snail paintings and drawings (such as Snail, 1914; or Snail, 1924; In the sign of the snail, 1921; Snails, 1926); or with others representing people, such as Metaphysical transplant (1920, fig. 104). In both Klee's and Tàpies' works, the image of the represented object differs from its optical image, yet it does not contradict it from the point of its totality.²³⁷

All these similarities notwithstanding, Tàpies' paintings of 1949 convey a sense of terror or nightmare absent in Klee's more ironic and playful works. This is something that brings Tàpies closer to the Surrealist artists, especially to Miró, at least as they were perceived by Tàpies:

A Miró, a pesar de la fama que tiene de colorista alegre, a menudo lo veo más trágico, más "negro" que Klee, quien todo lo hace por pequeñas persuaciones.²³⁸

Besides similarities existing between a part of Tàpies' Surrealist works and Klee's paintings, there is an important relationship between Klee's art and Tàpies' matter paintings. Like Tàpies, Klee had a peculiar feeling for materials, especially for humble ones, to which he gave an elegance and near magical effects. The grounds of his oils and watercolors gave a rich expressiveness to his works because they were built up

²³⁷See, for Klee, Will Grohmann, Paul Klee, Norbert Guterman trans. (New York: Abrams Inc., 1967), p.31.

²³⁸Memoria..., p. 221.

with plaster, chalk and encaustic; and the supports included, together with linen and handmade paper, wrapping paper, cotton remnants, and even aircraft canvas.²³⁹ As early as 1914, Klee began to make works in which he combined paints, glues, fabrics, and papers. It was, however, during the last years of his career that he became more interested in making the material elements assertive substances, using, for example, newspaper glued on jute. Also, when he painted on regular artist's paper he often wet it first so that the paint would cause it to ripple and acquire a distinctive character.²⁴⁰

From 1937 on Klee increased the size of his works, which even if still small in size, became more monumental and acquired a mural-like quality which gave them a "wall-like" sense. The notion of "wall" was a common preoccupation among many avant-garde artists of the thirties. This notion has a double sided meaning. On the one hand, artists such as the Mexican muralists looked for a social art which addressed a "collective truth" greater than the individual one. Mural art allowed them to create a public art to be understood by many. On the other hand, the notion of wall has a more private

²³⁹Ann Temkin, "Klee and the avant-garde 1912-1940," Lanchner ed., Klee, p. 14. See also Sabina Rewald, Paul Klee (The Berggruen Klee Collection in The Metropolitan Museum of Art) (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), p. 33.

²⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 32.

meaning, concerning automatism, mimicry and l'informe, and the inscription of space into the body of an organism. This was the conception which defined an important part of Surrealist art, including Brassai's photographs of graffiti. Together with the rawness of some of the new materials employed in his late work and his characteristic calligraphic signs which on occasion appear like scratched or scribbled graffiti, the wall-like quality made Klee's paintings project the same impression as Brassai's murs des cavernes and murs des usines.²⁴¹ Another feature Klee and Tàpies shared, the impression of the artist's initials (P/K or A/T) in the painting²⁴² is part of this "writing on the wall," by which the artist merges with the space represented. This was extremely important in Tàpies' matter paintings, as well as in the art by other artists associated with L'Informel:

La divulgación de las imágenes de Paul Klee tuvo aquellos años un eco fulminante en todo el mundo. Sus variadísimas técnicas --los raspados, las incisiones, los grosores texturales, los collages de mallas, de filamentos, el tono grafitico-- fueron una lección y un estímulo extraordinario por todo el mundo. Muchos artistas --por ejemplo, Tobey, Dubuffet, Burri-- no escaparon, como yo, de su influencia. También el gran fotógrafo Brassai, que me impresionó, supo

²⁴¹Cfr. Brassai, "Du mur des cavernes au mur d'usine," Minotaure, 3-4 (December 14, 1933): 6.

²⁴²See Klee's Harbor with sailboats of 1937 (fig. 105) and Tàpies' Painting of 1955 (ACP no. 129, fig. 33).

valorar el tono gráfico de la obra de Paul Klee.²⁴³

* * *

Max Ernst

Max Ernst is yet another Surrealist painter whose works have affinities with those by Tàpies. We could easily find in both artists the coincidence of some motifs. For example, in his Oedipus Rex of 1922 (fig. 116), Ernst symbolized the feminine sexual organ as a nut with split shell.²⁴⁴ Similarly, the split nut as well as the split bud, are recurrent motifs in Tàpies' paintings of his Surrealist period, including Nunf of 1949²⁴⁵ (fig.

²⁴³Memoria..., p. 220. The similarities with the artists of this generation have been frequently noted. Klee's Stricken city (1936), for instance, have been perceived as anticipating Dubuffet's work of the fifties (Rewald, Klee, p. 250).

²⁴⁴See Whitney Chadwick, Myth in Surrealist Painting, 1929-1939 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Press, 1980), p. 20. Paintings such as The blind swimmer (1934, fig. 117) express this same idea.

²⁴⁵ACP no. 83. Cirici-Pellicer titled this painting Cat and dated it of 1951. However, this painting lacks the three-dimensional profundity, with its play of bright and dark areas, with its magic boxes and doors of the works of 1950, such as The letter, also called El lector final (ACP no. 73, fig. 82). Neither does Nunf have the social implications of the paintings that Tàpies did in 1951 after his trip to Paris. On the contrary, the importance of line, the floating relations between space and figure, as well as the motifs of the cat and the flower all point to 1949 as the date for this painting,

22) or even The probing of the foliage of 1950 (fig. 17).²⁴⁶ Later on, during the second half of the sixties, those motifs appeared in works such as Material in the shape of a nut of 1967 (fig. 50).²⁴⁷ This painting represents a shrivelled, rotten nut, which evokes at the same time the buttock and the genitals of an old woman.²⁴⁸

Although Tàpies discovered Ernst's works approximately at the same time as those by Klee and Miró, Ernst's influence was felt a year later. This influence appears to mark an evolution in the Surrealism of Tàpies. In 1950, Tàpies began to abandon the open space which had characterized his paintings of the two preceding years and began to paint enclosed spaces, interiors with mysterious doors, and double-bottomed boxes.

That same year Tàpies also created some open landscapes, generally nocturnal scenes, such as Nymphs,

 and relate to works such as Dream garden (ACP no. 59, fig. 13).

²⁴⁶ACP no. 67. The sexual connotations of this painting are accentuated by the fact that together with two split shapes (one that appears to refer to the feminine sexual organs; the other which has a phallic form), there are also, in the opposite rectangles at the bottom of the canvas, a breast and a pair of hanging testicles.

²⁴⁷ACP no. 299.

²⁴⁸Cirici, Tàpies, Witness..., p. 259.

dryads and harpies (fig. 15)²⁴⁹ or Landscape of Urus (fig. 14).²⁵⁰ These paintings are more illusionistic than the "cosmic fields" of the two preceding years and represent petrified landscapes, not unlike certain works by Ernst such as The entire city (1935-36). These paintings present various similarities including a type of composition divided into two parts; on the lower section a petrified forest, city or landscape, and on the upper section a planet, moon, or star of oversized proportions. These works appear to have been painted with an extreme attention to detail which emphasizes that characteristic tactile quality of the objects represented.

Considering that the material aspects of a work of art are so significant to the matter paintings, that important part of Ernst's art which has to do with the securing of those qualities could have not gone unnoticed by Tàpies, who wrote:

En un tono diferente, Max Ernst. Aunque en muchas de sus obras fuese más por motivos literarios que plásticos, están sus "bosques" y tantas pinturas donde la calidad plástico-textural tiene muchísima importancia.²⁵¹

Although there are precedents as early as 1919, Ernst fully developed the frottage technique in 1925 with

²⁴⁹ACP No. 62.

²⁵⁰ACP no. 61.

²⁵¹Tàpies, Memoria..., p. 221.

his Histoire Natural.²⁵² Significantly, Histoire Natural exerted an special influence on Tàpies, for in 1950, at a moment in which Ernst's reputation in Europe was about to increase considerably,²⁵³ and at a moment when Tàpies was living in Paris, Tàpies decided to create a counter-replica of Ernst's Histoire Natural.²⁵⁴

There is, indeed, a similarity of conception between Tàpies' matter painting and Ernst's frottage, the artistic procedure apparently developed under the

²⁵²Werner Spies, Max Ernst, Frottages, Joseph M. Bernstein trans. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986), p. 6.

²⁵³Evan M. Maurer, "Image and Dream of Desire: The Prints and Collage Novels of Max Ernst," Robert Rainwater ed., Max Ernst: Beyond Surrealism (New York and Oxford: The New York Public Library and Oxford University Press, 1986) p. 51. Significantly, after World War II the textures of his paintings, not as a mode of representation but as the content of that representation, came to the fore: "The informal style that has dominated postwar painting for many years is greatly indebted to Max Ernst. Without Ernst one could not imagine Fautrier, Dubuffet, and the rest." Werner Spies, Max Ernst, 1950-1970 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1971), p. 62.

²⁵⁴At this moment Tàpies was deeply involved in Marxism, and in the role of art in society. In consequence he did not follow the magical-biological view of Ernst but instead a Marxist one, even though magic had been very important to Tàpies: "En los primeros días de mi estancia en Saint-Cloud hice una serie de una treintena de dibujos que titulé Historia Natural, un poco como réplica de los frottages de Max Ernst que también llevan este nombre. Entonces encontraba insignificante, a pesar de que me había gustado mucho, la explicación puramente biológico-mágica que Ernst nos daba de la naturaleza" (Tàpies, Memoria..., p. 273).

stimulus created by Masson's and Miró's new work.²⁵⁵ This technique consists in a pencil rubbing over paper placed on a surface, originally a floorboard, parts of whose texture get imprinted in the paper. The rubbing provides random patterns which the artist modifies creating fantastic images and landscapes.²⁵⁶ In the frottages, as in matter paintings, that which is a technical value merges, as Werner Spies expressed it, with an image which structures that material into a semantic unit and transforms it into language.²⁵⁷

Material is objectified, acquiring in Tàpies' paintings the characteristic look of a wall, and in Ernst a wood-like quality. The material has a dimension of its own which is superimposed on the object represented without fully identifying with it. This confrontation of two planes of reality makes Tàpies' figures, as well as Ernst's, appear in a characteristic state of suspension. This diminishes the distinction between the various objects and forms, expressing that constant longing of many artistic trends for a pantheistic union with the

²⁵⁵William Rubin, Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage, p. 82.

²⁵⁶See Ernst's description of his discovery of the frottage technique in Max Ernst, "An Informal Life of Max Ernst," William S. Lieberman ed. Max Ernst rep. ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), p. 14.

²⁵⁷Spies, Ernst, Frottages, pp. 9-11.

natural world.²⁵⁸ This use of the material elements also led both artists to achieve a balance between automatism and control. In addition, this procedure implies a tactile experience of the world rather than one primarily optical.²⁵⁹

* * *

Salvador Dalí

Although Tàpies' Surrealist works appear much less related, if at all, to Dalí than to Miró, Klee or Ernst, there are coincidences between Dalí's Surrealism, and Tàpies' matter paintings. There are iconographic parallels, but perhaps there is also a similarity of conception that implies common sources, if not a relation.

A common motif in Surrealist iconography is that of the buttocks and the anus, and it can be found both in Dalí's early Surrealist work and in Tàpies' matter paintings. In the case of Tàpies, the double curve at

²⁵⁸Maurer, "Images of Dream and Desire...", pp. 48-49. Both Tàpies and Ernst developed iconographic motifs which expressed this desire of communion with nature.

²⁵⁹Giulio Carlo Argan, "Il Subliminale di Max Ernst," Filiberto Menna ed., Studi sul Surrealismo (Roma: Officina Edizioni, 1977), p. 19.

the bottom of Painting no. 27 (1955, fig. 34)²⁶⁰ seems to have evolved to that at the top of no. VII of 1956 (fig. 36),²⁶¹ and to the figure in Figure landscape in red also of 1956 (fig. 55),²⁶² and from these two to Two painted ovals of 1965 (fig. 56).²⁶³ The motif of the buttocks is rendered more clearly in other paintings in which the legs are also insinuated, as in Yellow band of 1966 (fig. 49).²⁶⁴ The anus is of special significance in these representations. In all of them the anus is marked either by a spot of different color, as in Painting no. 27, or by a shadow, as in Figure landscape in red, or just by a simple incision in the painting's surface, as in Yellow band. A 1959 work Beige with black circle, (fig. 44)²⁶⁵ appears as part of this iconography since on the flat surface of the canvas the black hole also turns out to represent the anus. Similarly, the anus-motif can be

²⁶⁰ACP no. 133.

²⁶¹ACP no. 160.

²⁶²Penrose no. 33.

²⁶³Penrose no. 59. The reappearance of motifs in different moments of Tàpies' career is due to the fact that he does not develop them as a series but as kind of musical themes which are repeated in different forms during the year (Interview with the author. Barcelona, June 1986).

²⁶⁴ACP. No. 291. In some paintings Jean Dubuffet represented the buttocks in a similar manner (i.e.: Triumph and glory, 1950).

²⁶⁵ACP no. 219.

found in an important work by Dalí The lugubrious game (1929, fig. 108), which was his reception piece for Surrealism.²⁶⁶ We clearly see the form of buttocks in that section which was indentified by Bataille as the objects of desire of the artist.²⁶⁷ There are other coincidences of motifs, such as the 'finger' (Dalí's The wounded bird of 1926, fig. 111, which has its counterpart in Tàpies' Ocher relief in white of 1957).²⁶⁸

Dalí's early Surrealist paintings such as The putrefied donkey (1928, fig. 109) or Bird (1929, fig. 110) show that he experimented with the texture of paintings, including in his canvases sand and resins, thus creating works of contrasting surfaces.²⁶⁹ As we know, this interest in texture and in the expressiveness of the materials is characteristic of Tàpies' matter paintings.

Dalí did not continue searching for an expressivity of the materials, and his art became more figurative. When he used new materials or affixed real substances to the canvas, including photographs and engravings as in Accommodations of desire (1929, fig. 107), he did not

²⁶⁶Dawn Ades, Dalí and Surrealism (New York: Harper & Row: 1982), p. 65.

²⁶⁷Georges Bataille, "The Lugubrious Game," in Visions of Excess, pp. 24-30.

²⁶⁸ACP no. 171.

²⁶⁹Ades, Dalí and Surrealism, p. 60.

intend to establish a link with reality as Tàpies did in the matter paintings, or as Cubism had done. Instead, Dalí was interested in rendering his hallucinatory images with the clarity and precision of Dutch seventeenth century painting as a source and stimulus for delusion, making the viewer believe in the existence of the phenomena represented.²⁷⁰ Hence, Dalí's admiration for Vermeer, Meissonier and Fortuny.

Later on, during the forties and fifties, Dalí developed a renewed interest in matter. The explosion of the atom bomb and the new developments in the knowledge of the structure of matter absorbed Dalí's interest to the point that he tried to apply his own version of them to his art. Whereas during the thirties Freud was his mentor, in the preface to the catalogue to his exhibition at the Carstairs Gallery of New York, Dalí included a Manifesto of Anti-Matter, and wrote: "today my father is Dr. Heisenberg...."²⁷¹

The impact of the atom bomb and the new discoveries of physics were felt after the war among a broad spectrum

²⁷⁰See Chadwick, Myth in Surrealist Painting, p. 63. Soby quotes Dalí saying: "The illusionism of the most abjectly arriviste and irresistible imitative art, the usual paralysing trick of trompe l'oeil, the most analytically narrative and discredited academicism can all become sublime hierarchies of thought and the means of approach to new exactitudes of concrete irrationalities." James Thrall Soby, Dalí (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), p. 10.

²⁷¹Quoted by Ades, Dalí and Surrealism, p. 178.

of artists on both sides of the Atlantic. Tàpies was one of them:

Me interesé mucho por conocer más a fondo las investigaciones sobre el átomo, las discusiones entre deterministas e indeterministas, los problemas sobre la cuanta, sobre la casualidad, la incertidumbre, etc. Naturalmente, todo este conjunto de ideas me transtornó muchísimo No hay duda de que la necesidad que yo oscuramente sentía --como la de algunos maestros que me influyeron-- de introducir nuevos materiales en la pintura obedecía a un intento de sugerir muchos de los problemas que planteaban la materia, la substancia, la naturaleza.²⁷²

Although the art created after World War II by Dalí and Tàpies was radically different, both were supported by Michel Tapié partially in terms of their expression of matter. Tapié wrote of Dalí:

Ses dernières oeuvres "corpusculaires" font une curieuse jonction ... entre Velasquez et les plus actuelles tentatives structurelles d'artistes como Tobey or Mathieu Ce gran visionnaire, d'autant plus visionnaire pour nous que sa peinture est vertigineusement proche du reel, a toujours été très normalment hauté par les phénomènes de la Physique viscosité, densité, équilibre, espace son mis violemment en question non par l'habituel dépaysement surréaliste des innattendues recontres mais à travers un comportement autre des composants structuro-morphologiques ²⁷³

In spite of their common interest in the new theories about matter, Dalí's art at that moment did not

²⁷²Memoria..., p. 212.

²⁷³Michel Tapié, Dalí (Paris: Editions du Chêne, p. 1957), pp. 5-6.

have any influence on Tàpies' matter paintings. Dalí's works important to Tàpies were the early Surrealist ones. It also appears that it was some of Dalí's early theories, expressed in his writings, and movies, rather than Dalí's paintings which were significant to Tàpies.²⁷⁴

Like Breton, Tàpies has continuously and passionately denounced the later academization of Dalí and his political approval of Franco's regime and the Vatican, but has recognized the prestige of Dalí's early period work:

Una mañana [J.V. Foix] quiso llevarnos a ver a Dalí, viejo amigo suyo, por mar, en su barca motora, de la cual él era el timonel. Dalí había tenido para mí un gran prestigio debido a muchas de sus teorías de la época en que publicó el Manifeste Groc con Gasch y formó parte del grupo Surrealista. Ahora, sin embargo, confieso que me parecía una especie de bufón al servicio del Vaticano, del franquismo y, sobre todo, del dinero.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴Even before the Spanish Civil War Dalí was as important as an intellectual as he was as a painter. See, for instance, C.B. Morris, Surrealism and Spain 1920-1936, pp. 12-21.

²⁷⁵Memoria Personal, pp. 257-258. During the late fifties and early sixties Dalí supported Tàpies. Dalí wrote an article on Tàpies' work in which he praised the "wall" quality of his work: "En Catalan Tàpies veut dire 'pan de mure' et à ceux qui rapprochent aux tableaux de Tàpies de recembler a un pan de mur, Dalí leur fait repeler que précisément les meilleures pages que Marcel Prust écrivit furent sur le 'pan de mur jaune' que Wermer pengui...." Original Dalí's manuscript in "Dalinian" French reproduced in Eduard Forns, Dalí y Los Libros, exh. cat. (Barcelona: Editorial Mediterránea, 1985), p. 61. Published in English in Dalí, "Tàpies, Tàpies, clàssic, clàssic!", Art News, 61, 3 (May, 1962): 41, 67.

The most important contribution of Dalí to the theory of Surrealism was his critical-paranoic method which consists in the ability of the artist to perceive different images within a given configuration. In this manner, what in a painting like Spain (1938) seems at first glance to represent a battle of men and horses, in a second look is perceived as a woman's head. This idea was not new since it had been previously employed by Max Ernst when he interpreted the images emerging from his frottages. It even goes back to Leonardo da Vinci's Treatise of Painting in which young artists are advised to discover scenes or landscapes in old walls or clouds. Tàpies, Dalí, Ernst, and Miró were well aware of Leonardo. Dalí, for instance stated:

Leonardo proved an authentic innovator of paranoic painting by recommending to his pupils that, for inspiration, in a certain frame of mind they regard the indefinite shapes of the spots of dampness and the cracks on the wall, that they might see immediately rise into view, out of the confused and the amorphous, the precise contours of the visual tumult of an imaginary equestrian

Also in 1955, Dalí wrote a text for the catalogue of Tharrats and Tàpies' exhibit at Stockholm's Sturegalleriet, published as a special issue of the review Dau al Set (November, 1955). See also M.J. Ragué-Arias, "Antoni Tàpies en la hora del equilibrio," Jano, 12-18 October 1979, pp. 143-8. In recent years, Tàpies' confrontation with the government's support of Dalí has raised strong polemics. See: Tàpies, Per un Art Modern i Progressista, pp. 104-107.

battle.²⁷⁶

The notion of the double image, that is, the object that is figure and background simultaneously, is also present in Tàpies' matter paintings. For instance, in his 1965 painting Relief ocre avec rose (fig. 68)²⁷⁷ the forms of the kneeling woman represent both the naked body of the woman and a wall. Significantly, Tàpies also mentions Leonardo's advice as relevant to his discovery of the notion of the "wall" and matter paintings:

Y desde todas las divulgaciones arqueológicas que fui absorbiendo hasta los consejos de da Vinci, desde todas las destrucciones de Dada hasta las fotos de Brassai, todo esto contribuyó --y no es de extrañar-- a que ya las primeras obras de 1945 tuviesen algo que ver con los graffiti de la calle y con todo un mundo ... que también circulaba por los muros de mi país.²⁷⁸

Dalí's Endless enigma of 1938 (fig. 106) could be

²⁷⁶Salvador Dalí, "Dalí, Dalí!," in Salvador Dalí, exh. cat., New York, 1939. Quoted by Soby, Dalí, p. 21. Miró was very explicit in his interview with James Johnson Sweeney: "Nowadays, I rarely start a picture from an hallucination as I did in the twenties What is more interesting to me today is the material I am working with. It supplies the shape which suggests the form just as cracks in a wall suggested shapes to Leonardo" (Sweeney, "Joan Miró: Comment and Interview," reprinted in Rose, Miró in America, p. 118). See also Max Ernst, "Au-delà de la peinture," Cahiers d'Art, no. 6-7, 1936. In actuality, the allusions to "le mur de Léonard" were common among the Surrealists. Breton referred to it too, in his "Le Château Etoilé," Minotaure, no. 8, pp. 25-40.

²⁷⁷Prats no. 93.

²⁷⁸Antoni Tàpies, La Práctica del Arte, (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1973) p. 139.

perceived simultaneously as a reclining philosopher, a greyhound, a face, a mythological beast, a still-life and a beach scene. However, in Tàpies' matter paintings the phenomenon of the double image does not generate unexpected relations of unrelated objects. In the matter paintings there is no displacement of meaning of a reality which the artist cannot confront directly; neither is there a dream, nor Dalí's intention of systematization of delirium. The world of the matter paintings is quotidian. Tàpies' paintings are about anti-idealism and about the perception of the real.²⁷⁹

The architecture of Antoni Gaudí in particular, and that of Catalan Modernisme in general, were very important for both Tàpies and Dalí, as for Miró.²⁸⁰ For Tàpies, Modernisme confirmed his interest in the material elements of painting and in texture.²⁸¹ It also was an important source of motifs since many of Tàpies' matter paintings resembled the walls of Catalan Modernista

²⁷⁹The opinion of Cirlot was somehow different as he saw in Tàpies a "realismo desplazado," like that of the Surrealists. But this one had to do, according to Cirlot, more with the forms than with the contents. Cirlot, Significación..., p. 43.

²⁸⁰Joan Miró, "Ma Dernière Oeuvre Est un Mur," Derrière Le Miroir, 107-109 (1958): 24.

²⁸¹Tàpies' work has been frequently compared to that of Moderniste artist Nicolás Raurich, whose work was characterized by the use of thick layers of paint. See, for example, Vera Linhartová, Tàpies (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1972), pp. 8-9.

buildings.²⁸² For Dalí this architecture was also an important source of motifs, and many of the ectoplasmatic forms of his works of the early thirties could be traced back to Modernisme's "undulant-convulsive" style.²⁸³

In his 1933 text for Minotaure, "De La Beauté Terrifiante et Comestible de L'Architecture Modern-Style," Dalí defended the organic and edible character of this architecture and, in its capacity for realizing unconscious desires, he perceived a precedent for Surrealism.²⁸⁴ Dalí's essay was accompanied with photographs by Brassai and Man Ray. These are photographs of architectonic elements which have a definitive organic character, such as Man Ray's photograph of Gaudí's Casa Milà, whose curved façade has the appearance of frozen waves or of natural forms of rocks and trees. In conjunction with Dalí's text, these photographs of forms which being dead mimic nature appear to illustrate the above discussed ideas of another contributor to Minotaure, Roger Caillois.

Michel Tapié linked Tapiés' matter paintings to

²⁸²See, for instance, Painting (1957; ACP no. 165) in relation to the photographs of some houses of the Sant Gervasi quarters in Barcelona (fig. 73). Also Barrio-Garay, Tapiés, p. 12; Juan Eduardo Cirlot, "La Pintura de Antonio Tapiés," Parpalló, no. 4 (July-August, 1959); Marisa Volpi, "Un Maestro dell'Arte Spagnola Contemporanea," Avanti!, 26 February 1964.

²⁸³Soby, Dalí, p. 13.

²⁸⁴Minotaure, no. 3-4, 1933, pp.69-76.

that Spanish tradition which he saw embodied in Gaudí's art. Not by chance, Tàpies entitled a matter painting of 1956 Hommage to Gaudí (fig. 41),²⁸⁵ whose most distinctive element is a broken plate, a clear reference to Gaudí. In most of his early texts on Antoni Tàpies, Michel Tapié invariably referred to the names of Gaudí and Dalí, as well as Miró and Picasso.²⁸⁶ Although the influence of Miró and, above all, Joan Prats was extremely significant in Tàpies' re-evaluation of Gaudí's art, Dalí was instrumental directly through his own writings, and indirectly through Michel Tapié:

También, por entonces, además de la obra de Gaudí fui valorando mucho otros temas del arte, de la literatura y de la música de la época modernista. Quiero pensar en la influencia de los artículos leídos en casa de Prats --no puedo olvidar el de Dalí-- con los cuales mi situación personal parecía tan acorde.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ACP no. 180.

²⁸⁶"[Tàpies] vient d'un pays où réussissent merveilleusement les expériences de cette sorte, le moine mystique Raymond Lull a résolu la fausse contradiction apparent entre la mystique et la logistique ... le calculateur du génie qu'était Gaudí a d'emblée dominé les structures généralisées, engageant pour l'avenir la riche matière première de l'informal" Michel Tapié, Tàpies, exh. cat. (Paris: Galerie Stadler, 1956) reprinted in Francesc Vicens ed. Prolegomènes a une Esthétique Autre de Michel Tapié, (Barcelona: Centre International de Recherches Esthetiques, 1960), pp. 171-172.

²⁸⁷Tàpies, Memoria..., p. 233. We also must consider that after the Civil War, during the forties, a kind of neo-Noucentisme took hold in the Spanish artistic world. Traditionally Noucentisme had reacted against Modernisme in general, and against Gaudí in particular.

The similarities between Tàpies' works and Dalí's extend to media other than painting. In Dalí's and Buñuel's Le chien andalou (1928-29) some shots include an armpit as well as parts severed from the human body, such as arms or hands. In turn, we discover two paintings by Tàpies of 1968 which depict an armpit (Material in the shape of an armpit), or a leg (In the shape of a leg) which seems to have been cut off its body. Similarly, important elements in Tàpies' works, the anus and buttocks, are principal elements in Le chien andalou.²⁸⁸ "La lune" scene, at the beginning of the movie, has been related to the buttocks of the woman who appears in the eleventh shot. In it the face of the woman is read as that of the buttocks whose center is occupied by the woman's illuminated eye perceived as the anus.²⁸⁹ This is even more interesting in our case since Tàpies relates that one of the motifs in his paintings from 1954 to 1956

It is logical, then, that when younger generations of artists including Tàpies reacted against Noucentisme's academization they returned to Gaudí's art.

²⁸⁸See Stuart Liebman, "Un Chien Andalou. The Talking Cure," Rudolf E. Kuenzli ed., Dada and Surrealist Film (New York: Willis Locker Owens, 1987), pp. 143-158.

²⁸⁹Reminding us that the anus is commonly called in French "l'oeil du cul," Liebman associates this image with the man at the beginning of the movie who was staring the moon (the buttocks) and who could be described as "un homme qui jette un coup d'oeil," the last three words becoming when inverted "oeil du coup," which sounds as "oeil du cul" (Ibid., p. 147).

is the face/sex (cara-sexo).²⁹⁰ In fact, his Painting no. 27 (fig. 34) could be read both as buttocks and as face.

The similarities of motifs are obviously extended to other movies by Dalí and Buñuel, such as L'Age d'Or (1929). A sofa, mirror or a bare foot (even if that of a statue) are motifs of the movie which are also characteristic of Tàpies' works.

In Tàpies' iconography, as well as in that of Buñuel and Surrealist Dalí, we perceive a preference for motifs considered repulsive by certain standards, including armpits, hairy legs, and anus dripping excrement. For Dalí, the cardinal images of life were excrement, blood and putrefaction;²⁹¹ If Tàpies' works were considered during the second half of the sixties as precedents of Arte Povera, it was due, in part, to his having emphasized the base and passive parts of the body

²⁹⁰Tàpies, Memoria...., p. 340.

²⁹¹"It has to be said once and for all to art critics, artists & C., that they need expect nothing from the new Surrealist images but disappointment, distaste and repulsion." (Salvador Dalí, "L'Âne Pourri," Le Surrealisme au Service de La Révolution, no. 1: 9-12, 1930. Cited in Soby, Dalí, p. 11). In actuality, this interest for decay and putrefaction appears to be characteristic of many of the Spanish Surrealists, including Maruja Mallo for whom man's presence is felt only in the footprints, in the garments, in the skeletons and in the corpses. See C.B. Morris, Surrealism and Spain, p. 47. See also Lucía García de Carpi, La Pintura Surrealista Española (1924-1936) (Madrid: Editorial Istmo, 1986), p. 170.

as well as his attraction for materials and objects "depreciated" by technological societies. As Tàpies said:

Lo que estaba sucio y estropeado me parecía a menudo más digno que todas las asepsias y todas las higienes burguesas Y, muy especialmente, la valoración de todo lo que es menospreciado, que en años posteriores incluso se concentrará en la imagen de la paja, de los estiércoles, de los calcetines sucios, del casi nada...²⁹²

These motifs reflect a materialist position and an attitude of rejection of any idealist aestheticism. This rejection was one of the objectives of Le chien andalou. Dalí and Buñuel applied the name of "perros andaluces" to the Andalusian Modernist poets from the previous generation who had an "idealistic" and "aesthetic" poetry. Juan Ramón Jiménez, an Andalusian and a distilled product of Spanish Symbolism of the turn of the century, was the model for those poets who were so much criticized by Buñuel and Dalí. They wrote the following letter to Juan Ramón:

We believe it is our duty to inform you -- disinterestedly-- that your work is deeply repugnant to us because of its immorality, its hysteria, its arbitrary quality. Especially: MERDE! for your Platero y Yo, for your facile and illintentioned Platero y Yo, the least donkeyish and the most odious donkey that we have ever encountered.²⁹³

²⁹²Memoria..., p. 337.

²⁹³Ibid., p. 47. The dead mule (Dalí's l'âne pourri) could also be perceived as a reference to Juan Ramón Jiménez's donkey protagonist of Platero y yo. Buñuel, who

Aestheticism is considered one of the burdens of our society. A drawing by Tàpies of 1949, La Musiqueta (The Little Music) represents a violinist who, as he performs, confuses his music with the report of a fart. In his writings, Tàpies has frequently attacked empty aestheticism:

Lo que se nos quería hacer pasar por valores eran tan sólo los ingredientes artísticos -- si acaso los hay-- y en cambio lo que verdaderamente cuenta ha sido siempre el pensamiento o los sentimientos que el autor nos ha querido comunicar.²⁹⁴

In Le chien andalou aestheticism is one of the elements which prevents the protagonist from achieving his objective, that is, from fulfilling his desire. The scene in which the man is almost in a state of ecstasy feeling up the woman's breast and buttocks is followed and interrupted by the man "dragging behind him a heavy burden of cork mats, melons, two Marist priests, two pianos, each bearing the carcass of a donkey and oozing

was even more radical than Dalí in perceiving the aesthetics of beauty as a bourgeois ideal did not hesitate to write about his friend the poet Federico García Lorca, to whom the title Le Chien Andalou appears to allude: "Federico wants to do Surrealist things, but they are false, done with intelligence, which can never discover the things which is an instance of his trouble. It is as artistic as his Ode to the Blessed Sacrament and will raise an erection in the feeble member of Falla and other Andalusian artists." See: Francisco Aranda, Luis Buñuel. A Critical Biography, trans. David Robinson (New York: Da Capo, 1985), p. 48. Significantly, Le chien andalou was previous to the title of the movie the title of a 1927 unpublished book by Buñuel.

²⁹⁴Tàpies, Práctica del Arte, p. 164.

from the lid entrails and excrement."²⁹⁵ The piano and the priests are symbols of aesthetic and religious ideas which are obstacles for the fulfillment of desire. "The inhibition of voyeurism and sadomasochism, the imagistic baggage of inhibition -piano (aesthetic culture), dead mules (work), Catholic brothers (religion)."²⁹⁶

Since the desire of the protagonists of Le Chien Andalou is continuously frustrated and doomed to failure, this movie seems to express Bataille's notion of love as expenditure which the French writer counterposed to the Western system of production; a system that represses and impedes the expansion of desire.²⁹⁷ The space of desire is the space of movement, of a passage from self-possession to a state of self-loss, and back again.²⁹⁸ This passage is, according to Bataille, due to our longing to transcend human discontinuity and to introduce

²⁹⁵Aranda, Buñuel. A Critical Biography, p. 62.

²⁹⁶Paul Sandro, Diversions of Pleasure: Luis Buñuel and The Crises of Desire (Columbus, Ohio: State University Press, 1987), p. 45.

²⁹⁷"Pleasure, whether art, permissible debauchery, or play, is definitively reduced, in the intellectual representations in circulation, to a concession; in other words it is reduced to a diversion whose role is subsidiary. The most appreciable share of life is given as the condition --sometimes even as the regrettable condition-- of productive social activity humanity recognizes the right to acquire, to conserve and to consume rationally, but it excludes in principle nonproductive expenditure" (Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," in Visions of Excess, p. 117).

²⁹⁸Sandro, Diversions of Pleasure, p. 46.

in us the sentiment of continuity.²⁹⁹ In the case of the protagonists of Le chien andalou, the need for continuity is not fulfilled by the satisfaction of interpersonal desire; instead it is fulfilled at a narcissistic level by an object. At the beginning of Le chien andalou the woman is looking at a book's reproduction of Vermeer's painting The lacemaker. The picture also represents a woman absorbedly looking at her work. We have here, then, an expression of desire to recover the lost state of totality through the mirror of art, designed to solicit and satisfy narcissistic desire.³⁰⁰

In the following scene, when the cyclist arrives, the woman throws the book substituting one object of desire, which is an art object, for another which promises the fulfillment of desire. Yet this desire will never be consummated, and the same structure is recycled. This continuous state of change in the movie, exemplified for one in the woman's armpit turning into a porcupine, is resolved at the end of the movie when the protagonists appear half buried in sand as in a static tableau. "They have left the fetish objects of their stories behind them only to become fetish objects themselves. For now that the lovers are stripped of what little autonomy they

²⁹⁹Georges Bataille, L'Érotisme, (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957), pp. 17-32.

³⁰⁰Sandro, Ibid.

still had as characters, their aesthetic function is acknowledged explicitly."³⁰¹

Many of the motifs in the matter paintings are objects of desire, such as the letter "M" which, if it stands for Mort (Death), also stands for the open legs of a woman.³⁰² As in Le chien andalou the fulfillment of desire is continuously interrupted, since the object represented is frequently obliterated by an X or by footsteps, as we see it in Petjades sobre llit marró (1966, fig. 59) where the bed is crossed out by an "X" and crossed over by footprints. On other occasions small patterns or graffiti superimposed on the surface of the painting negate the objectivity of the represented object of desire by revealing the flatness of the painting. Even more, most of the objects represented by the matter paintings are characteristically absent, notably the footprints, as in Marble-worker's sand with six foot

³⁰¹Ibid., p. 50.

³⁰²"The M against the bed, he says, became in the process of painting 'woman's legs open like unfolded wings'" (Barrio-Garay, Tàpies, p. 18). See also Victoria Combalia, Tàpies (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 1984) pp. 11-12. It is interesting seeing the "M" motif in relation to Painting and confetti (1967. Penrose no. 65, fig. 57). A similar iconography has been perceived in some recent works such as Dies d'aigua II (1987), which Combalia has interpreted as a representation of the theme of anal penetration (Victoria Combalia, ed. Tàpies. Anys 80, Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1988, p. 46).

prints (1959, fig. 42).³⁰³

The representation of an absence such as a footprint, and the negation of any represented object of the matter paintings are impediments to the fulfillment of desire. However, as in Le chien andalou, the desire is fulfilled at a more global textual level. The gesture and dynamic action expressed by the handprints, graffiti or criss-crossing is combined in Tàpies' work with a consciousness of style and form, and by a refinement of the craftsmanship which borders on the aesthetic. This formalism, which was already perceived in the fifties when Tàpies was considered the Malevich of L'Art Informel,³⁰⁴ acknowledges explicitly the aesthetic function of the paintings, turning them into fetishes

³⁰³ACP no. 211. According to Cirici, these footprints refer to a vanished reality and relate Tàpies' work with Conceptual Art (Alexandre Cirici Pellicer, Antoni Tàpies i els Petits Motors, exh. cat. Palma de Mallorca: Sala Pelaires, 1971, p.4). According to Joan Teixidor, they refer to solitude (Joan Teixidor, Antoni Tàpies. Maderas, Papeles, Cartones y Collages, Barcelona: Sala Gaspar, 1965, p. 22). For another interpretation of the footprints see Georges Raillard, "Tàpies A Mots Découverts," Derrière Le Miroir, 210 (June 1974): 14. See also Werner Schmalenbach, Tàpies. Dibujos (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 1974), p. 23.

³⁰⁴See footnote no. 74. Cirlot also said that already in the early works of the second half of the forties, Tàpies successfully joined the distasteful with the seductive (Juan Eduardo Cirlot, "Antonio Tapies, su Primer Período," Correo de Las Artes, no. 20, October 1959, p. 3). See also Idem, "Tàpies y La Escuela Española Actual," Destino 10 October 1959. Also, Raoul-Jean Moulin, "Tàpies: Présence de L'Homme et du Temps," Les Lettres Françaises, no. 1208, 15-21 December 1967, p. 30.

which at last will fullfill our desires, if only at an artistic and narcissistic level.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁵In a different context Giulio Carlo Argan already referred to the amulet-like character of Tàpies' art, relating this character to its formalism (Giulio Carlo Argan, "La Superstizione di Tàpies," L'Europa Letteraria (Rome) 3 (June 1960): 215-222.

CHAPTER VI

MATTER PAINTING AND SURREALISM

Far from being a one-sided movement, Surrealism was composed of different and frequently antagonistic groups, whose roles within the movement changed over the years. The ideas of its members were not monolithic, and the trials and excommunications of those who were considered to deviate from the mainstream were continuous.

What is, then, the Surrealism that the matter paintings refer to? So far as it can be stated, the Surrealist elements of the matter paintings are related to the ideas generated by Georges Bataille, who officially broke with Breton's Surrealism in 1929.³⁰⁶ A

³⁰⁶Breton devoted a relatively long section of his Second Manifesto of Surrealism to attacking Bataille: "M. Bataille professes to wish only to consider in the world that which is vilest, most discouraging and most corrupted The only reason we are going on at such length about flies is that M. Bataille loves flies. Not we: we love the miters of old evocator, the miter of pure linen to whose front point was affixed a blade of gold and upon which flies did not settle, because they had been purified to keep them away." André Breton,

reading of Bataille's writings provides us with a series of images and themes which seem recreated in many paintings by Tàpies: an anus dropping excrement, an abandoned shoe, a foot, and others.³⁰⁷

The affinity between Tàpies and Bataille is best expressed in the motif of the foot, which Tàpies began using before the matter paintings, and that continues to the present in different forms (from the iconic representation of the image of a foot to the indexical sign of the foot's imprint).³⁰⁸ In these representations Tàpies purposely rejects any canon of ideal beauty, one that has been already disrupted by choosing a motif traditionally considered distasteful and fetishistic. The foot of Material in the shape of a foot (1965, fig. 64) is not smooth and attractive, instead it

Manifestoes of Surrealism, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1972), pp. 181, 184.

³⁰⁷In the Solar Anus, for instance, Bataille wrote: "An abandoned shoe, a rotten tooth, a snub nose, the cook spitting in the soup of his masters are to love what a flag is to nationality. An umbrella, a sexagenarian, a seminarian, the small rotten eggs, the hollow eyes of judges are the roots that nourish love" (Georges Bataille, Visions of Excess. Selected Writings, 1927-1939, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, p.6).

³⁰⁸As the letters "A" and "T" appear imprinted in many paintings by Tàpies, the feet --in Spanish "pies"-- has been interpreted as another reference to TA-pies' surname. See José Miguel Ullán, "Pour ce qui a trait à Tàpies," in Antoni Tàpies, exh. cat. Europalia 85 (Brussels: Museum voor Modern Kunst, 1985), p. 22.

appears swollen and dirty; it is covered with corns and scars. For Tàpies, the foot is base and passive, related to the materiality of the earth rather than to the spirituality of thought.³⁰⁹ It does not appear "useful" anymore, and is therefore opposed to any ideology of production.³¹⁰

Tàpies, like Bataille, has insisted that his motivation consists in reevaluating those objects socially condemned to disuse. His message is one of reevaluation of the base, the repulsive, and the material. Since matter is the substantial element of life, the mission of intellectuals and artists is to give expression to a materialist view of the world:

Malgrat que sovint es parli dels valors
espirituals de l'art i de la literatura,
gairebé és un lloc comú recordar que en tot
temps la mentalitat de molts artistes ha
tingut fama d'estar més a prop de les
concepcions materialistes i sensuals de la
vida, de les coses "tal com són" de tot allò
que es toca i es palpa, del terrenal i fins
carnal, que no pas del rebutjos del món,
propis de les actituds sectàries que sostenen

³⁰⁹See Alexandre Cirici-Pellicer, Witness of Silence (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1972), p. 246.

³¹⁰Although for Freud the foot has a phallic meaning, in contrast to the feminine symbolism of the shoe, this signification is not central to the matter painting --at least at an intentional level. In the opinion of José Miguel Ullán this "freudian" symbolism may be appropriate to understand some of Tàpies' early drawings in which he depicted figures with their feet buried in the ground (J.M. Ullán, "Tàpies, al pie de la letra," ABC, International Edition, 14 November 1984, p.1).

el primat de l'esperit.³¹¹

Foot and Big Toe are essential characters of Bataille's philosophy. For Bataille, man's tendency to divide the universe into subterranean hell and heavenly sky explains man's secret horror of his foot and the inclination to conceal its size and form as much as possible, for human life is erroneously seen as elevation. In Le Gros Orteil Bataille referred:

Blind, but tranquil and strangely despising his obscure baseness, a given person, ready to call to mind the grandeurs of human history, as when his glance ascends a monument testifying to the grandeur of his nation, is stopped in mid-flight by an atrocious pain in his big toe because, though the most noble of animals, he nevertheless has corns on his feet; in other words, he has feet, and these feet independently lead an ignoble life.³¹²

³¹¹Antoni Tàpies, La Realitat com a Art, (Barcelona: Laertes, 1982), p. 117. In another text he wrote: "Reflexionar sobre la paja, sobre el estiércol, tiene hoy quizás alguna importancia. Significa meditar en las cosas primeras, en lo más natural, en el origen de la fuerza y de la vida Por esto se trata también de recordar que en el mundo existen todavía muchas yacijas de paja, y que el artista se ocupa de ellas con más interés que de las camas de los dioses o de sus enviados o de los ricos que los adoran la "sal de la tierra" está ... en los que luchan desde abajo Que en lo que es primordial, en lo más simple, en la paja y hasta en el estiércol y en la misma muerte, nos guste o no, hay en potencia toda una nueva fuente de vida. Que el de abajo, el excremento de la sociedad, que está oprimido y se rebela contra el de arriba tiene toda la razón para hacerlo e incluso tenemos que agradecerse porque nos obsequia con esta nueva fuente de vida" (Antoni Tàpies, La Práctica del Arte (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1973, pp. 188, 190).

³¹²Bataille, Visions of Excess, p. 22. Similarly, in L'Erotisme, he wrote: "Si nous voyons dans les interdits essentiels le refus qu'oppose l'être à la nature

Both Bataille and Tâpies are opposed to the excessive "functionalism" of western civilization which has turned man into an "economical animal."³¹³ One's writings and the other's paintings criticize the notion of "production" upon which the bourgeois order relies. Bataille counterposed expenditure (dépense) to production. Life is, according to Bataille, in continuous movement and change: it is a product of its own decomposition. In L'Erotisme he wrote:

En un sens la vie est possible, elle se produirait facilement sans demander ce gaspillage immense, ce luxe de l'anéantissement qui frappe l'imagination Mais nous devons nous représenter jusqu'au bout le cycle infernal. La croissance des végétaux suppose l'interminable amoncellement de substances dissociées, corrompues par la morte. Les herbivores engloutissent des monceaux de substance végétale vivante, avant d'être eux-mêmes mangés, avant de répondre par là au mouvement de dévoration du carnivore. Rien ne reste à la fin, sinon ce déprédateur féroce, ou sa dépouille devenant à son tour la proie des hyènes et des vers. D'un point de vue qui répondrait au sens de ce mouvement, plus les procédés qui engendrent la vie sont dispendieux, plus la production d'organismes nouveaux est coûteuse, plus l'opération est

envisagée comme une débauche d'énergie vive et comme une orgie de l'anéantissement, nous ne pouvons plus faire de différence entre la morte et la sexualité. La sexualité et la morte ne sont que les moments aigus d'une fête que la nature célèbre avec la multitude inépuisable des êtres ..." (Georges Bataille, L'Erotisme, Paris: Le Editions de Minuit: 1957, p. 69).

³¹³Michele Richman, Reading George Bataille: Beyond the Gift (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 10.

réussie.³¹⁴

Capitalism is structured in opposition to nature, not in harmony with it, because it is led by a passion for accumulation and a will to over-produce the least and the cheapest. By destroying natural channels of expenditure the bourgeoisie has destroyed the social communion established by shared symbolic gestures, and has aborted human rituals of passage from a discontinuous world to a continuous one; that is, from state of individual isolation to a state of participation in the continuité première which ties us with the being.³¹⁵

Dépense is related to destruction and death, and manifests itself in those substances, objects or habits cast off from society, especially those related to body excreta (sweat, feces, blood, and menstrual blood). Expenditure and death produce in us, according to Bataille, a feeling of terror and repulsion close to those aspects of sexuality considered obscene.³¹⁶ The

³¹⁴Georges Bataille, L'Érotisme (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957), pp.67-68.

³¹⁵See Annette Michelson, "Heterology and the Critique of Instrumental Reason," October, no. 36 (Spring, 1986), p.124. See also Bataille, *Ibid.*, p.22.

³¹⁶"Ce rapprochement a d'autant plus de sens que nous avons une horreur analogue des aspects de la sensualité que nous qualifions d'obscènes. Les conduits sexuels évacuent des déjections; nous les qualifions de "parties honteuses", et nous leur associons l'orifice anal. Saint Agustin insistait péniblement sur l'obscénité des organes et de la fonction de reproduction. "Inter faeces et urinam nascimur D'un point de vue qui

bourgeoisie's rejection of expenditure in favor of the accumulation of wealth resembles its censorship of body and sexuality; thus, Bataille's ideas, like Tâpies', are played out in a definitive social dimension:

This eruptive force accumulates in those who are necessarily situated below. Communist workers appear to the bourgeois to be as ugly and dirty as hairy sexual organs, or lower parts; sooner or later there will be a scandalous eruption in the course of which the asexual noble heads of the bourgeois will be chopped off.³¹⁷

Bataille's conception of expenditure and his emphasis on the base and material, demand a radical change in the traditional, idealist systems of thought and expression, which are for him prisons of the intellect.³¹⁸ In fact, Bataille's materialism cannot be easily assimilated into any idealist system. His violent confrontations with Breton were generated by Bataille's

répondrait au sens de ce mouvement, plus les procédés qui engendrent la vie sont dispendieux, plus la production d'organismes nouveaux est coûteuse, plus l'opération est réussie! Le désir de produire à peu de frais est pauvrement humain. Encore est-ce dans l'humanité le principe étroit du capitaliste ... celui de l'individu isolé qui revend dans l'espoir d'engloutir à la fin ... des bénéfices amoncelés" (Bataille, L'Érotisme, pp.65, 67-68).

³¹⁷Bataille, "The Solar Anus," in Visions of Excess, p. 8.

³¹⁸"The great constructions of the intellect are, finally, prisons making us vomit like drunkards this servile nobility, this idiotic idealism that leaves us under the spell of a few comical prison bosses" (Bataille, "The 'Lugubrious Game,'" Ibid., p. 27-28. See also Bataille, "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," Ibid., 45-52).

perception of the latter's theories as a neo-idealism which espoused exalted values manifested in "lower" values of the unconscious.³¹⁹ Bataille did not intend to unify rationality with irrationality. He insisted, instead, on the non-transcendental content of the irrational; by emphasizing matter, rot and expenditure he denounced the intellectual predispositions of idealism, even those of Breton's Surrealism.

A consequence of this rejection of the ideal in favor of base matter was the notion of the "formless," informe. The "formless" was the first entry of an unfinished dictionary Bataille had begun to write. It summarizes Bataille's theory, as it was aimed against academics for whom " ... philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat."³²⁰ The informe had the "job" of undoing all formal categories. "The boundaries of terms are not imagined by Bataille as transcended, but merely as transgressed or broken, producing formlessness through deliquescence, putrification, decay."³²¹ If, for

³¹⁹Richman, Reading Bataille, p.51.

³²⁰Bataille, "Formless," Ibid. p. 31. Dalí also used Bataille's term, informe. See Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," in Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, L'Amour Fou. Photography and Surrealism (Washington D.C. and New York: The Corcoran Gallery and Abbeville Press, 1985) pp. 57, 64.

³²¹Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," p. 65.

Bataille, civilization has been created in opposition to nature, the informe abolishes the distinction separating nature and culture.

Bataille's informe was not as explicitly expressed in Surrealist painting or sculpture as it was in Surrealist photography. The photographs by Man Ray, Raoul Ubac, Hans Bellmer, Jacques André Boiffard or Brassai among others are characteristic examples. Man Ray's Primat de la matière sur la pensée (fig. 114) states the case. Not only the procedure of solarization of this photograph aims at discovering a new reality beyond the woman's body whose boundaries appear to integrate into matter, but also the title of the picture refers to the primacy of the formless and baseness, over idealism.³²²

These photographers used different mechanisms to express the informe. A basic one consisted in the rotation of the vertical axis, with which humankind traditionally identifies itself, to the horizontal axis.³²³ Another mechanism, frequently combined with the

³²²"La titre donné par Man Ray à cette image révèle par ailleurs le "materialisme" aussi invétéré qui irrévérencieux de son auteur soucieux de marquer sa distance à l'égard de toute interprétation "idéaliste" de son démarche" Edouard Jaquer, Les Mystères de la Chambre Noire. Le Surréalisme et la Photographie, Paris: Flammarion, 1982, p. 52).

³²³Bataille, "The Big Toe," in Visions of Excess, pp.20-23. See Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," pp. 57-70. Also, Hendel Teicher, "Chairs Nocturnes, Délices

previous one, was that of the close-up. In this process, the human body is "disoriented," losing --in Bataille's terms-- its "discontinuity" and melting with the space which surrounds it, emerging from matter, as if it were.³²⁴

These mechanisms have been common practice in Tàpies' work from its beginning. Examples of rotation are found in early paintings such as Zoom (1947, fig. 2),³²⁵ where a head turns upwards and loses its human nature, resembling a celestial body. A painting of 1950, The barbershop of the damned and the chosen (fig. 18)³²⁶ shows a rotation from the vertical to the horizontal axis. The shift from a vertical axis, corresponding to the optical experience of the standing human position, to a horizontal one, in which we walk or sit, is important to paintings like Brown bed (1960, fig. 45).³²⁷ In this work a flattened bed is seen perpendicularly from above and has imprinted on it the marks left by head and feet. As in the case of many of Robert Rauschenberg's early works, it does not matter that these paintings are later

Photographiques," in Charles Goerg ed., Regards sur Minotaure (Genève: Musée Rath, 1985), p. 208.

³²⁴See Bataille, L'Erotisme, p. 17-32.

³²⁵ACP, no. 16. Cirlot and Tharrats date this painting in 1947, whereas Cirici does it in 1946.

³²⁶ACP, no. 71.

³²⁷ACP, no. 247.

going to be placed vertically. It is not the actual placement of the image that counts, but the mode in which it is experienced.³²⁸ This is especially expressed in Petjades sobre llit marró (1966, fig. 59),³²⁹ in which what could have been a "visual" representation of a bed is turned into a horizontal surface by the imprints left by the artist's feet achieved by walking on the paint of the the canvas.

Similarly, the matter paintings are associated with the "wall," which is a surface on which graffiti can be written and forms of objects or persons can be "adhered." Just like a billboard, the picture plane of Tàpies' paintings is totally different from the transparent projection plane of man's visual field, referring instead to what Leo Steinberg has called the "flatbed picture plane."³³⁰ In addition, the large size of many of the canvases used by Tàpies does not allow the artist to reach the center of the painting. The fact that Tàpies works towards the very edges of the canvas, frequently leaving a void in the center (as in Grey corners on brown of 1959, fig. 43)³³¹ reinforces the perception of

³²⁸Leo Steinberg, Other Criteria (New York: Oxford Press, 1979), p. 84.

³²⁹GIMFERRER, no. 179.

³³⁰Steinberg, Other Criteria, pp. 82-91.

³³¹ACP, no. 213.

horizontality. All of the above generates the impression that these paintings were worked on the floor, or over a table; indeed, that is how these works were created.

Another mechanism that Tàpies used to express the informe is that of the close-up. In Ocher relief on white (1957, fig. 37),³³² for instance, a finger, in addition to being shown from above, is enlarged and cropped to a point that is no longer recognizable as a finger. The digit is no longer perceived as a self-contained entity, instead it merges with the formless surface of the canvas.

The technical process by which Tàpies creates the matter paintings expresses the notion of the informe. He first applies a layer of varnish to the canvas, and before this varnish dries he sieves marble dust, sand or other materials as well as pigments all over it. He then adds paint with a brush to different areas, creating a figure, an object or a field of color. Once the top layers are applied, the material begins to crack, showing its structural components. Sometimes the artist intensifies this impression by peeling off some sections. The fissures and cracks as well as the different colors and textures do not necessarily follow the lines of any figure or object, whose inflexions relate as much to the material as to the represented object. The distinction

³³²ACP no. 171.

between the "formed" figure and "formless" space surrounding it is thus blurred.

To express the notion of the informe by the technical and material qualities of the art work was also common among Surrealist photographers. Raoul Ubac's La Nébulose of 1939 (fig. 113) is a case in point. In it, Ubac used the process of brûlage which consists in attacking the emulsion of the negative with the heat of a small burner; then, the figure in the negative melts, rippling and contorting the field of the photo.³³³ With this procedure figure and space invade each other, and become continuous.

Ubac as well as Man Ray and Brassai, whose work had direct influence on Tàpies' matter paintings,³³⁴ were photographers whose work was frequently reproduced in the Surrealist journal Minotaure. The impact of the periodical on Tàpies was tremendous. It was through its pages that Tàpies first came to know and appreciate the works of these photographers and the theories they embodied. Still today, Tàpies keeps in his personal library the complete set of Minotaure, which he bought from Joan Prats. In his Memoria Personal, Tàpies wrote:

Cómo me quedaron enraizadas las sorprendentes

³³³Cfr. Jeanine Warnod, "Rencontres," in Regards sur Minotaure, p. 250.

³³⁴See Antoni Tàpies, Memoria Personal (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1983), p. 220.

imágenes de Miró, o los collages de La femme 100 têtes de Ernst, o las reproducciones de la revista Variété, y, sobre todo, Minotaure, o los catálogos de las exposiciones del grupo entrevistados en la casa de Prats!³³⁵

That Tàpies was influenced by the Surrealist photographers, especially by Brassai, is not surprising, as their work included elements that many Post-World-War-II artists were going to develop. Jean Dubuffet, for one, re-elaborated in his Art Brut the graffiti photographed by Brassai, reproduced in the 3rd-4th issue of Minotaure.³³⁶

The notion of informe is intrinsically related to that of mimétisme set forth by the sociologist Roger Caillois in essays also published in Minotaure. Caillois analyzed the natural phenomenon of mimicry by which an organism adapts itself to its surroundings, obliterating the distinction between one and the other, as they merge

³³⁵Tàpies, Memoria...., p.228.

³³⁶Brassai said at this respect that his graffiti are close " ... de l'art moderne de Miró à Tapiès, en passant par Dubuffet et beaucoup d'autres le mur reflète les tendances majeures de l'art actuel: calligraphie, art informel" Quoted in Jaguer, Mystères, p.68. Significantly, similarities between the work of these photographers and Tàpies can be seen throughout his career. For instance, a motif of Jacques André Boiffard depicting the toes of a foot tied with the fingers of a hand, as seen in Untitled (1929) is very similar to an image done by Tàpies for a poster celebrating the milenary of Catalonia. Similarly, the relation between the phallic cross and the female's buttocks of Man Ray's Monument à D.A.F. Sade (1933) does not appear too different in Tàpies Diptych de vernis of 1984 (Anys 80, no. 21).

into the informe.³³⁷ In this argument he brings up the example of the praying mantis that being already decapitated is still capable of simulating death when in danger.³³⁸

According to Caillois, the process of mimicry cannot be exclusively explained in terms of its defensive utility as it has been proved that predators eat a large number of mimetic insects and that they do not guide themselves by sight as much as by smell. Also, in other cases that Caillois points out, mimicry is a "dangerous" mechanism as certain species eat their mates by confusing them with leaves. Caillois, then, concludes that the protection objective is just an epiphenomenon of this process, but one which must be understood, rather, as an act of perception and representation of space:

Furthermore, this behavior depends on vision, since it neither takes place at night nor after the removal of the ocular peduncles ... which shows once again that what is involved

³³⁷Roger Caillois, "Mimétisme et Psychasthénie Légendaire," Minotaure 7 (June, 1935): 5-10; English translation by John Sheply, "Mimicry and Lendary Psychasthenia," October, no. 31 (Winter, 1984), pp. 16-32.

³³⁸"Il convient enfin de ne pas passer sous silence le mimétisme des mantidés, qui illustre de façon quelquefois hallucinante le désir humain de réintégration à l'insensibilité originelle, qu'il faut rapprocher de la conception panthéistique de la fusion dans la nature, fréquente traduction philosophique et littéraire du retour à l'inconscience prénatale" (Roger Caillois, "La Mante Religieuse," Minotaure, May 1934, p. 26.

is a disturbance in the perception of space.³³⁹

By this mimétisme certain species, and those humans who also suffer from these experiences, go through a process of "depersonalization." The assimilation to space is accompanied by a decline of the consciousness of the self. The subject enters into an state which he called psychasthénie légendaire, in which life seems to recul d'un degré.³⁴⁰

It is this notion of mimétisme which pervades Tàpies' matter paintings. A critic as close to Tàpies as Jacques Dupin noted that the the object represented seem to be in a process of formation, or also de-formation, as being born from matter or as being dissolved into it. In these paintings, matter becomes object, and object becomes matter. This is why "matter" is never elaborated in an abstract way; it is the recreation of a fragment of the reality. In these paintings matter and form identify each other. We do not find the representation of a door or a foot; but, as Tàpies puts it in his titles, a "Materia en forma de pie" (1965) or a "Materia en forma de nuez" (1967):

Captifs de la matière n'existant qu'en elle et par elle, figures et objects sont de même nature que les marques et accidents de la paroi et, comme eux, ils renvoient à la totalité du tableau, à sa

³³⁹Callois, "Mimicry and Legendary ...," p. 28.

³⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 28-30.

plénitude questionnante. Présences négatives ou désirs d'être, et non images transposées du monde extérieur, leur amplification et leur opacité les neutralisent. Ils ne s'affirment que pour se nier, se dépersonnaliser ³⁴¹

The feeling of blurring the limits between the self and the milieu already appears to have underwritten Tàpies' experiences with the material aspects of painting from 1946 to 1948. These works were born out of a personal and very special experience of almost "self-disintegration," and of a sense of pantheistic communion with the world, which he felt was a kind of alienation.³⁴² Similarly, in his Memoria Personal, he wrote:

Por otra parte, me obsesionaba la materialidad, la pastosidad de los fenómenos que yo interpretaba usando un material espeso, mezcla de pintura al óleo con blanco de España, como una especie de materia prima interior que ponía de manifiesto, la realidad "nouménica" que no veía como un mundo aparte, ideal o sobrenatural, sino como la única, total y verdadera realidad de la cual todo se compone. Naturalmente, de esta creencia no estaban ausentes algunas ideas de ciertos filósofos o ciertos artistas y poetas surrealistas.³⁴³

Tàpies' matter paintings share with Caillois' mimicry a common reference to magic. Caillois relates the phenomenon of mimétisme to the incantational

³⁴¹Jacques Dupin, "Devant Tàpies," Derrière Le Miroir, no. 158 (November, 1967), p. 20.

³⁴²Interview with the author, Barcelona 1986.

³⁴³Tàpies, Memoria...., p. 194.

practices of sympathetic magic, for there is in the primitive an overwhelming tendency to imitate, and a strong belief in the efficacy of this imitation. Following the ideas of Tylor, Huber and Mauss, and Frazer, Caillois pointed out that "there is a correspondance between the principles of magic and those of the association of ideas. To the law of magic (things that have once been in contact remain united) corresponds association by contiguity quite precisely to the attractio similitum of magic: like produces like."³⁴⁴

We know that Tàpies has always been attracted to the world of magicians and illusionists. This interest increased with Tàpies' friendship with Joan Brossa; they greatly admired a stage magician and actor of the turn of the century called Frégoli, who could change from one role into another in a matter of seconds.³⁴⁵ Tàpies'

³⁴⁴Caillois, "Mimicry," p. 25.

³⁴⁵In 1969 Tàpies collaborated with Brossa in the creation of a book of artist devoted to Frégoli. In the catalogue for the exhibition of Tàpies at Sala Gaspar, in November 6, 1969, Brossa wrote: "El gran transformista Leopold Frégoli (1867-1936) va ésser una figura màxima del teatre entre els dos segles; i, encara, la primera estrella cinematogràfica i el rival de Méliès. Els seus recitals, segons testimonies, eren uns espectacles insòlits de metamorfosis fulminants, veritables precursors del Surrealisme per capgirament poètic, la sorpresa constant i la inventiva teatral que comportaven Deixant de banda les concessions al gust del moment i els nombrosos imitadors, creien que la concepció inaudita que ell tenia del gènere esdevé actualíssima i el seu sentit del ritme i la mutabilitat escènica han estat precursors d'una manera de fer" (A. Tàpies, Barcelona: Sala Gaspar, 1969, n.p.).

"Surrealist" paintings of 1950, such as La cambra fosca (fig. 19)³⁴⁶, depict series of mysterious shadows, trapdoors, and boxes with false bottoms, which refer to this sense of metamorphosis and continuous change.

The matter paintings too are imbued with this feeling of permanent becoming, for --as it has been said-- the images look like forming, or also de-forming. Since in these paintings the distinction between figure and matter is not defined, there is always a relation of contiguity and similarity between them, which has to do with the attractio similitum of magic. Inanimate matter is infused with life, and vice versa life participates with the materiality of matter. Tàpies, like the magicians who fascinate him, acts on matter, immersing himself in it, and transforming it, shaping part of its internal flow. The cross, a ubiquitous motif in his oeuvre, is a perfect example: at different interpretative levels, it can stand for the dualities between matter and spirit, horizontal and vertical, birth and rebirth.³⁴⁷ It also alludes to the artist's surname with its initial "t":

Es como la condición previa que ha de tener
el que se dispone a asistir a una sesión de
prestidigitación, de magia. Como dice
Olivier Lacombe, la image de los ilusionismos

³⁴⁶ACP no. 72. Cirici entitles this painting The last hand.

³⁴⁷See, for instance, Painting (1955, fig. 33).

del mago es muy oportuna para explicar los "poderes" del artista, ya que la magia contiene igualmente este elemento de presencia y de ambigüedad entre lo real y lo irreal. Y si uno no se deja "enredar" por estos ilusionismos que constituyen la convención llamada arte, más vale ya no seguir adelante.³⁴⁸

Magic and mimétisme have, in Tàpies, a common source, related to one element which defines the Catalan Spirit of his work: the tradition of medieval alchemy and mysticism, embodied in the writings of Arnau de Vilanova, Enrique de Villena and Ramón Llull.³⁴⁹ Since alchemy sought for the "philosopher's stone" by which the mutation of substances would be achieved, the mystic of yesterday and the artist of today are understood as alchemists of the spirit, who aim at a transmutation beyond the self, into a kind of spiritual informe.

³⁴⁸Tàpies, Práctica del Arte, p. 183.

³⁴⁹Pere Gimferrer, Tàpies y el Espíritu Catalán (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1976), pp. 31-46. Tàpies' interest in their writings is proved by the fact that already in 1949 the review Dau al Set published a text by Enrique Villena which was hand-written by Tàpies. Also in many of his works Tàpies refers to Ramón lo Foll, Ramón the mad (i.e.: Foll of 1973; Gimferrer no. 346, fig. 65), the personage of Llull's novel Blanquerna which represented the author himself.

APPENDIX

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANTONI TAPIES, BARCELONA 1985-1988

- MB A LA HORA DE CREAR, QUE VALOR LE CONCEDE A LA ACCION RAPIDA, A LA ESPONTANEIDAD? EXISTE UNA DIALECTICA ENTRE ESPONTANEIDAD Y CONTROL?
- AT Para empezar te diré que nunca he reflexionado excesivamente sobre este tema. El hacer las cosas rápidamente ha sido una necesidad natural. La verdad es que siempre he trabajado muy rápidamente, pero sin saber exactamente por qué lo hago. Con el tiempo, me he dado cuenta de que el trabajar rápidamente me permite imponer una barrera al control intelectual. Trabajando deprisa estoy siguiendo los dictados del inconsciente de un modo más auténtico, sin dejar intervenir lo racional o lo cultural. Espontáneamente me impongo dificultades, utilizando, por ejemplo, materiales que se secan rapidísimamente, con los que tengo que

trabajar a toda velocidad para que no queden petrificados.

MB LLEGA A ESTABLECERSE UNA IDENTIDAD ENTRE EL ARTISTA Y EL MATERIAL?

AT Muy a menudo he utilizado un material que fue de mi invención, el polvo de mármol mezclado con algún barniz o cola sintéticos. Este era un material desconocido y yo mismo, por consiguiente, fui experimentando con él. Con el trabajo de muchos años, lo he llegado a dominar, consiguiendo una indentificación total con el material. En la actualidad, sé lo que pasará en cada momento de la ejecución de un lienzo. A veces, esta misma seguridad me cansa. Últimamente, este material no lo utilizo en absoluto, precisamente porque ya sé de antemano lo que pasará; y yo, en cambio, prefiero mantener un estado de cierta sorpresa, experimentar con otros materiales.

MB QUE IMPORTANCIA TIENE LA TECNICA EN SU OBRA?

AT Una técnica que pudiese llegar a un refinamiento del trabajo en el sentido académico puede que no la tenga, porque no he tenido una preparación escolar. Sin embargo, me he dado cuenta que con los años la experiencia de haber pintado mucho me ha ayudado.

Es casi como una acumulación de conocimientos en los nervios de la mano. Con cualquier gesto puedo dar una cierta expresividad a la materia.

MB CUALQUIER EMOCION PUEDE SER PLASMADA.

AT Sí, o así me lo parece al menos.

MB CUANDO CONSIDERA UNA OBRA COMO ACABADA? SE IMPONE ALGUN LIMITE?

AT El saber cuándo tienes que acabar es una de las cosas más difíciles. A mis sesenta y pico de años todavía tengo miedo al final, siempre tengo miedo de estropear la obra. Tal vez debido a eso tengo una tendencia a pararme un poco antes, de dejar las obras inacabadas, de dejar las cosas casi sin nada, con pocos detalles... todo por ese miedo a pasarme. Si pecho de algo es de escasez, no de exceso.

MB QUE IMPORTANCIA TIENE EN SU OBRA EL MARCO Y LOS LIMITES FISICOS DEL CUADRO?

AT Es curioso, me han preguntado esto en algunas ocasiones y nunca he sabido qué decir. En general, no pienso en los límites del cuadro. Trabajo como si estuviese haciendo una cosa sin límites. El marco lo encuentro un poco como por sorpresa. A veces, tengo en cuenta que lo que estoy haciendo es

una composición en un campo cerrado, y se debe de tener en cuenta un cierto equilibrio. Pero, no es lo primero que me preocupa. Esto está relacionado con mi deseo de huir de toda jerarquía. Para mí, cualquier elemento del cuadro es importante.

MB EN MUCHOS DE SUS CUADROS HAY UNA DIFERENCIA DE ESCALA ENTRE UNOS OBJETOS Y OTROS.

AT Efectivamente, casi siempre hago los objetos más grandes de lo normal; en cambio, más pequeños casi nunca. Me parece que hay un cierto simbolismo, pero más bien de tipo improvisado, no sistemático. En muchas ocasiones he hecho un pie o una oreja a una escala mucho más grande de lo normal; y me doy cuenta que, ampliando una cosa pequeña y sencilla, la vuelvo cósmica. Esa ha sido siempre una de las claves que he querido presentar en mi obra: que en una cosa pequeña e insignificante se pueda contemplar todo el universo.

MB QUE ELEMENTO PLASTICO ENFATIZARIA EN SU OBRA: FORMA, TEXTURA, COLOR, ESPACIO O LUZ?

AT Se ha dicho mucho --yo mismo también lo he dicho-- que soy uno de los pintores que más han experimentado con las calidades de la materia, de la textura. Tal vez sea cierto que el lenguaje de

la textura no había sido analizado con anterioridad tan exhaustivamente; y, en general, puedo decir que probablemente sea éste uno de los elementos que predomina en mi obra. Pero, a mí me interesa todo, todo lo que sea un medio expresivo. Hay mucha gente que piensa que soy poco colorista. Yo, en cambio, creo que estudio bastante el color. No son los colores primarios (aunque eventualmente también los utilice), sino que son colores más sutiles, más misteriosos. Igualmente el elemento espacial es muy importante para mí.

MB A QUE SE DEBE QUE EN 1950 LA LUZ DE TIPO BARROCO, A LO CARAVAGGIO, TUVIESE TANTA IMPORTANCIA EN SU OBRA? FUE TAL VEZ DEBIDO A SUS VISITAS AL MUSEO DEL PRADO Y EL CONOCIMIENTO DE LAS PINTURAS DE ZURBARAN Y RIBERA, COMO SUGIERE TEIXIDOR EN UNA RESEÑA DE 1950?

AT El uso de la luz vino como necesidad de liberarme del aspecto literario del Surrealismo. La utilización que de la luz había hecho Zurbarán encajaba con esta necesidad. De ahí que fuese entonces una fuente de inspiración. Aunque en estos años visité el Prado, a Zurbarán obviamente ya lo conocía desde mucho antes a través de reproducciones en revistas y libros.

MB EN LOS AÑOS CINCUENTA LLEGÓ A HACER TANTEOS CON LA PINTURA GEOMÉTRICA, INTENTOS DE "OP ART".

AT Sí, en efecto, a principios de los 50 hice algunos tanteos ópticos. Llegué a jugar con los colores complementarios en repetidas ocasiones para dar una sensación óptica.

MB PUEDE DECIRSE QUE LA FALTA DE "COLORIDO" EN SU OBRA MADURA SUPUSO UNA REACCIÓN SUPONÍA UNA REACCIÓN CONTRA LA PINTURA ESPAÑOLA DE LAS GENERACIONES INMEDIATAMENTE ANTERIORES QUE PECABAN DE COLORISTAS?

AT Tal vez sea cierto. Pero, cuando huyo de todo "colorido", no es tanto por los colores en sí, sino por todo aquello que éstos puedan tener de industriales, de prefabricados. Siempre he deseado que a través de mi arte se exprese una vuelta a lo natural.

MB POR QUÉ EL COLOR DE SUS OBRAS SE AVIVA A MEDIADOS DE LOS 60?

AT Nunca me he planteado este tema. Puede que sea así. Lo cierto es que si vives en una época más optimista, es lógico que también tus cuadros sean más optimistas y que el color lo exprese.

MB PUEDE ESTAR RELACIONADO EL COLOR MARRON, COLOR DE LOS EXCREMENTOS, CON EL PODER SENIL DEL REGIMEN DE FRANCO, COMO AFIRMABA RAILLARD EN 1974?

AT Con los colores, al igual que con otros motivos de mis obras, ocurre que los significados se acumulan; y en el caso en concreto al que se refiere Raillard posiblemente el marrón adquiriera este significado. Pero, en general, el color marrón es el color de la tierra, de lo material.

MB QUE VALOR LE OTORGA, EN ESTE CONTEXTO, AL COLOR GRIS?

AT Creo que, ante todo, las cosas deben de ser bellas y que el color debe servir para realzar esta belleza. Utilizando colores como el gris intento dar nobleza a aquellos elementos considerados tradicionalmente como innobles.

MB COMO EMPEZO SU INTERES POR LA MATERIA Y LA TEXTURA DE LAS COSAS?

AT Yo siempre he dicho que tuve unas intuiciones que debían de responder a unos sentimientos muy auténticos y profundos. Eran los momentos en que yo había surgido de una enfermedad y estaba hipersensibilizado, llegando realmente a las

fronteras de la locura. Siempre he creído que aquel momento fue tan auténtico, de una expresión tan profundamente personal que llegué a esta sensibilidad especial casi inconscientemente. Luego fui refinando mi técnica e ideas, empezando a aportar ya otras cosas.

MB FUE ESTA SENSIBILIDAD POR LA MATERIA UN FENOMENO COMUN EN LA BARCELONA DE LOS 40?

AT Yo siempre me he sentido muy inclinado a la reflexión sobre qué constituye lo real, sobre qué es la materia; pero, por supuesto, esta sensibilidad no dejaba de estar relacionada con cosas que le preocupaban a todo el mundo, que estaban en el ambiente. Existía una gran preocupación por la materia. Fue cuando se empezó a saber sobre la energía atómica, sobre la descomposición de los átomos... Mis principios como pintor coincidieron con la utilización de la bomba atómica. Todo eso me interesaba mucho y, en mi caso personal, tuvo mucha repercusión. Además tuve un profesor que nos inculcaba el interés por el estudio de la materia. Nos explicaba la gran revolución de la física a principios del siglo.

MB EL HECHO DE QUE EN EL ARTE CATALAN HAYAN HABIDO

PRECEDENTES EN EL TRATAMIENTO DE LA MATERIA (EL CASO DE GAUDI, POR EJEMPLO) TUVO ALGUNA REPERCUSION EN SU OBRA?

AT Al principio no, fue algo a posteriori. De pequeño siempre me habían dicho que tenía facilidad para el dibujo, siempre había tenido una cierta ilusión de que algún día podría llegar a ser pintor; pero, cuando empecé a pintar conocía, en realidad, muy poco.

MB SE PUEDE SENALAR EN SU OBRA UNA EVOLUCION DE LA "REPRESENTACION" DE TEXTURAS Y DE OBJETOS A SU "PRESENTACION". COMO HA OCURRIDO ESTA EVOLUCION?

AT De una manera muy intuitiva ya al principio de mi carrera, casi sin darme cuenta, tendía a la "presentación" de objetos. Entonces eran otros objetos: papeles, papeles higiénicos, periódicos, cuerdas, cartones... Ya tenía una cierta inclinación natural a presentar las cosas tal y como son. Después fui refinando mis procedimientos y empecé añadiendo óleo, hasta que hice una pintura más escolar, con temas más o menos surrealistas. Pero pronto volví a trabajar con el material, con las pinturas matéricas. Y de una manera paralela, poco a poco, fui trabajando sobre todo en el collage. Y así, por ejemplo, si en un momento

determinado, quería dar la sensación de un reptil en lugar de pintarlo lo que hacía era enganchar algún material que tuviese un aspecto de serpiente. En lugar de pintar algún objeto en plan "trompe l'oeil" me parecía mucho más lógico para una mentalidad del siglo XX el coger simplemente la cosa y mostrarla directamente.

MB QUE CRITERIOS TIENE EN CUENTA PARA SELECCIONAR LOS MOTIVOS DE UNA COMPOSICION O LOS OBJETOS DE UN COLLAGE? SON ESPECIFICOS A UNA OBRA EN CONCRETO? SON GENERALES?

AT Generalmente he utilizado materiales que ya conforman toda una visión del mundo, que ya tienen una carga simbólica. Son materiales que parecen decadentes, estropeados, gastados por el tiempo, grises, materiales a los que la luz parece haber borrado el color, como si estuviesen llenos de polvo. Qué filosofía hay detrás de todo eso? No lo sé exactamente.

MB QUE SIGNIFICADO TIENE EN SU OBRA LA IDEA DE CAMBIO Y METAMORFOSIS? Y LA DE TRANSFORMISMO?

AT La filosofía general de mis pinturas responde a la idea Heraclitiana de que todo cambia y de que a la vez todo sigue siendo lo mismo. Todo es

transitorio, todo parece que se acaba, pero a la vez todo parece que renace. Una colaboración que realicé con Joan Brossa me estimuló en este sentido, cuando hicimos el libro sobre Frégoli, un transformista que hacía obras de teatro con varios personajes, todos los cuales eran interpretados por él mismo. Era una multiplicidad que a la vez era una unidad. No sé si Joan Brossa lo veía en este sentido porque a él le interesa más la cosa del juego, de la magia... Pero cuando me propuso hacer un libro juntos el tema me gustó mucho porque traducía esta idea de cambio y de permanencia a la vez.

MB PODRIAN ESTAR LAS REFERENCIAS SEXUALES DE SU OBRA RELACIONADAS CON ESO?

AT No me lo he planteado muy conscientemente, pero es posible que sí. El sexo tiene muchas connotaciones. El cambio para mí es la fusión con la naturaleza. El ser todo y nada de los movimientos biológicos.

MB ESTO SE RELACIONADA CON LA ESPONTANEIDAD, CON LA DEPURACION TECNICA.

AT Efectivamente. El uso del barniz me ha permitido conseguir este efecto de cambio. En un principio mezclaba el polvo de mármol con el barniz, que es

algo pastoso, que tiene calidades como de miel y es bastante incontrolable, el cuadro muchas veces se hace solo. Los motivos se forman y deforman por sí mismos. Al final he trabajado con barniz solo. No sé si hay otros pintores que lo han hecho, pero contribuye mucho a esta filosofía. A veces tratas de hacer dos formas separadas, pero el barniz las junta sin que tú quieras. Todo se une y desune a la vez.

MB SE OLVIDA DE LAS TEORIAS A LA HORA DE CREAR? SIGUE EL PRINCIPIO DEL "OLVIDO CREATIVO"?

AT Si, totalmente. Podría haber construido muchas teorías, pero cuando atraviseo la puerta de mi estudio no me acuerdo de nada. En el estudio el problema es solucionar una cosa concreta, un material... no el justificar una teoría.

MB CUAL FUE LA RAZON QUE LE IMPULSO A ESCRIBIR?

AT Mis primeros artículos tenían un tono polémico porque eran respuestas a ideas que flotaban en el ambiente aquí en Barcelona con las que no estaba de acuerdo. El nivel de nuestra crítica no era muy bueno en aquellos momentos, por lo que hice un esfuerzo de suplencia. Alguien debía de decir algo. Era también un momento en que estaba muy de

moda el realismo socialista. A mucha gente le parecía que si querías tener unas ideas de izquierda y querías luchar por la democracia debías de pasar por el realismo socialista, de influencia incluso estalinista. Yo empecé a escribir precisamente cuando se acababa de morir Stalin. El realismo socialista me parecía un disparate y empecé a publicar en la revista Destino y luego más tarde en La Vanguardia.

MB QUE RELACION ESTABLECERIA ENTRE LO QUE ESCRIBE Y SU PROPIA OBRA ARTISTICA?

AT Hay un poco de todo. En algunos artículos, el centro de mis reflexiones es el fenómeno cultural o artístico en general, en otros es mi propia obra. Si empecé a reflexionar sobre mis cuadros era porque todo el mundo me lo pedía, a fin de entender mejor mi pintura. Recuerdo que escribí un artículo para una revista que se titulaba Cavall Fort, muy sencillo, pero que me valió las felicitaciones de mucha gente porque pude dar ya allí una idea de lo que era mi pintura. En mi libro La Practica de l'Art hay también algunos artículos sobre mi pintura; pero estos son siempre minoría, predominando mis ensayos sobre otros temas culturales.

MB CUAL CONSIDERA QUE DEBE DE SER EL PAPEL DEL ARTISTA EN LA SOCIEDAD?

AT Tal vez los artistas hayamos deformado la visión de nuestra misión en la sociedad. Nos creemos muy importantes. Yo he llegado a los sesenta y tantos años pensando todavía que con mi pintura es posible cambiar el mundo. Siempre nos queda la ilusión de que tenemos una misión social de cierta importancia, sobre todo cuando ha fallado el mito del racionalismo, del poder del intelecto para explicar las cosas y nos hemos dado cuenta, como ya decían los budistas, que la realidad puede ser explicada a través de la pintura. Es algo que tengo metido muy dentro de mí y pienso que la capacidad de la obra de arte para explicar la realidad es un modo mucho más claro y rico (con muchas más gamas y matices) que el lenguaje corriente

MB QUE HA SIGNIFICADO PARA USTED LA INTERPRETACION QUE CIERTOS CRITICOS HAN HECHO DE SU OBRA (CIRLOT DESDE UNA LINEA SIMBOLISTA; MICHEL TAPIE DESDE UNA LINEA RELACIONADA CON EL INFORMALISMO; ARGAN DESDE UN PUNTO DE VISTA EXISTENCIALISTA; GIMFERRER DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA CATALANISTA)? LE HAN OFRECIDO NUEVOS PUNTOS DE VISTA DE SU PROPIA OBRA? HAN TENIDO UN

PAPEL EN SU PROPIA EVOLUCION?

AT No, no creo. Siempre va bien que alguien interprete y analice tu obra; pero, como te decía antes, cuando llego a la puerta de mi estudio me olvido de todo. No porque lo desprecie, sino porque estoy ante otro tipo de problemas.

A veces ocurre que hay críticos que se sirven de mi obra para justificar sus propias teorías. En otras ocasiones, hay críticos que procuran adaptarse y explicar mi obra. Pero, en general, todos son puntos de vista parciales.

MB ELIGIRIA UNO? CUAL CONSIDERA QUE FUE MAS GLOBAL?

AT Cirlot fue tal vez uno de los que profundizaron más. Era una persona muy inteligente, aunque tenía el handicap de ser muy de derechas...

MB ERA UNA PERSONA MUY CULTA...

AT Sí estaba muy informado y además vivía todo de un modo muy profundo. Era poeta y vivía sus experiencias de un modo muy intenso. Creía totalmente en el simbolismo. Creía que el análisis de los símbolos nos ayudaban a entender las cosas de la vida y la realidad. Su visión del mundo no era exclusivamente fruto de pura erudición.

MB EXISTE ALGUNA RELACION ENTRE EL HECHO DE QUE CIRLOT TUVIESE UN GRAN INTERES POR EL SIMBOLISMO Y DE QUE LOS SIMBOLOS SEAN PARTE IMPORTANTE DE SU OBRA?

AT Sí, hubo una cierta relación. Aunque políticamente no teníamos nada en común, yo reconocía el valor que tenían sus estudios de los símbolos. Recuerdo que Cirlot podía analizar todo desde este punto de vista. Una vez vino al estudio y le dije que acaba de hacer un cuadro y que estaba seguro que no podía ser analizado simbólicamente. Era un cuadro que había hecho con paja enganchada, con una mancha verde y otra azul que actuaban como una especie de ojos. Yo mismo no lo interpretaba, pero Cirlot hizo todo un discurso sobre él. Cirlot actuaba con un diccionario que se había confeccionado él mismo. Yo, en cambio, nunca he actuado con ningún tipo de diccionario; siempre he trabajado de un modo totalmente intuitivo.

MB CUANDO UTILIZA MOTIVOS INCOGRAFICOS COMO LA T, X, M, EXISTE UN REPERTORIO ESTABLECIDO DE ANTEMANO DE ACUERDO A UN CODIGO?

AT Hay algunos signos que utilizo como marca de fábrica. Hay cosas que quiero que sean reconocibles inmediatamente como obras de Tàpies. Son signos que se repiten. Esto lo hago mucho

cuando me encargan un cartel, por ejemplo. Por supuesto, sólo hago carteles por causas que me gustan, con las que me siento solidario y quiero que se vea que Tàpies está de acuerdo con aquella idea, y procuro que el Tàpies sea bien Tàpies, que haya una X o una T, o cualquier otro elemento muy característico. Existe, pues, una especie de repertorio que utilizo como marca propia, pero en el que cada signo tiene interpretaciones muy variadas.

MB SE PUEDE HABLAR DE SERIES EN SU OBRA? CIRLOT Y OTROS SOSTIENEN QUE NO. PERO, COMO JUSTIFICA EL QUE HAYA UNA SERIE DE MOTIVOS QUE SE REPITEN?

AT No trabajo en series en el sentido de un tema que se empieza, se desarrolla y se acaba; pero sí que utilizo motivos o elementos que se repiten en diversas obras, un poco en el sentido de variaciones musicales. Por otro lado, temas que en un momento significan algo específico; en otro momento, significan algo distinto. Le doy a mis motivos lecturas distintas, de acuerdo al contexto. Por ejemplo, en 1950 hice un cuadro en el que representaba un brazo. Este no tenía otro sentido que el ser representado de un modo muy realista, de acuerdo al gusto de la época. En obras

posteriores, como la que pertenece a la colección de Miró, el brazo ya ha tenido el sentido de reivindicar un elemento considerado de mal gusto (la axila). Más tarde, adquiere un valor relacionado con la historia del budismo: aquel discípulo que para llamar la atención de su maestro que estaba meditando ante el muro se corta el brazo y se lo ofrece. En mis obras cerámicas más recientes tiene un valor de ex-voto. Por otro lado, siempre me ha interesado el repetir un mismo elemento en diversas técnicas (tintas, materias...) para ver como responde un mismo elemento ante diversos modos de hacer.

MB QUE PAPEL JUEGA LO AUTOBIOGRAFICO EN LA SELECCION DE LOS MOTIVOS? QUE HAY DE AUTOBIOGRAFICO EN LA REPRESENTACION DE UNA OREJA, DE UN MIEMBRO LACERADO...?

AT Originalmente, casi siempre hay un factor autobiográfico. Luego lo elaboro y le doy un aire más general. Por ejemplo, en relación a las letras de que hablábamos, la primera vez que representé la M lo hice porque quería representar una mano y copié la M de la palma de la mano. Además estaba aquello de que todos tenemos una M dibujada en las líneas de la palma de la mano, lo cual refiere a la

muerte; y también que en el pie hay unas arrugas en forma de S. Todo combinado era "Muerte Segura". La primera vez que utilicé la M tenía de un modo medio inconsciente esta idea de que representaba la muerte.

MB TAMBIEN TIENE OTRAS ASOCIACIONES...

AT Sí, claro. Más tarde la utilicé para simbolizar la montaña. Otras veces la M me sirvió para representar los lienzos típicos de la iconografía del Descendimiento.

Mi obra tiene mucho de auto-biográfico, porque toda mi obra es un intento de introspección, de ver y penetrar en todo aquello que supone mi entorno inmediato.

MB ES ESA LA RAZON DE QUE PINTASE TANTOS AUTO-RETRATOS EN SU PRIMERA EPOCA?

AT Una primera razón radica en el hecho de que era un modelo muy barato. Con todo, mis auto-retratos están efectivamente en esta línea de introspección, de ahí que desde un principio haya elementos de mi rostro a los que les de una intensidad muy especial, como los ojos a los que llegaba a representar de un modo muy minucioso, detallando incluso las venas.

MB EN ALGUNAS DE SUS OBRAS SE REPRESENTA UN GRAN SOMBRERO, REFIERE ESTE A JOAN PRATS?

AT No especialmente. En general, el sombrero sería símbolo de lo burgués, de la burguesía.

MB COMO DIFERENCIARIA EN GENERAL EL ARTE ESPANOL PRODUCIDO ANTES DE LA GUERRA CIVIL DEL PRODUCIDO DESPUES DE LA GUERRA CIVIL?

AT Yo era muy joven cuando estalló la guerra, tenía doce o trece años; pero me quedaba el recuerdo de aquel número de la revista D'Aci i D'Allà dirigido por Sert y por Prats y que a mí pareció que daba una pauta de lo que era el arte moderno. Yo creía que respondía al sentir de un amplio sector de la cultura catalana o española. Con los años he sabido que eran una minoría muy pequeña y que en absoluto eran tenidos en cuenta en ambientes oficiales, como el de la Generalitat. El país todavía estaba inmerso en el Noucentisme. Al acabar la guerra, con la desbandada general de artistas e intelectuales, lo que predominaba era un arte totalmente comercial. Las galerías se llenaron de un tipo de arte facilón y retrógrado que satisfacía el gusto de los nuevos ricos del Franquismo, que carecían de toda educación

artística. En general, te puedo decir que no tenía una buena opinión ni del arte de nuestro país de antes de la guerra, ni del de después de la misma. Ahora bien, siempre reconocí la existencia de minorías que trabajan con un criterio vanguardista.

MB COMO DEFINIRIA SU PAPEL EN LA EVOLUCION DEL ARTE
ESPANOL?

AT Creo que hubo un momento en que efectivamente tuve mucha influencia, sobre todo en la segunda mitad de los años cincuenta. Ocurrió sin darme cuenta. No es que yo me propusiese el influir a nadie. Pero yo era muy tenaz y muy luchador. Empecé a escribir, a exponer; y si hubo algunos grupos que empezaron a concederme un cierto liderazgo, fue porque vieron que se imponían mis ideas y que éstas eran viables. Rápidamente adquirí conciencia de que tenía un cierto papel.

MB CREE QUE ESTO PUDO HABER TENIDO REPERCUSION EN SU
OBRA?

AT No, en absoluto. Mi obra es algo que estoy haciendo continuamente. Todavía hoy en día estoy lleno de dudas. Todavía me considero en formación. Pero, en mis contactos con otros artistas, me daba cuenta de que estaba ejerciendo un papel

importante. No es algo que yo haya buscado, ya que muchas veces esto me crea problemas: pierdes en cierto modo la intimidad, la libertad; y, por supuesto, te crea muchos enemigos.

En cierto modo, esta popularidad también está relacionada con la situación política que vivíamos. Yo tenía una imagen de artista, de intelectual de izquierdas bastante fuerte. En la época de la lucha anti-franquista cuando todos estábamos unidos, el ser de izquierdas iba muy bien; pero, luego, con la democracia, noté que había gente que me veía con un cierto recelo. Hubo momentos, inmediatamente después de la instauración de la democracia, que parecía como si quisiesen marginar desde la Generalitat a todo el que fuese de izquierdas, y sentí un poco de rechazo. En todo caso, esto ha cambiado últimamente. El actual departamento de cultura de la Generalitat es bastante abierto.

MB QUE REPERCUSION TUVO EN SU OBRA LA REVALORIZACION
QUE SE HIZO DE GAUDI EN LOS ANOS CINCUENTA?

AT En la época de mi primera formación, Gaudí todavía no se había puesto de moda; al contrario, estaba desacreditado. Más tarde apareció el denominado Grupo R, que incluía a Oriol Bohigas y a otros

arquitectos que hicieron una campaña de revalorización, llegando incluso a organizar una exposición en el Tinell. Con todo, ya habíamos puesto nuestra atención en la obra de Gaudí con anterioridad, a través de cosas que había oído de Dalí, de los mismos amigos de Miró, y de Joan Prats.

MB SU CUADRO HOMENAJE A GAUDI (1956) TIENE QUE VER CON ESTO?

AT Aquel cuadro lo hice en un momento en que visitaba frecuentemente las construcciones de Gaudí, acompañado de algunos amigos extranjeros como Michel Tapié, que entonces venía a menudo a Barcelona.

MB EXISTE ALGUNA RELACION ENTRE EL INTERES QUE GAUDI MOSTRO POR LOS MATERIALES Y EL SUYO PROPIO?

AT Mi investigación es independiente, aunque es muy posible que algunas estructuras o algunas imágenes de Gaudí me impresionasen bastante. En cierto modo, ese es una de los pocos aciertos de Dalí, quien fomentó el interés de mucha gente por Gaudí.

MB HA SIDO LA OBRA DE NICOLAS RAURICH IMPORTANTE PARA VD?

AT Fue Cirlot quien me dijo que debía ir a ver las pinturas de este artista Modernista. Pero, en realidad, no la conocí hasta relativamente tarde, por lo que no creo que llegase a influir en mi obra.

MB VERA LINHARTOVA SUGIERE QUE LA REIVINDICACION DE LAS CUEVAS DE ALTAMIRA Y LAS PINTURAS RUPESTRES POR LA ESCUELA DE ALTAMIRA Y MATHIAS GOERITZ ESTARIAN RELACIONADAS CON LA CONCEPCION DE AT DE LA PINTURA COMO MURO-PARED. HASTA QUE PUNTO ES ESTO CIERTO?

AT No creo que existiese ninguna relación, al menos explícita. No es que me hubiese importado, pero lo cierto es que no tuve contactos con la Escuela de Altamria. Tal vez el contacto más intenso consistió en el hecho de que me enviasen el catálogo de una exposición que hicieron.

MB TUVIERON FAUTRIER Y DUBUFFET ALGUNA REPERCUSION EN SU OBRA? CUANDO EMPEZO A CON FAMILIARIZARSE LA PINTURA DE ESTOS ARTISTAS?

AT En general, creo que sí, al menos como estímulo y confirmación de un camino a seguir. Con todo, siempre hay que matizar. En concreto, en la obra

de Dubuffet hay un aspecto de caricatura que no va nada con mi carácter. Sin embargo, me siento atraído por las "texturologías".

A Fautrier lo conocí cuando entré en la galería Stadler, a partir del año 55. Fautrier no exponía en la Stadler, pero Tapié era muy amigo suyo. De Fautrier tengo alguna cosa, le tengo mucho respeto, pero hay que reconocer que es un artista muy limitado.

MB CUANDO A FINALES DE LOS CUARENTA Y PRINCIPIOS DE LOS CINCUENTA SE EMPEZARON A FORMAR DIVERSOS GRUPOS ARTISTICOS EN BARCELONA, HABIA UN SENTIDO DE RECUPERACION DE LA CULTURA NACIONAL? HACIA QUE ARTISTAS DE NUESTRO PASADO HISTORICO SE SE VOLVIO LA MIRADA?

AT Hubo un grupo que hizo mucho por volver a enlazar con las cosas de antes de la guerra, enlazar no en el sentido de retornar sino en el sentido de que se trataba de una línea que se desarrollaba, rota durante la guerra y sobre todo durante los 40 debido a la opresión franquista. Este grupo era el Grupo 49. Posteriormente, lo que tuvo mucho peso en este sentido fueron los artículos de Cirici en Serra D'Or, por ejemplo, que de un modo consciente se proponía el enlazar con las tradiciones

vanguardistas propias de Catalunya. Hubo gente que se preocupaba mucho. Para mí y para algunos compañeros de generación, fue una suerte de importancia vital el poder ser amigos de los protagonistas de la vanguardias de aquellos años. Para mí, el llegar a ser amigo de Miró fue sensacional. Asimismo, los amigos de Miró, como el sombrerero Joan Prats, tuvieron también una gran importancia. Era gente que luchó toda su vida por imponer una ideas de progreso y modernidad.

MB SE CONOCIA A OTROS ARTISTAS DE LAS VANGUARDIAS HISTORICAS?

AT Se conocía poco. Miró era totalmente desconocido aquí. No exponía en absoluto. Era conocido sólo entre amigos.

MB COMO SE REACCIONO ANTE ARTISTAS DE UNA LINEA MUCHO MAS CONSERVADORA COMO MARES O CASANOVAS?

AT No nos relacionábamos en absoluto con ellos. Los considerábamos como nuestros enemigos. La reacción fue de rechazo. Más tarde a Marés lo he tratado un poco y sé que es una bellísima persona, pero su obra no nos decía nada.

MB QUE PAPEL CREE QUE DESEMPENARON GALERIAS COMO

LAYETANAS, EN BARCELONA, O BIOSCA, EN MADRID?

AT Las galerías no hacían gran cosa, porque éstas dependían mucho de la demanda del público de entonces. Y lo que el público les pedía en aquel momento era de muy mala calidad. Las Layetanas tuvieron un buen momento cuando entró como socio J.M. Gudiol quien se propuso renovarlas. Hicieron algunas exposiciones de carácter vanguardista. Dieron acogida al Salón de Octubre que fue uno los primeros salones de carácter renovador en el año 48. Allí hice mi primera exposición. Más tarde organizaron una exposición de Miró, quien se había negado a exponer aquí en España. No pudieron conseguir obra directamente de Miró, sino de las colecciones de sus amigos. Con todo, esta galería alternaba también con cosas conservadoras. No mantenía, por tanto, una línea coherente. De hecho lo que se hacía de vanguardia era más por iniciativa de otros que de la propia galería.

MB QUE PAPEL CREE QUE TUVIERON EN EL DESARROLLO DEL ARTE ESPAÑOL FIGURAS POLITICAS COMO RUIZ GIMENEZ?

AT Ruiz Giménez fue un Ministro de Educación que se propuso ser más liberal... hasta el punto de llegar a enfrentarse con el sistema. Es posible que en aquel momento se hiciesen cosas más liberales a

través de amigos suyos como Laín Entralgo. Llegaron a aglutinarse un poco en torno a Revista. A nivel artístico fue un momento de cierta apertura, pero siempre en un sentido bastante conservador. No era "vanguardia-vanguardia". Había una fuerte influencia de antiguos falangistas de buena fe, a los que les gustaba un arte de crítica social, y proponían un retorno a la figuración crítica. No constituían una vanguardia investigadora.

MB HASTA QUE PUNTO SE PODRIA DECIR QUE LOS MOVIMIENTOS DE VANGUARDIA SURGIERON DE DENTRO DEL SISTEMA?

AT Lo que ocurrió fue que el sistema se encontró en cierto modo desbordado por los acontecimientos históricos. Tenían que dar una buena imagen de cara al extranjero. Querían dar la imagen de que aquí no pasaba como en la Alemania Nazi, y de que aquí a los artistas de vanguardia no se les perseguía, sino que se les defendía. Yo siempre explico una anécdota: la primera vez que expuse en el Salón de los Once vinieron unos periodistas y fotógrafos del ABC e hicieron una reportaje de nuestras obras. Ahora bien, el reportaje no surgió nunca en la edición nacional, lo utilizaron solamente para una edición internacional. El Instituto de la Cultura Hispánica también actuaba

en este sentido, desarrollando una campaña con el fin de dar una imagen de liberalización. Este instituto fue el que organizó la Bienal Hispanoamericana, donde di a conocer mis primeros cuadros de materia, que en aquellos momentos constituyeron un gran escándalo.

MB SI, ESTA BIENAL CONSTITUYE UN PUNTO CLAVE EN LA EVOLUCION DEL ARTE CONTEMPORANEO ESPANOL.

AT Sí, pero no fue gracias a la Bienal, sino a pesar de ella. Me acuerdo que dudamos mucho de tomar parte, puesto que se trataba de una cosa oficial... Al final decidí participar. Había un reglamento, había un formulario que se debía de rellenar... Juan Ramón Masoliver era uno de los comisarios, hablé con él y me alentó a participar. Envié unos cuadros. El jurado de selección me rechazó un cuadro. En realidad, no les gustaba en absoluto lo que hacía. Gracias a la intervención de Ainaud de Lasarte que era miembro del jurado cambié la pintura y expuse tres obras. Me los colgaron muy bien, en un lugar que se veía mucho. Causaron un escándalo tremendo. Todos los académicos reaccionaron muy negativamente. Hubo unas polémicas tremendas. Yo estaba desesperado, pero los amigos de Miró me animaron diciendo que lo

importante era que los diarios hablasen, si bien o mal ya era secundario. Ahora estoy contento de lo que pasó, porque marcó una época. Fue el momento en que ejercí una mayor influencia en todos los jóvenes.

MB MAS TARDE SE OPUSO A PARTICIPAR EN CERTAMENES OFICIALES.

AT Sí. Más tarde nos invitaron a participar en la Bienal de Venecia. A Venecia sólo se podía ir oficialmente, a través del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores. También recuerdo que lo discutí mucho con Antonio Saura... Al final decidimos aceptar para ver si dábamos un golpe. Y realmente fue un golpe. Hicimos bien en aceptar. Pero, inmediatamente nos dimos cuenta de que nos estaban utilizando. El comisario de la exposición, González Robles, tenía un enfoque político tremendo. Más tarde trató de organizar una especie de Bienal en Londres, y ya entonces tanto Saura como yo decidimos que no íbamos a exponer nunca más, y nunca lo hicimos, en ninguna exposición oficial.

MB SI NO RECUERDO MAL, EN ESTA EXPOSICION UTILIZARON CUADROS DE COLECCIONISTAS, EN CONTRA DE SU

VOLUNTAD.

AT Sí llegué a poner un pleito a la persona que prestó mis cuadros, ya que según una ley del siglo pasado el artista tiene el derecho de exhibición. La propiedad intelectual para los artistas no es sólo la reproducción pública sino también la exhibición pública. Y, como la ley es muy clara, gané el pleito. Claro que cuando gané el pleito la exposición ya se había acabado. En cierto modo, fue también culpa de los ingleses, ya que no quisieron colaborar conmigo. Decían que la exposición les venía en bloque desde España y que no podían ni poner ni sacar nada...

MB MICHEL RAGON AFIRMA QUE A DIFERENCIA DE LA LITERATURA, DEL CINE O DEL TEATRO, LA PINTURA NUNCA FUE OBJETO DE PERSECUCION POR LA ESPANA FRANQUISTA. QUE DE CIERTO HAY EN TODO ESTO?

AT Los gobernantes de entonces se dieron cuenta de que la pintura abstracta, dado que no era muy explícita, no hacía políticamente ningún mal. Tuvieron la viveza de darse cuenta de que perseguir a un artista era convertirlo en martir y, así, si no era imprescindible no "veían" nada en la pintura abstracta. Con todo, hicimos una exposición de despedida del Dau al Set (despedida de su primera

época, antes de que Tharrats se apropiase de la revista) en la galería Caralt, que fue cerrada por la policía.

MB CUAL CREE QUE FUE LA REPERCUSION QUE TUVO LA EXPOSICION "OTRO ARTE"?

AT Aquella exposición la organicé yo mismo con la colaboración de Michel Tapié en la Sala Gaspar, con cuyos directivos me enfadé mucho ya que cuando la exposición ya estaba prácticamente montada, cuando ya habían enviado las obras desde París, nos obligaron a incluir a los artistas de la galería. Añadieron a Tharrats, a Vilacasas... incluso querían añadir un Clavé, aunque por esto ya no pasé de ningún modo. De todas formas, la exposición fue un golpe aquí en Barcelona. Había obras de Jackson Pollock, de Willem de Kooning... Por supuesto, pude organizar la exposición gracias a a mi amistad con Tapié, quien entonces dirigía la galería Stadler. Nos hicimos muy amigos, e incluso solíamos bromear sobre nuestro posible parentesco dada la casi coincidencia de nuestros apellidos.

MB TUVO ALGUNA REPERCUSION LOCAL LA EXPOSICION QUE SE HIZO DE NUEVA PINTURA ESPANOLA EN EL MoMA 1960?

AT Este era ya un momento en el que yo ya no quería

participar en exposiciones oficiales. Pusieron cosas mías sin decírmelo. En realidad, hubo dos exposiciones muy cercanas una de la otra, una que organizó Sweeney para el Guggenheim y la otra organizada por Frank O'Hara para el MoMA. Pero, en ningún caso quise intervenir. Nunca me ha gustado exponer en grupo de un modo gregario. En estas exposiciones de grupo procuraba decir que no, o no ir; pero me colocaban cuadros, los pedían a coleccionistas.

MB COMO CARACTERIZARIA LA SENSIBILIDAD ARTISTICA DE LOS 40 EN RELACION A LA DE LOS 50? Y LA DE LOS 50 RESPECTO A LOS 60, 70 Y 80? EN QUE PERIODOS DIVIDIRIA EL ARTE MODERNO DESPUES DE LA SEGUNDA GUERRA MUNDIAL?

AT En realidad, nunca me preocupaba de lo que pasaba en el mundo. Más bien creía que yo estaba influyendo en el mundo, en la formación de los cambios de gusto. Ciertamente, hubo un momento en el cual me dio la impresión que mi obra tuvo una gran influencia: a la gente le gustaba vestirse con cosas de colores grises, verduscos, terrosos... el color de los hábitos franciscanos. Fue algo que al paracer se puso de moda años más tarde con el Arte Povera; y son cosas que afortunadamente veo que se

están poniendo de moda de nuevo: el gusto por lo humilde, por lo austero, por lo simple. En mi caso, todo esto es fruto de mi aversión por todo lo industrial, seguramente derivación de algunas ideas marxistas. La excesiva "tecnologización" de las cosas es un arma que revierte en nuestra contra. En lugar de tener la técnica a nuestro servicio, nos ponemos al servicio de la técnica. Ya desde muy joven propugné este retorno a la naturaleza, no desde un punto de vista romántico, sino en el sentido de una adaptación mejor a la naturaleza. Mis primeros escritos ya apuntaban en esta dirección. Me queda la satisfacción de que el tiempo me vuelve a dar la razón.

MB QUE VALOR LE DA EN SU OBRA A TODO LO QUE SEA VERNACULO Y LOCAL? QUE VALOR LE DA A TODO LO QUE SEA DE TIPO INTERNACIONAL? Y A TODO LO QUE ES DE TIPO INDUSTRIAL?

AT En general, siempre he sentido bastante aversión contra todo el mundo industrial. El diseño industrial excesivamente anónimo o funcional nunca me ha gustado. Incluso he llegado a tener alguna polémica con algún arquitecto. Creo que se ha exagerado la importancia del diseño industrial. Algunos aspectos del diseño industrial, como el

intento de integrar lo artístico con el resto de cosas de la vida me parecen importantes, pero siempre me he inclinado más por las cosas artesanales, sencillas e incluso pobres. Todo lo que tenga connotaciones de excesivamente trabajado, pulido hecho a máquina no me gusta. Me gusta que se vea la huella humana, el tacto humano.

MB COMO REACCIONO ANTE LA OBRA DE ARTISTAS COMO BURRI, CON QUIEN A VECES SE LE HA COMPARADO?

AT Sí, sé que en alguna ocasión se me ha comparado con Burri porque él también dio cierta importancia a la textura del cuadro. Lo que ocurre es que Burri se limitó durante cierto tiempo a hacerlo con ropa, con sacos... entrando luego en un campo de presentación del material por el material, lo cual no está en mi línea. A pesar de que una buena parte de las formas de su obra son también orgánicas y sugerentes, existe otro aspecto en la producción de Burri que deriva del Neoplasticismo, de la pintura abstracta. Esta no es en su caso geométrica, pero sigue el principio de subordinar la composición, la expresividad del color y de la forma, la textura a unas ideas plásticas más que intencionales; al contrario de lo que ocurre en mi obra, en la que las texturas están combinadas con

signos, con alusiones simbólicas, personales... las obras de Burri del periodo de los Sacchi son más ricas en alusiones: todas aquellas manchas de rojo que recuerdan sangre, los cosidos que recuerdan elementos de cirugía... Esta obra de Burri, me gustaba mucho. Luego entró en un momento que ya no me interesa tanto, en el que los materiales no ordinarios que utilizaba tenían un sentido puramente plástico.

MB ES ESTE EL CASO DE MILLARES?

AT A Millares, como ya conocía lo que hacía Burri, siempre lo había tenido como un pintor que no tenía suficiente personalidad y que seguía demasiado a Burri. Nunca le presté demasiada atención; al contrario, siempre me ha parecido un pintor bastante mimético, que se apropiaba algún signo de Saura o incluso mío, como las X.

MB PRESTABA, EN AQUELLA EPOCA, MAS ATENCION AL ARTE QUE SE HACIA FUERA DE ESPANA?

AT Sí, claro. Hoy no se nota tanto la diferencia de edad, pero a los artistas de El Paso los veía entonces casi como críos. No tanto en el caso de Millares como en el de Saura, con quien existía la diferencia de edad era mayor. No les presté, por

tanto, nada de atención. Además eran gente de Madrid...

MB SIN EMBARGO, EN ALGUNOS TEXTOS SE TIENDE A ASOCIAR A SAURA CON TAPIES.

AT Sí, porque yo entré en una galería de París, la Stadler, y al cabo de unos años Saura también entró. Nos hicimos muy amigos. Saura es un pintor muy educado con quien se puede hablar de todo. Además, a través de la Stadler se organizó alguna exposición conjunta. Expusimos una vez en Alemania juntos. Tal vez por eso la gente nos asocia un poco. Pero yo me encuentro totalmente diferente de Saura.

MB TUVO ALGUNA REPERCUSION EN SU OBRA LA IRRUPCION DEL POP ART?

AT He detestado bastante al Pop Art, ya que es un arte populista, basado en imágenes de supermercado y de Disneylandia. Es un arte falsamente popular, es un arte popular inventado por las industrias de la cultura.

MB EXISTE ALGUNA RELACION ENTRE SU OBRA SI (1974) Y LA OBRA DE JASPER JOHNS TITULADA NO (1961)?

AT Me han hablado de esta obra, pero nunca la he

visto.

MB NO ES UNA REACCION CONTRA ESTA OBRA?

AT No. Si hay algún tipo de reacción es contra un paisano tuyo, Raimon, que hizo aquella canción titulada Diquem No. Pensé que no siempre hay que decir "no", sino que también hay veces en que hay que decir "sí". Claro que era un sí muy condicional. Si te acuerdas del cuadro sabrás que el "sí" está entre unas líneas que están en desequilibrio. Si te das cuenta esto es bastante característico de mi pintura, en la que si en muchos casos hay una crítica muy dura, también hay propuestas positivas.

MB TUVO JOHN CAGE, LA ESCUELA DE LA BLACK MOUNTAIN Y EL GRUPO DE ARTISTAS QUE ENFATIZABAN EL PROCESO Y NO EL PRODUCTO FINAL ALGUNA REPERCUSION EN SU OBRA?

AT La música de Cage la conocí en Nueva York. Me la hicieron conocer unos pintores jóvenes americanos. En mi primer viaje a Nueva York, Varese no era casi conocido. Su música la empecé a oír desde muy pronto, pero la parte teórica llegó aquí más tarde, ya casi en el período del arte conceptual. Entonces se hablaba mucho de que quien dominaba esta situación, entre bastidores, era Marcel Duchamp a

quien conocí en el 58. El era miembro del jurado que me dio el premio Carnegie. Pronto tuvimos una cierta relación que mantuvimos por cierto tiempo.

MB CONOCIO A ALLEN GINSBERG? HA HABIDO ALGUNA INFLUENCIA DE THE BEAT GENERATION EN VD?

AT Sí, entré en contacto con este grupo de intelectuales y artistas a raíz de mis viajes a Nueva York. Con todos ellos me he sentido siempre muy a gusto. Hay en ellos un elemento derivado del budismo que se relaciona con mi modo de ver las cosas. En realidad, me he sentido mucho más cercano a los artistas y poetas de la Beat Generation que a los Expresionistas Abstractos. Incluso por edad estaría más cercano a los primeros... Con el mismo Tapié me sentía distante cuando defendía a los artistas informalistas, no así con gente como Jack Kerouac o Allen Ginsberg. De los Expresionistas Abstractos me interesaron Tobey y Kline; pero a Kline, por ejemplo, lo consideraba como un producto del "constructivismo", más que como fruto de una comunión con el arte oriental... al contrario de lo que ocurre con los poetas de la Beat Generation.

MB DE QUE MODO INFLUYO SU PERIODO SURREALISTA EN SU

OBRA POSTERIOR?

AT Creo que el Surrealismo ha influido mucho en mí. Ha influido en sus aspectos teóricos. En mis primeros viajes a París, compré primeras ediciones de los Surrealistas. Leía mucha poesía. Sus estudios, sus investigaciones del inconsciente... me atraían mucho. Como consecuencia del interés que los Surrealistas tenían por la psicología y el psicoanálisis llegué a interesarme por Freud y, especialmente, por Jung. Incluso el interés por los temas del Extremo Oriente ya era apuntado por los Surrealistas. Los primeros años de mi formación estuvieron totalmente influidos por el Surrealismo. Pero, como digo, esta influencia se produjo a un nivel teórico y literario, más que a nivel de obras concretas o de artistas.

MB TUVIERON ALGUNA REPERCUSION LOS ESCRITOS DE DALI?

AT Los de Dalí menos, porque muy pronto me dejó de gustar Dalí debido a su postura política. Inmediatamente después de la guerra, la mayoría de los intelectuales nos pusimos en contra de Dalí.

MB QUE IMPORTANCIA HA TENIDO PARA VD LA OBRA DE KLEE?
EN QUE ASPECTOS LE HA INFLUIDO?

AT En relación a Klee deberíamos de hablar

extensamente. De entrada, Klee me impresionó por su profundización. Klee comienza de una manera muy crítica y muy burlesca, tiene un algo de ironía en sus primeras obras que tal vez ligue menos con mi temperamento; pero, en cambio, cuando se pone dentro de su, digamos, "análisis de la naturaleza entre bastidores", desde dentro, me interesa mucho. Me di cuenta de que era una persona con una capacidad de análisis de las cosas muy profunda, y eso me interesó mucho. Procuré leer algunos de sus escritos, sus diarios. Los diarios de artistas siempre me han sido muy útiles para hacerme ver su evolución. También me impresionó el que fuese tan pintor, el que utilizase bien los elementos propios de la pintura, y con tanta variedad. Para mí siempre ha sido un modelo muy firme.

MB QUE IMPORTANCIA TUVO EL DAU AL SET EN SU OBRA?

AT En general, cuando se habla del grupo del Dau al Set como si se tratase de un grupo homogéneo. En cambio, cada uno de los miembros era muy distinto del resto. No había una coherencia ideológica determinada. Hicimos el Dau al Set más como un grupo de jóvenes llevados del deseo de darse a conocer que guiados por ninguna intención ideológica. Con todo, Joan Brossa le dio a los

primeros números una coherencia. Todos los pintores recibimos en aquel momento su influencia. Esta influencia duró muy poco, al menos en mi caso. Pero se ha de reconocer la importancia de Brossa, a pesar de que figurase Tharrats como editor, quien no pintaba aún cuando se empezó a hacer la revista. Tharrats se aprovechó del hecho de tener una imprenta. Nos reuníamos en su casa para hacer el número, y él, poco a poco, se fue apropiando la revista.

Referente al Dau al Set hay muchas cosas que no son ciertas. En el primer número, por ejemplo, pusimos que estaba dirigido por Ponç. Esto es falso, ya que la revista era discutida entre todos. Ponç había hecho las letras de cabecera, mientras que los otros habían hecho el resto de dibujos y, como consecuencia, su nombre no aparecía. En algún sitio había que colocar su nombre y se decidió que fuese figurando como director. Así, la revista pasó a la historia con Tharrats como editor y Ponç como director, pero este no era el caso en absoluto. Otro personaje que también se apropia mucho el nombre del Dau al Set es Arnau Puig, que se presenta como el ideólogo del grupo... y de eso nada. Puig era un chaval que estaba entonces haciendo el bachillerato, y quien no tuvo nada de

influencia. El empezaba a escribir un poco, quería ser filósofo. En cambio, sí le reconozco su peso a Joan Brossa, a través de sus ideas y su obra. Él era realmente quien tenía contactos con Miró, con Joan Prats y fue él quien nos relacionó con ellos. Fueron precisamente los números del Dau al Set inspirados por Joan Brossa los que tuvieron un cierto aire de creación y de revulsivo del ambiente del país.

Poco a poco los primitivos fundadores nos fuimos separando. Ponç se fue a Brasil de maestro, y fundó una pequeña escuela de arte. Cuixart dejó sus actividades artísticas por una temporada y se dedicó a la estampación de tejidos... Con todo, Tharrats continuó haciendo la revista hasta 1956. Duró bastante. Yo mismo me apropié un poco de los últimos números, para dar a conocer mis obras. Utilicé la cabecera Dau al Set, puesto que era muy difícil el publicar cosas: había que buscar permisos legales... Conseguí que se publicara un texto de Michel Tapié con motivo de la exposición Un Arte Otro. Su texto se titulaba "La Estética en Devenir". Se publicó gracias a mí, y financiado por amigos míos. Más tarde se hizo también un número que sirvió de catálogo para mi primera exposición en la galería Stadler, también con texto

de Tapié, titulado "Tâpies ou l'oeuvre complete".
Este fue uno de los últimos números de Dau al Set.

MB QUE PAPEL DESEMPEÑO J.E. CIRLOT?

AT Cirlot llegó más tarde. Se adhirió al grupo cuando ya estaba formado.

MB HUBO POLEMICAS SOBRE LA ADHESION DE CIRLOT AL DAU AL SET?

AT Sí porque escribía en castellano, era hijo de militar y le tenían un poco de resentimiento desde el punto de vista político. Sin embargo, yo fui uno de los que muy rápidamente apoyó su entrada en el grupo. Muy pronto me di cuenta de que se trataba de una persona intelegentísima y formadísima.

MB CUAL CREE QUE FUE LA REPERCUSION QUE SUS PRIMEROS EXPERIMENTOS CON MATERIAS PUDIERON TENER EN SU EPOCA SURREALISTA?

AT Hubo un momento en que fui eliminando este tipo de pintura "Surrealista" de carácter literario y empecé a interesarme por texturas y materias. Al principio lo hice sin tener ninguna intención de reemprender mis primeros trabajos. Casi descubrí por sorpresa que mi nuevo estilo enlazaba con lo

que había hecho con anterioridad, con lo que había experimentado en mi juventud. Fue el momento en el que decidí lanzarme al vacío de nuevo y prescindir de las influencias del Surrealismo, especialmente las de mi amigo Joan Brossa y las del poeta Foix. A Brossa lo veía entonces prácticamente cada día. Me estimulaba mucho con su elogio. Pero de repente me di cuenta que me estimulaba en aquellos cuadros que encajaban mejor en las coordenadas de su obra literaria, como piezas literarias...y, sin darme cuenta, iba abandonando el terreno de la pintura-pintura... Reaccioné de un modo instintivo y abandoné las cosas de tipo literario, fue entonces cuando volví a investigar la materia.

MB CUAL FUE LA CONTRIBUCION DE MICHEL TAPIE EN ESTE RENOVADO INTERES POR LA MATERIA?

AT Tapié fue uno de los primeos críticos en apostar por mi obra, pero cuando lo conocí ya tenía unos cuadros con un cierto bagaje. Su contacto fue muy fructífero para mí. A través de él conocí la obra de artistas como Pollock. Tapié tenía una pequeña colección, con cosas sensacionales. Luego, también me dio a conocer a Clifford Still.

MB EN CLIFFORD STILL, COMO EN OTROS ARTISTAS

AMERICANOS DE LA COSTA OESTE LA INFLUENCIA DE LA CULTURA ORIENTAL ES IMPORTANTE. TUVO ESTE DESCUBRIMIENTO ALGUNA REPERCUSION EN SU PINTURA?

AT Sí. Estas eran unas vías concretas a través de las cuales se reafirmaban mis intuiciones, no dejaban de ser un estímulo y en cierta manera una influencia. En aquellos años, la galería Stadler representaba a una escultora que vivía en San Francisco, Claire Falkstein. A través de ella nos interesamos por la escuela de California. Eso fue en 1954 ó 1955. Casi paralelamente, en París se hizo una gran exposición de pintores americanos y Clifford Still ya estaba allí. A aquella exposición le doy una importancia histórica, dentro de mi pequeña historia personal. Era entonces cuando yo buscaba galería. Fui a Paris, conocí a Michel Tapié, y coincidí con esta gran exposición. Luego, en mis primeros viajes a Nueva York, a través de Martha Jackson y de Michel Tapié entré en contacto con Motherwell, con de Kooning, Hans Hoffmann... Hice una cierta amistad que ha durado hasta ahora. En concreto, con Motherwell todavía mantengo correspondencia. En relación a la escuela de la costa Oeste, ya sabía que tenía contactos con el Extremo Oriente y tal vez por eso les presté más atención, porque era algo que a mí ya me

interesaba.

MB SIN EMBARGO, AQUELLOS MOMENTOS SE CONOCIA EN EUROPA
MEJOR EL ARTE DE LA COSTA ESTE, NO EL DE LA OESTE.

AT Muy rápidamente tuve una sensibilidad especial por
esta escuela, ya desde mis primeros viajes a Nueva
York. En 1953, cuando fui al Whitney Museum, me
sorprendió sobre todo un cuadro de Tobey. Luego
supe que Tobey también había estado en Oriente y se
interesaba por la cultura oriental. Al final, he
acabado por tener varias obras de Tobey. Este
elemento oriental también se da en Motherwell,
aunque puede ser que él no lo explique tanto, pero
la verdad es que la obra de Motherwell se acerca
mucho a las caligrafías japonesas.
Por otro lado, la cuestión de la influencia
oriental no la veo tanto a nivel de gusto o de
modas, sino que creo que tenemos una obligación de
incorporar muchas cosas de la cultura
extremoriental en nuestra visión del mundo...
Occidente debe de olvidar la idea de que es el
centro del mundo y debe de esforzarse por aceptar
la aportación de otras culturas y otras
civilizaciones

MB PARECE QUE SU INTERES POR LA CULTURA ORIENTAL

CRECIO EN 1956, POR QUE? QUE SIGNIFICO LA LECTURA DE ALLAN WATTS?

AT Fue, efectivamente, en 1956, cuando a través de mis lecturas de Watts, que fue muy importante para mí, y a través de Michel Tapié, quien tenía contactos con el Japón, se acentuó mi interés por lo oriental.

MB JOAN TEIXIDOR SUGIERE QUE UNA CAPA DE COLOR VIOLETA EN SUS OBRAS TENIA CONNOTACIONES BUDISTAS. ES CIERTO? EN QUE SENTIDO?

AT Mas que violeta yo diría naranja, que efectivamente es el color de los trajes de los monjes budistas.

MB QUE VALOR TIENE PARA USTED LA PALABRA HISTORICISMO, EN SU SENTIDO ARTISTICO?

AT Siempre he sido contrario a la recuperación de cosas exclusivamente por un capricho esteticista. Lo que recuperamos son cosas de un pensamiento que esté en una línea de progreso, de una modernización de la visión del mundo. Eso me interesa mucho, pero en realidad no es una recuperación, es seguir con los buenos modelos que nos ha dado la humanidad, los buenos modelos de aquellos que han tenido una visión clara del mundo. Si recuperamos

lo griego, por ejemplo, tal y como se está haciendo hoy en día, hay que preguntarse sobre qué griegos se trata de recuperar. No todos tienen el mismo valor para nosotros. Si recuperamos los griegos pre-socráticos posiblemente nos encontraríamos con una filosofía que ligaría mucho con la problemática actual. Pero no se puede hablar de recuperar el pasado en bloque. Hay cosas del pasado que están muy bien para el presente, pero no para utilizarlas como un adorno como se hace hoy en día, sino porque tienen un valor espiritual importante y ejemplar para la humanidad.

MB COMO VE DESDE LA PERSPECTIVA DE LOS 80 SU CARRERA Y SU OBRA?

AT Yo me veo como una persona que está en un proceso de cambio. He hecho algunos cambios últimamente, pero continúo con las mismas obsesiones que me han acompañado toda la vida. En general, podría decir que estoy satisfecho, pero todo a base de muchos sacrificios y de muchas penas, muchas veces provocadas por estas influencias exteriores de lo político, de lo comercial... Con todo, me queda la ilusión de que lo bueno aún no lo hecho, todavía está por hacer.

INTERVIEW: ENGLISH TRANSLATION

MB HOW IMPORTANT ARE ACTION AND SPONTANEITY IN YOUR
WORK? IS THERE A DIALECTICS BETWEEN SPONTANEITY AND
CONTROL?

AT I have never thought too much about it. To begin
with, to do things very fast has been a natural
need for me. I have always worked very fast, but
without ever knowing exactly why. In time I
realized that to work fast allows me to establish a
barrier to any intellectual control. When I work
fast I follow the dictates of the unconscious in a
more authentic way and do not let that which is
rational or cultural mediate. I impose obstacles
on myself spontaneously, using, for instance,
materials which dry very fast, with which I have to
work at full speed so that they do not become
petrified prematurely.

MB IS THERE AN IDENTIFICATION BETWEEN ARTIST AND

MATERIAL?

AT I have frequently used a material which I invented, the marble dust mixed with varnish or synthetic glue. This was an unknown material, and in consequence I myself had to experiment with it. Through the work of many years I mastered it, achieving a total identification with the material. I know now what is going to happen in every moment of the creation of a painting. Sometimes this same certainty wearies me. Lately, I do not use this material at all because I know beforehand what is going to happen next. Instead, I prefer to keep a state of surprise, and to experiment with other materials.

MB HOW IMPORTANT IS THE TECHNIQUE IN YOUR WORK?

AT I probably do not have a technique by which I could achieve a refinement in an academic sense, because I did not have an academic training. However, I realize that in time the experience of having painted a lot helped me. It is almost like having accumulated knowledge in the nerves of the hand. With any gesture I am able to confer a certain expressivity to the material.

MB ANY EMOTION CAN BE EXPRESSED.

AT Yes, or at least that is how it looks to me.

MB WHEN DO YOU CONSIDER A WORK TO BE COMPLETED? DO YOU ESTABLISH ANY LIMIT?

AT To know when you have to finish a work is one of the most difficult things. I am more than sixty years old and I am still afraid of the finish; I am always afraid of spoiling the work. Maybe because of it I have a tendency to stop a little bit before the work is finished, leaving it unfinished, leaving things without much, with few details..., and all is due to the fear of going too far. If I err it is on the side of scarcity, not of excess.

MB HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE FRAME AND THE PHYSICAL LIMITS OF THE CANVAS IN YOUR WORK?

AT It is curious. Some people have asked this question of me on different occasions and I have never known what to say. In general, I never think about the limits of the canvas. I work as if I was doing something without limits. The frame comes to me as a surprise. Sometimes, however, I take into account that I am doing a composition in a closed field, and that there is a certain balance that I have to consider. But it is not something I think

too much about. This is related to my desire to escape from any hierarchy. To me, any element of a canvas is important.

MB IN MANY OF YOUR PAINTINGS THERE IS A DIFFERENCE OF SCALE BETWEEN OBJECTS. IS THERE A SYMBOLISM?

AT True, I always create the objects bigger than normal, but rarely smaller. It seems to me that there is a certain symbolism, but this is an improvised one, not systematic at all. Frequently I have done a foot or an ear in a scale much bigger than reality, and then I realize that by doing that, by enlarging something little and simple I turn it into something cosmic. This has always been a key in my work: the whole universe can be contemplated in something little and insignificant.

MB WHICH PLASTIC ELEMENT IS MORE IMPORTANT IN YOUR WORK: FORM, TEXTURE, COLOR, SPACE OR LIGHT?

AT It has been said a lot --I myself said it too-- that I am one of the painters who has experimented most with the qualities of the materials and their texture. It is possible that the language of textures was not analyzed so exhaustively before. In general, I can say that this is probably one of the predominant elements in my work. But, I am

interested in everything, everything that could be an expressive means. Many people think that my paintings are scarcely coloristic. I think, however, that I study the color sufficiently. My colors are not the primary colors (although I also used them); instead I use more mysterious and subtler colors. Similarly, the spacial element is very important to me.

MB WHY IT IS THAT IN 1950 A KIND OF BARROQUE LIGHT, A LA CARAVAGGIO, HAD SO MUCH IMPORTANCE IN YOUR WORK? IT WAS PERHAPS DUE TO YOUR VISITS TO THE PRADO MUSEUM AND TO THE FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE OF PAINTINGS BY ZURBARAN AND RIBERA?

AT My use of light came as a need to free myself from the literary aspect of Surrealism. Zurbarán's light fitted this need, and turned into a source of inspiration. However, even though I visited the Prado Museum during those years, I had known Zurbarán much before through reproduction in magazines and books.

MB DURING THE FIFTIES YOU ATTEMPTED TO MAKE GEOMETRIC PAINTINGS, EVEN A KIND OF OP ART?

AT That's right. At the beginning of the fifties, I did some "optical" attempts. I used the

complementary colors repeatedly to create an optic feeling.

MB WAS THE LACK OF "COLOR" IN YOUR MATURE WORK A REACTION AGAINST THE SPANISH PAINTING FROM THE PREVIOUS GENERATIONS WHICH WERE EXCESSIVELY COLORISTIC?

AT Maybe. However, when I avoid any "colorfulness" it is not because of the colors in themselves as much as it is because of that which these colors may have of the industrial and prefabricated. I always wanted to express in my art a return to nature.

MB WHY DID THE COLOR OF YOUR WORKS BRIGHTEN IN THE MIDDLE SIXTIES?

AT I never thought about it. It may be so. If you live in a more optimistic period, it is logical that your works are also more optimistic, and that the color expresses it.

MB RAILLARD SAID IN 1974 THAT THE COLOR BROWN, THE COLOR OF THE EXCREMENTS, IS RELATED WITH THE SENILE POWER OF FRANCO. IS THIS SO?

AT The meaning of a color as well as that of other motifs in my works accumulate; and in the specific case to which Raillard refers it is possible that

the brown acquired this meaning. But, generally speaking, brown is the color of the earth and of that which is material

MB IN THIS CONTEXT, WHAT IS THE MEANING OF GRAY?

AT I think that things have to be above all beautiful, and that gray must be used to enhance this beauty. Using colors such as gray I intend to confer nobility to those elements traditionally considered ignoble.

MB HOW DID YOUR INTEREST FOR THE MATERIALS AND TEXTURE BEGIN?

AT I always say that, in a moment when I had recovered from an illness and was hypersensitive almost to a point of madness, I had some intuitions which must have answered to true and deep feelings. I have always believed that this moment was so authentic and so deeply personal that I arrived at that sensibility almost unconsciously. Later on, I refined my technique and ideas and began to contribute with other things.

MB WAS THIS SENSIBILITY FOR THE MATERIALS A COMMON PHENOMENON IN THE BARCELONA OF THE 1940s?

AT I have been always inclined to think about what is

real, about what is matter; but, of course, my sensibility was related to ideas that floated in the ambient and about which everybody was concerned. Matter constituted everybody's concern. In that moment we began to know about atomic energy, the decomposition of atoms.... My beginnings as a painter coincided with the atomic bomb. All this interested me very much and had a deep repercussion on me. In addition, I had a teacher who inculcated in us the study of matter. He used to lecture on the great revolution of physics at the beginning of the century.

MB DOES THE FACT THAT THERE HAD BEEN PRECEDENTS AMONG CATALAN ARTISTS IN THIS TREATMENT OF MATTER HAVE ANY REPERCUSSION IN YOUR WORK?

AT Not at the beginning. This influence was something that happened later. Since childhood I was always told that I was talented in drawing, I always dreamed that some day I would be a painter; but when I began to paint I knew, in actuality, very little.

MB THERE IS IN YOUR WORK AN EVOLUTION FROM A "REPRESENTATION" OF TEXTURES AND OBJECTS TO THEIR

"PRESENTATION." HOW DID THIS EVOLUTION HAPPEN?

AT I had already "presented" objects intuitively, almost without realizing, at the beginning of my career. The objects I used then (paper, toilette paper, newspaper, string, cardboard) were different to those I was going to use later on, but I had already a kind of natural inclination to present things as they are. Later on, I refined my techniques and began adding oil and making a more scholarly painting with themes which were more or less Surrealist. But soon after I began to work with the materials, the matter paintings. Parallel, little by little, I began doing collages. Thus, for instance, if in a certain moment I wanted to confer the sensation of a reptile I did not paint one; instead I added some material that had the aspect of a snake. Instead of painting an object in trompe l'oeil I thought it was more appropriate for a 20th-century mentality to simply get the thing and show it directly.

MB WHICH CRITERIA DO YOU FOLLOW IN SELECTING THE MOTIFS OF A COMPOSITION OR THE OBJECTS OF A COLLAGE? ARE THEY SPECIFIC TO A WORK? ARE THEY GENERAL?

AT In general I have used materials that bring to me a

whole vision of the world and bear a symbolic charge. These are materials that look decadent, damaged, worn out by time, gray materials whose colors seem faded by light and look as if covered by dust. What is the philosophy behind all this? I do not know exactly.

MB WHAT MEANING DOES THE IDEA OF CHANGE AND METAMORPHOSIS AND THAT OF "TRANSFORMISMO" HAVE IN YOUR WORK?

AT The general philosophy of my work follows Heraclitus' notion that everything changes and, at the same time, remains the same. Everything is transitory, everything seems to have an end, but at the same time everything seems to be reborn again. A collaboration with Joan Brossa encouraged me in this sense, when we did the book on Frégoli, a "transformista" who used to performe all the roles of a theatrical function. There was multiplicity and at the same time unity. I do not know if Joan Brossa saw it in this sense because to him the notion of game, of magic is very important.... But when he proposed that we do the book together I liked very much the idea because it expressed the notion of simulatenous change and permanence.

MB ARE THE SEXUAL REFERENCES OF YOUR WORK RELATED TO THIS?

AT I have never really thought about this, but it is possible. Sex has many connotations. Change to me is fusion with nature, being everything and nothing of the biological movements.

MB THIS IS RELATED WITH SPONTANEITY AND WITH THE DEPURATION OF TECHNIQUE.

AT Exactly. The use of varnish has allowed me to obtain that effect of change. At the beginning, I mixed marble dust with varnish, which is something doughy, which has honey-like proprieties, and which is uncontrollable to the point that sometimes a painting is done by itself. Motifs are formed and deformed by themselves. Lately, I have been working with varnish alone. I do not know if other painters have done such a thing, but this material emphasizes the philosophy of permanent change. Sometimes you try to create two separated forms, but the varnish joins them together without you even wanting it. Everything gets united and disunited at the same time.

MB DO YOU FORGET ALL THESE THEORIES IN THE PROCESS OF CREATION? DO YOU FOLLOW THE PRINCIPLE OF CREATIVE

FORGETFULNESS?

AT Yes, totally. I might have built many theories, but when I go through my studio door I forget everything. In the studio the issue consists in solving an element specific to the painting, a material ... not in justifying a theory.

MB HOW DID YOU BEGIN TO WRITE?

AT My first articles had a polemical tone because they responded to ideas that were in the ambiance here in Barcelona. I did not agree with them. The level of our criticism was not very high then, and I made an effort of substituting. Somebody had to say something. It was also a moment when Socialist Realism was very much up-to-day. Many people thought that if you wanted to have leftist ideas and wanted to fight for democracy you had to follow a Socialist Realism, which had even Stalinist overtones. I began to write precisely when Stalin had just died. I thought that Socialist Realism was absurd and began to publish in the magazine Destino first, and later on in the newspaper La Vanguardia.

MB IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUR WRITING AND

YOUR ART WORK?

AT There is a little bit of everything. In some articles, the focus of my thoughts is the cultural or artistic phenomenon in general; in others, it is my own work. I began to think about my own works because everybody asked me to do it in order to understand my painting better. I remember having written an article for a magazine called Cavall Fort, very simple but for which I was congratulated by many people because I had been able to give an idea of what my painting was. In my book La Practica de l'Art there are also some articles about my painting, but these are always a minority, prevailing my essays on other cultural topics.

MB WHICH IS THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST IN SOCIETY?

AT Perhaps we artists have a deformed image of what our role is in society. We believe that we are very important. Nonetheless, I am in my sixties and still think that my painting can change the world. We always hope that we have a social mission of importance, above all, when the myth of rationalism and the belief in the capacity of the intellect to explain things have failed. Then, we realize that reality can be explained through painting, as it was already said by the Buddhists. This is

something that has deep roots inside myself and I think that the capacity of a work of art to explain reality is a way much clearer and richer --with a much broader range of nuances-- than normal language.

MB HAS THE INTERPRETATION THAT SOME CRITICS HAVE MADE OF YOUR WORK BEEN SIGNIFICANT TO YOU (CIRLOT'S FROM A SYMBOLIST POINT OF VIEW, MICHEL TAPIE'S IN A LINE RELATED TO L'ART INFORMEL, ARGAN'S FROM AN EXISTENTIALIST PERSPECTIVE, GIMFERRER'S FROM A CATALANIST POINT OF VIEW)? HAVE THESE INTERPRETATIONS CONTRIBUTED TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR OWN WORK? DID THEY HAVE A ROLE IN YOUR OWN EVOLUTION?

AT No, I don't think so. It is always interesting to read or listen to somebody else's interpretation and analysis of your own work; but, as I was saying, when I arrive at the door of my studio I forget everything. It is not that I despise these opinions; it is that I am then involved in a different kind of problems.

Sometimes there are critics who use my work to justify their own theories. On other occasions, there are critics who try to accomodate themselves to my work and explain it. But, in general, all

these interpretations are a partial point of view.

MB WOULD YOU CHOOSE ONE OF THESE CRITICS? WHICH ONE DO
YOU THINK WAS MORE COMPLETE?

AT Cirlot was perhaps one of the critics who went
deeper into my work. He was a very intelligent
person, although he had the handicap of being too
Rightist...

MB HE WAS A VERY CULTIVATED PERSON..

AT Yes, he was very well informed and also he lived
everything in a profound way. He was a poet and
lived his experiences with intensity. He believed
wholeheartedly in symbolism. He thought that the
analysis of symbols helped us to understand life
and reality. His view of the world was not
exclusively the result of sheer erudition.

MB IS THERE ANY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FACT THAT
CIRLOT HAD SUCH AN INTENSE INTEREST IN SYMBOLISM
AND THAT SYMBOLS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR
WORK?

AT Yes, there was a certain relationship. Even though
politically we did not have anything in common, I
recognized the value of his studies on symbols. I
remember that Cirlot could analyze everything from

this point of view. He came once to my studio and I told him that I had just finished a painting and that I was sure it could not be analyzed symbolically. It was a painting I had made with straw, and it had a green spot and another blue that worked as a kind of eyes. I myself could not give a specific meaning to it, but Cirlot built a whole discourse around it. Cirlot worked with a dictionary of his own creation. Instead, I have never worked with any kind of dictionary, I have always worked intuitively.

MB WHEN YOU USE ICONOGRAPHIC MOTIFS SUCH AS THE T, X, OR M, IS THERE A PRE-ESTABLISHED REPERTOIRE, ACCORDING TO A CODE?

AT There are some signs that I use as a brand mark. There are things which I want to be immediately recognizable as works by Tàpies. These are signs that appear in many of my works. I use them frequently when somebody commissions a poster, for instance. Of course, since I only do posters for causes that I like and with which I sympathize, I want the public to recognize that Tàpies is in agreement with that idea. Then, I try to show that this "Tàpies" is a true "Tàpies," and that the poster includes an "X" or a "T" or any other

element characteristic of my paintings. There is some kind of repertoire that I use as my brand mark, but in which each sign has a variety of interpretations.

MB CAN WE TALK OF SERIES IN YOUR WORK? CIRLOT AND OTHERS SAY THAT IT IS NOT POSSIBLE. BUT, THEN, HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE EXISTENCE OF MOTIFS THAT KEEP APPEARING IN DIFFERENT OCCASSIONS?

AT I do not work in series in the sense that a theme is started, then developed and then completed. But I do use motifs or elements that repeat in different works, a little bit in the sense of musical variations. Themes which in a moment mean something specific may in another moment mean something else. I do different readings of my motifs according to the context. For instance, in 1950 I did a painting in which I depicted an arm, whose only sense consisted in being represented realistically, according to the taste of the period. In later works, such as the one in the Miró collection, the arm had the sense of reevaluating an element considered of bad taste (the armpit). Later, this motif acquired a value related to the history of Buddhism: that a pupil in order to call the attention of his master, who was

meditating in front of a wall, cuts off his arm and offers it to him. In my most recent ceramics the motif of the arm has the value of a votive offering. In addition, I have also been interested in repeating an element in different techniques (inks, materias...) in order to see how the same element responds to different ways of working.

MB IS THERE ANYTHING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IN YOUR SELECTION OF MOTIFS (AN EAR, A LACERATED LIMB...)?

AT Originally there is almost always an autobiographical factor. Later on, I elaborate on that and confer upon the motif a more general sense. For instance, regarding the letters about which we were just talking, the first time I represented the "M" I did it because I wanted to represent a hand and I copied the M we all have in the lines of our hands. It's that old wives' tale that the M of the lines of our hands, refers to death [Mort]; and that also in our feet there are wrinkles in the form of an S. Hand and foot all combined meant "certain death." The first time I did an M I had in mind, more or less unconsciously, the idea that it was a symbol for death.

MB IT ALSO HAS OTHER ASSOCIATIONS...

AT Yes, of course. Later on I used the "M" to symbolize the mountain. On other occasions the M was useful to me in order to represent the linen typical in the iconography of the Descent from the Cross.

My work has a much of the autobiographical, because all my work is an attempt to introspect, to see and penetrate into everything that constitutes my immediate environment.

MB IS THIS THE REASON WHY YOU PAINTED SO MANY SELF-
PORTRAITS IN YOUR FIRST PERIOD?

AT A first reason is that I was a very cheap model. However, my self-portraits are indeed in this line of introspection. That's why from a first moment there were elements in my face to which I gave a special intensity, such as the eyes which I represented in a very detailed way, depicting even the veins.

MB IN SOME OF YOUR WORKS THERE IS REPRESENTED A BIG
HAT, DOES IT REFER TO JOAN PRATS?

AT Not specially. In general, the hat is a symbol of everything bourgeois, of the bourgeoisie.

MB HOW WOULD YOU DIFFERENTIATE THE SPANISH ART CREATED BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR FROM THAT CREATED AFTER?

AT I was very young when the war broke out, I was twelve or thirteen; but I had the memory of that issue of the magazine D'Aci i D'Alla edited by Sert and Prats. To me this issue set a standard of what modern art was. I thought that it reflected the opinion of a broad sector of the Catalan or Spanish culture. With the years I discovered that they were a reduced minority and that they were not taken into account in the official circles, such as the Generalitat. The country was still immersed in Noucentisme. When the war ended, with the general diaspora of artists and intellectuals, the predominant art was totally commercial. Art galleries were covered with a facile and reactionary art which satisfied the taste of the nouveaux riches of the Franquismo, who lacked any artistic education. In general, I can tell you that I did not have a good opinion of our country's art either before the war or after. Nevertheless, I always acknowledged the existence of elites which worked within avant-garde principles.

MB HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE YOUR ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT

OF SPANISH ART?

AT I think that there was a moment when I had in fact a profound influence, above all during the second half of the fifties. I did not realize that such a thing was happening. I did not have any intention of having any influence. But I worked and fought very hard. I began to write, to exhibit; and, if there were some groups that began to recognize in me a certain leadership, it was because my ideas began to set roots and they saw that they were feasible. I quickly acquired a consciousness that I had a certain role.

MB DO YOU THINK THAT YOUR ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SPANISH ART HAD A REPERCUSSION IN YOUR WORK?

AT No, not at all. My work is something that I am doing continuously. Even today I have many doubts. I still consider myself in a period of training. But, in my contacts with other artists, I realized that I had an important role. It is not something I was looking for, since many times this creates problems. To a certain degree, you lose your privacy, your freedom; and, of course, it creates many enemies.

To a certain extent, this popularity is also related with the political situation in which we

were living. I had a very solid image of a Leftist artist and intellectual. During the period of anti-Franquismo fight we were all united, to be a Leftist was very good; but, later, during the democracy, I noticed that there were people who looked at me with distrust. Immediately after the installation of the democracy, it seemed that the Generalitat wanted to leave out anybody with Leftist ideas, and I felt a bit of rejection. In any case, this has changed lately. The current department of cultural affairs of the Generalitat is open enough.

MB WHAT REPERCUSSION DID THE REVALUATION OF GAUDI IN THE FIFTIES HAVE IN YOUR WORK?

AT In my period of formation, Gaudí was not yet in fashion. He was, on the contrary, discredited. Later on, the so-called Group R, which included Oriol Bohigas and other architects, did a campaign of revaluation, even to the point of organizing an exhibition in the Tinell. However, Gaudí's work had drawn my attention previously through things that I had heard from Dalí, from Miró's friends, and from Joan Prats.

MB IS YOUR PAINTING HOMENAJE A GAUDI (1956) RELATED TO

THIS PHENOMENON?

AT I did that painting in a moment when I used to visit frequently Gaudí's constructions together with some friends from abroad, such as Michel Tapié, who used to come often to Barcelona.

MB IS THERE ANY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GAUDÍ'S INTEREST FOR MATERIALS AND YOUR OWN?

AT My research is independent, although it is very possible that some structures and some images by Gaudí had a good impression on me. To a certain degree, one of Dalí's few wise decisions was to contribute greatly in promoting the interest for Gaudí.

MB HAS THE WORK BY NICHOLAS RAURICH BEEN IMPORTANT FOR YOU?

AT It was Cirlot who told me that I should go to see this Modernista artist's works. But, in actuality, I knew his work relatively late, and I do not think therefore that he could influence my work.

MB VERA LINHARTOVA SUGGESTED THAT THE REVALUATION OF THE ALTAMIRA CAVES AND THE CAVE PAINTINGS BY THE SCHOOL OF ALTAMIRA AND MATHIAS GOERITZ WERE RELATED TO YOUR CONCEPTION OF PAINTING AS A WALL. TO WHAT

POINT IS THIS TRUE?

AT I do not think there was any relationship, at least explicitly. It is not that it had mattered to me, but the truth is that I did not have any relations with the School of Altamira. Probably the most important relation between that group and myself was that they sent me the catalogue for one of their exhibitions.

MB DID FAUTRIER AND DUBUFFET HAVE ANY REPERCUSSION IN YOUR WORK? WHEN DID YOU BEGIN TO FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH THE PAINTING OF THESE ARTISTS?

AT Generally speaking, I think that there was an influence, at least in terms of incentive and confirmation of a way to follow. In Dubuffet's works there is a caricature-like element which has nothing to do with my character. But I am very interested in his "texturologies."

I knew Fautrier when I entered in the roster of the Stadler gallery, in 1955. Fautrier did not exhibit in Stadler, but Tapié was a close friend of his. I have some works by Fautrier, I respect him a lot, but we must recognize that he is a very limited artist.

MB WHEN AT THE END OF THE FORTIES AND AT THE BEGINNING OF THE FIFTIES DIFFERENT ARTISTIC GROUPS BEGAN TO TAKE SHAPE IN SPAIN, WAS THERE A SENSE OF CULTURAL RECOVERY? TO WHAT ARTISTS OF OUR HISTORIC PAST DID YOU AND THE OTHER ARTISTS TURN FOR INSPIRATION?

AT There was a group that tried very hard to connect with the prewar period, to connect not in the sense of a return to the past but in the sense of a cultural stream which was still in the process of being developed, even though it was broken during the war and above all during the 40's due to Francoist oppression. This group was the Grupo 49. Later, the articles by Cirici in Serra d'Or were instrumental in this endeavour to recover our past. Cirici wanted consciously to link with the avant-garde traditions of Catalonia. There were people who cared a lot about this. Some of my peers and myself were extremely lucky to be able to befriend the protagonists of the avant-garde of the Pre-war years. For me to be able to be friend of Miró was extraordinary. Similarly, Miró's friends, such as the hatmaker Joan Prats, had also a great importance. These were people that fought all their lives in order to establish ideas of progress and modernity.

MB WERE OTHER ARTISTS OF THE PRE-WAR AVANT-GARDE KNOWN?

AT We knew few. Miró was totally unknown here. He did not exhibit at all. He was only known among friends.

MB WHAT WAS YOUR PEERS' REACTION TO CONSERVATIVE ARTISTS SUCH AS MARES OR CASANOVAS?

AT We did not relate at all with them. We considered them as our enemies. There was a negative reaction. Later on, I met Marés and know that he is a beautiful person, but his work did not say anything to us.

MB WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF ART GALLERIES SUCH AS LAYETANAS, IN BARCELONA, OR BIOSCA IN MADRID?

AT The galleries did not do much because they depended upon the public demand, and the public did not ask then for quality. The Layetanas had a good moment when J.M. Gudiol was associated with it. He intended to renew the line of the gallery, and some avant-garde exhibitions were organized. In this gallery was hosted the Salón de Octubre, which was one of the first "salons" with a progressive character in 1948. It was there that I had my first solo exhibition. Later, they organized an

exhibition of Miró, who had previously refused to exhibit in Spain. They could not get work directly from Miró, but they did get it from his friends' collections. However, this gallery still was holding very conservative exhibitions. It did not keep, therefore, a coherent line. In fact, anything that was avant-garde was done under the initiative of people more or less from outside the gallery.

MB WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF POLITICAL FIGURES SUCH AS RUIZ GIMENEZ IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPANISH ART?

AT Ruiz Giménez was a Minister of Education who tended to be more liberal... to the point of confronting the system. It is possible that in that moment things were a little bit more liberal, in part due to some of his friends including Loin Entralgo. They all gathered around the magazine Revista. On an artistic level, it was a moment of a certain opening up, but always in a very conservative sense. They did not promote "avantgarde - avantgard." There was a strong influence of old Falangists of good faith, who liked an art of social criticism, and who proposed a return to critical figuration. But, they did not constitute an inquisitive avant-garde.

MB TO WHICH POINT CAN IT BE SAID THAT AVANT-GARDE
MOVEMENTS AROSE FROM WITHIN THE SYSTEM?

AT What happened was that the system was in a certain
way overcome by historical events. They had to
create a good image of themselves for the exterior.
They wanted to show that here it did not happen
like in Nazi Germany, and that here nobody was
prosecuting avant-garde artists, but that on the
contrary they were protected. I always tell an
anecdote: the first time I exhibited in the Salón
de los Once some journalists and photographers from
ABC came and did a feature of our works. However,
the article never appeared in the national edition,
it was used only for an international edition. The
Instituto de Cultura Hispánica also worked in this
direction, developing a campaign aimed at promoting
an image of liberalization. It was this Institute
--the one that organized the Biennial
Hispanoamericana where I showed my first matter
paintings-- which in that moment caused a
commotion.

MB THIS BIENNIAL WAS A TURNING POINT IN THE EVOLUTION
OF MODERN SPANISH ART.

AT Yes, but it was not because of the Biennial, but in

spite of it. I remember that we had many doubts about participating because it was something official ... At the end, I decided to participate. There were some rules, there was an application form you had to fill out ... Juan Ramón Masoliver was one of the curators. I spoke with him and he encouraged me to participate. I sent some paintings. The selecting jury turned down one of them. In actuality they did not like what I was doing at all. Due to the intervention of Ainaud de Lasarte, who was a member of the jury, I changed the painting and exhibited three works. They hung them very well, in a place which could be seen very well. These works caused a tremendous commotion. All the academicians reacted very negatively. There were tremendous polemics. I was desperate, but Miró's friends cheered me up and told me that the important thing was that the newspapers wrote about me; whatever they could say was of lesser importance. I am now pleased of what happened because it marked a period. It was the moment when I had a stronger influence among young people.

MB LATER ON YOU DID NOT WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN ANY
OFFICIAL EVENT.

AT Yes. Later, they invited us to participate in the

Biennial of Venice. In those years you could only participate in this Bienial officially through the Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores. I remember having also discussed this matter with Antonio Saura... At the end, we decided to accept the invitation to see if we could surprise everybody. But immediately we realized that the Government was using us. The curator of the exhibition, González Robles, had a definitive political point of view. Later on, he tried to organize a kind of London Biennial, but then both Saura and I decided not to exhibit again in any official exhibition, and we never did.

MB FOR THIS EXHIBITION THEY OBTAINED PAINTINGS FROM COLLECTORS AGAINST YOUR WILL

AT Yes, I even sued the person who lent my paintings, for according to a 19th-century law still valid an artist has the right to refuse exhibition. The copy-right law for an artist not only includes the public reproduction of his works, but also their public exhibition. And since the law is very clear in this matter, I won the case. But, of course, when the lawsuit was over, the exhibition was already closed. To a certain extent, the British authorities were also guilty since they did not

want to collaborate with me. They said that the exhibition came to them as a group from Spain and that they could not add or remove anything...

MB MICHEL RAGON STATES THAT PAINTING WAS NEVER THE OBJECT OF PROSECUTION IN FRANCO'S SPAIN, WHILE LITERATURE, MOVIES OR THEATER WERE. IS THIS TRUE?

AT The officials of the period realized that abstract painting did not do any political harm to them since its meaning is not explicit. They were clever enough to see that prosecuting an artist meant to turn him into a martyr. Thus, if it was not entirely unavoidable they did not want to "see" anything in abstract painting. However, when we did the "farewell" exhibition for the Dau al Set (farewell to its first period, before Tharrats took over the magazine) in Galeria Caralt, it was closed by the police.

MB WHAT WAS THE REPERCUSSION THAT THE EXHIBITION "OTRO ARTE" HAD?

AT I organized that exhibition together with Michel Tapié in Sala Gaspar with whose directors I got very angry because when the exhibition was ready to be hung, --when the works from Paris were already sent,-- they forced us to include artists of the

gallery. They included in the show artists such as Tharrats, Vilacasas They even intended to include a painting by Clavé, but I absolutely refused to accept this. These problems notwithstanding, the exhibition was a success here in Barcelona. There were works by Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning ... Of course, I was able to organize the exhibition thanks to my friendship with Tapié, who then directed the Stadler gallery. We became close friends, and we even used to joke about our possible relationship due to the almost coincidence of our surnames.

MB DID THE 1960 MOMA EXHIBITION OF SPANISH ART HAVE ANY REPERCUSSION IN BARCELONA?

AT This was already a moment in which I did not want to participate in official exhibitions. They selected some works of mine without my consent. Actually, there were two exhibitions very close in time. One was organized by Sweeney for the S. Guggenheim Museum; the other was organized by Frank O'Hara for MoMA. But I declined to take part in either of them. I have never liked to exhibit in a group, gregariously. I tried to decline participation in these group shows, but they selected paintings of mine borrowed from

collectors.

MB HOW DO YOU CHARACTERIZE THE ARTISTIC SENSIBILITY OF THE 40s IN RELATION TO THE 50s? AND THAT OF THE 50s IN RELATION TO THE 60s, 70s, AND 80s? IN WHAT PERIOD WOULD YOU DIVIDE SPANISH ART AFTER SECOND WORLD WAR?

AT Actually, I was not too much interested in that which was happening in the world. On the contrary, I rather thought that I was influencing the world, shaping the changes of taste. Certainly, there was a moment in which I had the impression that my work had a great influence: people liked to dress with grey, darkgreen, earth-like colors... the color of the Franciscan habits. It was something that apparently became fashionable years later with the arrival of the Arte Povera; and it is something that fortunately is fashionable again: the taste for that which is humble, for that which is austere, for that which is simple. In my case all this is a consequence of my distaste of everything industrial, possibly a consequence of some Marxist ideas. The excessive "technologization" is a weapon which works against us. Instead of using the technique for our service, we are at the service of the technique. Since my early youth I

defended this return to nature, not from a romantic point of view, but in the sense of a better adaptation to nature. My first writings already pointed in this direction. I have the satisfaction of seeing how time is proving my point.

MB HOW MUCH DO YOU VALUE ANYTHING VERNACULAR IN YOUR WORK? AND THAT WHICH IS INTERNATIONAL OR OF AN INDUSTRIAL TYPE?

AT Generally speaking, I have always disliked anything industrial. I have never liked the excessively anonymous or functional industrial design. I even had a polemic with an architect. Some aspects of industrial design, such as the will to integrate art and life, are to me important, but I have always had a preference for humble and even poor crafts. I do not like anything that has connotations of being excessively worked, polished, machine-made. I want the human mark to be visible and the human sense of touch to be felt.

MB WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION TO THE WORK OF ARTISTS SUCH AS BURRI, WITH WHOM YOU HAVE BEEN FREQUENTLY COMPARED?

AT Yes, I know that on some occasions I have been compared with Burri because the painting's texture

was also very important to him. However, during a time Burri limited himself to work with cloths, bags, entering later into a field of presentation of the material by the material, and that's not in my line. Despite the fact that a good part of the forms of his works are also organic and suggestive, there is a whole other aspect of Burri's work which derives from Neoplasticism, from abstract painting. This is not in his case geometric, but it follows the principle of subordinating the composition, the expressivity of color and form, and the texture, to plastic ideas more than to intentional ones. In my work it is just the opposite, since in it textures are combined with signs, with symbolic, personal references. Burri's work of the Sacchi period are richer in allusion; all those red spots that remind us of blood, the sewing that remind us of surgery elements... This part of Burri's work interests me a lot. But, then, he entered in a period which does not interest me so much, in which the non-ordinary material that he used had a sheer plastic sense.

MB IS THIS THE CASE OF MILLARES?

AT I knew Millares' work when I already knew Burri's, and I always considered him as a painter without

enough personality and who followed Burri excessively. I never paid much attention to what he was doing; on the contrary, it always seemed to me that he was somehow mimetic, and that he used to take some elements from Saura and even from me, such as the letter X.

MB DID YOU AT THAT TIME PAY MORE ATTENTION TO THAT WHICH WAS BEING DONE OUTSIDE SPAIN?

AT Yes, of course. Although today the age difference is not so apparent, I used to see the artists from El Paso as kids. That was not so much the case of Millares as that of Saura with whom there was a greater age difference. I did not, therefore, pay too much attention to them. Also, they were people from Madrid...

MB HOWEVER, IN SOME TEXTS THERE IS A TENDENCY TO RELATE SAURA WITH TAPIES.

AT Yes, because I entered in the roster of a Parisian gallery, Stadler, and within the next few years Saura did it too. We became close friends. Saura is a very cultivated painter with whom you can talk about everything. Also, by way of the Stadler gallery a joint exhibition was organized. We exhibited once together in Germany. Maybe due to

that, people associated him with me. But I feel myself totally different from Saura.

MB DID THE OUTBREAK OF POP ART HAVE ANY REPERCUSSION
IN YOUR WORK?

AT I disliked Pop Art because it is a populist art,
based on supermarket or Disneyland images. It is a
falsely popular art; it is popular art created by
the culture industries.

MB IS THERE ANY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUR WORK SI
(1974) AND JASPER JOHNS' NO (1961)?

AT Some people have told me about this work, but I
never saw it.

MB YOUR WORK IS NOT THEN A REACTION AGAINST JOHNS'?

AT No. If there is a reaction of any type it is to a
countryman of yours, Raimon, who wrote that song
entitled Diquem No. I thought that we do not
always have to say "no," but sometimes we have to
say "yes." Of course, my "yes" was a conditional
one. If you remember the painting you will notice
that the "yes" is placed between lines that are
unbalanced. You will notice that this is
characteristic of my painting in which, if in many
instances there is a strong criticism, there are

also very positive proposals.

MB DID JOHN CAGE, THE BLACK MOUNTAIN SCHOOL AND THE GROUP OF ARTISTS WHO EMPHASIZE PROCESS AND NOT THE FINAL PRODUCT HAVE ANY REPERCUSSION IN YOUR WORK?

AT I knew Cage's music in New York. Some young American painters introduced me to it. On my first trip to Paris, Varese was almost unknown. I began to listen to his music very soon, but the theoretical part came to me later on, almost in the period of the Conceptual Art. Many people used to say then that the one who pulled the strings behind the scenes was Marcel Duchamp, whom I met in 1958. We soon established a relationship which we kept for a while.

MB DID YOU MEET ALLEN GINSBERG? DID THE BEAT GENERATION HAVE ANY INFLUENCE ON YOU?

AT Yes, I was in touch with this group of intellectuals and artists during my trips to New York. I felt very comfortable with all of them. There is in all of them an element derived from Buddhism which is related with my way of seeing things. Actually, I felt much closer to the artists and poets of the Beat Generation than to the Abstract Expressionists. Even by age I would

be closer to the former... I felt distant even from Tapié when he championed L'Art Informel artists. I did not feel distant from people such as J. Kerouac or A. Ginsberg. Of the Abstract Expressionists I was interested in Tobey and Kline, but I considered Kline as a product of "Constructivism" more than really the result of a communion with Oriental art.... With the poets of the Beat Generation it is the opposite.

MB IN WHICH WAY DID YOUR SURREALIST PERIOD INFLUENCE YOUR LATER WORK?

AT I believe that Surrealism has deeply influenced my work. It has influenced me in its technical aspects. On my first trips to Paris, I bought Surrealist first editions. I read a lot of poetry. Their studies, their investigations of the unconscious were very attractive to me. As a consequence of the interest that Surrealists had for psychology and psychoanalysis I came to be interested in Freud and, especially, in Jung. Even the interest for Far Eastern themes was already noted by the Surrealists. The first years of my formation were totally influenced by Surrealism. But, as I say, this influence was produced at a theoretical and literary level more than at a level

of specific artists or works of art.

MB DID WRITINGS BY DALI HAVE ANY REPERCUSSION IN YOUR WORK?

AT Dali's writings not much, because I began to dislike Dali soon enough because of his political position. Immediately after the war, a great part of the intellectuals opposed Dali.

MB HOW IMPORTANT WAS KLEE IN YOUR WORK? IN WHAT ASPECTS DID HE INFLUENCE YOU?

AT Concerning Klee we should talk extensively. To begin with, Klee impressed me because of the way he got deeply into things. Klee began in a very critical and mocking way, in his first works he had something ironic which perhaps relates less with my character; however, when he enters in his phase of, let's say, "analysis of nature behind the scenes," from inside, his works are of extreme interest to me. I realized that he was a person with a profound capacity to analyze things, and that interested me a lot. I tried to read some of his writings, of his diaries. Artists' diaries have always been very useful to me because they let me see the evolution of the artist. I was also very impressed by the fact that he was such a good

painter in the sense that he used so well painting's own elements, and in such a variety. He has always been a very firm model to me.

MB WHAT WAS THE IMPORTANCE OF DAU AL SET IN YOUR WORK?

AT In general, when we speak of the Dau al Set group we do it as if it was an homogeneous group. However, each one of its members was very different from the other. There was no specific ideological coherence. We created the Dau al Set more as a group of youths carried by the will to be known than led by any ideological intention. However, Joan Brossa gave coherence to the first issues. At that moment all the painters received his influence. This influence was minor, at least in my case. But, we must acknowledge Brossa's importance, despite the fact that Tharrats, who, when we created the magazine was not even painting, appeared as editor of the magazine. Tharrats took advantage of owning a press. We used to meet in his house to prepare the issue, and he, step by step, appropriated the magazine for himself. In relation to the Dau al Set there are many things that are not true. In the first issue, for instance, we wrote that it had been edited by Ponç. This was false since the magazine was discussed by

everybody. Ponç had designed the masthead while the others had created the rest of the drawings. Since his name did not appear anywhere and we had to put it somewhere, we decided that he could appear as director. Thus, the magazine went down in history as edited by Tharrats and directed by Ponç, but this was not the case at all.

Arnau Puig is another person who also appropriates frequently the name of Dau al Set. He sees himself as the ideologist of the group... but there was nothing of that. Puig was a kid who was then in high school, and had no influence at all. He began to write a little bit; he wanted to be a philosopher. Instead, I recognize the importance of Joan Brossa, his ideas and work. He was really the one who had relations with Miró and Joan Prats, and he was the one who put us in touch with all of them. Those Dau al Set issues under Brossa's tutelage were the ones that had a certain air of creation and shock in the country's cultural environment.

Step by step the original founders of the group separated. Ponç went to Brasil as a teacher and founded a small art school. Cuixart abandoned his artistic activities for a while and devoted himself to textile printing... However, Tharrats continued

publishing the magazine until 1956. It lasted a long time. I myself took advantage of the last issues in order to let my work be known. I used the masthead of Dau al Set because it was very difficult to publish anything; it was necessary to obtain legal permission... I secured the publication of a text by Michel Tapié on the occasion of the exhibition Un Arte Otro. His text was entitled "La Estética en Devenir." It was published through my efforts and funded by friends of mine. Later on, an issue was also published which was used as the catalogue for my first exhibition in Stadler gallery. It also included a text by Tapié entitled, "Tàpies ou l'oeuvre complete." This was one of the last issues of Dau al Set.

MB WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF J.E. CIRLOT?

AT Cirlot came later. He became part of the group when this was already formed.

MB WERE THERE DISCUSSIONS ABOUT CIRLOT'S MEMBERSHIP?

AT Yes, because he used to write in Castillian. He was the son of an army officer and everybody felt a bit bitter about his political ideas. However, I was one of the first to support his candidacy.

Immediately, I realized that he was a very intelligent and cultivated person.

MB WHAT WAS THE REPERCUSSION OF YOUR FIRST EXPERIMENTS WITH MATERIALS IN THE WORKS OF YOUR SURREALIST PERIOD?

AT There was a moment when I began to get rid of this type of "Surrealist" painting of literary character and began to be interested in textures and materials. At the beginning I did it without any intention of starting again in the line of my first works. Almost by surprise I discovered that the new style was related to what I had done earlier, with my experiences of youth. It was a moment when I decided to jump into empty space again and to get rid of Surrealist influencea, especially those of my friend Joan Brossa and the poet Foix. I used to see Brossa almost daily. He stimulated me a lot with his praise. But I soon realized that he praised those paintings that fitted better with the coordinates of his own literary work, as literary pieces Without realizing it, I was leaving the field of "painting-painting".... Instinctively, I reacted by abandoning literary things. It was then that my research of the materials began.

MB WHAT WAS MICHEL TAPIÉ'S CONTRIBUTION IN THE RENEWAL OF YOUR INTEREST FOR THE MATERIALS?

AT Tapié was one of the first critics to support my work, but when I met him I had already created paintings which had their own distinctive character. My relation with Tapié was, nonetheless, very productive for me. Through him I became acquainted with the work of artists such as Pollock. Tapié had a small, yet impressive collection. Later on, he also introduced me to the work of Clifford Still.

MB IN CLIFFORD STILL THE ORIENTAL INFLUENCE IS IMPORTANT, AS WELL AS IN OTHER AMERICAN ARTISTS OF THE WEST COAST. DID THE DISCOVERY OF HIS WORKS HAVE ANY REPERCUSSION IN YOUR PAINTING?

AT Yes. These were specific ways through which my intuitions were reaffirmed, they were stimuli and to a certain point an influence. In those years, Stadler gallery represented a sculptress who lived in San Francisco, Claire Falkstein. Through her we became interested in The School of California. That was in 1954 or 1955. Almost at the same time, there was organized in Paris a big exhibition of American painters; one of them was Clifford Still. Within my own personal history, I give to that

exhibition an historical importance. It was then that I was looking for a gallery. I came to Paris; I met Tapié and I saw this great exhibition. Later on, during my first trips to New York, through Martha Jackson and Michel Tapié I met Motherwell, de Kooning, Hans Hoffmann.... I made a certain friendship with some of them which has lasted until now. With Motherwell I am still in correspondence. Regarding the West Coast School, I knew they were in touch with the Far East and maybe I paid them more attention because of that, because I was already attracted to Oriental cultures.

MB HOWEVER, DURING THOSE YEARS THE ART OF THE EAST COAST WAS BETTER KNOWN IN EUROPE THAN THAT OF THE WEST, WASN'T IT?

AT I developed a special sensibility for this school very soon, already in my first trips to New York. In 1953, when I went first to the Whitney Museum, I was struck above all by a painting by Tobey. Later on, I also found out that Tobey had been in the East and was interested in Oriental culture. I ended by obtaining several works by Tobey. You could also find this oriental element in Motherwell, although it is possible that he does not refer to it as much, but the truth is that

Motherwell's work gets close to Japanese calligraphies.

I do not think that the question of the oriental influence has to be seen at a level of taste or fashion. Instead I think that we have an obligation to include many things of Far Eastern culture in our world view... Western civilization must abandon the idea that it is the center of the world and must make efforts to accept the contribution of other cultures and civilizations.

MB IT SEEMS THAT YOUR INTEREST FOR EASTERN CULTURE INCREASED IN 1956, WHY? WHAT DID READING WATTS MEAN FOR YOU?

AT It was, in fact, in 1956, when due to my readings of Watts, who was very important to me, and due to Michel Tapié, who had connections in Japan, my interest for things oriental was accentuated.

MB JOAN TEIXIDOR SUGGESTED THAT A LAYER OF VIOLET COLOR IN YOUR WORK HAD CONNOTATIONS OF BUDDHISM. IS IT TRUE? IN WHAT SENSE?

AT Rather than violet I would say orange, which, in fact, is the color of the dress of the buddhist monks.

MB WHAT DOES THE WORD HISTORICISM MEAN FOR YOU, IN ITS
ARTISTIC SENSE?

AT I have always been opposed to the recovery of things just based on sheer estheticist fancifulness. That which we can recover is a thought which is in the line of progress and modernization. This interests me a lot, but in actuality it is not a recovery; it is to follow the good models that humankind provides for us, the good models of those who had a clear view of the world. For instance, if we recover things Greek, as it is being done today, it is necessary to ask which Greeks we are trying to recover. Not all of them have the same value for us. If we recover the Pre-Socratic Greeks, we could probably find a philosophy which relates a lot with our current situation. But we cannot talk about recovering the past as a whole. There are things from the past which are very good for the present, not, however, for ornamental use as is being done today, but as a spiritual value important and exemplary to humanity.

MB HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR OWN WORK FROM THE PERSPECTIVE
OF THE EIGHTIES?

AT I see myself as a person who is in a process of

change. Lately I have made some changes, but I continue with the same obsessions that accompanied me all my life. Generally speaking, I could say that I am satisfied, but it has been by making a lot of sacrifices and by suffering many hardships, many times generated by exterior influences, be they political or commercial I have, in any case, the hope that I still have not done the good work, that it is to be done.

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ANTONI TAPIES: THE "MATTER PAINTINGS"

by

MANUEL J. BORJA

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1 Antoni Tàpies at work, summer 1969

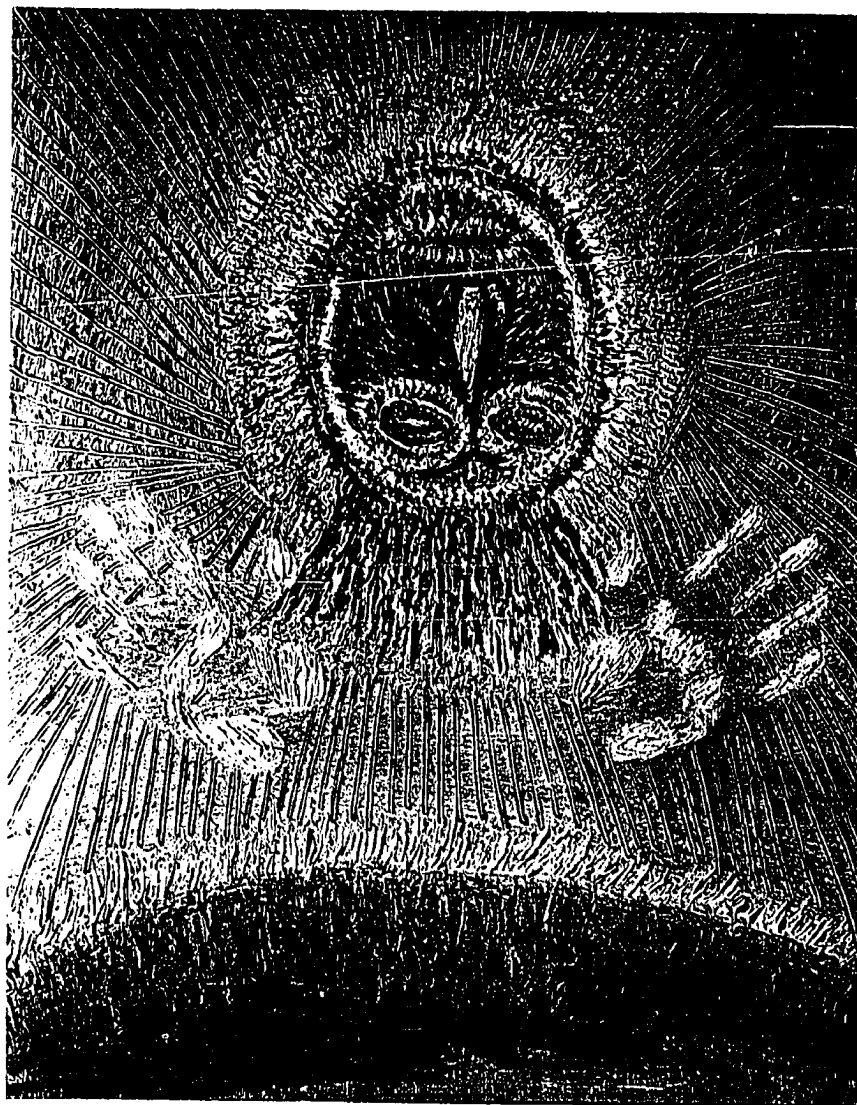


Fig. 2 Antoni Tàpies. Zoom, 1947



Fig. 3 Antoni Tàpies. Collage of the rice and strings, 1947



Fig. 4 Antoni Tàpies. Figure of newspaper and threads, 1947



Fig. 5 Antoni Tàpies. Collage of the crosses, 1947

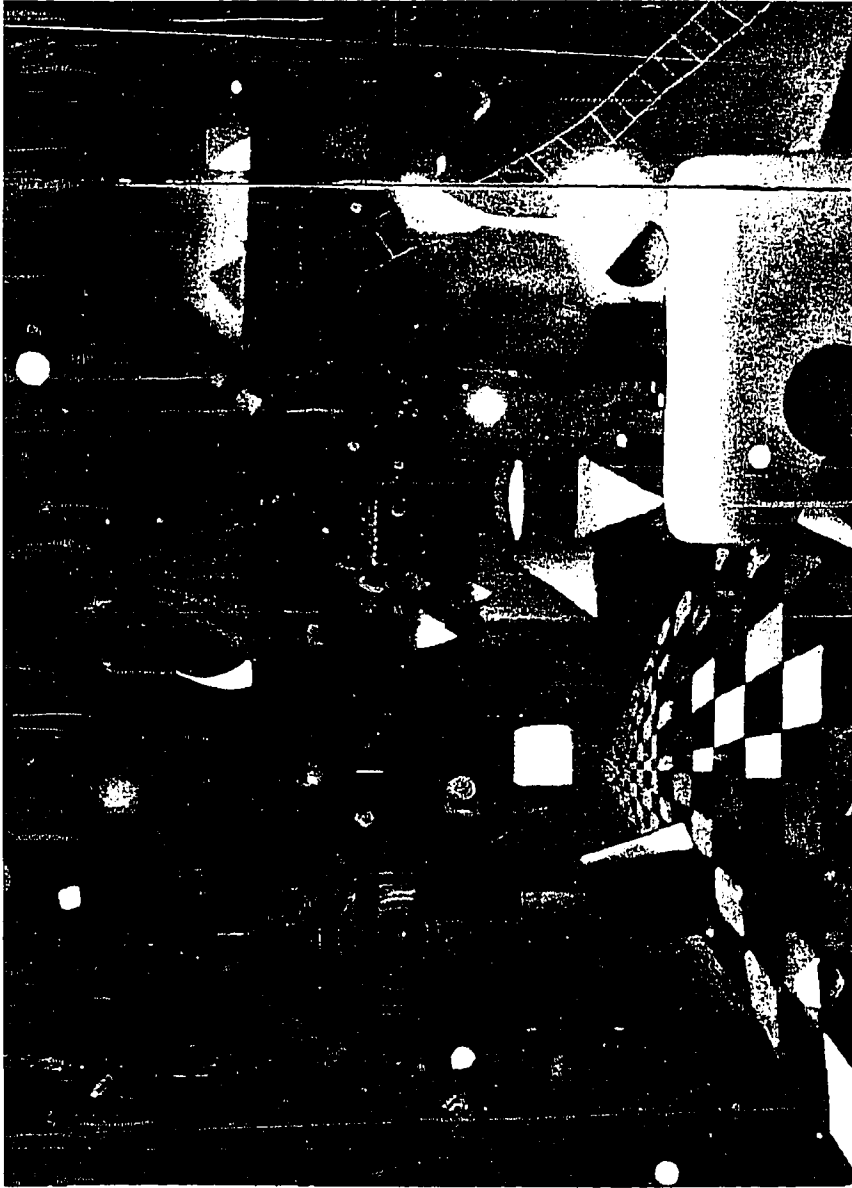


Fig. 6 Antoni Tàpies. Parafaragamus, 1949



Fig. 7 Antoni Tàpies. Bel, 1949



Fig. 8 Antoni Tàpies. Magic, 1949



Fig. 9 Antoni Tàpies. Inscripcions a l'Est d'un jardí, 1949



Fig. 10 Antoni Tàpies. The fire of the thorns, 1949

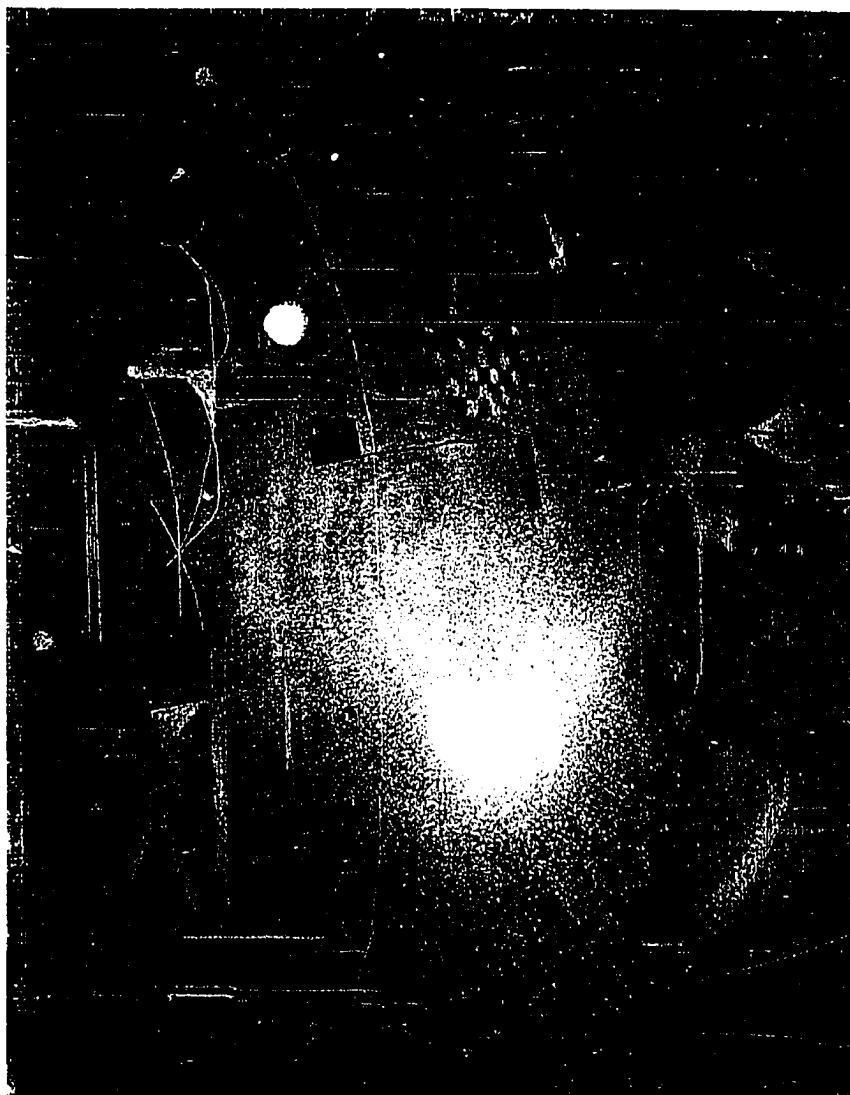


Fig. 11 Antoni Tàpies. UGB, 1949



Fig. 12 Antoni Tàpies. The eyes of the foliage, 1949

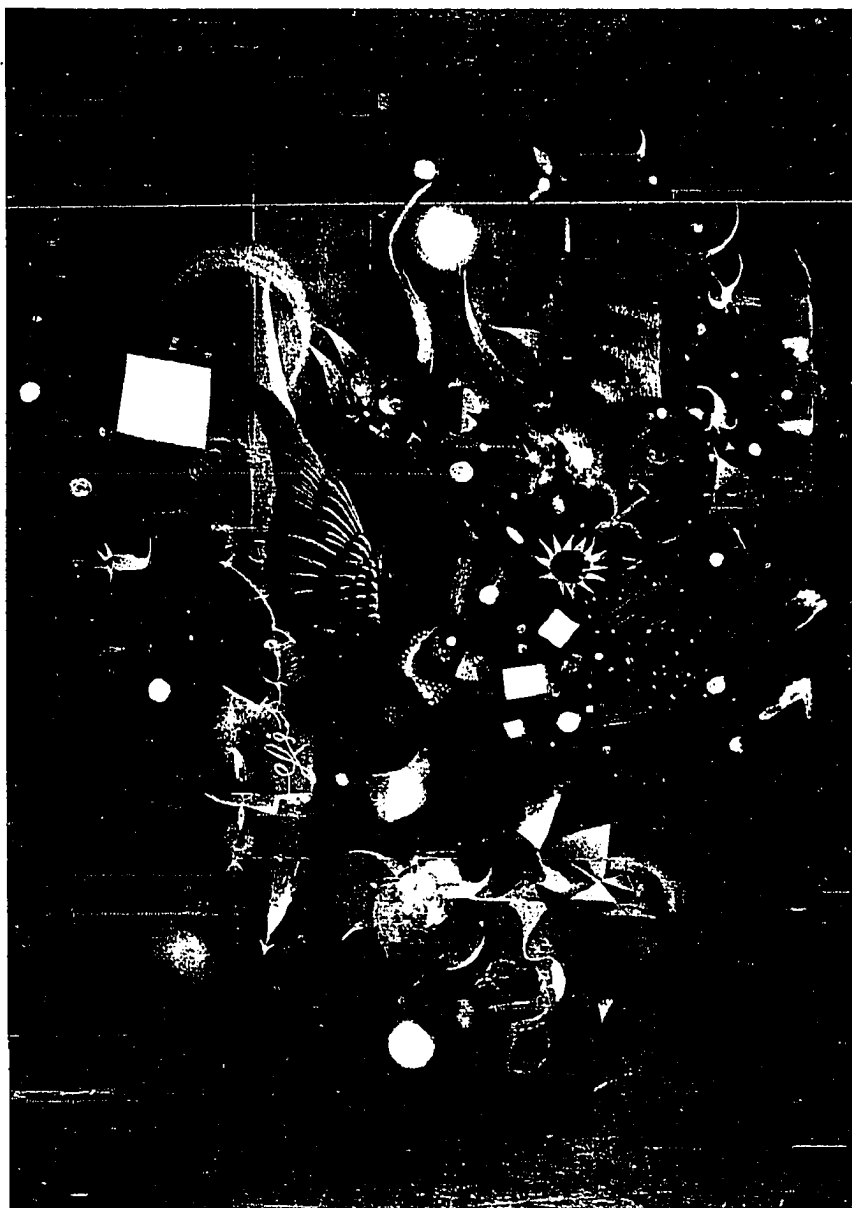


Fig. 13 Antoni Tàpies. Dream garden, 1949



Fig. 14 Antoni Tàpies. Landscape of Urus, 1950

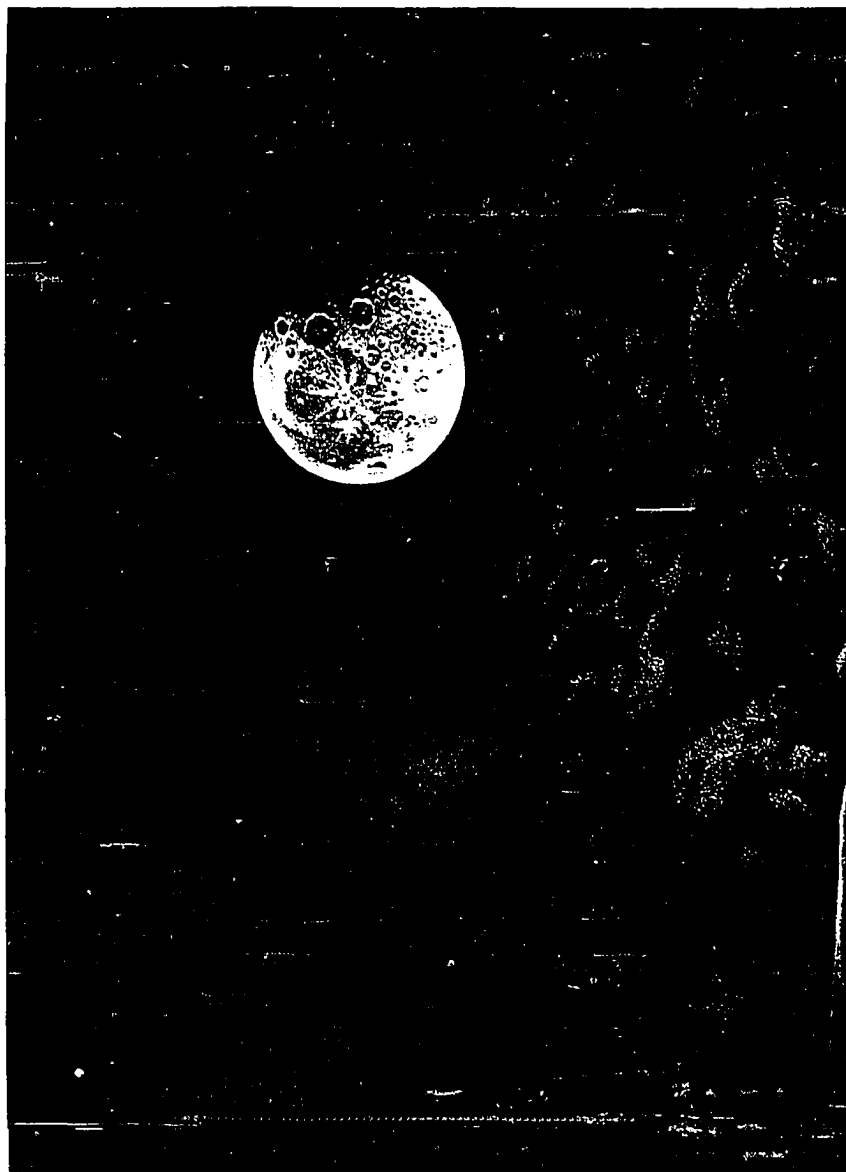


Fig. 15 Antoni Tàpies. Nymphs, dryads, harpies, 1950



Fig. 16 Antoni Tàpies. The legerdemain of Wotan, 1950

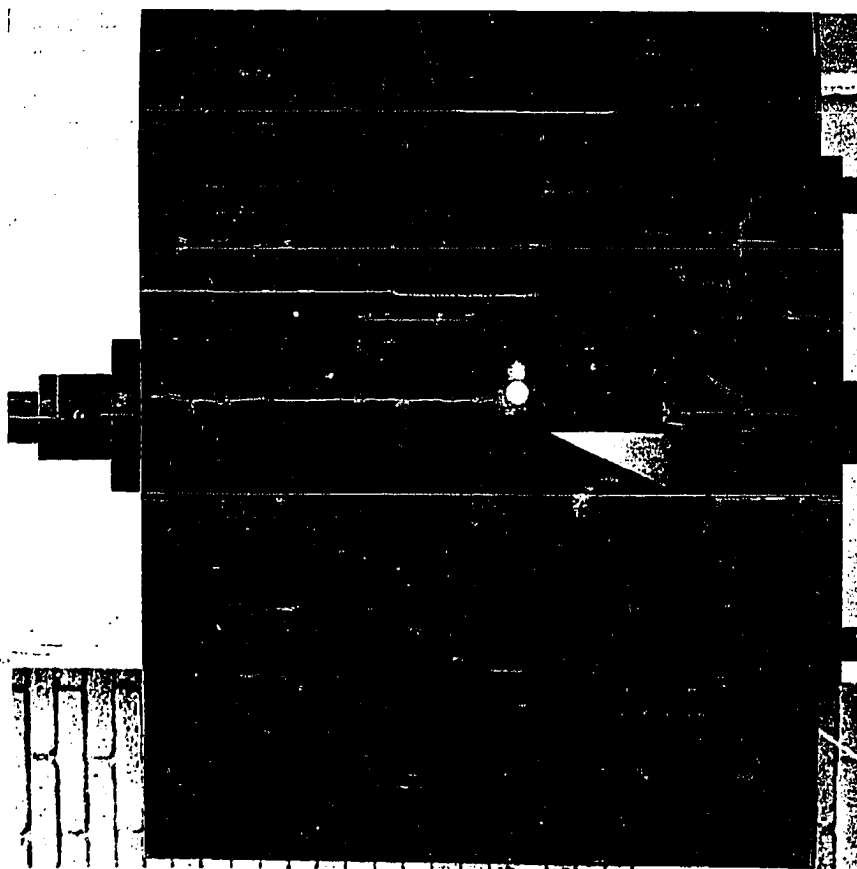


Fig. 17 Antoni Tàpies. The probing of the foliage, 1950

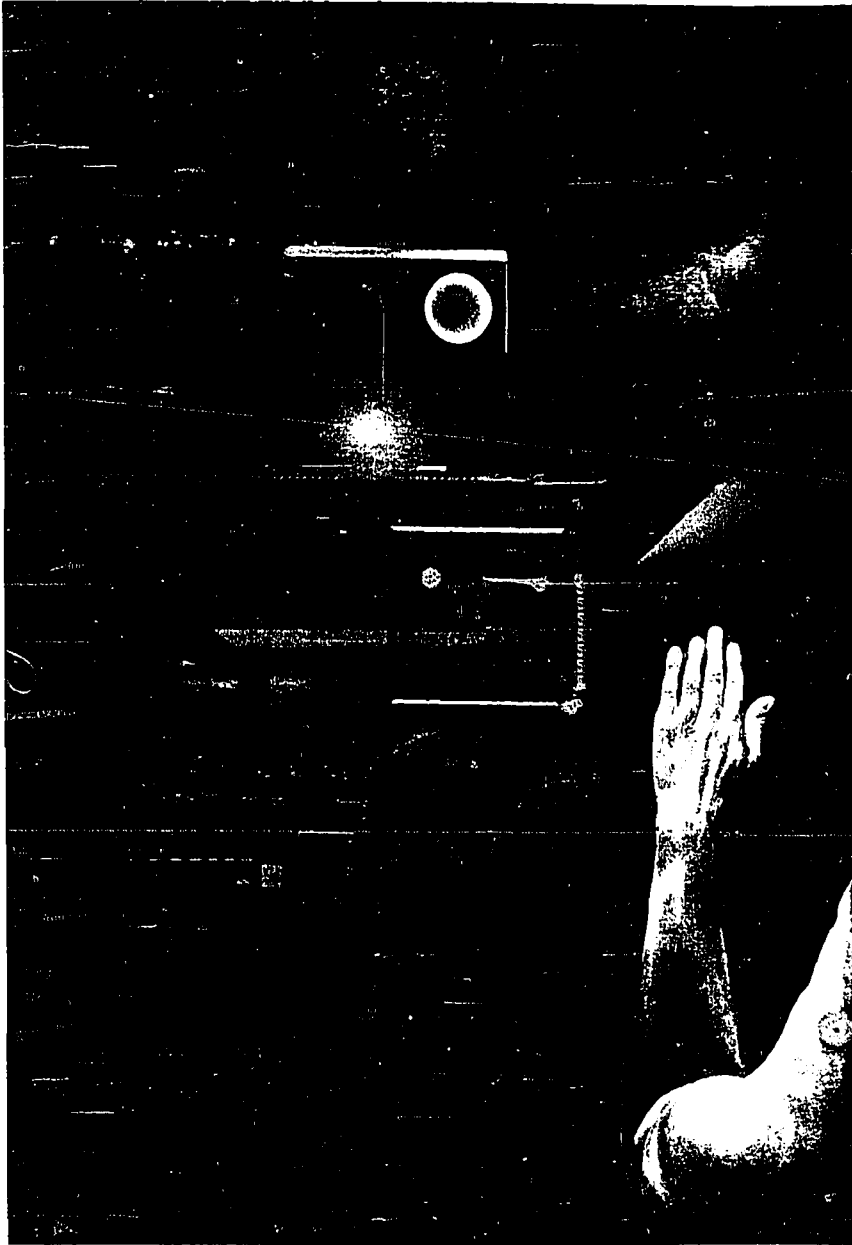


Fig. 18 Antoni Tàpies. The barbershop of the damned and the chosen, 1950



Fig. 19 Antoni Tàpies. La cambra fosca, 1950

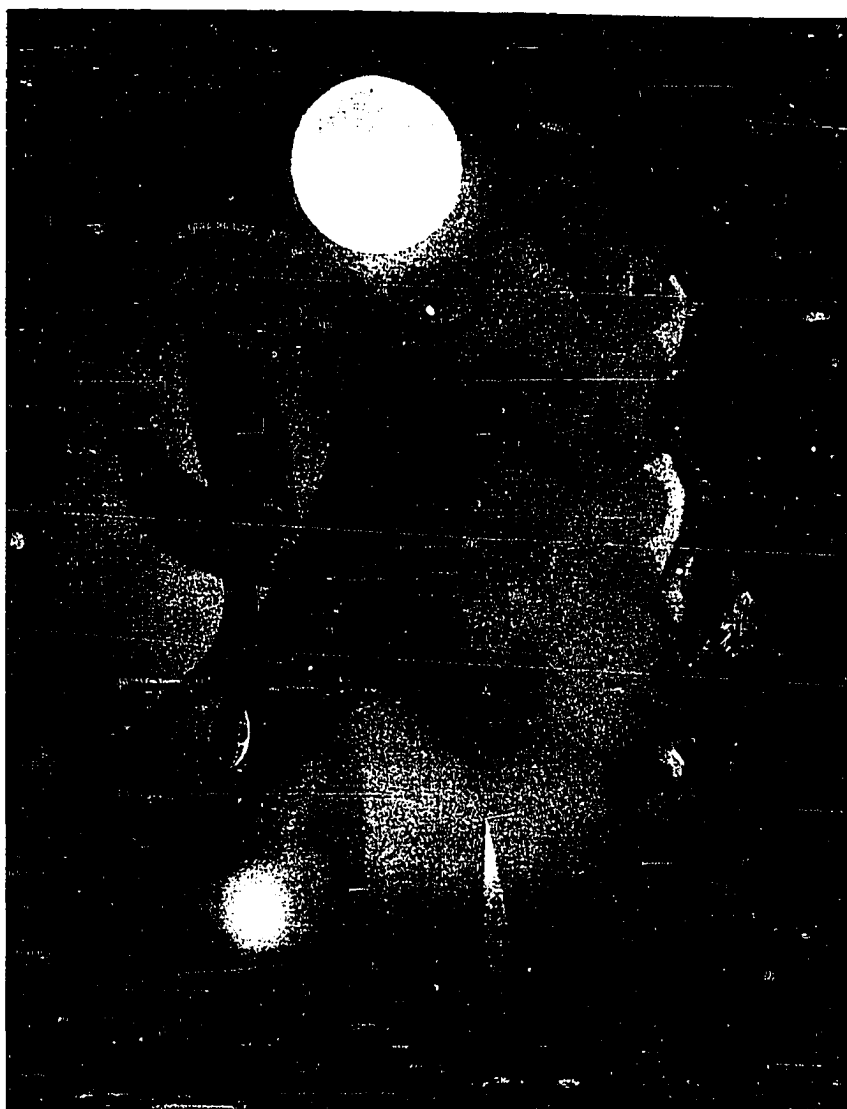


Fig. 20 Antoni Tàpies. Homage to Federico García Lorca, 1951

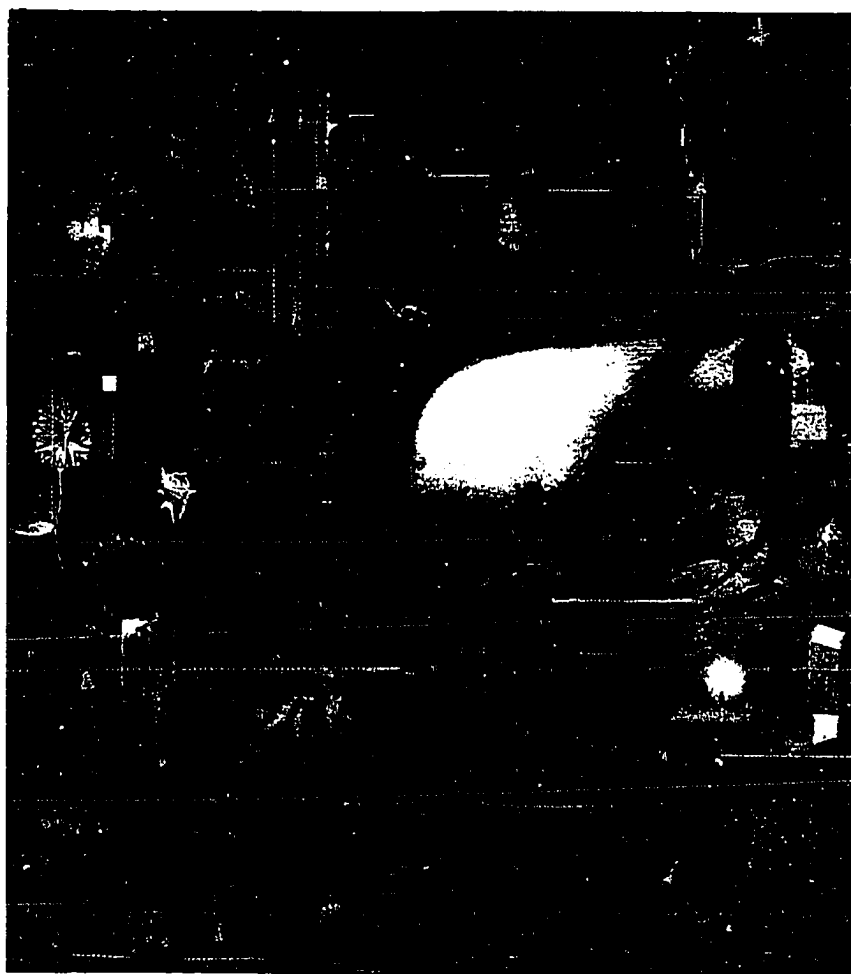


Fig. 21 Antoni Tàpies. The monument, 1951



Fig. 22 Antoni Tàpies. Nunf, 1949

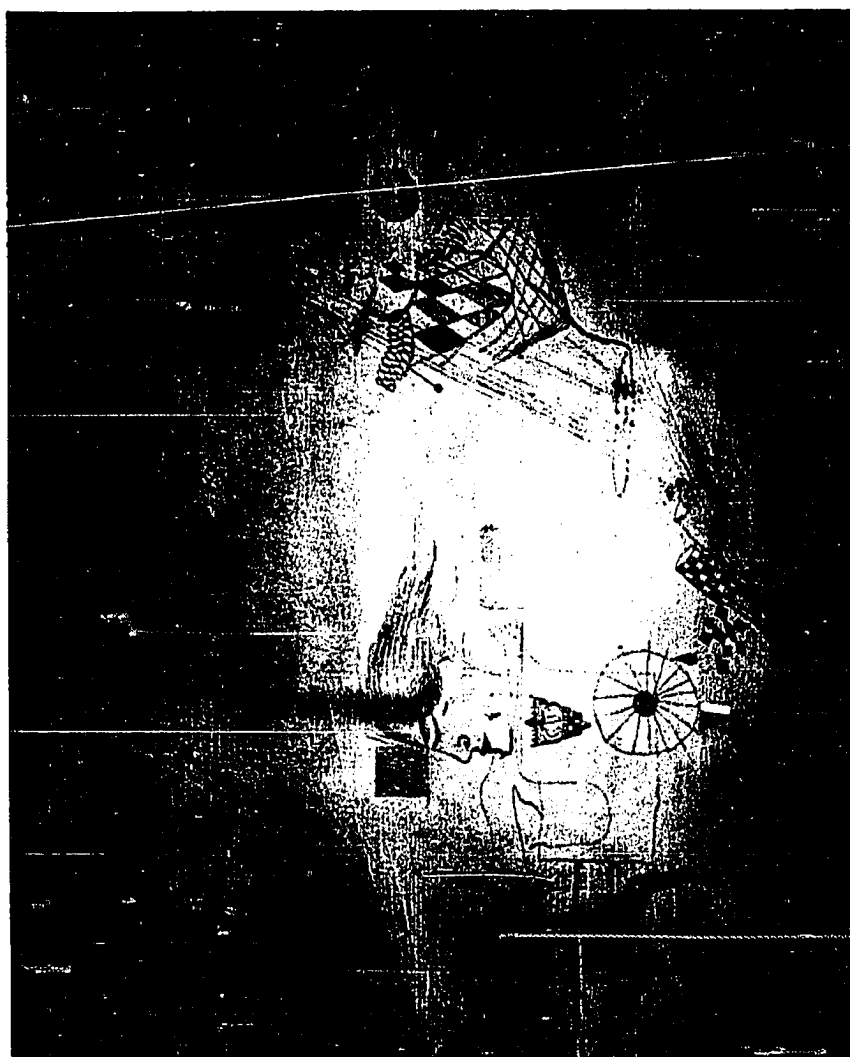


Fig. 23 Antoni Tàpies. The collision, 1951

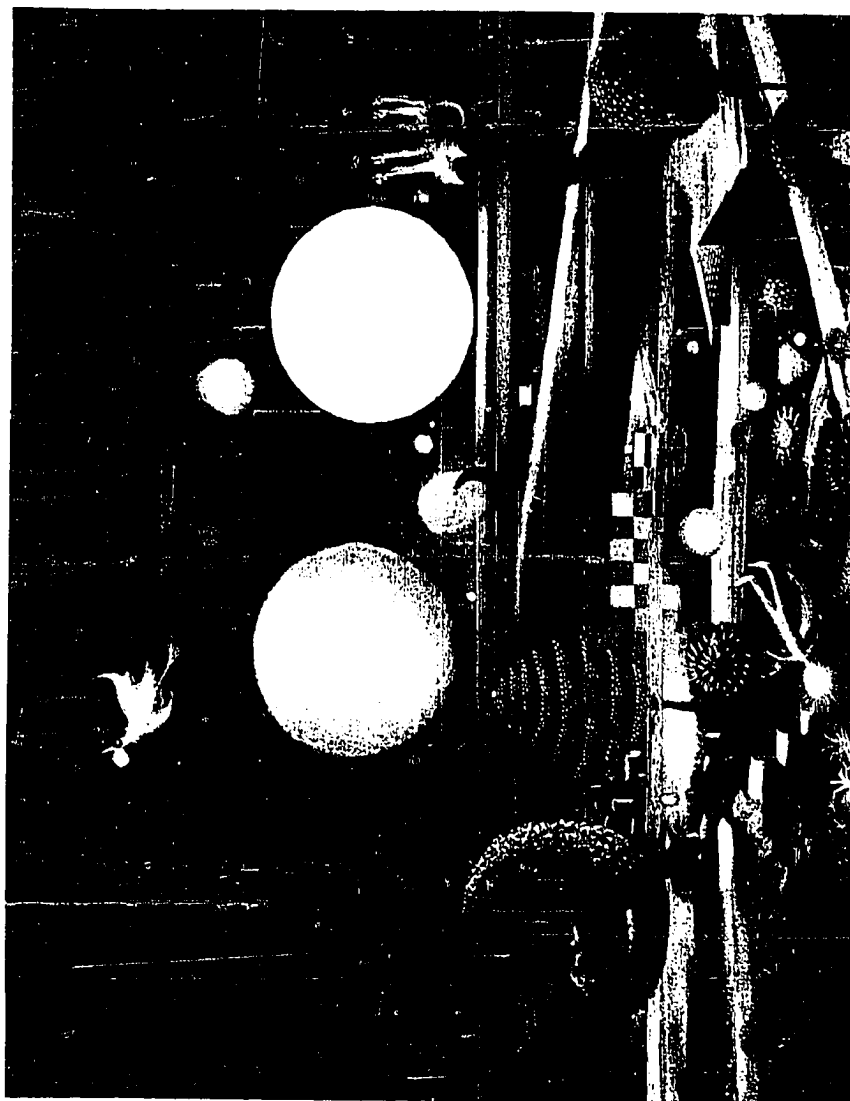


Fig. 24 Antoni Tàpies. Lunar disconsolation, 1949



Fig. 25 Antoni Tàpies. Composition of blues and reds, 1952



Fig. 26 Antoni Tàpies. Composition of complementary colors, 1952

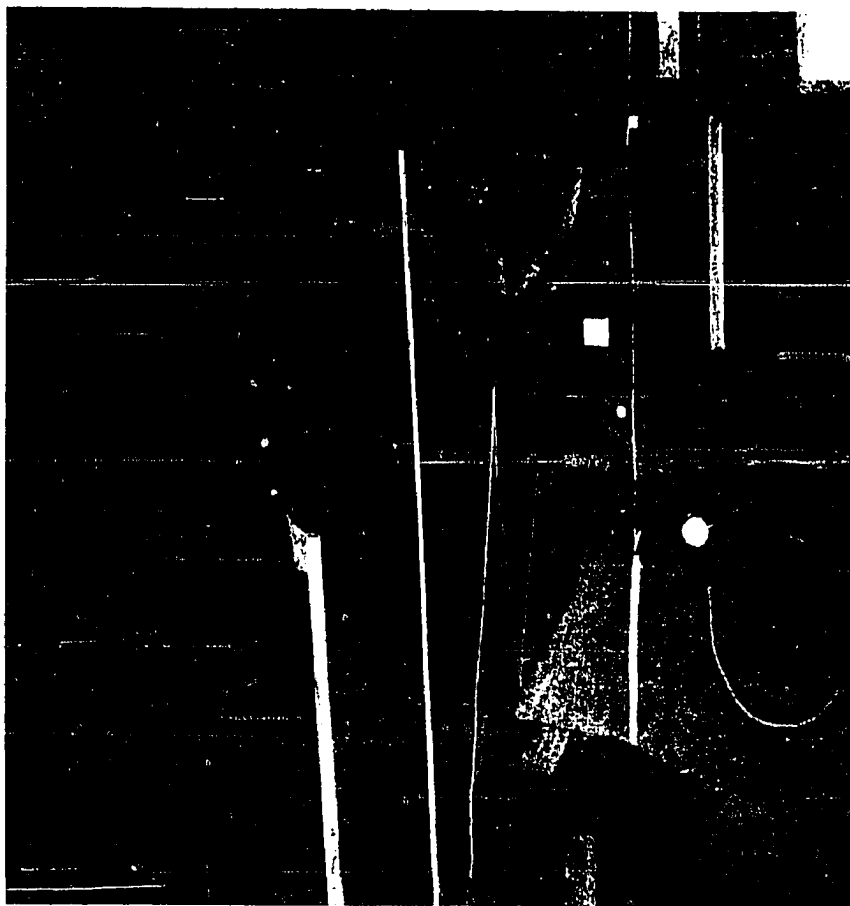


Fig. 27 Antoni Tàpies. Línies i formes, 1952

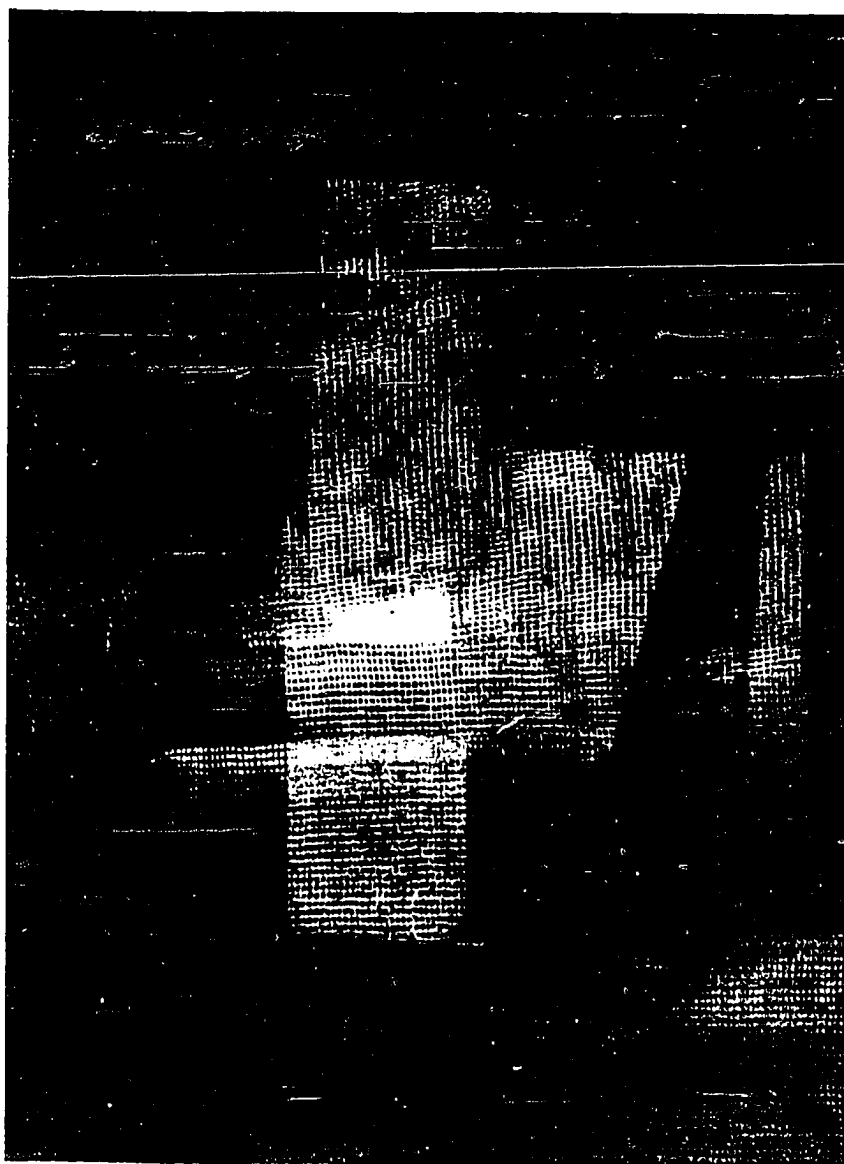


Fig. 28 Antoni Tàpies. Epicurean meditation, 1953

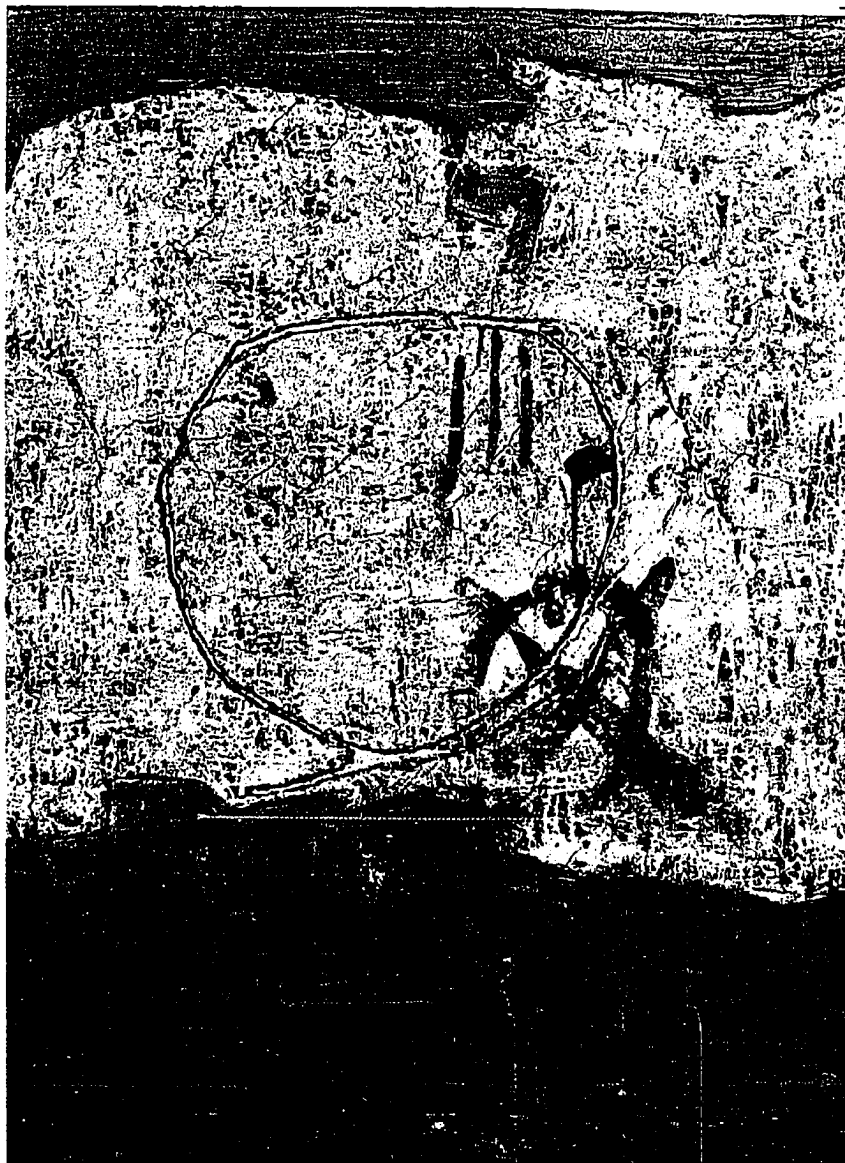


Fig. 29 Antoni Tàpies. White with red marks, 1954



Fig. 30 Antoni Tàpies. Grey, 1955

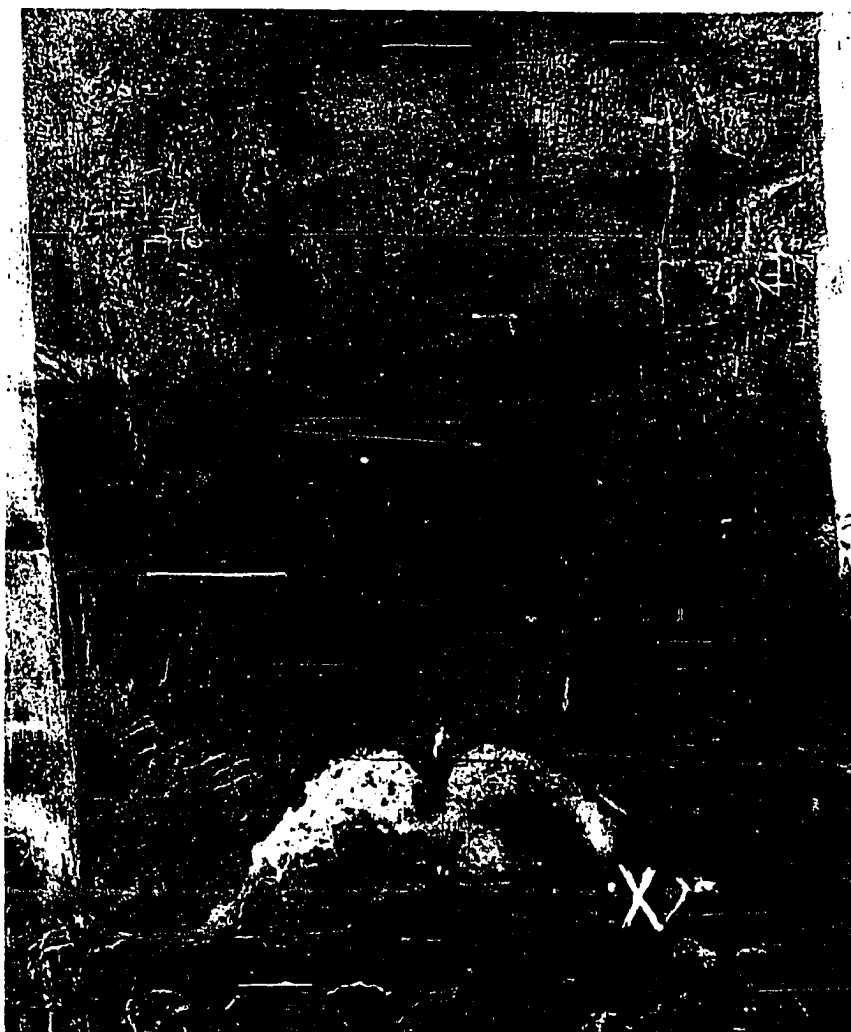


Fig. 31 Antoni Tàpies. Large grey painting, 1955

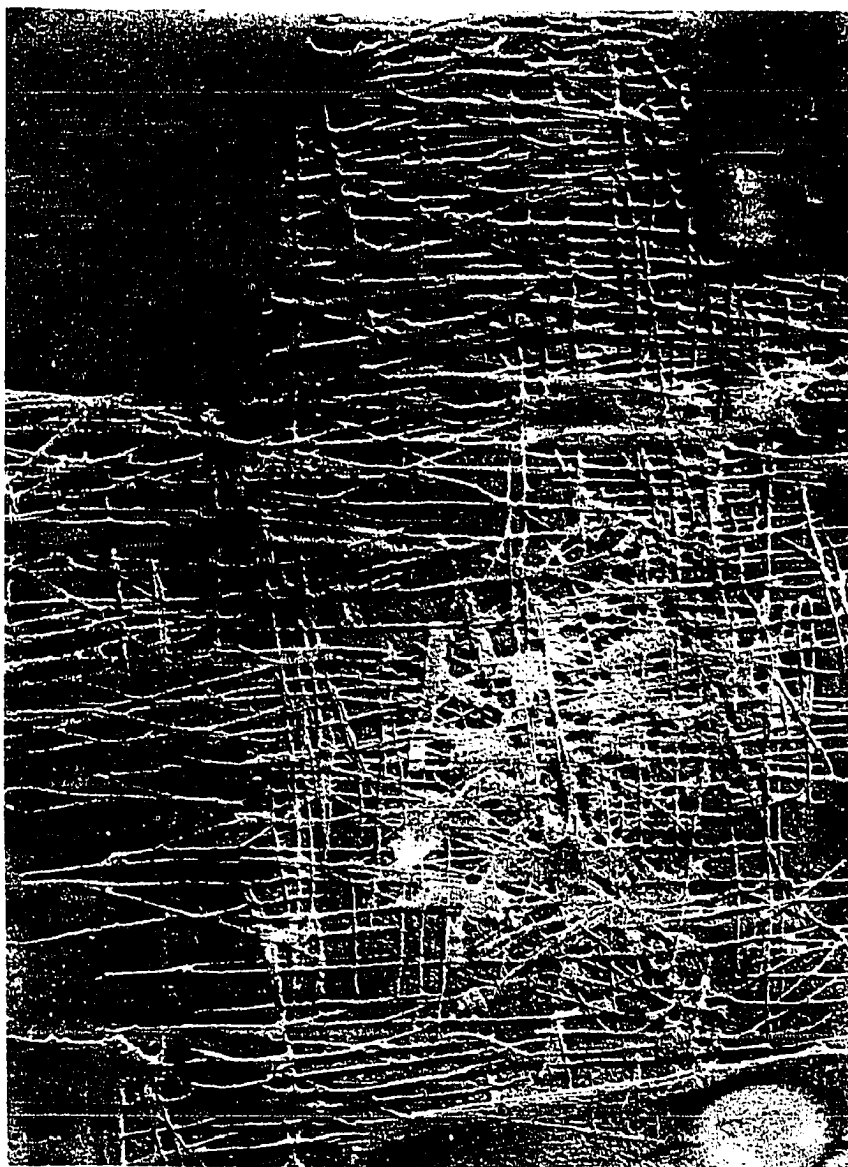


Fig. 32 Antoni Tàpies. Painting, 1955



Fig. 33 Antoni Tàpies. Painting, 1955



Fig. 34 Antoni Tàpies. Painting no. 27, 1955



Fig. 35 Antoni Tàpies. Grey and black, 1956



Fig. 36 Antoni Tàpies. No. VII, 1956



Fig. 37 Antoni Tàpies. Ocher relief on white, 1957

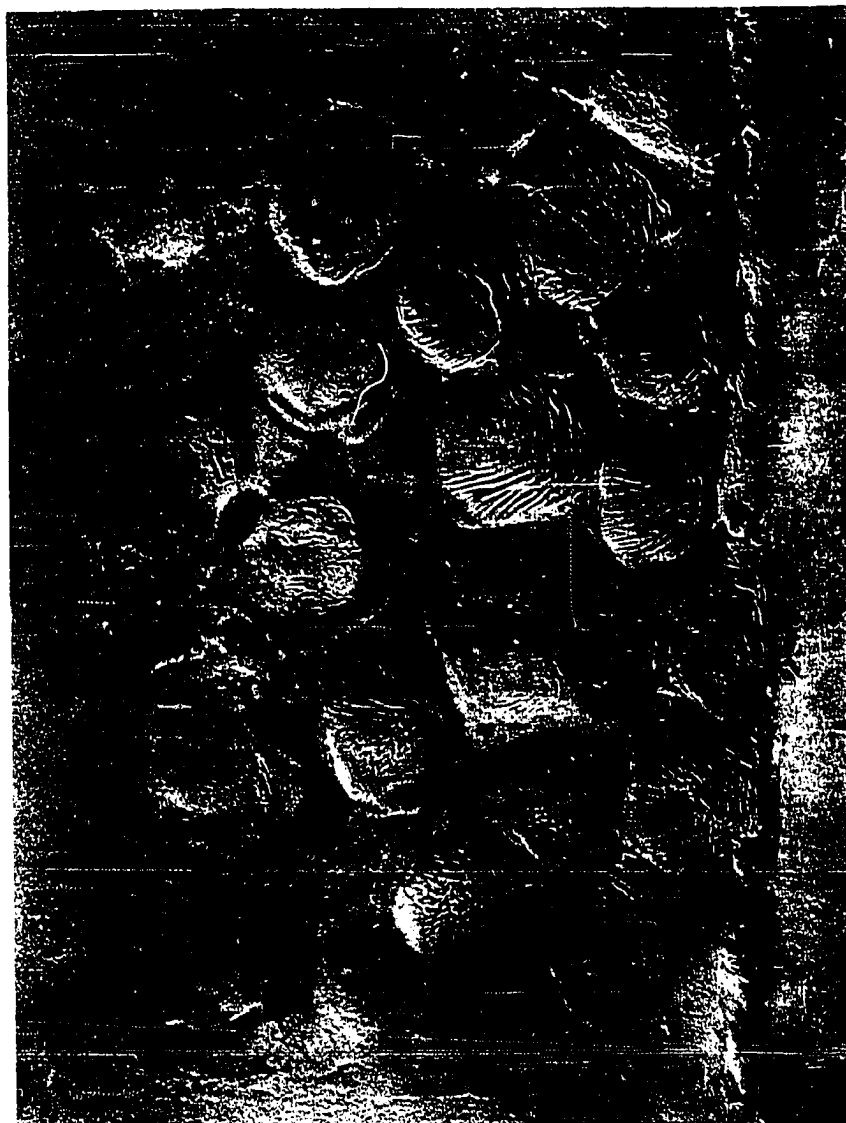


Fig. 38 Antoni Tàpies. Grey relief no. VIII, 1957

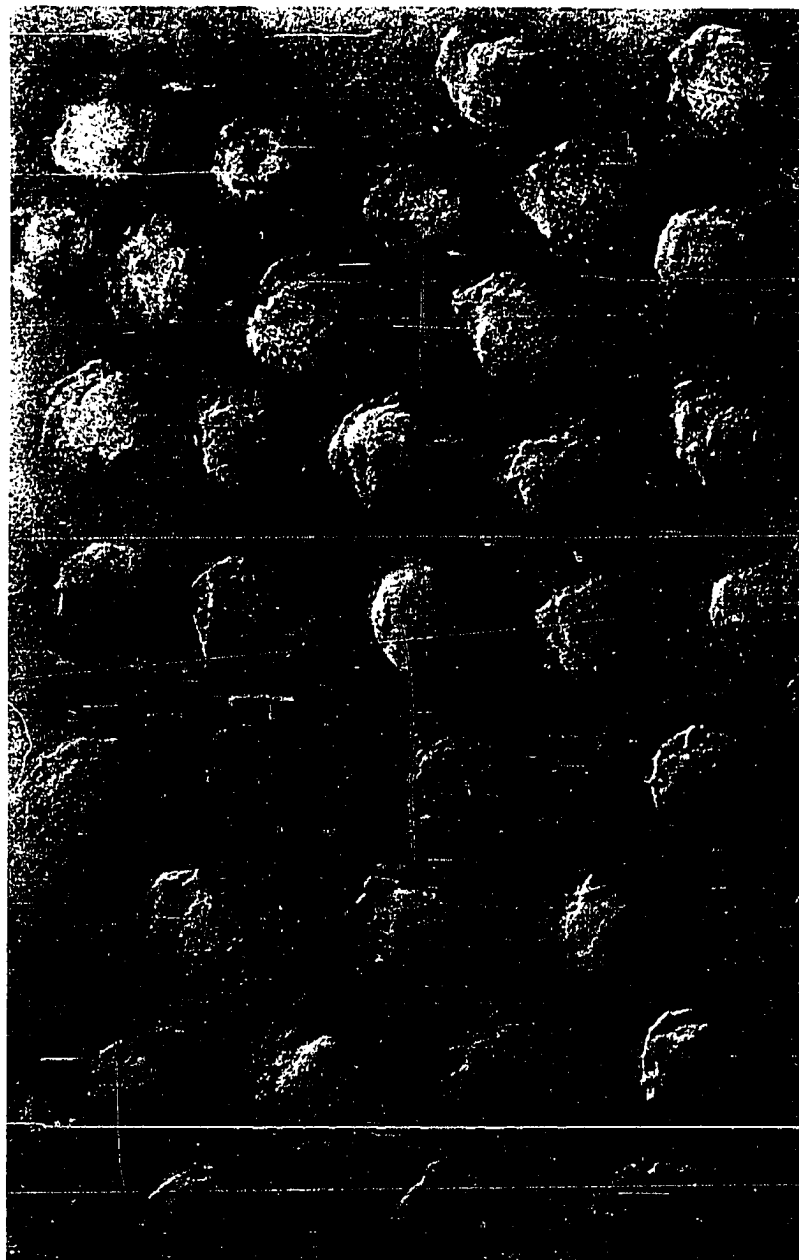


Fig. 39 Antoni Tàpies. Blackish-ocher relief, 1958

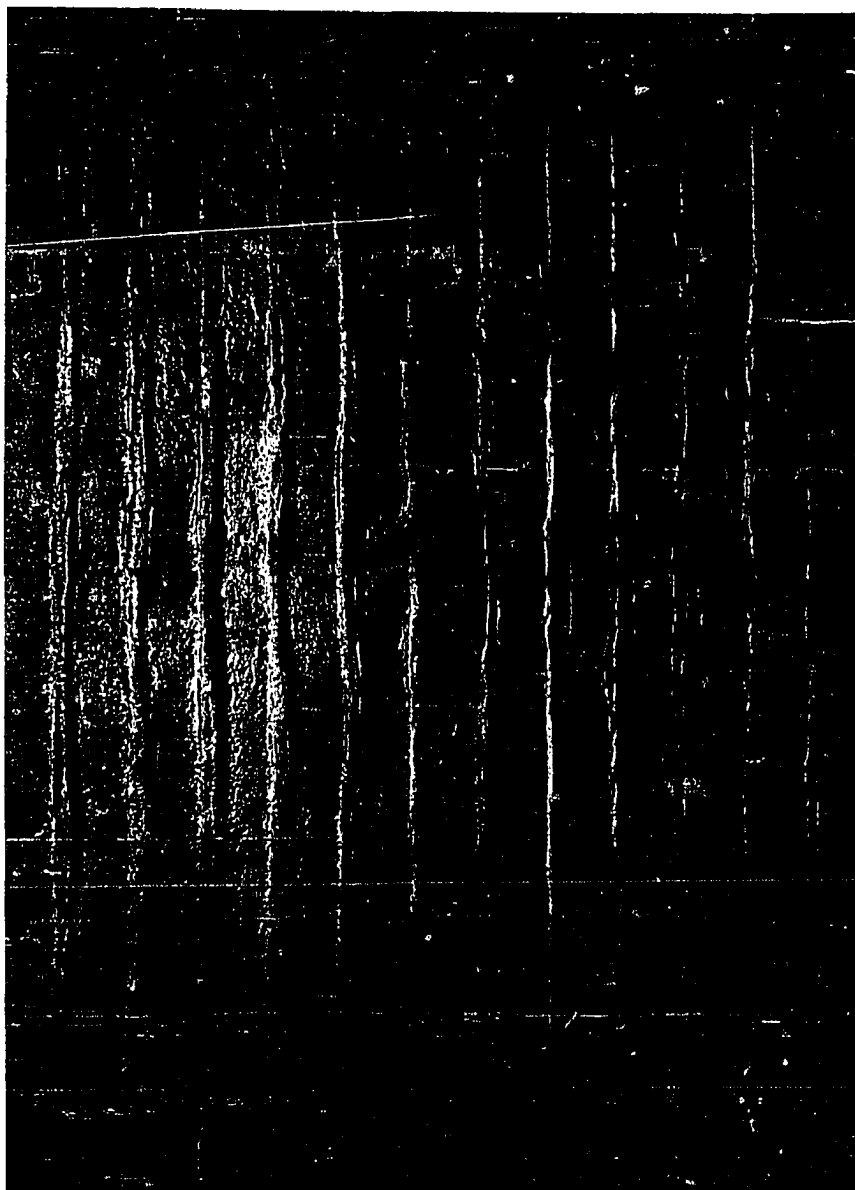


Fig. 40 Antoni Tàpies. Grey furrows, 1956

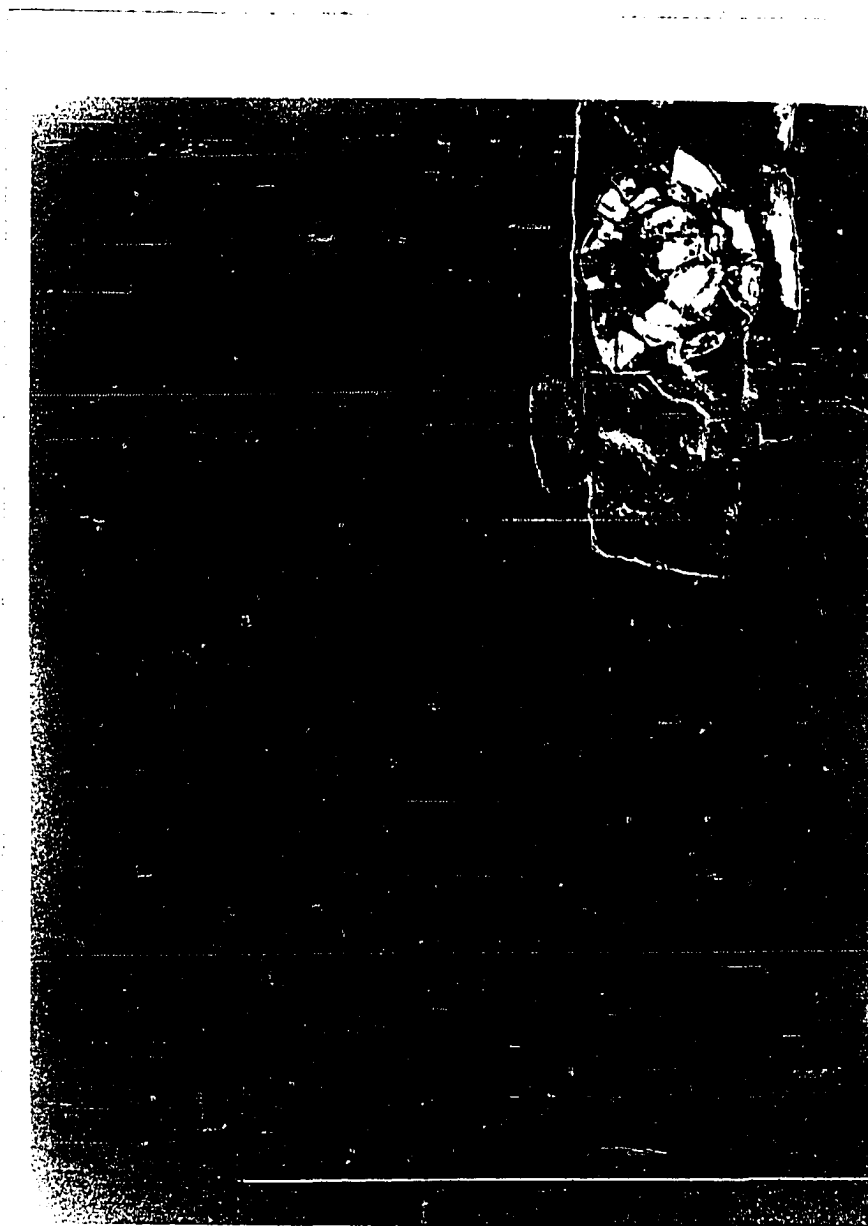


Fig. 41 Antoni Tàpies. Homage to Gaudí, 1956

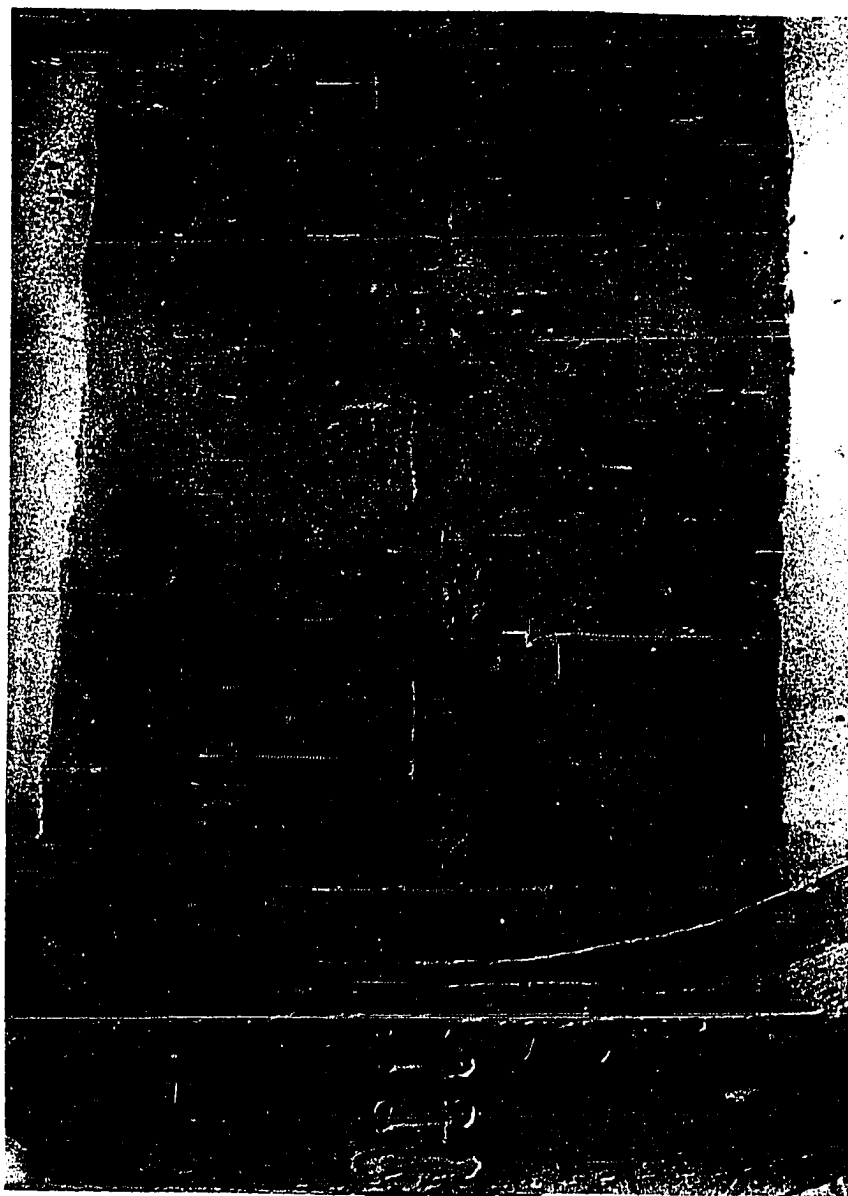


Fig. 42 Antoni Tàpies. Marble-worker's sand with six footprints,
1959

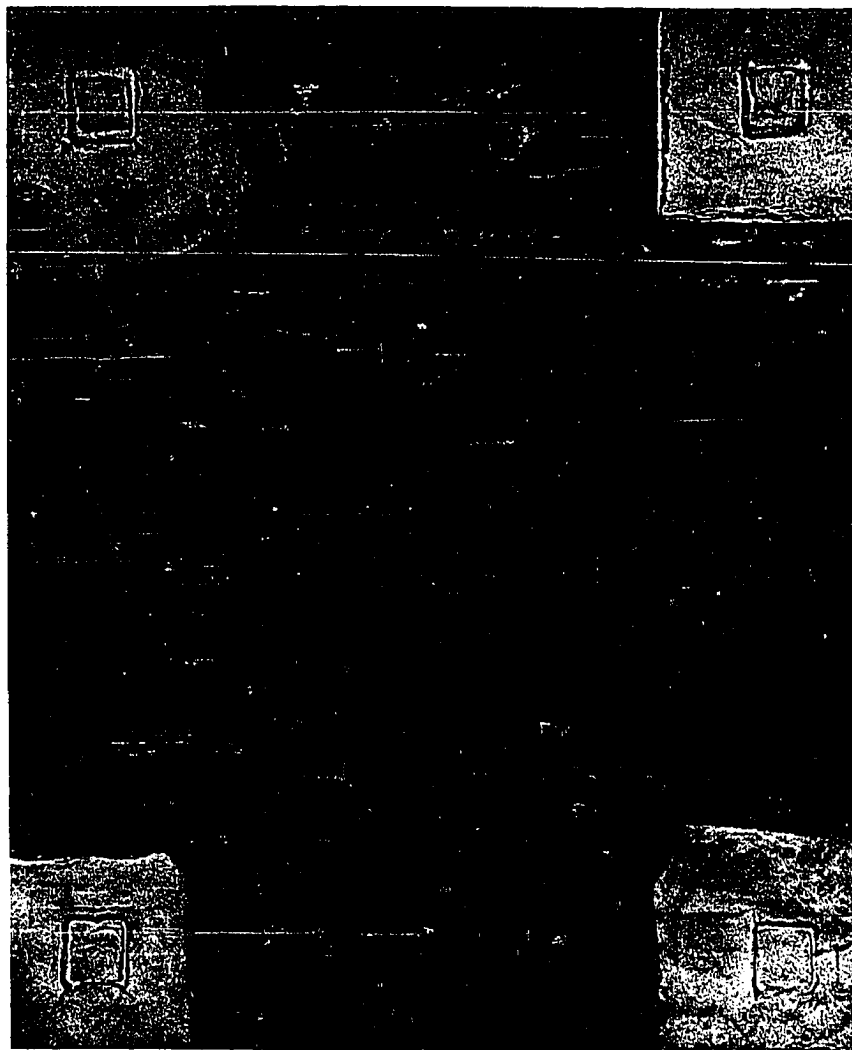


Fig. 43 Antoni Tàpies. Grey corners on brown, 1959

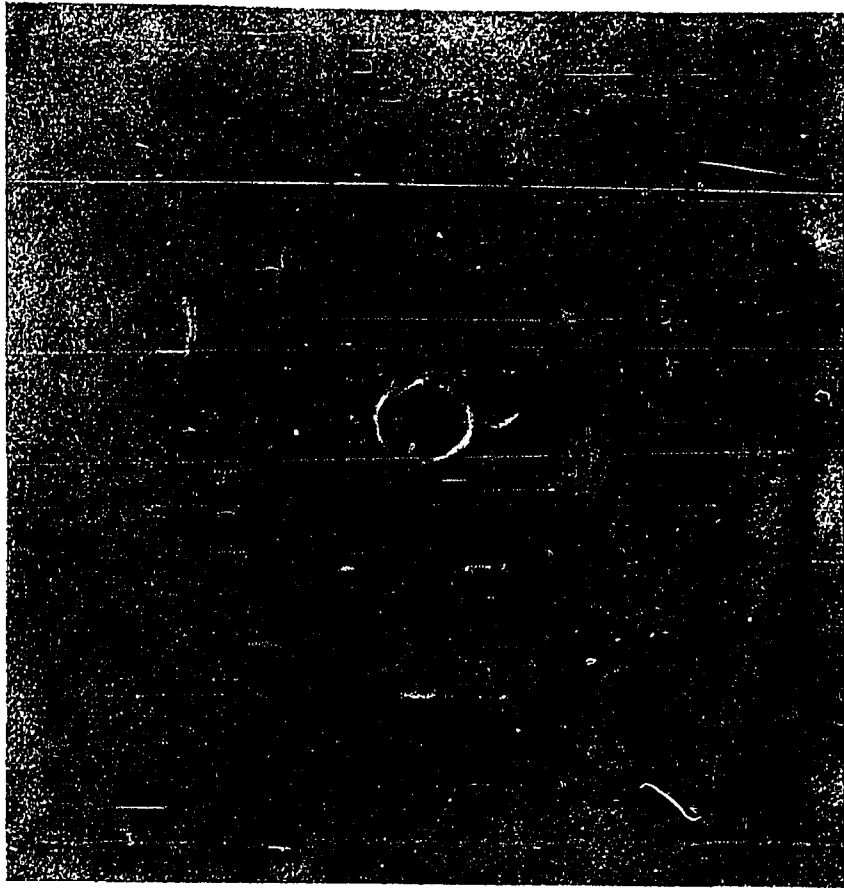


Fig. 44 Antoni Tàpies. Beige with black circle, 1959

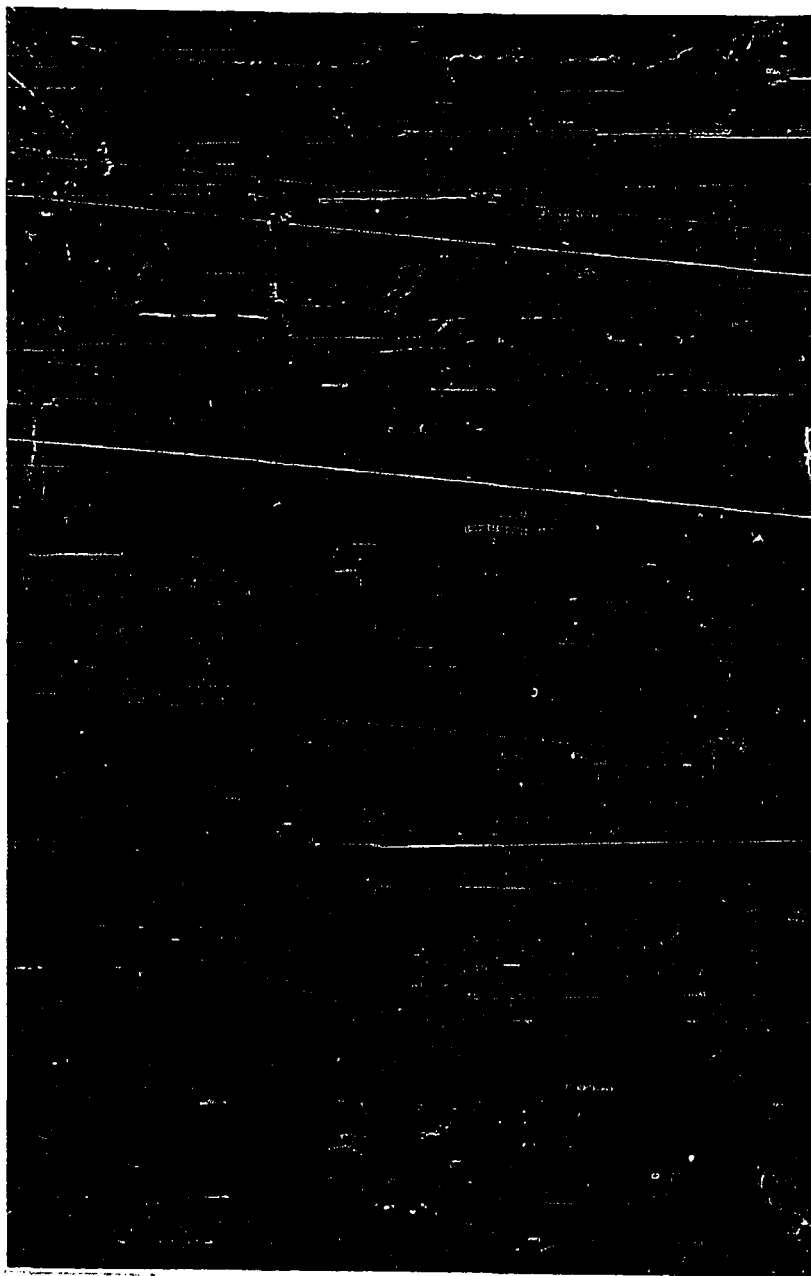


Fig. 45 Antoni Tàpies. Brown bed, 1960

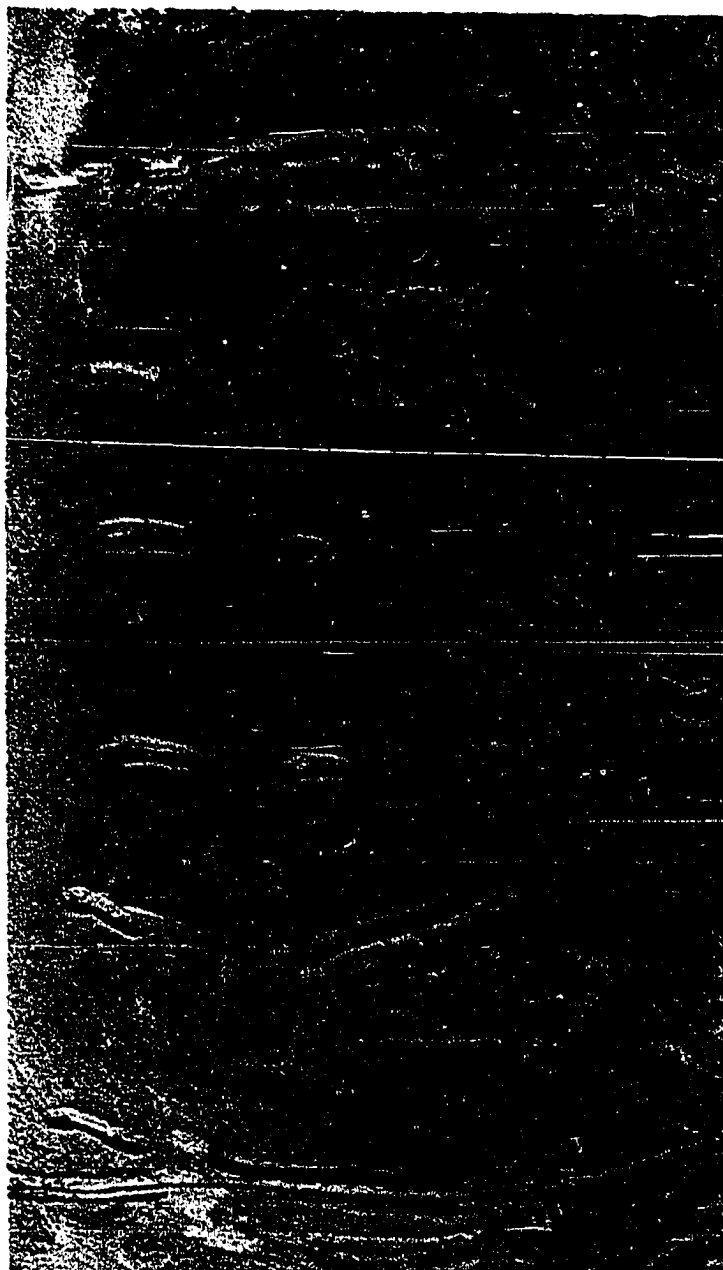


Fig. 46 Antoni Tàpies. Flesh color, 1961

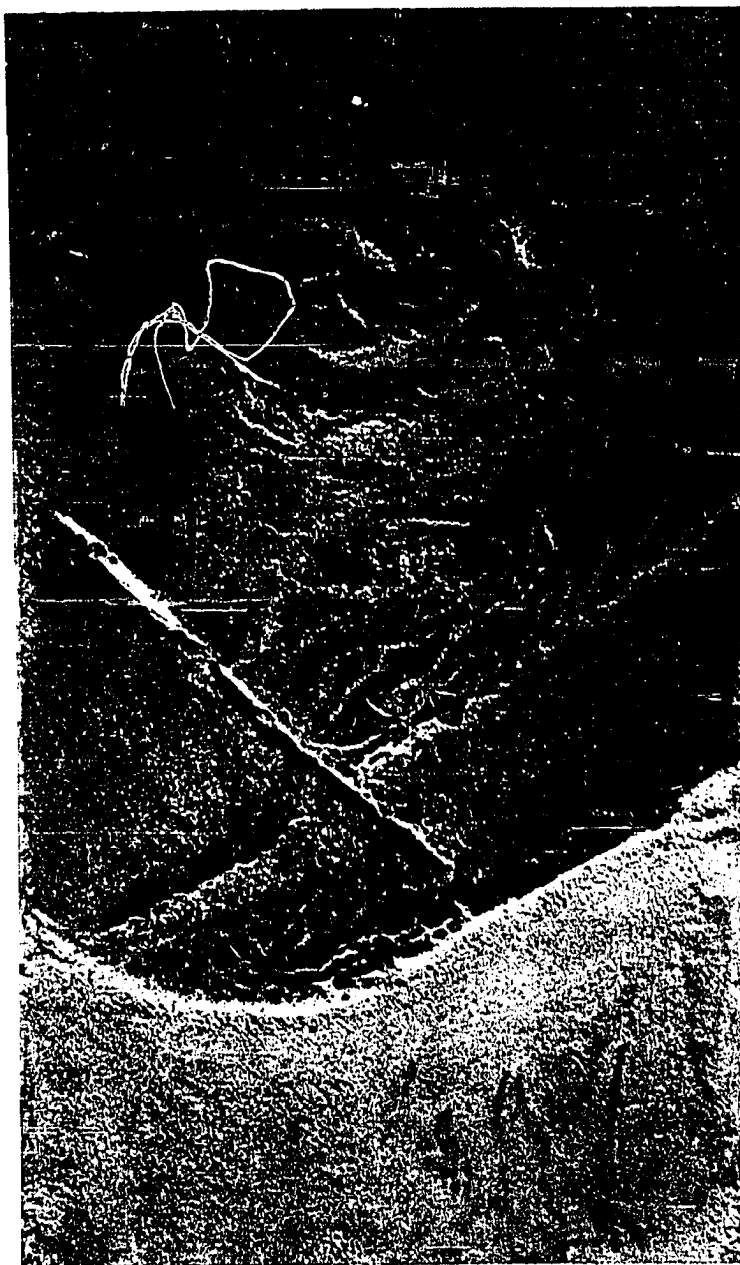


Fig. 47 Antoni Tàpies. Relief in grey with three small holes, 1964

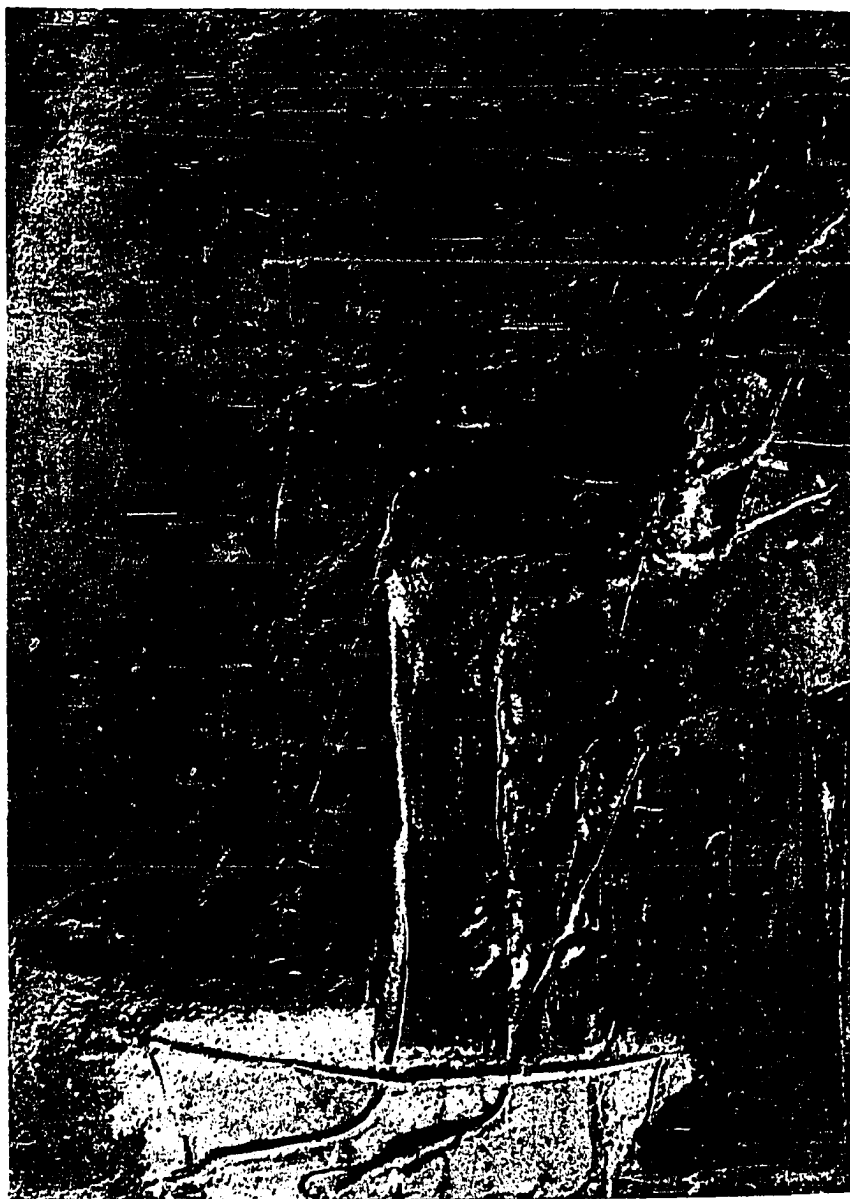


Fig. 48 Antoni Tàpies. Lacerated relief, 1966

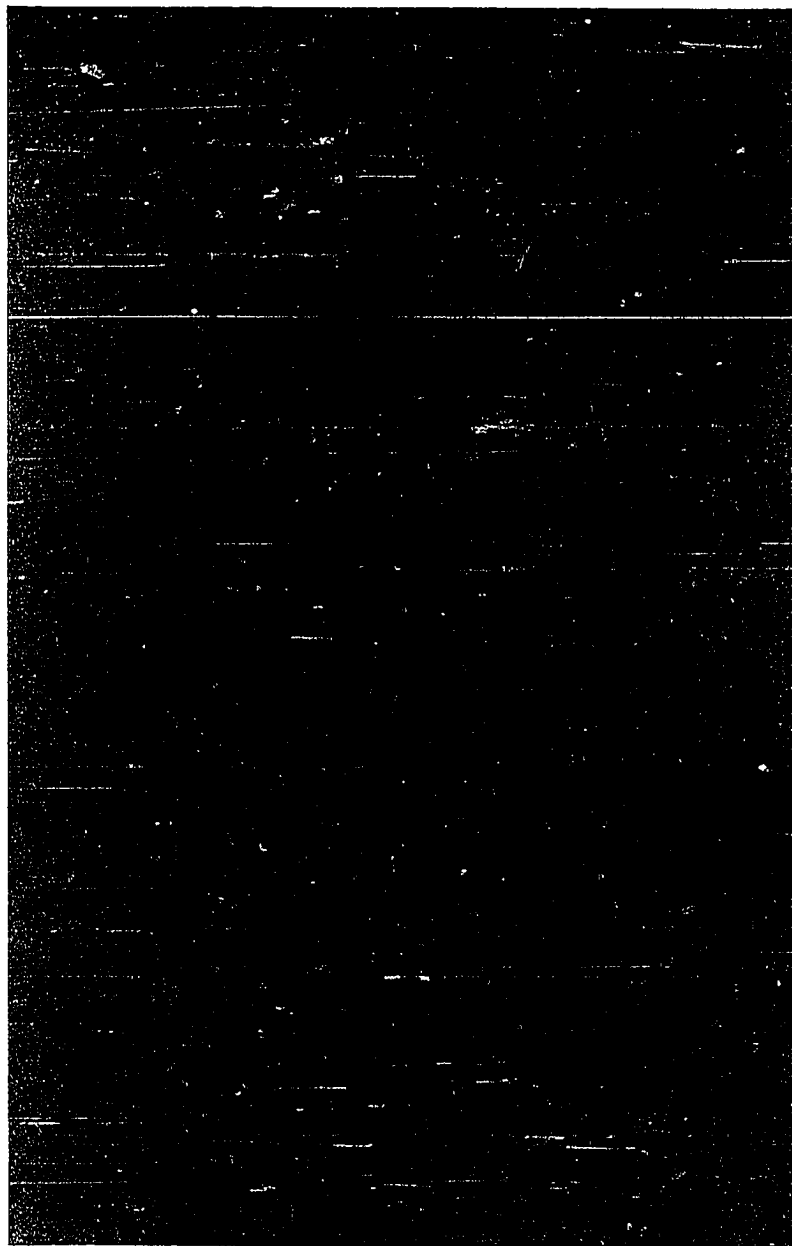


Fig. 49 Antoni Tàpies. Yellow band, 1966

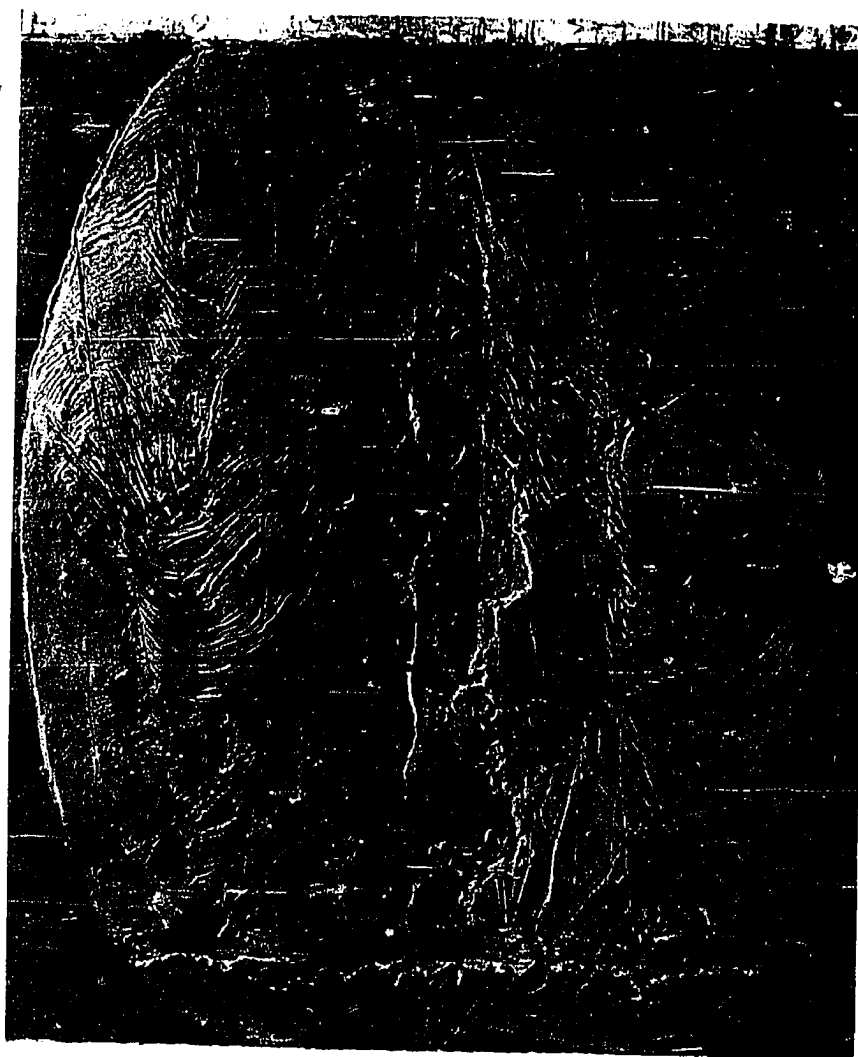


Fig. 50 Antoni Tàpies. Material in the shape of a nut, 1967

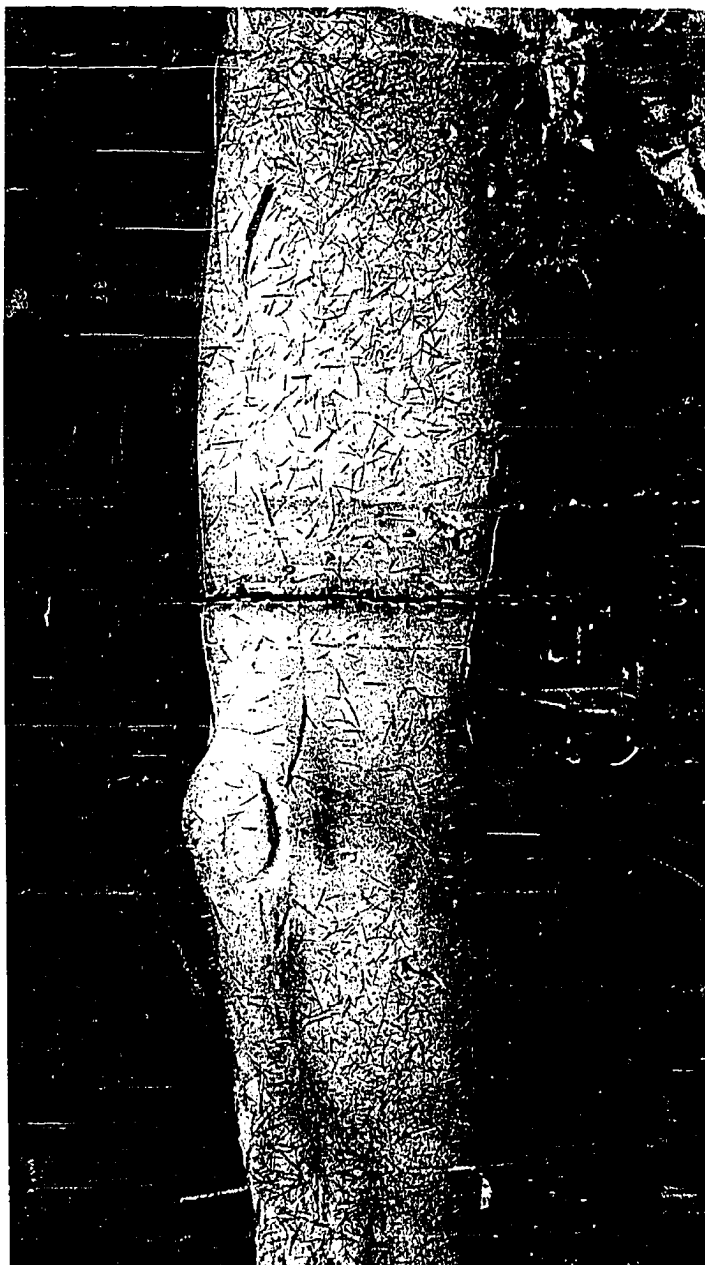


Fig. 51 Antoni Tàpies. In the shape of a leg, 1968

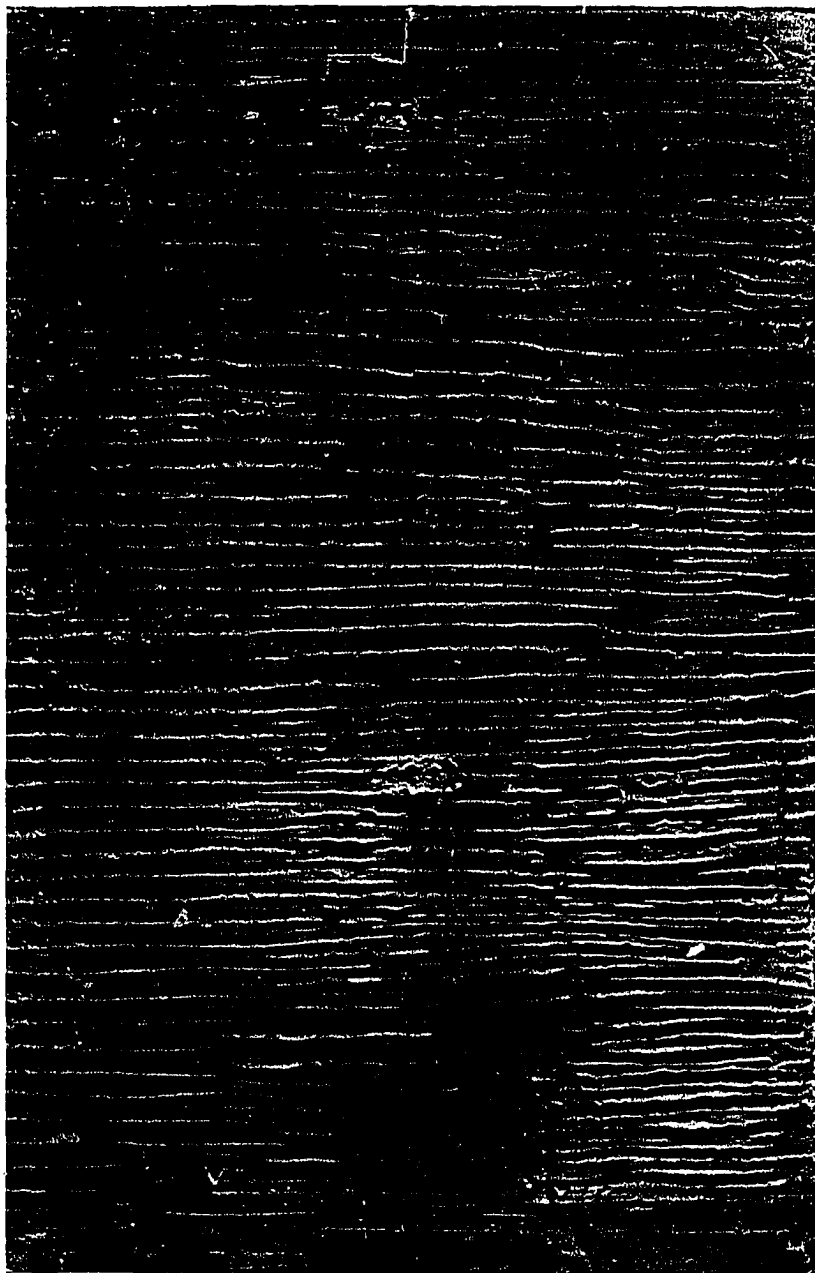


Fig. 52 Antoni Tàpies. Undulating grey relief, 1956

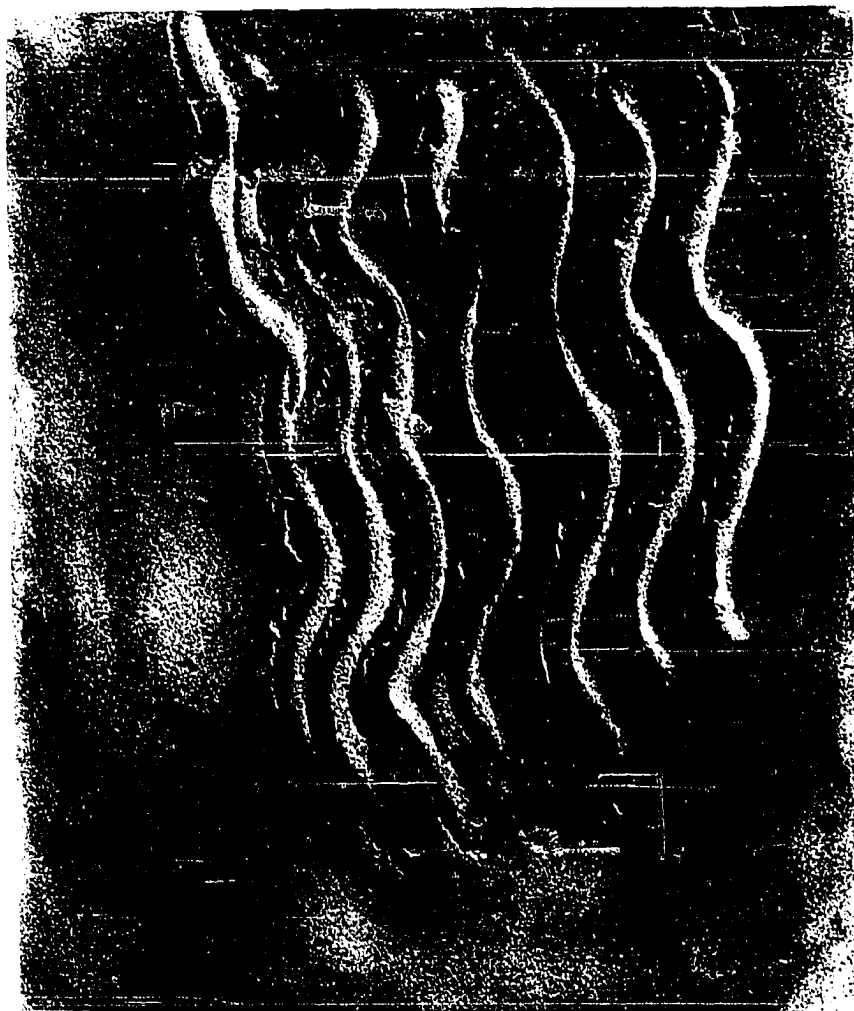


Fig. 53 Antoni Tàpies. Relief, 1956

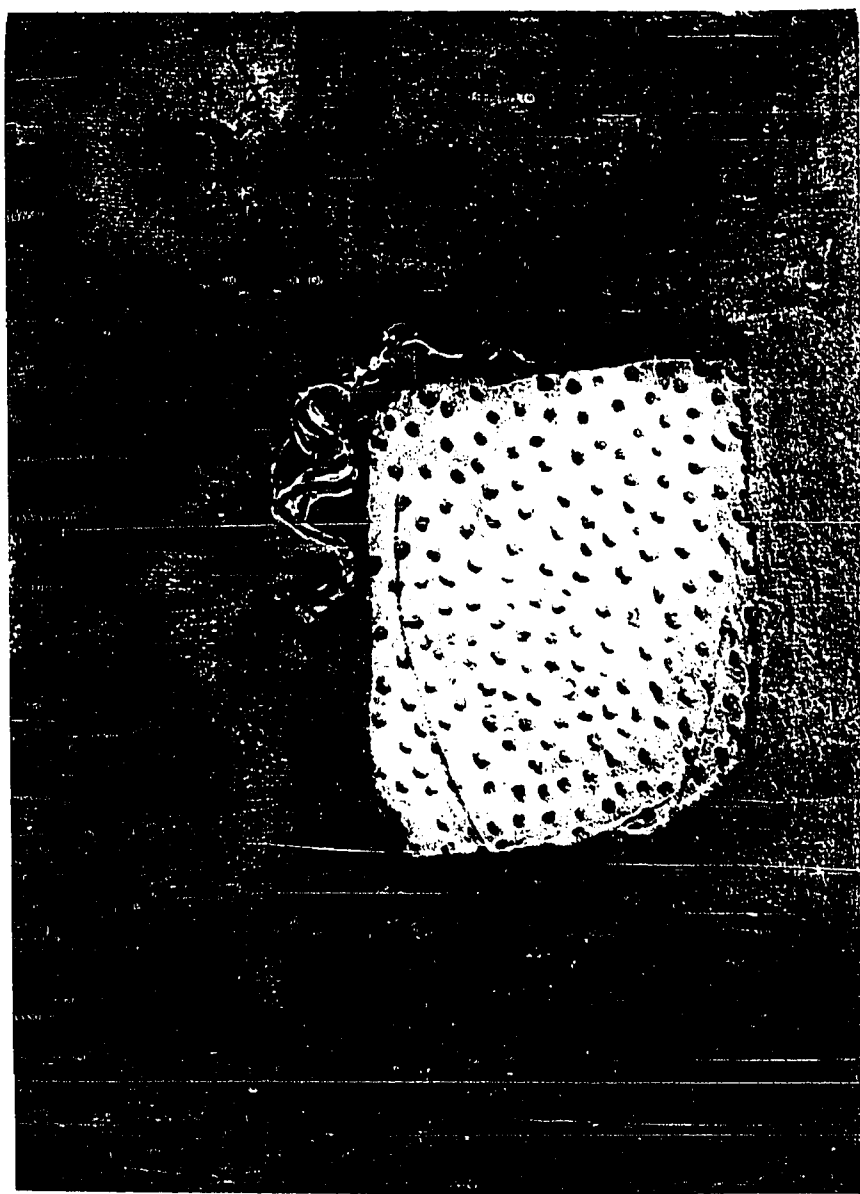


Fig. 54 Antoni Tàpies. Serpent, 1956

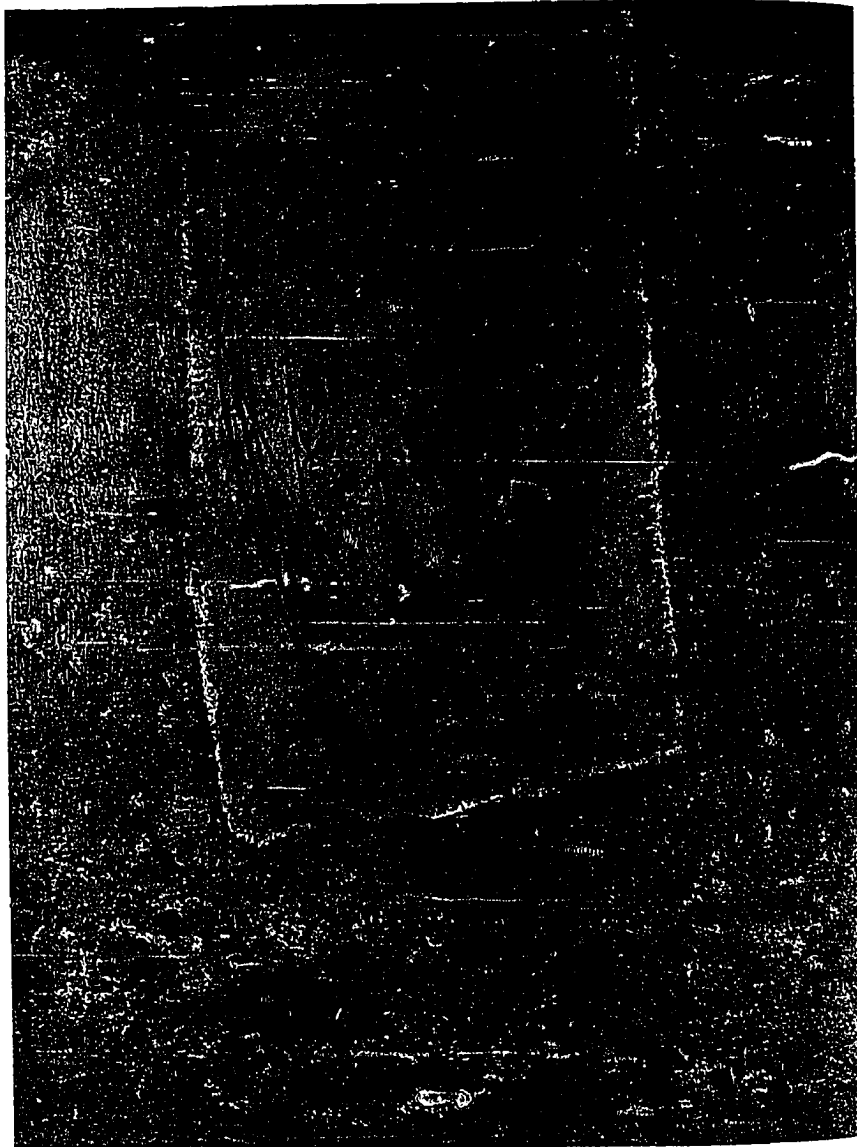


Fig. 55 Antoni Tàpies. Figure landscape in red, 1956



Fig. 56 Antoni Tàpies. Two painted ovals, 1965



Fig. 57 Antoni Tàpies. Painting and confetti, 1967

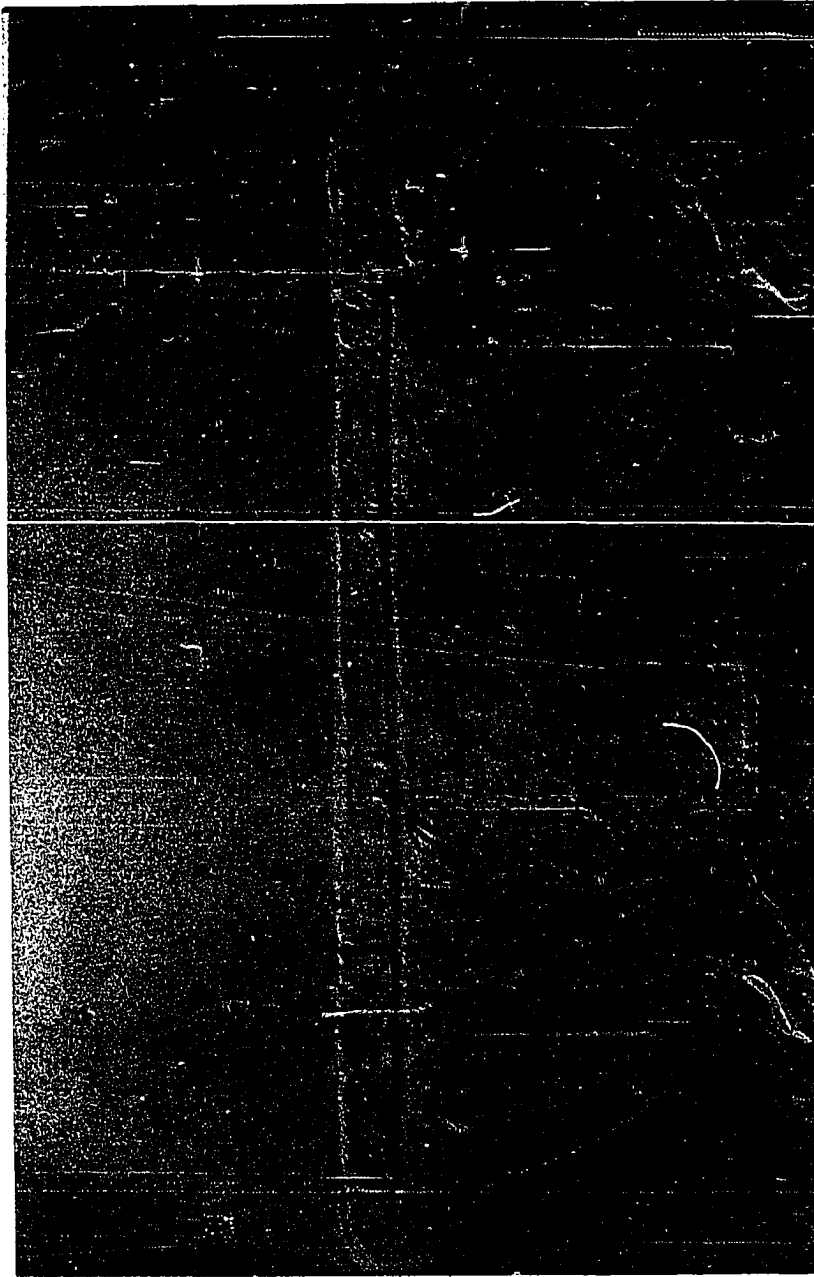


Fig. 58 Antoni Tàpies. Bathtub, 1975



Fig. 59 Antoni Tàpies. Petjades sobre llit marró, 1966

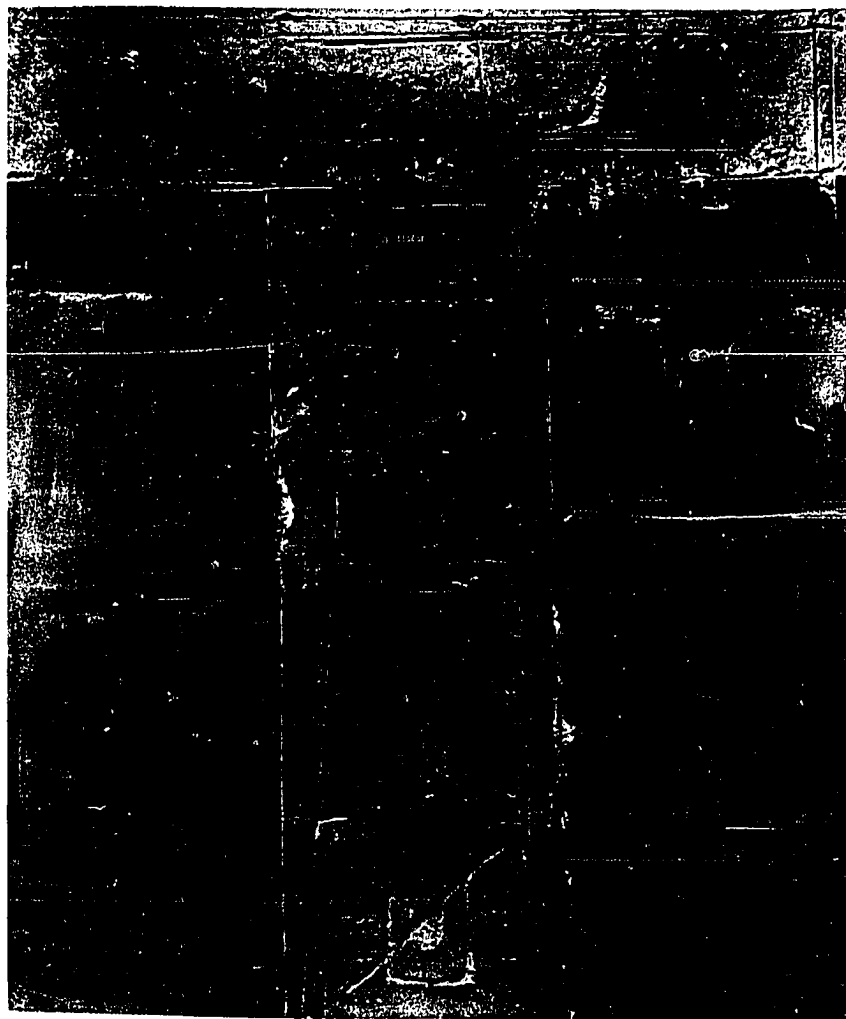


Fig. 60 Antoni Tàpies. Medieval, 1959

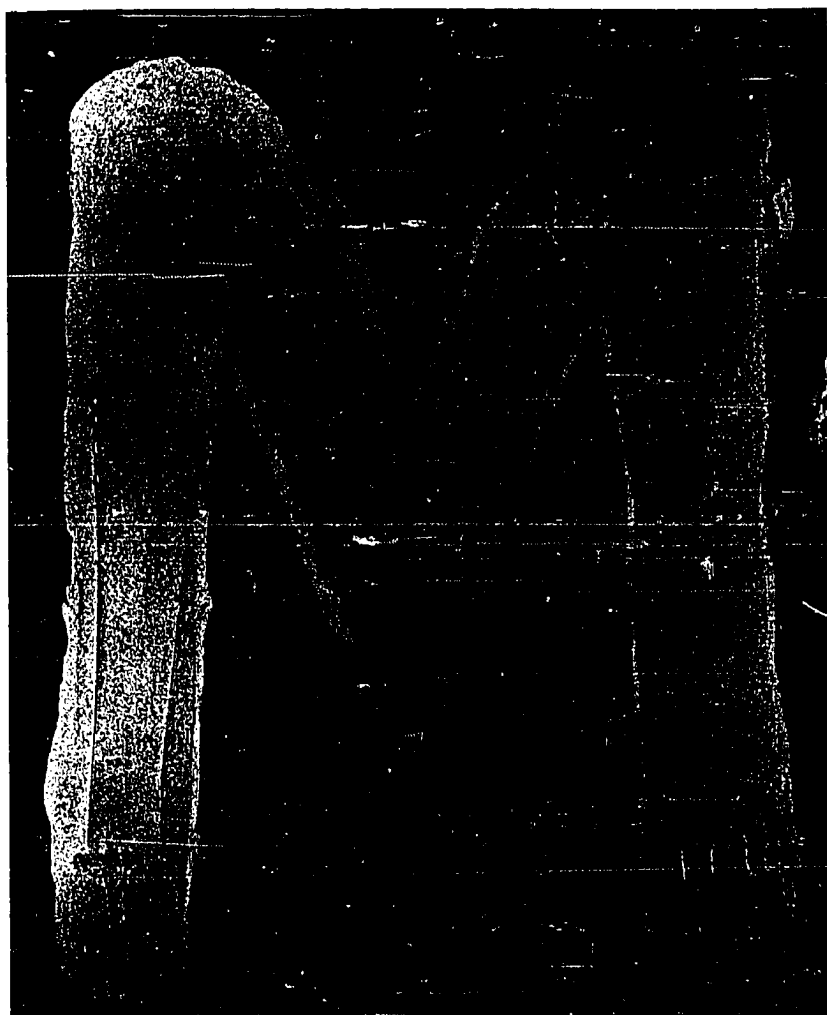


Fig. 61 Antoni Tàpies. M, 1960

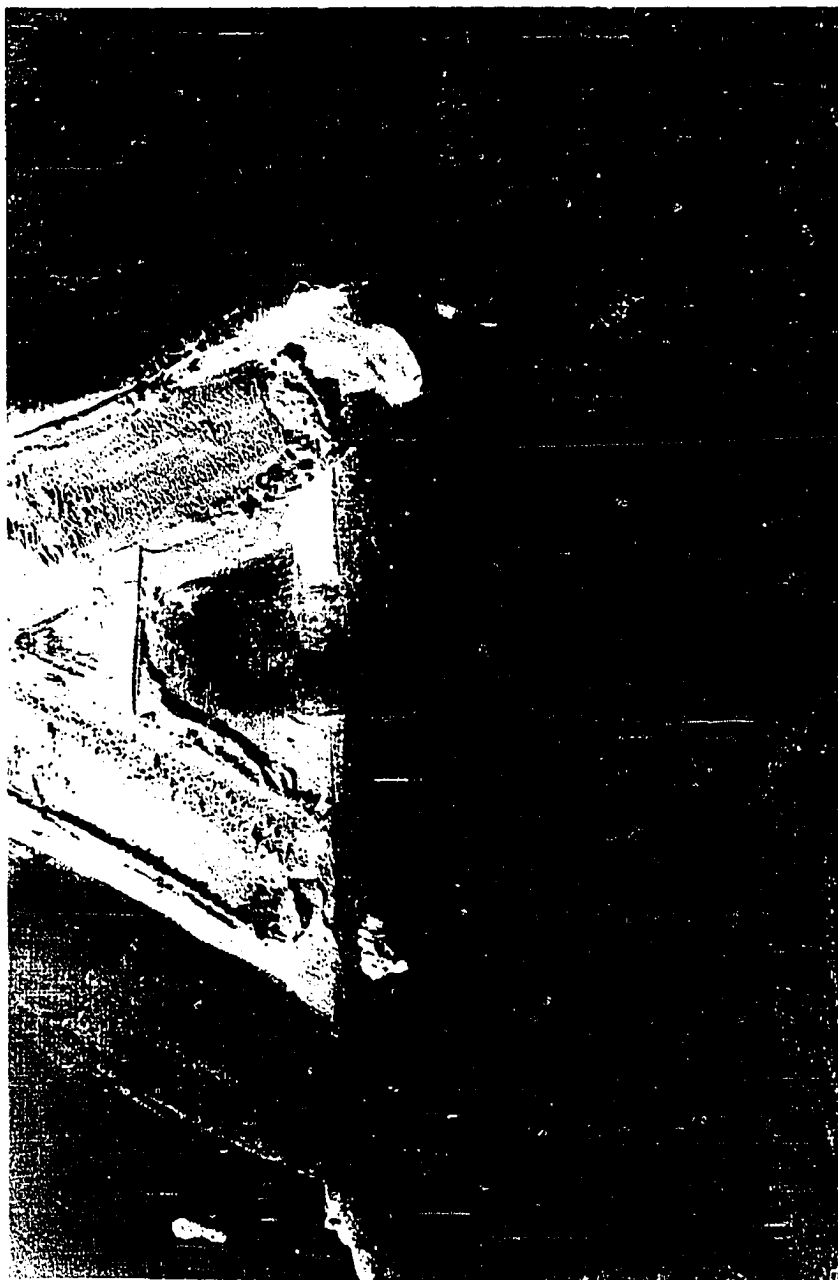


Fig. 62 Antoni Tàpies. A, 1961



Fig. 63 Antoni Tàpies. Paraigua, 1972

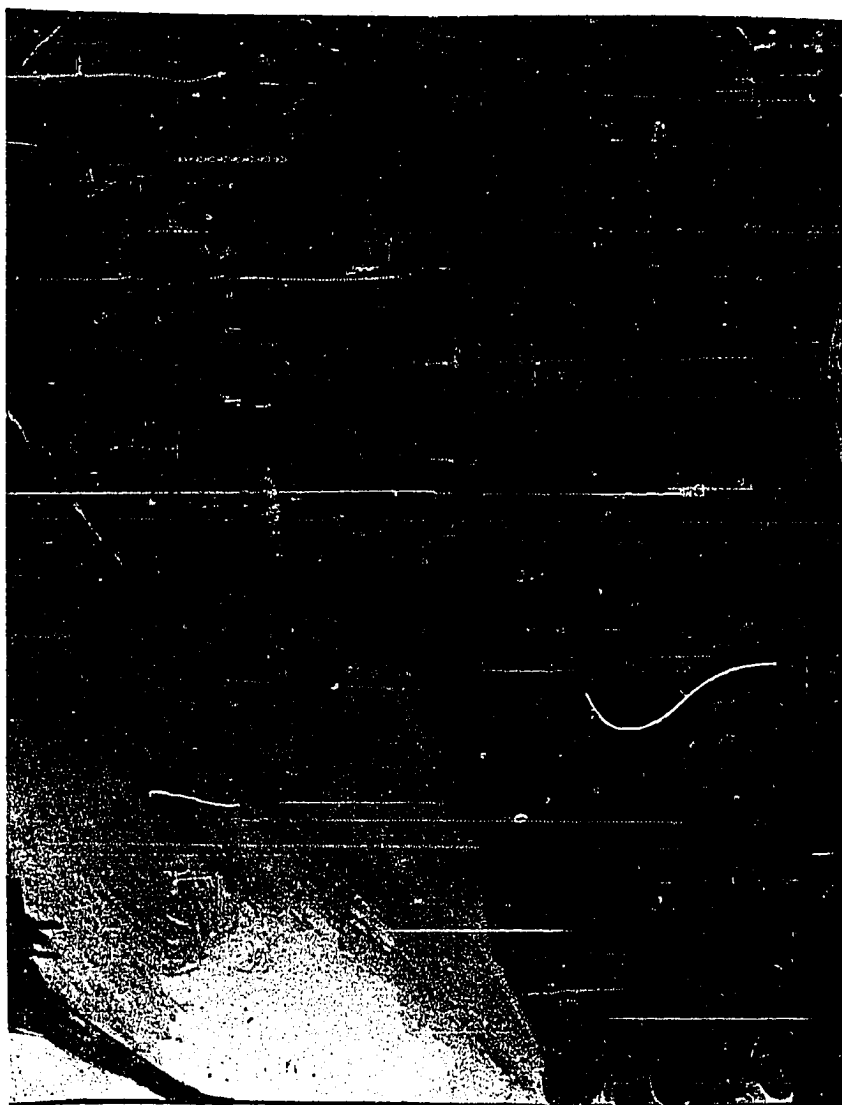


Fig. 64 Antoni Tàpies. Material in the shape of a foot, 1965

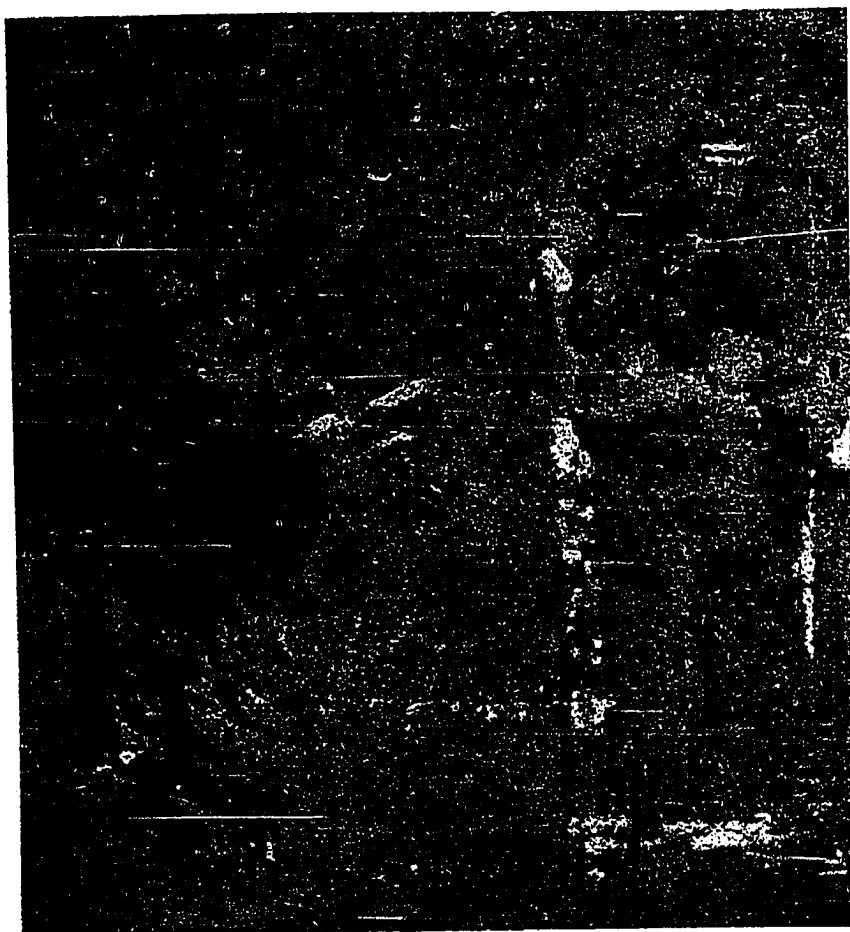


Fig. 65 Antoni Tàpies. Foll, 1973



Fig. 66 Antoni Tàpies. Painting, 1947

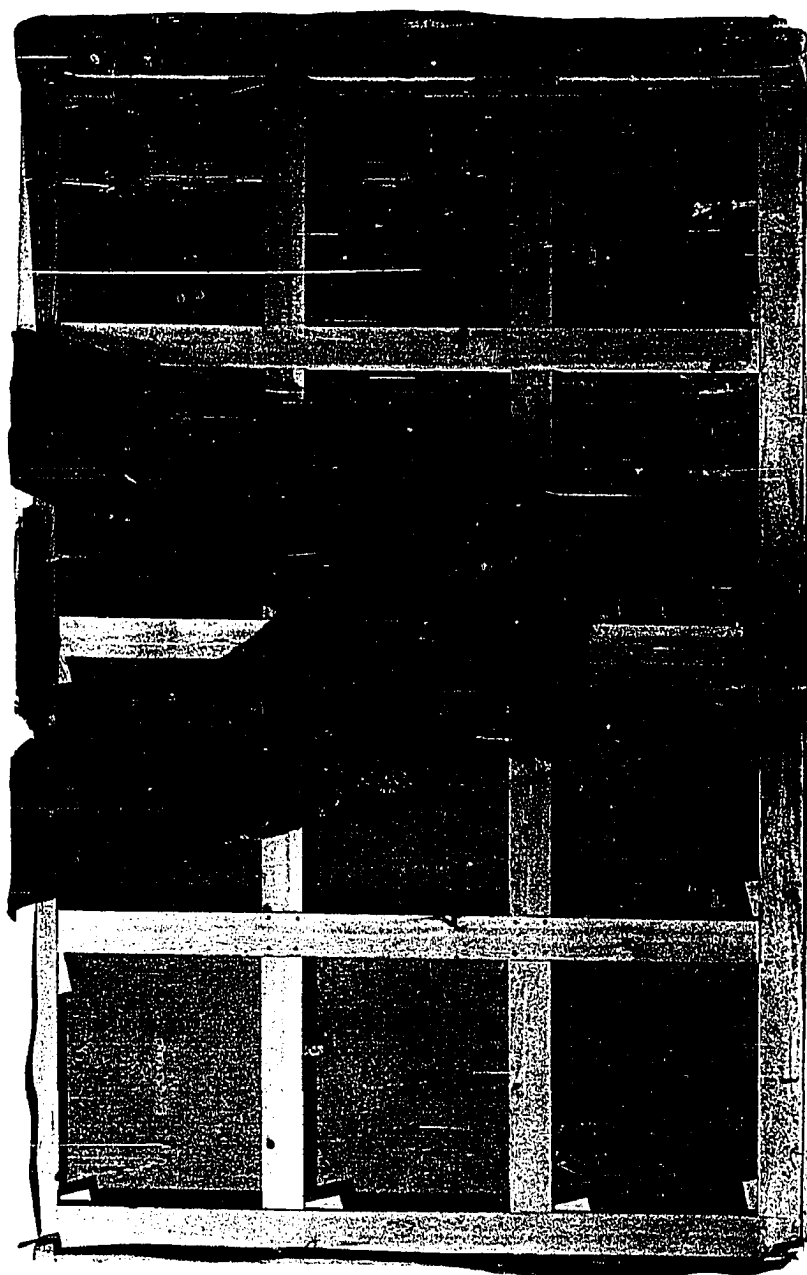


Fig. 67 Antoni Tàpies. Pantalones sobre bastidor, 1971

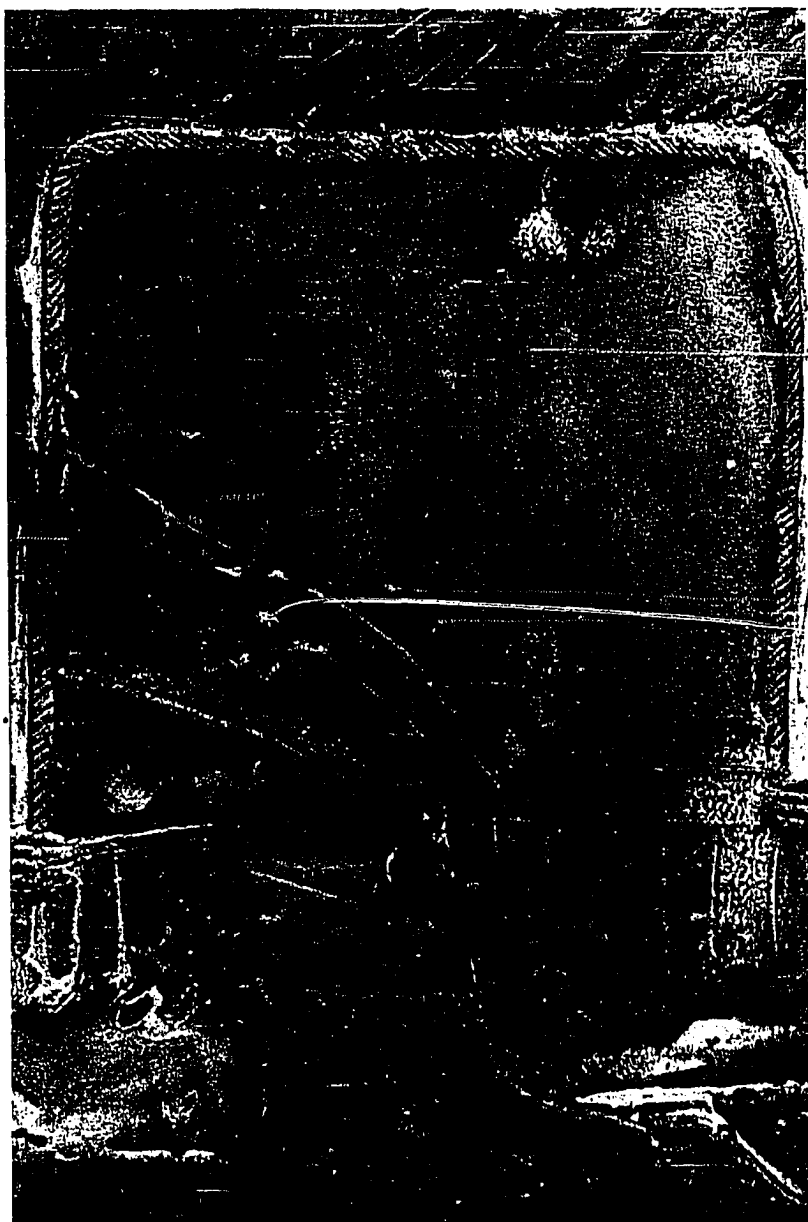


Fig. 68 Antoni Tàpies. Relief ocre avec rose, 1965



Fig. 69 Cemetery of Campins

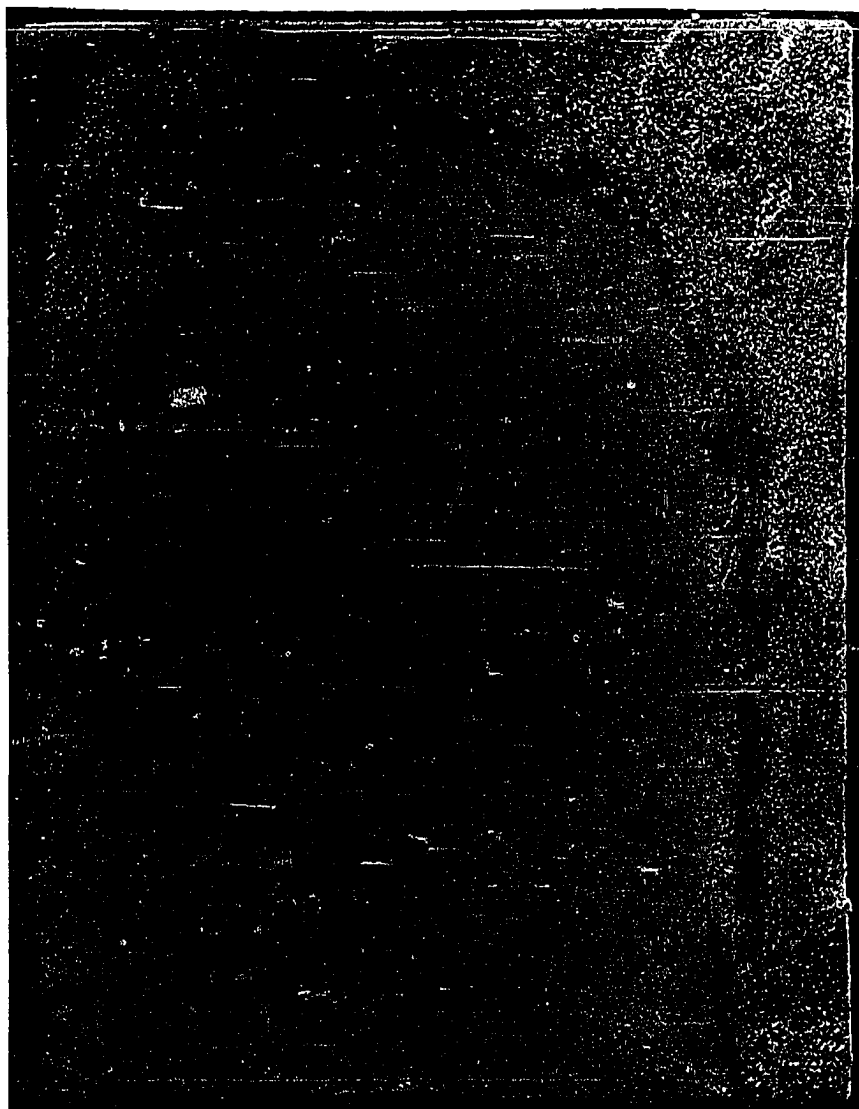


Fig. 70 Antoni Tàpies. Petit arc blanc, 1963



Fig. 71 Tàpies' house in Campins

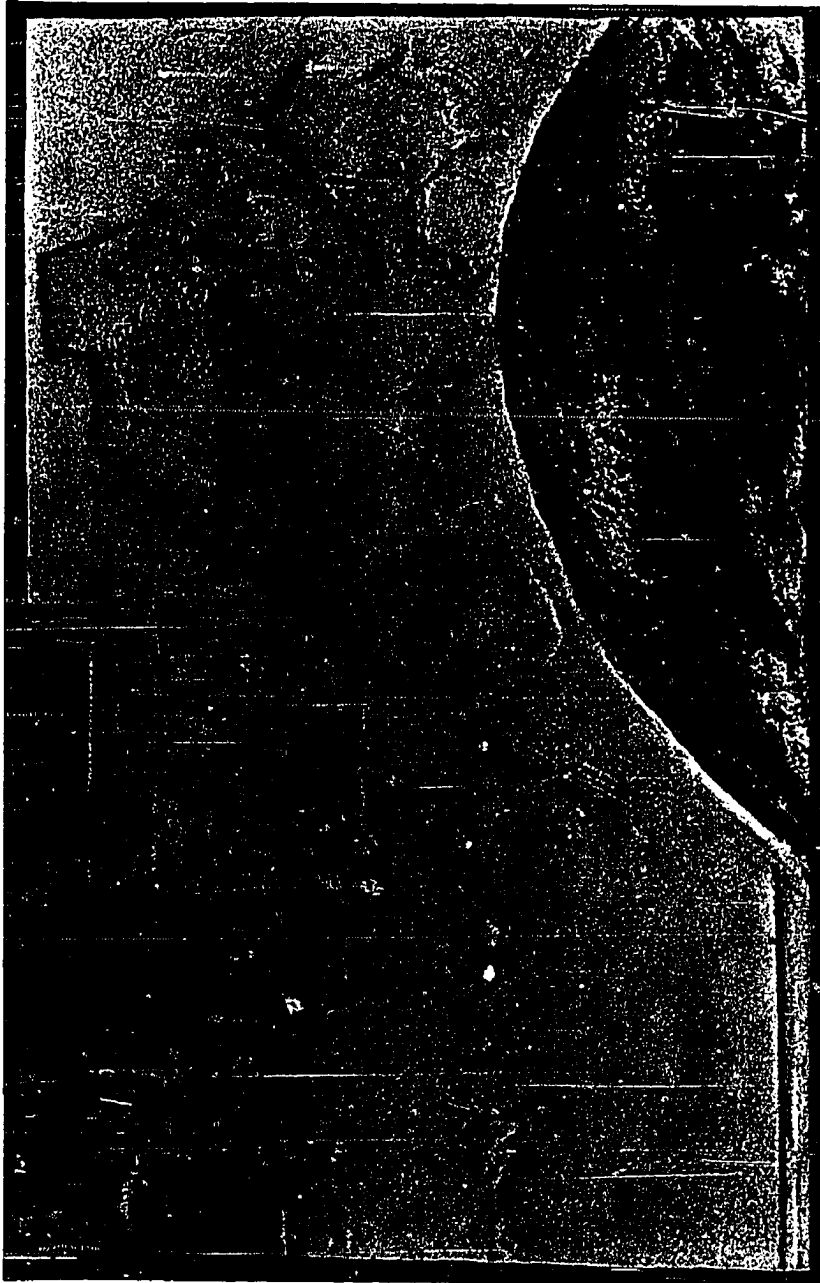


Fig. 72 Antoni Tàpies. Ocher and grey, 1964

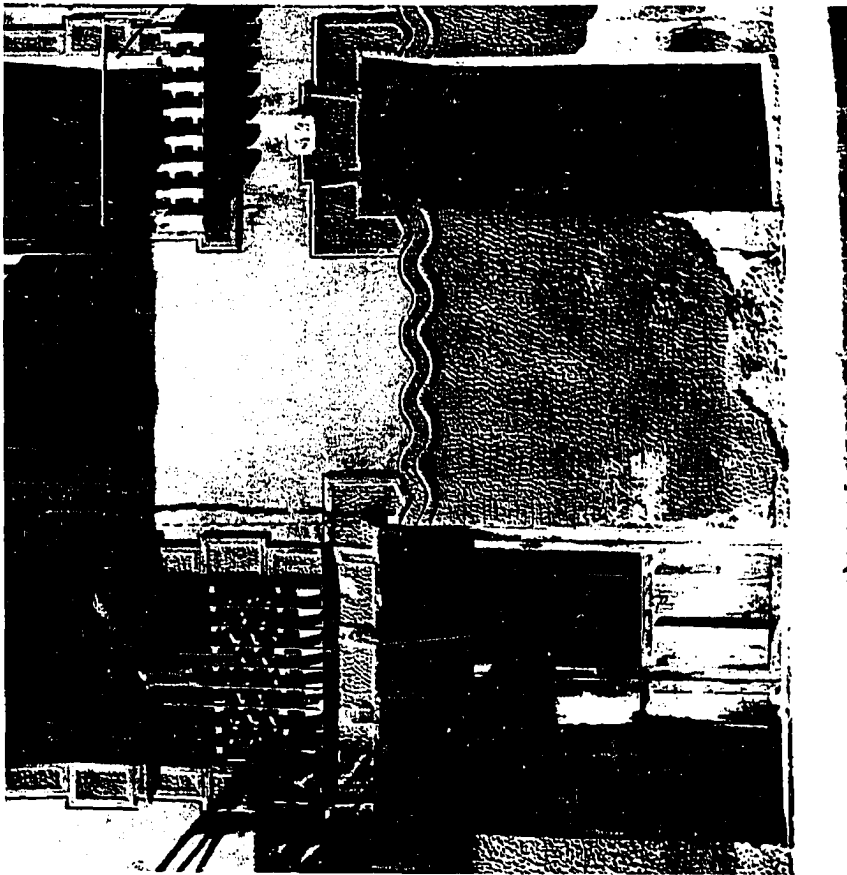


Fig. 73 House of the San Gervasio area in Barcelona

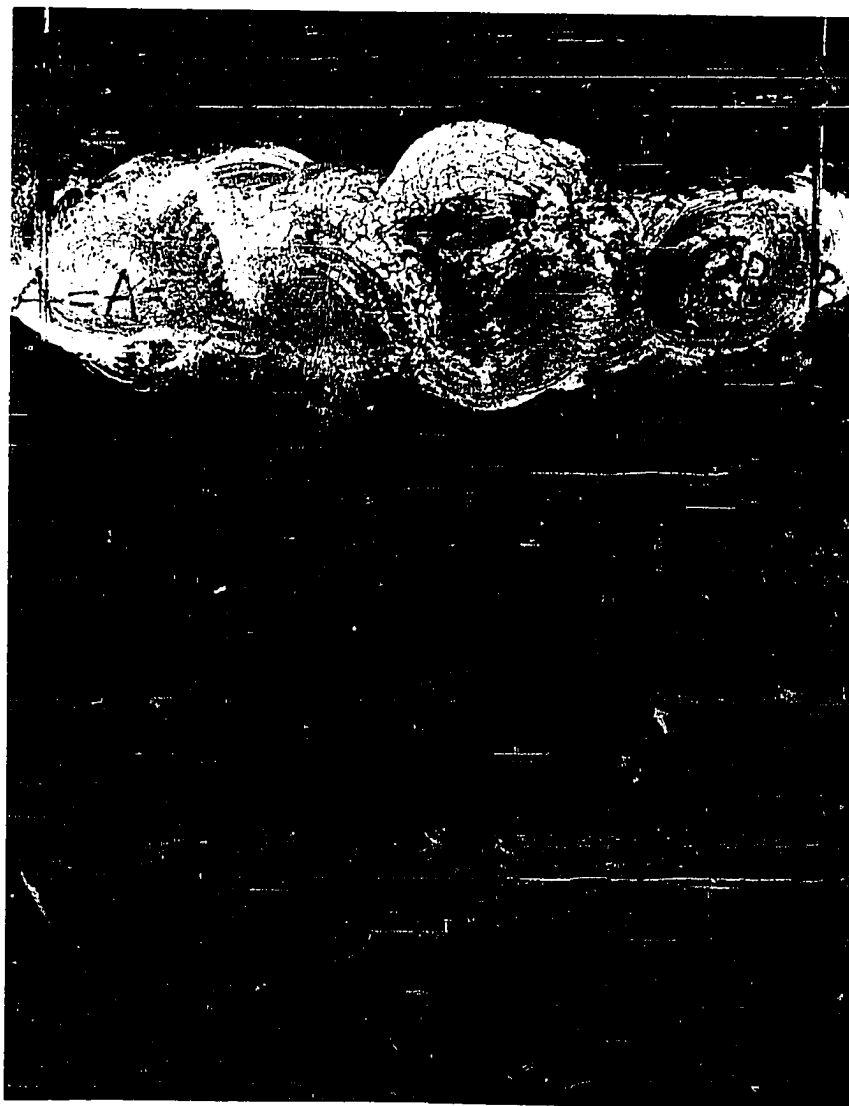


Fig. 74 Antoni Tàpies. Blau emblemàtic, 1971



Fig. 75 Antoni Tàpies. Capell capgirat, 1967

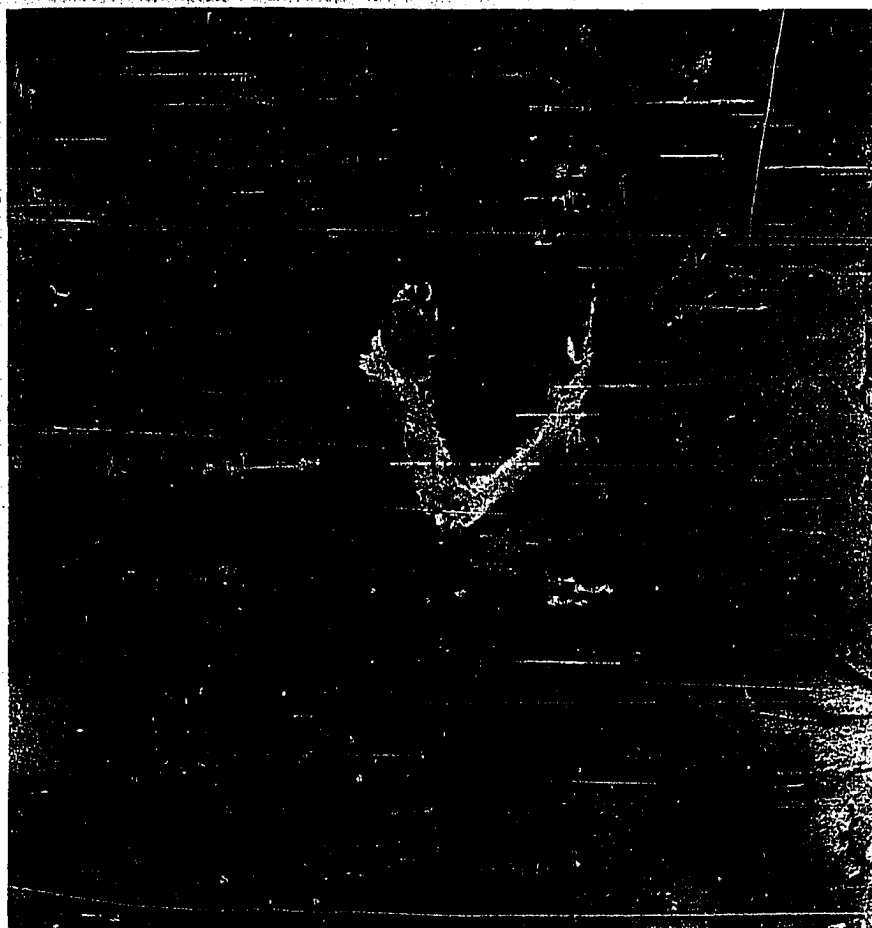


Fig. 76 Antoni Tàpies. Souvenir, 1982

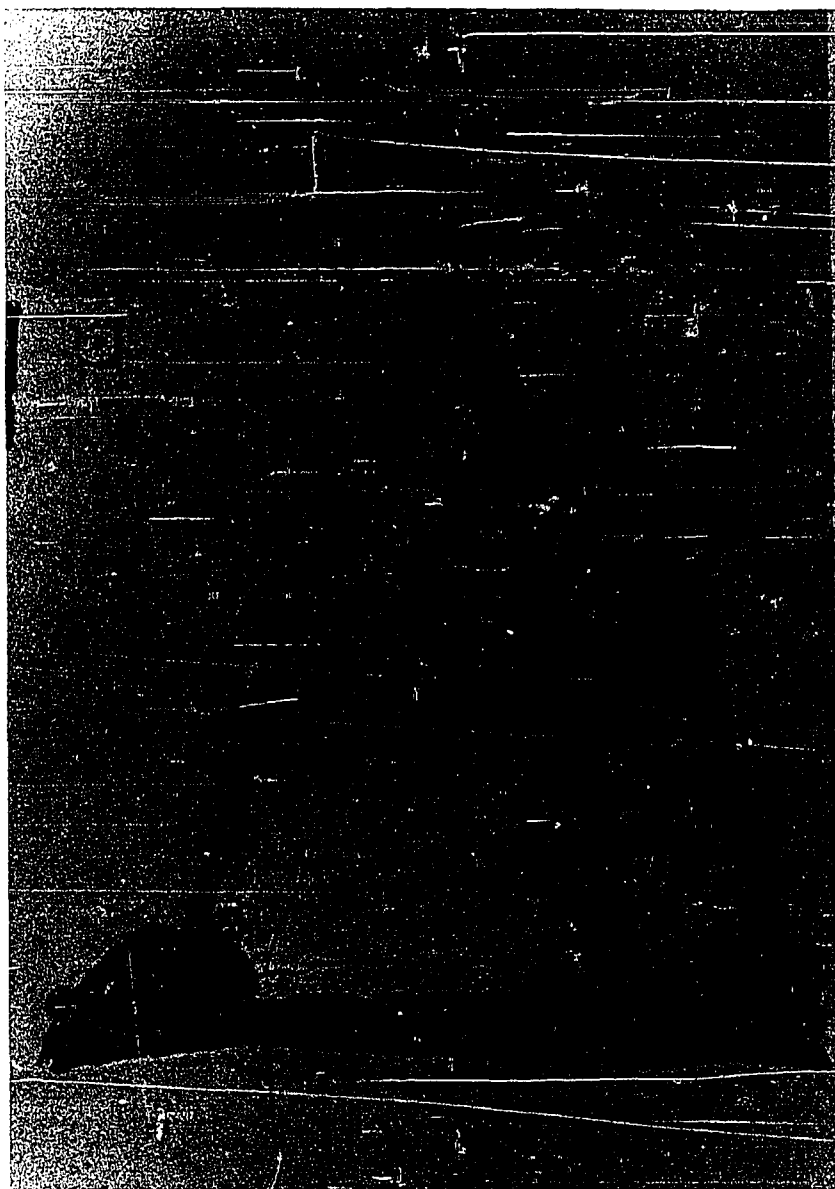


Fig. 77 Antoni Tàpies. La escalera, 1968



Fig. 78 Antoni Tàpies. Nu de vernís, 1980



Fig. 79 Antoni Tàpies. Efecte de cos en relleu, 1979

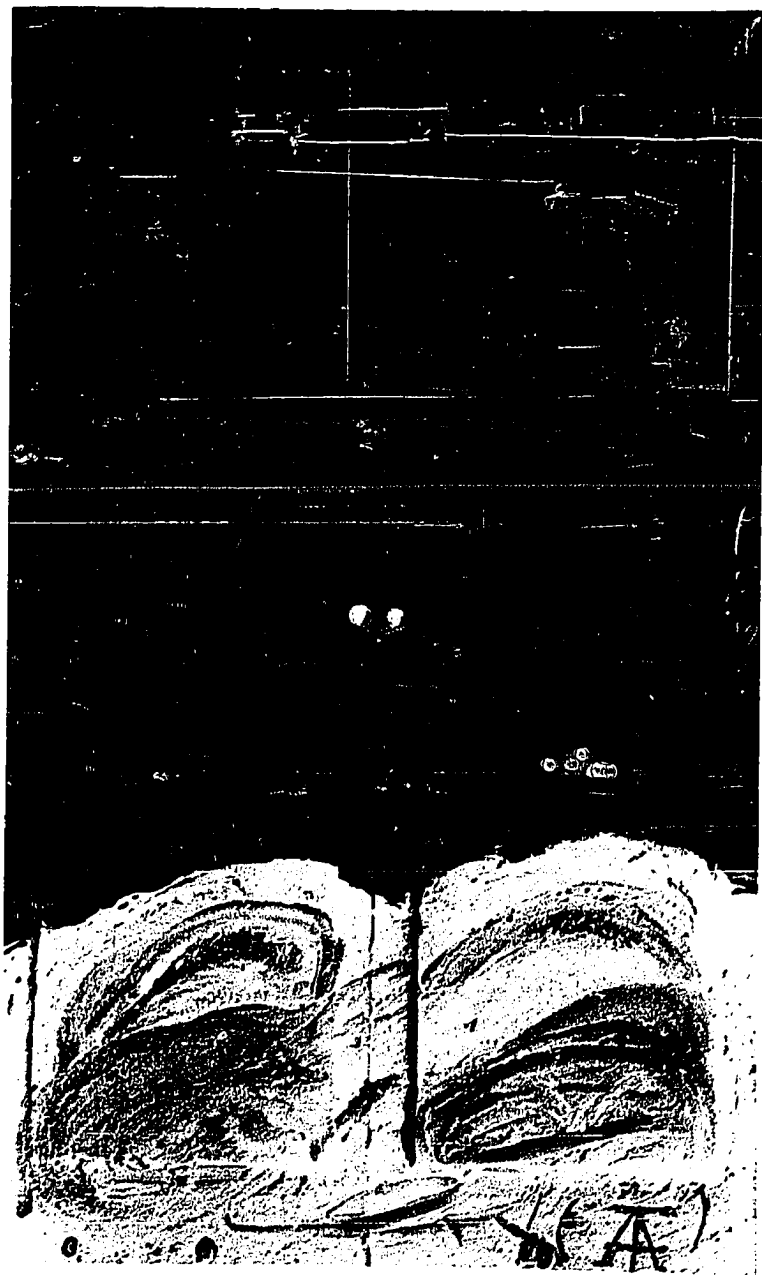


Fig. 80 Antoni Tàpies. Porta-armari, 1973

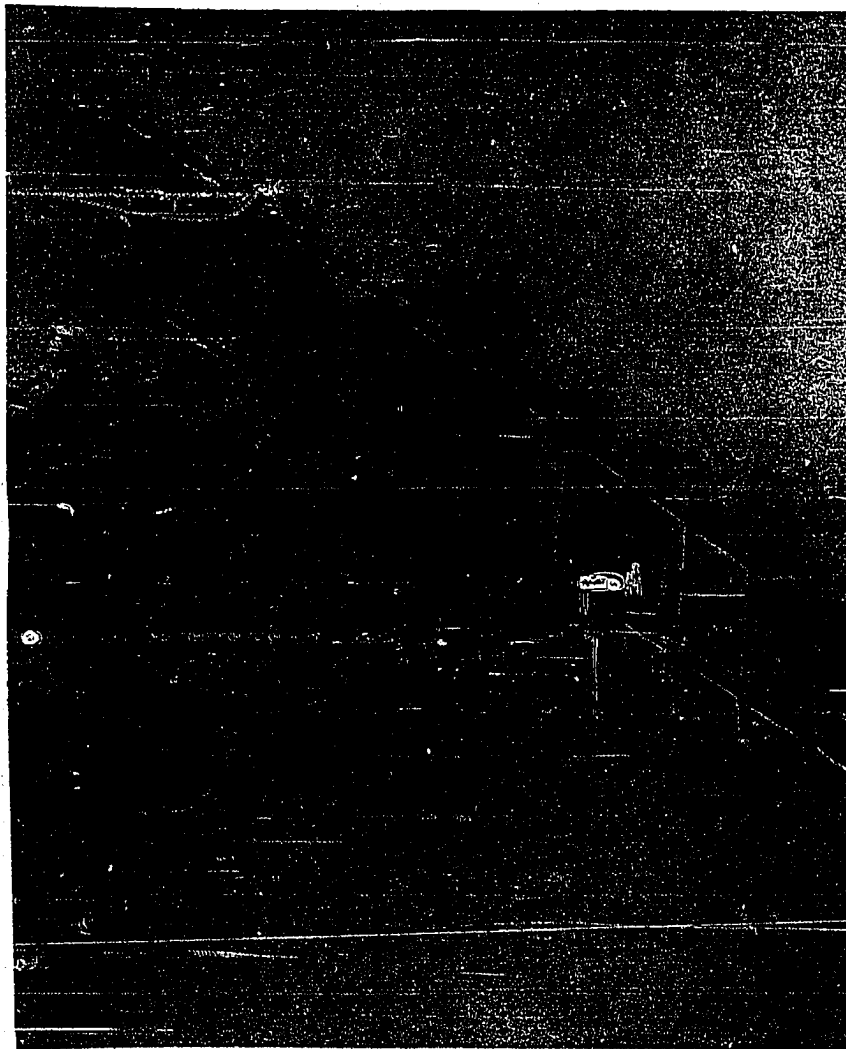


Fig. 81 Antoni Tàpies. L'escala, 1974

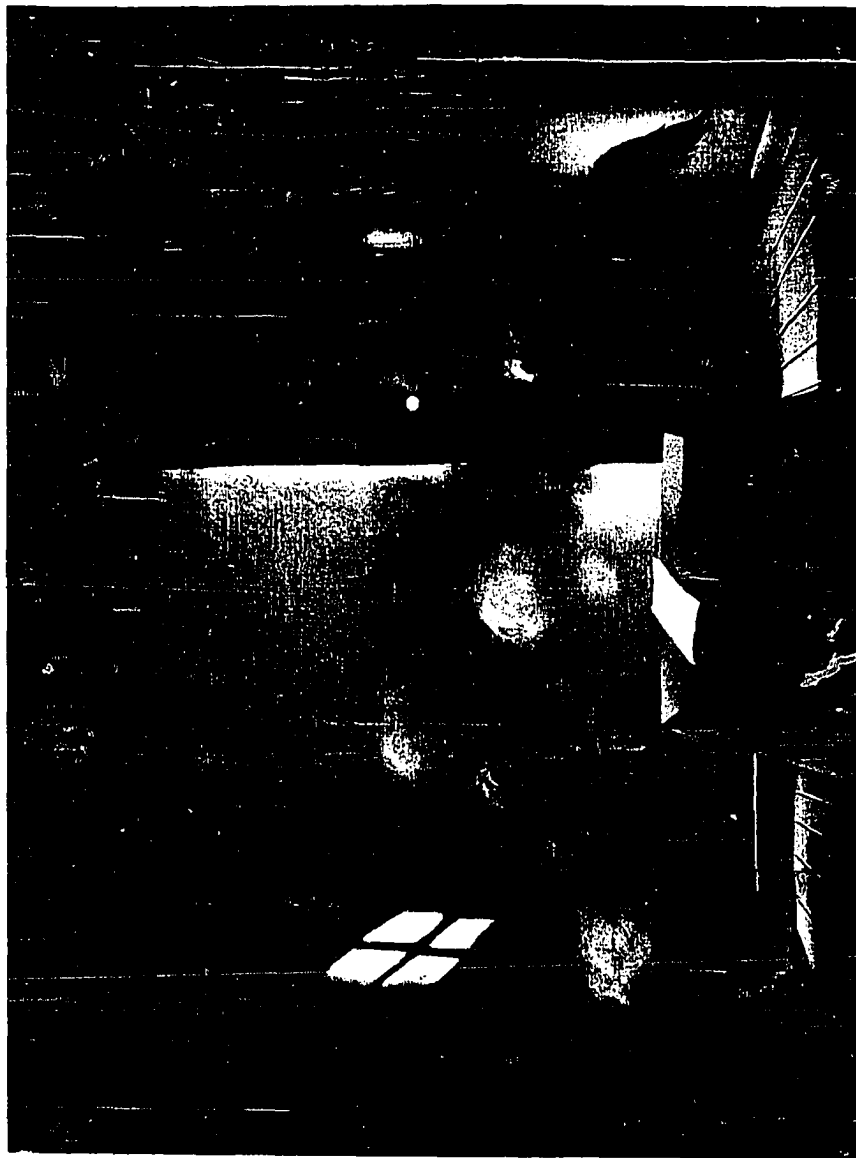


Fig. 82 Antoni Tàpies. El lector final, 1950

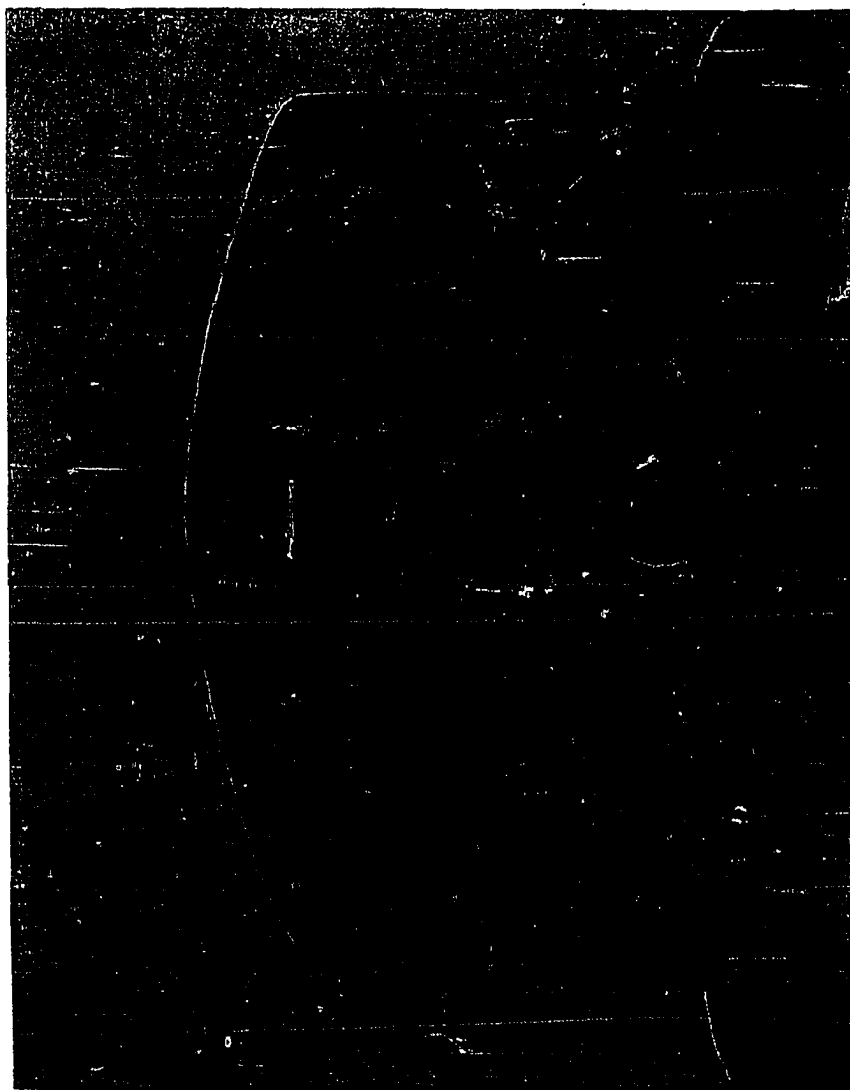


Fig. 83 Antoni Tàpies. Materia grisa en forma de barret, 1966

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