ALMINE RECH

Antoni Tàpies
The Practice of Art

Jul 20, 2024 — Jan 12, 2025 | Museu Tàpies, Barcelona, Spain

Curated by Manuel Borja-Villel, this is one of the most comprehensive exhibitions devoted to the artist's career. With over a hundred works from public institutions and private collections in Spain and elsewhere—some of them on show for the first time in Barcelona—'Antoni Tàpies: The Practice of Art' allows Tàpies' work to be re-situated in the most recent history of art.

The exhibition presents a journey from 1943 to 2011, from his first self- portraits to his final works, marked by a preoccupation with death, and taking in his material, political and also most intimate works, such as the *Teresa Series*, devoted to his wife.

The project is complemented by an extensive public and educational programme, as well as a catalogue with texts by the curator, Cathleen Chaffee, Carles Guerra and Pedro de Llano Neira, fragments of the interview between the curator and Tàpies from 1995 and the interview by Barbara Catoir from 1988, as well as a review of Antoni Tàpies' career through key documents.

'Antoni Tàpies: The Practice of Art' opens at 7 pm on 19 July with an event curated by Imma Prieto and Judith Barnés, featuring Blanca Llum Vidal and Los Sara Fontán, Lolo & Sosaku and a homage to Mika Vainio, the author of a sound installation on the museum roof in 2001, beneath the sculpture *Núvol i cadira [Cloud and Chair]*.

The central exhibition in the commemorative programme for the Tàpies Year, which celebrates the centenary of the artist's birth, comes to Barcelona after being presented at Bozar in Brussels (autumn 2023) and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid (spring 2024).

The Tàpies Year, the programme of exhibitions and activities to commem-orate the centenary of the birth in Barcelona of Antoni Tàpies (1923–2012), reaches its climax with the presentation of the retrospective exhibition 'Antoni Tàpies: The Practice of Art' at the museum founded by the artist himself in Barcelona, after visiting Brussels and Madrid. The exhibition, which reflects the museum's own history, celebrates the occasion to pay homage to Tàpies' artistic and intellectual legacy.

Manuel Borja-Villel (b. Borriana, Spain, 1957), curator of the exhibition, is one of the leading experts in the world on Tàpies' work, and ran the artist's museum in Barcelona between 1990 and 1998. Borja-Villel conceived and developed this project on the basis of the affections and connections between the artist's life and his work through settings with a marked political but at the same time poetic meaning in the works.

Tàpies took himself as his starting point—whether in self-portraits or else through his own language on walls, with the cross/T standing for both his own surname and his wife's name or with bubbles—in an effort to situate himself in the world and understand his relations with others and with his environment, with a touch of humour. The artist defied labels and explications for his work, highlighting the gesturality of attach-ments with calls to attention using external elements or colour or whatever is hidden in his works, which might exist or not: the canvas as the imprint of the absent body, of someone who was there.

The title of the exhibition refers to the first compilation of his writings, pub-lished in 1970, which brings together sixteen texts by the artist about freedom, both in artistic practice and in his interpretation, in the broadest sense of the word.

The exhibition offers visitors a non-linear journey through Tàpies' career, structured in different settings that make connections beyond chronology. The starting point is the self-portraits made over a long period recovering from an illness, influenced by the avant-gardes and by his links with the artistic group Dau al Set, and his experiments with raw materials in the 1950s, which earned international recognition of his work, with major exhibitions in New York and at the biennials in Venice and Sao Paulo. In the following decade, Tàpies deepened his anto-Francoist political commitment, producing work from everyday objects.

His early work on paper and cardboard, through drawing and grattage, allowed the artist to undertake a painting free from brush strokes, written and scratched on the support. Tàpies embarks on new material explorations, incorporating objects in his large-format creations, using varnish as an element of his work and experimenting with parts of the body, at the same time continuing to work in small formats on cardboard and paper with recurrent motifs and a structural persistence of attachments and intentions.
In his final stage, celebration of international accolades and the opening of the Museu Tàpies (1990) alternated with melancholy and a concern for illness and death present in his work. According to the curator in the exhibition catalogue, for the artist time "was a spiral. There are mutations and changes in his work and from the materials of the 1950s to the varnishes of the 1980s there is an evolution. But this is not founded on a progression, or on completing stages or a linear development, but in superimpositions and repetitions."

Committed to his times and his city, Tàpies stood up for democratic freedoms and Catalan culture, giving his support to a range of international humanitarian causes. The big questions he poses in his work and in his intellectual legacy, about life, death, illness, people and human rights, remain valid, in his critical spirit and the social function the artist gave his work.

The exhibition project allows the creation of thought spaces around his legacy, by exploring his work and generating new interpretations. Among other things, the public programme includes an international symposium where eminent thinkers will reinterpret the works in the exhibition, as well as a conference which, for the first time, will explore the *Teresa Series* from a philosophical and poetic standpoint. A performance series commemorating Fluxus and a concert by Jordi Savall will round off a bill of activities to suit all audiences complementing the programme for the Tàpies Year.