

The Artistic Development of  
Antoni Tàpies

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Pauline Franklin

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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

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PAULINE FRANKLIN

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## INTRODUCTION.



## PART ONE.

The significant art that has arisen out of post World War II Europe has, for the most part, dealt with a profound search for moral values. The moral stability of European culture, that had become so ingrained through the centuries had been threatened by the war. The burden of a world with no meaningful supernatural values weighed heavily, and the impact of Sartre's Existentialism dominated European intellectual thought, and led certain artists to search for their truths in what remained of the raw materials of their environment. Among these artists, the Spaniard, Antoni Tapies, developed a body of work that, at its best, could intimate, on a highly dramatic scale, the structure and burden of a history suspended. Where Alberto Burri presented cast-off materials in a straightforward, non-symbolic context, creating a sort of desolate decoration and Dubuffet turned to a naive archetypal symbology in order to play up the absurdity of the human situation, Tapies set out to use the materials of reality as a tool for tragedy.

His trips to France, Belgium, and Holland in 1950 acquainted him with the potent philosophic frustrations confronting artists throughout Europe, and his first trip to New York in 1953, exposed him to the new space of American action painting. After his return home from America, his work turned away from its early involvement with Surrealism. His new pictures took the form of object-paintings - solid, three-dimensional surfaces that moved out into the room. By mixing with his paints and mediums such materials as sand, marble dust and acrylic resins, he simulated fragments of stucco, mud and clay walls or stone slabs. On these surfaces he acted by gouging, colouring, and working to create the look of human history - time had acted here, events had left their record on these materials and then passed on. This work, though, did not attempt to conform to the American ideas of informal painting. Rather, it worked within the context of a highly structured space, using the techniques of action painting, to record in an emblematic manner, the passage of time and confrontation. His approach has not been literary or illustrative, rather it has involved a concern with the creation of universal ambiguous realities - twentieth century myths that impose upon the viewer the dominance and irrepressibility of his historic prison.

## PART TWO.

Antoni Tapies was born in 1923 in the Spanish city of Barcelona, in the area known as Catalonia. Like his contemporaries, the Andalusian Picasso, and the Catalan Miró, Tapies came from a middle-class background. It is worth noting that his family belonged to a more educated kind of middle class. His father, Josep Tapies i Mestres, was a lawyer, and a typical example of

well-to-do bourgeoisie; he was also a materialist, an atheist, and a Catalan nationalist. His mother, Maria Puig i Guerra, was a deeply religious woman who had a mania for moving house!

Owing to his mother's strong religious beliefs, Antoni was sent to school at the age of three, at the Loreto convent near Claris and Mallorca. However, he was very unhappy there. He had a deep rooted fear of the nuns whose methods of preaching virtue to young children were somewhat frightening and intimidating. His father, being an atheist and anxious to separate the boy from clerical influences, transferred him to a German school. Although Antoni was unhappy there also, and very relieved when his mother had him removed from the school in 1931, he did however retain a deep and lasting admiration for the Aryan race. He held a romantic admiration for their physical constitution and also for their culture and music, especially the music of Wagner. Through the influence of his father, (also a lover of Wagner), at an earlier age, he connected this romantic vision of an ideal Germany and its ideal people with the violence and inner life of Wagner's music. Antoni was then sent to a school run by the Piarist Fathers where he began his secondary studies in 1934.

Much of Tapies' adolescent life was marked by war and illness. It is an interesting fact that Picasso and Miró, who lived in Barcelona, and both of whom Tapies would form friendships with later on, also suffered from severe illnesses in their adolescence and recovered by leaving the city. Tapies was only twelve years of age when on July 19th 1936, the Spanish Civil War broke out. During this period Antoni was enlisted as a clerk in his father's office. He recalls the marks of bomb raids on the walls of the church of Saint Philip Neri and in the Carrer del Bisbe. He also remembers another occasion when the bombs destroyed his grandfather's bookshop, his flat, and the artist's own birthplace. Tapies was fifteen years of age when the war ended.

After the Civil War Antoni resumed his studies. In 1940, when he was finishing his secondary education, it was again interrupted when he suffered an almost fatal heart attack. Being so young he was left in a severe state of shock which resulted in breathing difficulties and a depression which lasted for a long time. He then caught a tubercular infection which prevented him from taking the State examination for university until he was well again. The two years that followed were of crucial importance in his development. He was sent to a sanatorium in the mountains for a long spell of treatment which ended with a complete cure.

His depression did not drag him down - on the contrary it seemed to stimulate him and gave him a peculiar clairvoyance which he compares to the results of certain breathing exercises of Yoga. In his isolation he found plenty of time for meditation. Having completely abandoned his religion and discovered the works of oriental writers, the result was a desire to delve deeper into the subjects of the "symbolist sensitizations", (1), of his childhood. As an adolescent, Tapies had begun to read the works of Dostoevsky, Ibsen, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. Among the



oriental philosophies, he took an interest in Yoga, the Vedas, and Zen Buddhism. A book which influenced him a great deal was a translation into Catalan of the Zen work by Okakura Kazuzo - "Book of Tea", and from this he became acquainted with Japanese poetry. In this way also during a period of convalescence in rural areas, both Picasso and Miro experienced new revelations and acquired new ideas and perspectives on life which would later shape their art.

To please his father Antoni went to University in 1943 to study law. However, his long hermit-like existence in the mountains had made some profound changes on his outlook on life, and he found it difficult to readjust to city life. For three years he persevered in his law studies, though realizing that he was not suited to it. Finally in 1946 he abandoned his law course to devote himself to painting.

FOOTNOTES.

- 1) Alexandre Cirici: Tapiès: Witness of Silence, p. 42.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE EARLY PHASE.

## THE EARLY WORKS.

During his long spell of convalescence after his illness, Tapies found himself turning more and more to drawing as a means of self-expression. He went to an exhibition of drawings by the Catalan Spanish artists, Rogent, Fin, and Vilató, which attracted his attention. He was also struck by the work of an artist called Gabino, another Catalan painter, which he saw in an exhibition at the Galeria Syra in Barcelona. The realism in the work was somewhat deformed in a Cubist manner and in it Tapies seemed to find something new, compared with the art he had seen in Spain up to then.

In 1947 Gabino introduced Tapies - then in his twenties - to the group of young artists known as the 'Blaus'. Among them he met Joan Ponç, August Puig, and Tort, painters who were enthusiastically patronised by the Catalan poet, J. V. Foix, who had been closely connected with the Surrealists in Paris in the thirties. Foix saw in these adventurous young men a means of continuing the old avant-garde. Tapies also met a brilliant young poet, Juan Brossa. Under the influence of Foix, Brossa had abandoned the old traditional verse, in the style of Jacint Verdaguer, for a new form of poetry in which phrases taken from everyday language were juxtaposed in unusual and banal combinations. The result was a poetry full of vague and ambiguous meanings. A mutual enthusiasm for the music of Wagner and Brahms brought the two men closer together and they became life-long friends. From then on the poetry of Brossa proved to be a wealthy source of ideas for Tapies' art. Antoni considered Brossa's verses to be the literary expression for many of the thoughts he wished to express visually.

At the same time as he was drawing, he was also writing poetry and essays and keeping an intimate literary diary - he was obsessed with the idea of connecting the work up with the old pre-war avant-garde. His friendship with Joan Prats, who had been in close contact with the avant-garde in Paris before the war, and who had been a student with Miró, was of enormous help to him as it was Prats who not only gave him the chance to visit Miró, whom he had longed to meet, but also gave him access to a lot of surrealist literature published prior to the war. Another acquaintance Tapies made during this time, through Joan Prats, was that of Joaquim Gomis. Through him Tapies was able to look at the French reviews of the thirties, the "Mintaire" and the "Cahier d'Art", making a special study of the works of Miro and Klee. For Tapies and the Blaus members this was a period of great importance as they were now beginning to think of themselves as Surrealists.

In September of 1948, Tapies, Brossa, and associates produced a review, "Dau al Set", (Seven-faced Dice) - written in the banned Catalan language - under the leadership of Joan Josep Tharrats and the existentialist philosopher, Arnald Puig, which was to have a massive impact. Two months after the publication of the review, Tapies exhibited his work in public for the first time.



The event which made this possible for Antoni and his friends was the 1948 Saló d'Octubre. The exhibition provoked official outcry and violent retaliation, which was to be expected as it was the first manifestation since the Civil War of a clandestine avant-garde presence in Barcelona.

Having briefly examined the events of this time in Tapies' artistic development, the influences at work upon him through the art he was seeing, and the circles in which he was mixing, we shall now re-examine the same period, concentrating this time on the work Tapies was producing, and looking more closely at the effects these new-found friendships and the concern with surrealism were having on his art.

Most of his works previous to 1945 consisted of portraits (Plates 1 & 2), which were of little importance - they display aspirations to purity of line in the style of Ingres. There are also a number of self portraits, a theme which was to fascinate him for a long time - and in them one can already see some of the obsessive themes which would be developed later on; the frontal view of the face, the hard hypnotic stare, and the forehead bent low over eyebrows that meet.

Human intention and experience are at the heart of Tapies' work and the symbolic expression of such is usually autobiographical - many of the images he uses have a host of personal meanings, and their intimacy and credibility are made more concrete by the recurrence of such motifs throughout the different stages of his career in many transformations and contexts. In a 'Self Portrait' (Plate 3), the artist is depicted staring out, in a trance like state, at the viewer, as if he is looking at himself in the mirror, he is holding a pen and is writing on a piece of blank paper; in the background is a bed. The picture can be taken as an expression of his own circumstances; - at the time he was recovering from his illness - symbolised by the bed - and was also trying to make the choice between following his own desire to paint or conceding to his father's wishes that his son study law.

By 1947 Tapies' method of communication was already bold and strong and he had also developed a highly personalized style. This form of communication seemed to have grown out of the idea that art should be concerned with the relationship between the imagination, the dream, and the implement which could express it. In his book, "Tapies", Roland Penrose states that Tapies saw his work as a means of stating truth, using illusion to do so, he also felt that if the illusion was to be convincing then it should have the power to command the attention of all our senses.

Tapies' work displayed a mood of deep melancholy along with a kind of mystic search for emotional and spiritual values. He was attempting to bridge the gap between man and his cosmos - a theme which defines the art of our time - and his dealings with this problem are evident even in his earliest and least known work.

An example of this can be seen in a drawing dated 1946-47 (Plate

4), the precedent for a painting done in the latter year (Plate 5). Both the painting and the drawing show a figure of a naked man rising up out of the earth. As he has no feet he appears to be part of the earth, growing out of it or emerging from it like a mountain. Here indeed, is evidence of the influence of Brossa - a line in one of his poems - "Oh heart! My whole body is the mountain" (1) - relates directly to this image. Brossa's work reveals other instances of this obsession with the terra and the animal and creating beings of a hybrid nature (mineral-man, vegetable-man, animal-man), and other more complex combinations. This theme goes back to Paracelsus, and the Alchemists - dealt with by Jung in 'Paracelsica'. It is of great importance to note that this expression of Jungian theory, in which 'Self' is symbolised by an animal which in turn represents our instinctive nature and the link with one's surroundings, was also being used by Jackson Pollock in America during the Abstract Expressionist movement. For the Surrealists, the animal side of man, his instinctive and impulsive nature was represented with the visible symbol of the beast - both themes are present in Pollock's work, in such pieces as "Animals and Figures" of 1942 (Plate 6) and the "Minataur" and "Pasiphae". This fusion of the animate and the inanimate is not confined to the figure. In the background of the painted version, a bird of prey's head and beak form the top of one of the mountains. These half-animal, half-vegetable forms are reminiscent of Hieronymus Bosch (Plate 7).

The central figure of the naked man, with circumcised sex and standing like some sort of ancient idol, appears in many different works throughout this period. In a drawing done in 1948 (Plate 8) he is present, standing erect and hieratical on a stool over to the right hand side. He is a central figure again in a drawing of 1947 (Plate 9) though in this instance there is a mythological context and the references to such in this piece belong to a separate stage in the artist's development.

In both the drawing and the painting of 1946- 1947, the tellurian male is holding a woman in his hands. She has one arm amputated and would appear to be his victim and he the offerer of the sacrifice to the hand descending from the sky. The facial expression of the male figure is sombre and impenetrable, whereas that of his victim reflects a burst of frantic and hysterical joy; it seems to be an image of madness. There are a number of differences between the two, and these discrepancies may perhaps be worth noting. The hand which descends from the sky does not appear in the drawing, only in the painting. In the drawing both the central figure and the victim have two normal eyes, however, in the painting the victim has one eye in the middle of his forehead - like a Cyclops - and the offerer has one eye on the right and a void oval shape on the left. The feature of normally constituted eyes and void eye shapes, as well as some other variations which will be mentioned later, become common occurrences in Tapiés' work.

In another little known drawing of 1947 (Plate 10) one sees a variation on the same format. The central figure is a man standing in a river. By the wounds indicated in his hands, feet,



and the left side of his chest, the figure can be identified as that of Christ. The theme is a combination of Christ's baptism in the Jordan and his appearances to the Apostles after his resurrection - the latter is indicated by the offering attitude and the extension of the left hand in a blessing. Underneath the water, in the lower half of the drawing, one is presented with the kind of primitive imagery one sees in naive art; a river snake, two fishes, a turtle, a cray fish, and a snail. These images are taken from medieval bestiaries, prayer books, and illuminated manuscripts - the presence of Christ therefore comes from an iconographical source. Tapies had not felt the phenomenon of religion with any intensity, and so he is using the central figure of Christianity only in so far as it is the centre of a tradition - Catalan mystic thought. Indeed there are other instances which will be looked at later, where Tapies uses recognised symbols of Christianity.

On inspection one sees the sun, moon, and stars all out at the same time, there are clouds to indicate an overcast sky as well as signs of rain. There is a bat between the sun and the moon which - as a nocturnal animal in daylight; an animal with wings, but essentially earthbound - corresponds to the presence of the rainbow, which represents the converging of two elements, fire - symbolised by the sun - and water.

An important drawing of 1944 (Plate 11) - one of the earliest - shows a nocturnal scene with a figure leaning in front of an open window. The outside world is invading the room behind the figure, and the darkness extends to the hair on the left of the face, the right side of the body - including the arm and eye - as well as the right leg which crosses behind the other leg ending up on the left of the drawing. The shadow also effects the left side of a circular picture frame in which the picture echoes the stance of the figure. The darkness is also present in the shadow cast by the ball of wool and the knitting needles on the floor to the left. This dual asymmetry suggests a schizophrenic struggle between two forces. This is indicated by the stark juxtaposition of the opposite colours of black and white, and the contorted attitude of the figure. One could suppose that the figure - androgynous, and perhaps hermaphrodite, tending towards the female - is struggling against the world of darkness which is attempting to devour it. The blackened eye is now completely divorced from any previous human shape, and has become a black sun of the Alchemist tradition, particularly important in Tapies imagery.

There is a work from 1950 (Plate 12), which presents us with a more highly developed variation on the same theme. In this version the negation is predominant and the room is now like a photographic negative. The figure is more obviously male and is sitting with his back to the viewer, his arm is twisted behind his back which is suggestive of violent coercion. Geometrical forms and shapes are floating in a void around the picture edges; to the left is a wing shape - this wing appears again in "The Letter", also done in 1950 - it indicates an evil presence. In the middle of the figure's back there is a mark which looks like

an eye, but, an official description of the drawing by Pere Gimferrer suggests that it is an owl. However, the relevance of the image in this case, is not so much what it is, but its whereabouts; its situation on the figure's back is indicative of a pact with the occult.

On observing this phase of Tapies' art, one is immediately aware of the importance he attaches to eyes. In his drawings they are emphatically articulated by black eyelashes and copious eyebrows, and convey a likeness of his own dark penetrating gaze. The sense of touch - frequently illustrated - is also of notable importance. Touching can often give us proof of the reality of what we can see, anything within our reach which cannot be touched is to be feared, it is like a spirit which can exercise power over us and therefore, possesses magical power. Many of the early drawings contain allusions to the verification of reality by touching.

The emphasis on hand and eye reveal the element of self-portraiture invested in the work of this period, not only because of the similarities between the artist's eyes and those in the drawings, but also because the eyes and the hands are the essential probes and tools of the artist; the eyes invite information in and also give it out; the hands are more utilitarian but they have a similar purpose - they are like antennae which explore the world. Their restlessness in his drawings reveal the artist's eagerness to discover and to acquire knowledge of the surrounding world. These qualities are particularly evident in a 1945 drawing (Plate 13), and another from 1946 (Plate 14). In the former, the artist depicts three figures grappling with their surroundings. The hands of the two figures in the centre are outstretched, feeling, fumbling, and probing. The fingers of the figure on the left are entwined around each other indicating confusion in his attempt to come to terms with truth and reality. In particular, the eyes of the large central figure display the characteristics of Tapies. In the latter drawing is an open hand against a cloud-like atmosphere: each finger ends in a spiral which forms an eye in place of each nail.

#### THE FIRST PAINTINGS.

The real starting point of Tapies' painting comes in 1945 as a result of the early 'synthetic drawings'. In these works he uses thick and densely mixed materials and creates textures reminiscent of Van Gogh's and Dubuffet's. As yet the work was indecisive, with its highly worked Ingres-type drawing, the graphically expressive quality of Van Gogh, its Fauve-like contorted attitudes, and the manual deformities which call to mind the hands in Picasso's and Miró's paintings. The personal element exists in the development of the frontal icon and the consistent self-portrait theme. Their communication is direct and instinctive. In their strength of structure they are like negro sculpture (Plate 15), and the mannered arabesque of the pupils in the eyes recall drawings done by schizophrenics. Some of the heads have biblical connotations; there is one with a face



which has two profiles - this is a reference to the Trinity.

One name comes to mind when one considers the structure of these paintings - that of Munch. The correspondence which exists between these first works of Tapies and those of Munch is in their stylistic relationship; the spontaneity of execution; the frontalism; the sense of violence; the writing and calligraphic marks used as a means of expression as well as evidence of the effects of materials. In these paintings there is a decision to reject civilized conventions and subtleties and the results are somewhat anti-aesthetic. However Tapies' purpose is validated, because of his sincere efforts to strip away tradition and convention in order to attain a more truthful image. In 1946 Tapies was beginning to grapple with the ideas of Nietzsche and Ibsen and the message of existentialism with its roots in the absurd and 'the man who lives to die'. While existential thought harmonized with much of Tapies' cultural and emotional ideas, he was in the beginning, unable to communicate it in his work continuing with the icons which he had outgrown - they were now more terrible than ever with heartless faces, obsessive eyes and masks turned upside down. In his 1946 painting "Zoom" (Plate 16) the paint is used thickly, providing a heavily textured surface, which relates directly to the image. It conveys emotional stress in which textured surface outlines emanate from the figure's head like a halo. However this use of paint became too limited for Tapies and led him to use raw materials stuck on to the picture. This development was his first encounter with 'Matter Painting' and without knowing it he was in fact preceding the fashionable movement of 'Arte Povera' (art which employs the use of mean or poor materials). So Tapies expressed existentialism in terms of human expression which links him with Dostoevsky in the search for truth.

The Cubists and later the Surrealists had introduced the idea of sticking actual objects onto a picture surface, thus creating a new type of texture. Picasso had made pictures out of his old shirt tails, Braque used objects collected from dustbins and Schwitters too had used rubbish. In 1945 Tapies began to use raw materials which he stuck to the picture surface. He would collect disregarded objects and rubbish from the streets to use in the work. It was his strong sense of design, coupled with his knowledge of Zen, which gave him the ability to transform the meanest materials into something of significance. Unlike Schwitters who transformed rubbish into a romantic, elegant assemblage, Tapies thought his meaning would be more obvious if he used monochrome, rather than rich colour, and scratches and scribbles instead of calligraphic marks and glossy finishes. This early encounter with matter reveals Tapies' continuing attempts to find artistic forms and processes to give physical reality to an envisioned world. The dialogue between object and concept begins with works such as "Box of Strings", 1945-46, (Plate 18), and "Thread and Curtain Ring Collage", 1946, (Plate 19), which are reminiscent of Mallerme's work and Duchamp's twine environment of 1942.

This search for the synthesis of the personal and the universal

is also evident in "Newsprint Cross", 1946-47, (Plate 20), and "Head on Scorched Wood", 1947, (Plate 21). The former echoes the random nature of Arp's "Collage with Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance". In the latter, though, the cross is an emblem and a sign, made from an actual newsprint obituary column. This reference to death, the inverted print and the relationship of the cross shape to the initial T correspond to the idea that 'the more fearful the situation, the more basic the need to reverse it'(2).

In "Head on Scorched Wood" the halo over the head of the figure and the bird-fish form suggests a religious reference to spiritual life and the Resurrection. In the mirror the figure, representing the artist, sees aspects of past and present self, and in conjunction with the actual scorching of the wood; emanates the 'alchemic element of meditation between all forms that vanish and all forms that are created' (3).

In using matter, which is the chief character of his work, in conjunction with the human icons, Tapies hoped to convey that human lives are as frail and transient and subject to change as the disregarded materials he incorporates into the work. He began to express this transience of human nature and his sense of anguish in living in these collages. Tapies' work always had a tendency to dwell on tragic aspects of his life, his experiences of loss during the Civil War and the Hitler invasions made him produce images of crosses, graffiti, scribbles and portraits that signified memories of people, reminders of their existence at one time, eliminated now by destructive means - a theme from Kafka.

In 1947 when Tapies decided to join the avant-garde movement, he was still using matter as a self-portrait. However his work was showing signs of moving into a new phase. This new development suggested the influence of the 'Magic Painting' of the Surrealists.



FOOTNOTES.

- 1) Pere Gimferrer: Tapies and the Catalan Spirit, p. 9.
- 2) Jose Luis Barrio-Garay: Thirty-three Years of His Work, p. 6.
- 3) Jose Luis Baario-Garay: Thrity-three Years of His Work, p. 6.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE MAGIC PERIOD.



## THE MAGIC PERIOD.

### The Development of Magic Painting.

The impact of the avant-garde began to show itself in the work of Tapies in about 1947. The influence of the Blaues had not immediately tempted him away from his sombre, austere, and anti-aesthetic style. However, the magic of the Surrealists painters, in particular Max Ernst, Paul Klee, and Joan Miró, were now having considerable claim on his attentions. This, in conjunction with his growing knowledge of what was happening in the art world outside Spain, and the influence of Brossa's work, wooed him away from his original background, and from what Tapies considered to be the physical, mental, and sexual disorder in his life, and from the former trend of thought and style of his work.

The Surrealist ideal of dreams and the subconscious being an intrinsic clue to reality, was one which appealed to both Tapies and Brossa. The discovery of the relationship between reality and fantasy excited their imaginations, inspiring Tapies to produce fantasy visions and in his enthusiasm and admiration for his friend's talent, Brossa gave to Tapies' new works romantic and elaborate titles, as we shall see.

And so Tapies became a painter of fantasies and dreams which germinated from the earlier works. These new pictures had a crudity about them in their colour and composition, which expressed their symbolic meaning. In "Drawing", 1947, (Plate 22), the image of the tree represents a cosmic Tree of Life. The fact that it has human characteristics, such as eyes, means that it can also be interpreted as an alchemic Tree of Knowledge. In the centre is a nude figure standing on a globe like a high priest or a primal Godhead. The duality of this hermaphrodite seems to dispel the conflict between male and female which exists in the drawings of the early phase. Between the breasts is a medallion which bears Tapies' monogram. This symbolises the identification of the artist with the linking of both sexes. The lion is symbolic of masculine qualities and is equated with the sun and the owl, whose erect penis is similar to the figure's; the cat and the moon are symbols of predatory fate and lust; and the two-headed serpent represents the energy of the feminine principle and the feminine qualities in man.

"Personage with Cats", 1948, (Plate 23), displays the familiar elements of self-portraiture in Tapies' art. The central nude figure no longer has a bisexual nature. The sun and the words which radiate from the male figure's mouth are now abstracted and more pictorial, as is the Tree of Life or Tree of Knowledge which is held by the figure; the branches now have a sail-like character. There are two cats - one lying at the figure's feet and the other held by a leash looking out at the viewer. The blooming bush on the left and the cats are linked to a womb-like shape in the ground by a system of roots or forces. This seems to imply that they have female sex, and thus a definite

determination of opposites is established between the cats and the figure.

The expansion of the magic paintings coincided with the execution of Tapies' first etchings. The paintings display a mysticism typical of the artist with the spiritualism of Kandinsky and the genetics of Klee. His practice of romanticism and romantic attitude are evident in the way he endows everyday things with mystery and importance. In direct contrast to the first paintings of the Magic Period, the subsequent works show an elegance of line, form and colour and a delicacy of touch which would predominate the paintings of this time. This next stage in the development of the Magic Period was to be characterised by scenographic compositions, theatricality, unreal lunar-like landscapes, ghostly nocturnal atmospheres, enormous perspectives, and, as the term 'magic' implies, a sense of illusion and saucery. Ambiguity of form, a sense of barbarism and violence, and the self-portrait theme also pervade. At this time Tapies was telling his friends how he has attempting to "unite the whole cosmos in one sole image" (1). This, he felt, could only be done in an atmosphere of obscurity and mystery, which is why many of the paintings are night scenes. There is a change in idea and forms. Tapies' use of heavy brushwork, impasto, and collage is replaced by thin brushwork, illusionistic and scenographic space. His use of local colour is also replaced by luminosity, phosphorescence, and colours which create a magical atmosphere. Tapies says "When I cleaned a painted ground in order to apply another colour, I would discover phantasmal smoky luminosities and prismatic lights" (2).

These dramatic nocturnal compositions usually feature a man's head, though not explicitly. These human forms contain self-denoting features, as in a painting of 1948 (Plate 24). The composition is asymmetrical with the significant elements situated on the left and the night sky and stars on the right. The imagery is sinister and consists of the black sun in the centre of the work. Underneath is the body of an animal without a head, the body is covered with down and scales and has claw-like hands; the penis is erect and from under the tail there is a protuberance like a horn or crescent moon. Images of flying fish with hook-like scales, flying personages, underwater animals with horns in other works along with the scaled animal images in this piece come from oriental influences and the influences of the Piarist Fathers. Beside the black sun is a larger disembodied head suspended in the heavens. The features strongly resemble those of the artist and one can assume that it is a self portrait. There is a star on the forehead and a half moon under the eye on the left. The look of anger in the eyes and the bared teeth suggest that the painting is an expression of rage.

The theatricality of the work makes itself felt in the geometric forms which give the feeling of stage sets. The figures, though abstracted, distorted, and somewhat grotesque, have a balletic quality in the style of "Machine for Making the Birds Sing" by Klee, or "Harlequin's Carnival" by Miro. It is interesting to note how Tapies' earlier concern with line has progressed from



its earlier Ingres type quality; he now contrasts the differing qualities of line in the one piece. There are thickly painted lines, finely scratched lines which possess an etched character, broken, dotted, sharpened, sfumatic, and diffused lines (Plates 25 & 26). In "The Scoffer at Diamonds", we also see the introduction of hieroglyphics.

Tapies says that these nocturnal masses echo coffins, pin cushions, and buttoned padding of coffins. This is a reference to his childhood years spent at the convent. The nuns made the children file past a red velvet cushion in the form of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Sins, which were represented by pins, were stuck into the cushion and each of the children had to pull out a pin as a symbol of repentance. At this time Tapies was three years of age and was frightened and perturbed by this ritual. As a result, he would play a sado-masochistic game of revenge where he would stick pins into a little velvet pin cushion on his mother's sewing table and pull them out again. The aggressive element in his work is the artist's attempt to overcome all the macabre things and disturbing memories that frighten him, and he takes a sadistic delight in wounding them. This casts a nervous tension on the panorama of cracks, eyes, open mouths, doors, sexes, gaps, teeth and hairs.

In these night scenes there are many landscape elements, the trees by night and the strange foliage and undergrowth are images of Tapies' night-time excursions with Brossa in the woods of Montnegre and Vallvidrera.

Tapies' efforts to "unite with the cosmos" are displayed in a "Self-Portrait" of 1950 (Plate 30). It shows the artist himself, painted with an almost photographic realism, staring out at the viewer with a hypnotic mediumistic stare, which gives drama to the piece. This painting echoes the early 1944 portrait and displays the emphasis on hand and eye which dominated the work of the early phase. Here he is pointing to a torn-off corner of paper, which has his signature on it, defining the subject. The painting is remarkably skillful and echoes the style of Magritte, its basis exists in the idea of cosmic and tellurian unity being achieved when outlines of the subject are placed in unusual surroundings - in this case the vaporous nocturnal background akin to those of Miro.

In 1950 Tapies seemed to be developing a theme of closed space - in direct contradiction to the vast open planes of the Magic Period which preceded it. It was a period of peep holes, locks and keys, interiors, boxes, corridors, wardrobes, back rooms and chambers in which visions of men could be seen. The images came from Brossa and his interest in conjuring and the double-bottomed box often used by magicians, which intrigued Tapies. This period saw the production of such works as "The Trickery of Wotan". (Plate 31). In the latter there is a subtle blend of the optical illusion of Tanguy and the magic of Ernst, which become reminders of either a theatre or a cavern. The objects in these settings are also ambiguous resembling stage props and geometric shapes of impending abstraction.

The bed= motif which made its appearance in the early self portrait is seen again in "The Construction of Shah Abbas" (Plate 32). It is not presented as a place of sleep or rest. There is a boat-like stage set which calls to mind the sail in "Personage with Cats". Tapies refers to it as one of his 'votive objects'(3) - a magical object 'in which the represented does not play the role of representation'(4). The images create their own reality and express spiritual needs of the individual.

In these paintings as in "The Barbershop of the Damned", we see the allusions to walls, windows, and doors, which would be so important later on.

#### Fait-Divers.

By 1950 Tapies was becoming recognised and was exhibiting alongside Miró. A scholarship from the French government enabled him to visit Paris where he met Picasso, who was of great help to him. Tapies began to take an interest in Marxism. This was the first time he had been exposed to international influences, which would bring about changes in his work. When he returned to Barcelona and resumed his painting, elements of magic still existed in his work, but he was beginning to abandon the self portrait and mythological themes and iminences and was now aiming more at the isolation and cruelty of society. This is known as Tapies' period of "Fait-Divers." His themes included the manifestation of wealth and power, and he treated social and historical problems which were to reach a peak in his work in 1952. Subsequent to this Tapies returned to using matter in his work as well as adapting an abstract oeuvre as opposed to the figurative we have dealt with up to this point.



FOOTNOTES.

- 1) Roland Penrose: Tapies, p. 30.
- 2) Jose Luis Barrio-Garay: Thirty-three Years of his Work, p. 6.
- 3) Jose Luis Barrio-Garay: Thirty-three Years of his Work, p. 8.

In Spain votive objects are inanimate objects or pictures depicting events in the life of a particular saint which are hung in the chapel where the saint is worshipped.

- 4) Jose Luis Barrio-Garay: Thirty-three Years of His Work, p. 8.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE MOVE TO ABSTRACTION.



## MATTER PAINTING.

Matterism: "Name given to a style of painting which exploits the evocative powers of material using a heavy impasto in the manner of Dubuffet and embedding in it materials such as shells, sand, slate, iron fillings, etc. for the sake of their expressive force" (1).

Most Spanish artists related to a European style beyond their own borders, a style which has become known as "Matter Painting". "Its characteristics include the use of pigment with a specific gravity in excess of the normal factor of oil paint. Plaster and plastic grounds, paint freighted with sand, or marble dust, or just very thick paint, create dense continuous pastes" (2).

The central figure of Matter Painting is Jean Dubuffet, whose exhibition "Mirobolus, Madame et Cie, Hautes Pates" was held in Paris in 1946. The material of these paintings is a dense, earthen paste so turgid that signs could be made only by graffiti, incising the high paste, or by modelling in shallow relief. The scarred and substantial surface widely influenced subsequent European art. In Matter Painting texture takes on many of the expressive functions usually carried by colour or by brushwork. Dubuffet, for example, has referred to his series of "Corps des Dames", painted in 1950, in these terms:

"....textures evoking human flesh....and other textures which have nothing to do with human bodies, suggesting rather the earth or things like bark and roots" (3).

Matter Painting affirmed the simple material basis of art at a time when artists in Europe and America were cutting down on elaborate stylistic apparatus which they had inherited from early twentieth century art. In America the simplifications tended, technically, toward a re-affirmation of pure painterly means; in Europe the thick paint revolution, with its massive planes, reduction of depth, and sluggish movement, led painting in the direction of relief sculpture. Hence the recurring use of the wall, both as an image, and as a flat worn surface in European art. Dubuffet's lithographs "Les Murs" (done in 1945 and published later), are an early exploration of the wall, not as a maker of boundaries or a protector of property, but as a surface modelled by time and people. Because it is a natural carrier of human marks, and because it is both flat and substantial, the wall has been a governing image in Matter Painting.

Tapies' works do not so much represent objects as resemble areas, places like city walls, the earth's crust, racked sand gardens in Zen Buddhist temples and archeological sites. Thus the literalness of the medium, more characteristic of sculpture than of strictly defined painting, which takes Matter Painting toward relief sculpture, is at the heart of Tapies' imagery.

Certainly Tapies would have had early access to Matter Painting. Apart from the visual information provided by magazines and

catalogues, he was also in Paris in 1950. By placing himself against an international, rather than a national framework, his uniqueness was not reduced. On the contrary, by citing an individual within the most extensive available context, we are approaching the real operating conditions of the modern artist with his easy grasp of the world.

In the 1950s Tàpies began to explore again, the expressive and physical qualities of materials in abstract compositions. The first paintings of this development were born out of a strong desire to reach a higher level of revelation. The period of "Fait-Divers" had heralded the break away from the style of the magic paintings, but now came a time of intense exploration of new and personal methods for Tàpies, which he conducted in his little bedroom studio. Tàpies refers to this time between 1952 - 1953 in an essay called "Communication on the Wall". For him it was a time of total solitude.

Indicative of the strong religious aspect in his culture - despite his indifference to the concept - is the allusion he makes to this spell as his own "forty days in the desert - a desert of which I still do not see an end" (4). He describes the "desperate fever of rage" (5) in which he took experiments of form to manic extremes. He regarded each canvas as a battlefield on which marks, scars and wounds multiplied to infinity. It suddenly came as a surprise to him that all the frantic movement, the gesticulation and the incessant dynamism, that came from the drawings, the strokes, the divisions and sub-divisions he inflicted over every part of the canvas, suddenly underwent a change in quality. The eye no longer needed to perceive detail as they cohesed into a uniform mass. Out of the ardent ebullience there came a silence.

When he attempted to attain the silence directly, he discovered a whole new perspective, a landscape of microcosmic images in the dust. He came to the realization that the differences that separate us from each other, are the same as those which distinguish one grain of sand from another. The symbolism of merging oneself with dust, which is the deep identity and inner depth that joins man with the nature, as stated in Zen teaching, contributed to Tàpies' constant unity with the cosmos theme, as man comes from the earth and ashes and returns to them. There was a form of triumph of the existentialist theme of Nothingness. To his great surprise, the paintings had evolved into walls.

A major factor contributing to his new direction was the impact of the war. His form of expression involved a mood of defiance and a determination to endure life and to understand its mysteries. Tàpies was not alone in this mood as painters, like the Spaniard, Millares, was using matter to depict the frustration and pageantry of Spain. The Parisian, Frautier, employed builders' materials to obtain a disfigured surface finished with pastel tints; Jean Dubuffet, with his caustic humour, used ungracious materials to depict human beings with sharp cynicism and force, while in Italy Alberto Burri was producing elegant and dramatic compositions in which the charring and lacerating of the meanest of materials exuded a strange kind



of beauty. In 1961 Andre Pieyre de Mandiargues had this comment to make on Tapies, Millares, and Burri:

"With one as with the others the role of the material is not gratuitous, but complementary to a spiritual vision as intense as that of poets and mystics, and, if I were not afraid of insulting them, I would say that these three painters are perhaps the most religious of our time" (6).

The use of the term 'religious' is somewhat unconventional here and points to the conception of matter and spirit. Tapies had discovered that the unity of the two could be achieved with directness and eloquence, by returning to its raw and primitive condition, where it could speak through a fundamental language and thus its meaning would be self evident. Tapies knows that some knowledge of the structure of reality can be gained from the most commonplace materials such as earth, ashes, and dust.

".....in an insignificant piece of clay one may see a whole universe" (7).

#### THEMES.

In his reflections on the nature of matter and of the human spirit, the spaces, fields and planes in his paintings began to evoke architectural and mural properties - to his great surprise. A list of Tapies imagery in 1945 - 46, includes the "increase of mural qualities, architectural ornaments, scaling walls, walls with bullet holes, street graffiti, more doors, corrugated metal doors, shop windows, ruins, and an increase of powder images" (8). Other broad thematic categories include human presence, man's furnishings and language and the four elements. This clarifies Tapies development of a specific repertoire of imagery.

#### COMMUNICATION ON THE WALL.

The image of the wall (as evidence of the presence of man) has had a particular importance for Tapies. Walls, windows, and doors are a prominent feature of his work. In 1969 he wrote the essay "Communication on the Wall", at the request of the review "Essais", for an issue devoted to themes on the idea of the wall as a form of expression in contemporary art.

When asked for explanations of such imagery, he immediately points out that he has, in fact, made fewer walls, windows, and doors, than people seem to think! His response can be interpreted in two ways: the first is one of apparent defence, a reminder that the walls, windows, and doors, have a perfect right to be in his pictures, and should be considered as the basic materials of the artistic experience. That is to say they are elements included in the artists' store of imagery resulting from his experience of the tangible world and an emotional one. The second sense in which the answer might be interpreted is as a warning of the artist's intention that these images, as in most works of art, should never be seen as an end in themselves, but should be seen as a "springboard, a means for attaining more



distant objectives" (9). Nonetheless Tapies acknowledges the existence of these images - "like so many of the images that appear in my pictures" (10) - and does not attempt to deny the fact. However he does not wish the viewer to think that the images are arbitrary and devoid of a subject.

Tapies feels that he must remain ambiguous on the question of there being a return (for him) to the 'subject'. He points out that due to the structure of artistic communication today things, elements, or images are sometimes there, and sometimes not, "appearing and disappearing, coming and going, entwining, releasing associations.....Everything is possible!" (11). This communication takes place in an infinitely larger field than that which is delineated by the size of the picture, or indeed, by what materially exists in the picture. Thus the work is merely a 'support', inviting the viewer to participate in a far broader experience.

"It is a talisman that builds or demolishes walls in deep corners of our spirit, that can open and shut the doors and windows in the mansions of our helplessness, our slavery and our freedom" (12).

Therefore the 'subject' may be found in the picture, or on the other hand, it may be found only in the mind of the viewer. He then proceeds to tell how the evocative power of mural imagery gradually manifested itself in his consciousness and took specific shape in his mind. The relevance of this image goes right back through his life, having its beginnings in his adolescence and early youth. Tapies grew up in the time of Civil War, he was only thirteen when General Franco commenced his campaign to crush Republican government in Spain. The Civil War was not only devastating from the point of view of the bloodshed, the bombardments, destruction, torture and death, but it also took its toll on family relationships, causing many rifts. The mistrust and demoralisation which resulted, had worse effects than the more blatant horrors of war. Even in his own family there were the beginnings of a cleavage. Antoni's grandfather, the former deputy mayor, was forced into hiding from the anarchists, owing to his earlier displays of royalist tendencies. On the other hand, his father, who had prospered as a lawyer before the war, left the bar to take up an important post in the Republican provincial government.

The end of Franco's war came with the fall of Barcelona. Shortly after this Hitler's invasions began. The events of both wars, such as he experienced during his formative years, could not fail to leave scars on the development of a sensitive youth. A sense of misery, isolation, and suspicion reigned over the young man, resulting from the loss of family and friends and defeat by a fascist dictator opposed to the ideals which Tapies regarded as his, and indeed, every man's right.

With this inheritance in mind it is little wonder why he describes feeling....."shut up by walls behind which I lived through years of war. The dramatic suffering of adults and all

the cruel fantasies of those of my own age, who seemed abandoned to their own impulses in the midst of so many catastrophes, appeared to inscribe themselves on the walls around me. The walls of the city, which family tradition made me consider so much my own, were witnesses of the martyrdom and inhuman sufferings inflicted on our people" (13).

Undoubtedly the impact of the war on Tapies' city was heightened by the cultural associations with that city. Gradually he absorbed ideas on the image of the wall which ranged from archaeological publications to the note-books of Leonardo, the intellectual demolitions of Dada and the photographs of graffiti by Brossa. "Not surprisingly all these contributed to the fact that his first works of 1945 already displayed something of the graffiti of the streets and a whole world of protest - "repressed, clandestine, but full of life - a life which was also to be found on the walls of my country" (14).

Arriving at the image of the wall was the result of a reaction against informal, anarchic art, an attempt to escape from the excesses of abstraction and the attraction of something more concrete. He saw this development as a way of coming into contact with more primitive spheres and the purest and most fundamental elements of painting, which the masters of the previous generation had forced him to look at. Perhaps some strange destiny had been written into his name, as Tapies is a Catalan word which means walls. To the artist they presented a wealth of possible deviations, "separating, cloistering, wailing walls, prison walls, witnesses of the passage of time; smooth, serene, white surfaces; old, tortured, decrepit surfaces; signs of the imprint of men, objects or the natural elements; the sensation of combat, of effort, of destruction or cataclysm; or of construction, springing up, balance; remains of love or pain, of revulsion, of disorder; the romantic glamour of ruins; the contribution made by organic elements, forms suggesting natural rhythms and the spontaneous movement of matter; the sense of landscape and the suggestion of the fundamental unity of all things; the generalization of matter; the assertion and estimation of the things of this earth; the possibility of various combinations of great masses; a sensation of failing, of sinking, of expansion, of concentration; rejection of the world, inner contemplation, annihilation of the passions, silence, death; tearings and tortures, bodies drawn and quartered, human remains: equivalences of sounds, clawings, scrapings, explosions, shots, blows, hammerings, shouts, resonances, echoes in space; meditation on a cosmic theme, reflection through the contemplation of the earth, the magma, the lava, the ashes; battlefield; garden; playing fields; destiny of the ephemeral..."(15).

Tapies was surprised when he discovered a work, written by the founder of Zen, called "Contemplation on the Wall of Mahayana". Zen temples have gardens of sand which form stirrations or bands comparable to the furrows in some of the pictures. According to Buddhist philosophy too, the earth is sometimes placed in a



frame, in a hole, or on a wall, or in ashes. The strips and grooves of the Zen temple sand gardens also proved to be an inspiration for Tobey and Pollock.

#### OPENINGS.

An aspect of the wall which has always fascinated Tapies is the mystery of what lies behind it, as well as the idea of escaping to freedom, and penetrating its surface. The wall is therefore a plane which is open to attack, either from the elements or from war; it can also reveal history - not only in the architectural sense - but also of people; lovers' names carved in, graffiti, clear or obscured, initials, numbers, signs, stains, obscenities, all accumulate on the surface like wrinkles on a face. Walls also imply buildings to Tapies, who grew up surrounded by splendid Catalan architecture and the triumphs of the Catalan architect, Gaudi. Although Tapies admired him greatly he was more interested in the openings, breaches, archways, doors, and windows, open or closed - than the monumental construction - whichever way, they imply a world of beyond.

Although Tapies presents his ideas with incredible simplicity, it would be a grave mistake to give simple interpretations to the work. The pieces are deliberately ambiguous, and the lack of titles, which would provide a clue to his thought, makes things more difficult. If we consider paradox then the work becomes more readable. A doorway traditionally implies an opening, an entrance from one space to another. The fact that the door is drawn or incised into a wall, thus limiting the ability to pass through, is in itself a paradox. He insists on its metaphysical character as a division between two worlds. The doors indicate that inside and outside are the same or of equal significance, and thus, they become a means of stating by paradox the essential duality and unity of all things, and the "existence of opposites" (16).

The image of the window has associations with the eye and light. Surprisingly though, as an architectural feature it usually appears as a barrier to light, blocked, or covered up by a cloth stuck to its surface. The 1966 piece "Light into Density" (Plate 38) is more expressive of an open window, although the space it looks out on is opaque. In "Violet with Rectangular Hole", 1970-1971, an oblong hole is cut out of the centre of the mauve canvas but it looks out onto total darkness.



## FURNITURE.

The morphology of furniture undergoes considerable development. Tapies sometimes uses the real object or part of it or else he manipulates matter to imply it. An example of these assemblages of ready made objects can be seen in "Metal Door and Violin" (Plate 40). The theme here is the suggestion of two different environments, the door, indicating an exterior one, and the violin indicating an interior one, though they are related.

The bed which was a visualistic theme from the "Trickery of Wotan", is one of predominance in Tapies' work. It is presented in its entirety or is represented by vertical forms which also suggest chairs or tables. These headboards, legs, supports, springs, mattresses and bedding signify a whole range of meanings, illness, repose, sleep, death, enclosure, sex, marriage, procreation, love, and birth - all of which are autobiographical as well as universal and are thus charged with emotion.

In "Great White Cage", 1965, (Plate 41) the sheets are personalized by Tapies' monogram. The darker used areas of the pillows suggest two people. "Headboard and Cloth", 1974, (Plate 42), shows an actual headboard with the sheet tied to it. The blood coloured stain on the floral sheet would seem to be an indication of virginity or fertility.

"Rose Painting", 1963, is an image of death. There is the imprint of the quilted lining of a coffin on the matter ground, as well as imprints of hinges and locks. The image is from a bronze coffin Tapies saw in his childhood.

## EROTICISM.

Tapies also treats themes of love and eroticism. In "Black and Red M", 1967, (Plate 43), the imprints of the headboard and supports of a bed in the matter-ground define the entire field. Against it is a large M in luminous red colour, which signifies a woman's legs parted. Between the legs are marks which are suggestive of ribs, and this is a silhouette of a kneeling man; the upper contour of his body is inscribed into the headboard and his lower half is in the flat area which echoes the M shape. The upper contour can also be read as the man lying between the woman's legs in copulation. Either way the images are a powerful metaphor of human life.

Chairs are a symbol of meditation and reflection, particularly reflection on one's own soul. The depiction of a second inverted image of a chair, in some pieces, implies the Zen process of heightening intuition through paradoxes and contradictions or a momentary insight into one's spirit.

Human violence is suggested by some of the works. In "Organic Painting", (1945), we are presented with flesh coloured matter on a white ground. The relief is partially covered with horsehair which has sexual connotations and the marks and scars resemble

branding scars.

In "Leg", the limb form is covered in gouges and lacerations and part of it is covered by a gauze bandage; and below the knee is one cut in the shape of a V. The edges of the leg blend into the purplish-black ground. Tapies explains the Zen Buddhist practice of contemplating the breaking up of the body after death. "In the Shape of a Leg", 1968, is reminiscent of this also.

#### WRITING.

Language is a recurrent motif and Tapies has been quick to appreciate the significance of anonymous graffiti that appears on the walls of Barcelona, signifying lovers messages, protests; and he adopted a similar method of communication. X is a mark denoting the signature of a person who was unable to write - an old practice familiar to most people. Tapies not only uses the X as a way of leaving his mark on the piece, but also as a symbol of cancellation, suppression or restriction.

Sometimes there is a sort of contrast between a small dense zone, and a larger, though less dense one. This is often created by the incorporation of graphic signs, for instance, a cross at one edge of a deserted composition. However Tapies refutes the idea that these compositions are an aesthetic quest for balance. He says that to put a mark on a smooth perfect surface made him feel as if he was marking it for destruction or rubbing something out or refusing it. He uses other graphisms in his work too, the letters M, A and T often appear. The M can signify "Mort" (death) or the M on the palm of the hand which is a mythical reference to unknown destiny. In "Blue and Bamboo", 1973, (Plate 53), the bamboo cane is a Chinese symbol for longevity and fertility - two intertwined hearts overlap the name 'Teresa', above, the Catalan word 'pinso' which means 'I think.'

In "M", 1960, (Plate 54), the M is made to look like a sheet or cloth in the shape of the letter M. It is monumental and dramatic as it approximates the size of shrouds hanging on crosses, on altars during Holy Week, and because of its death associations. But Tapies is also suggesting that death touches everybody and has done so by using his finger to inscribe his initial on one end of the M shroud and left an imprint of his fingers on the other. This is a reminder of the earlier concern with hands and touching. A and T are, of course, his own initials, but sometimes they can stand for Antoni and Teresa (his wife). In "Emblematic Blue", 1971 (Plate 55), the cloud becomes a phenomenon. The equation (A=A - B=B) can be understood in alchemic terms; A signifies the start of all things and B is the relation of the elements. The painting is stating that All is One.

"Painting" and the "Great Oval", 1956, (Plates 56 & 57) are examples of the first real presence of walls. The former suggests a stone wall which has been subjected to time. "Great Oval" is like a huge stone column. In both paintings -



especially the first, traces of human presence exist, comprising of marks, idiograms, and hieroglyphs. Tapies refers to these as cultural reminiscences. As a child he remembers being fascinated by the wedged shaped writing of Babylonia and Assyria, and recalls the mural quality of such works as the "Stalae of Hammurabi". In the late fifties Tapies introduced the imprint of stalae with wedged shaped characters into his own work.

For Tapies the language and signs come about automatically. We have mentioned the letters, initials, and hieroglyphics which occur, but the range of language elements is much wider. It includes graffiti, geometric figures, and signs, calligraphies, figures, finger marks, nail marks, holes, line, dotted lines, dashes, sentences of Juan Brossa's poetry, mathematical signs, automatic words, which communicate ideas or feelings.

#### CATALONIA.

The aspect of Catalonia as an influence on Tapies has its basic foothold in the theme of his homeland, which came to be of capital importance towards the end of the sixties. As an area rich in the relics of ancient reknown it provided a wealthy source of influential styles and ideologies. Evidence of Greek, Roman, Carthaginian and the Moor civilizations are at the core of Catalan culture and their remains can be seen in the dominating thirteenth century cathedral and medieval palaces of the gothic quarter of Barcelona, known as the Barri Gotic. The Romanesque frescos and carvings and the very distinctive Catalan Gothic style of architecture can be seen in the churches, palaces, domestic and commercial buildings of the city. Owing to this wealth of culture and tradition and Barcelona's position as the capital of Catalonia, its inhabitants possess a passionate pride in their country and its inheritance. The Catalans are a very nationalistic people maintaining their native language of Catalan. The nature of Catalonia in his work is as an assertion of culture, language, and identity, born out of the threat of its destruction, abolition and loss.

This can be seen in works such as "The Catalan Spirit", (Plate 63), and in "Inscriptions and Four Strokes on Sackcloth", 1971 - 72, (Plate 64). The colouration echoes the national flag and written on it are words and names that tell of Tapies whole life and development.

Paintings such as "Sardana", 1972, (Plate 65), show the footprints of the steps taken by people in a dance. It is the "Sardana" which is a national Catalan dance. The names of those taking part in it are inscribed into the ground where each person is standing.

"If I paint as I do, it is primarily because I am a Catalan. But, like many others, I am touched by the political tragedy as a whole. It manifests itself in my work, even when I do not intend it to" (17).



FOOTNOTES.

- 1) Harold Osborne: Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Art.
- 2) Lawrence Alloway: Antoni Tapies: Work done between 1945 and 1961.
- 3) Lawrence Alloway: Antoni Tapies: Work done between 1945 and 1961.
- 4) Antoni Tapies: La Pratique de l'Art, 1974, pp. 12 -14.
- 5) Antoni Tapies: La Pratique de l'Art, 1974, pp. 12 -14.
- 6) Roland Penrose: Tapies, p.48.
- 7) Roland Penrose: Tapies, p.48.
- 8) Jose Luis Barrio-Garay: Thirty-three Years of His Work, p. 10.
- 9) Antoni Tapies: La Pratique de l'Art, 1974, pp. 12 - 14.
- 10) Antoni Tapies: La Pratique de l'Art, 1974, pp. 12 - 14.
- 11) Antoni Tapies: La Pratique de l'Art, 1974, pp. 12 - 14.
- 12) Antoni Tapies: La Pratique de l'Art, 1974, pp. 12 - 14.
- 13) Antoni Tapies: La Pratique de l'Art, 1974, pp. 12 - 14.
- 14) Antoni Tapies: La Pratique de l'Art, 1974, pp. 12 - 14.
- 15) Antoni Tapies: La Pratique de l'Art, 1974, pp. 12 - 14.
- 16) Roland Penrose: Tapies, p. 60.
- 17) Antoni Tapies: La Pratique de l'Art, 1974, pp. 85 - 87.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The outside world is familiar with the contributions of Picasso and Miró and the personal cubist realizations of Juan Gris, to the world of art. However, these artists and their contributions are merely "peaks of the range". This range stretches back through Goya, through Velasquez, through Zurbarán and Medieval Catalan painting, to the cave art of Altamira, and Isidro Nonell y Moturiol, whose non-figurative researches were essentially linked to the abstract. His work was an embodiment of the credo that "Art should be born of the tool and the raw material and should keep the trace of the tool and the struggle between tool and material. Man should speak but the tool and the material speak also" (1). For the young men of Spain, particularly Tapiés, Nonell represents a revered precursor.

Tapiés was the first of a new generation of Spanish artists in their twenties and thirties to reach an international audience. Since the first one-man show in New York in 1953, the Spanish contribution to art, world-wide, had escalated considerably and critical opinion had unified them all as a new "school". A national group with a strong local identity had been set up and contrasted with the allegedly smooth flow of international abstract art.

The equalizing of Spanish art with international movements throughout the rest of the world, had been achieved mainly by emphasis on a presumed national image. This image was a continuation of the romantic love of Spain which started in the nineteenth century. As a place, the peninsula was evoked as barren, dry, rocky and brown - and all of these characteristics could then be detected in Spanish art. The Spanish palette thus became a metaphor of the Spanish earth. As for the national temperament - this was described as austere, (as in the sixteenth century when the Spanish court fashion was for black) but violent, (all the blood and ritual of the bullfight). This is typical of the way in which Spanish art has been identified with a romantic, geo-cultural presence, as if the real artist were Spain working through her artists: her passive agents.

Spanish and non-Spanish critics alike have been responsible for circulating this vivid but unverifiable image. Tapiés, however, repudiated his connections with other Spanish artists on the occasion of an official exhibition in London, sponsored by Spanish and British governments. He felt that it was, perhaps, time to consider Spanish artists more objectively as individuals and in relation, not to their own country, but to the general pattern of post-war art.

Looking back, we can see how Tapiés has pursued youthful aspirations and dreams. He sought the absolute and discovered the expressive power of matter, of language, of images of the universe and of man, and these he redefines in his work. His art took on the form of meditation, as new ideas on these themes called for the development of new forms, in which matter and ideas are brought together to signify relationships.



Anyone looking at Tapies' art for the first time is likely to find himself or herself out of their depth, as the artist is exploring a universe which does not provide the usual points of reference. It is difficult to reconcile the different stages of his work. However, with a proper understanding of its foundations - from the early phase to the first encounter with matter, and the magic period, through to the later return to matter and abstraction - one can see the unity of purpose throughout every stage. A study of his work reveals an extraordinary density of content which radiates a mysteriously strong attraction which has stressed its shock value. This is the reason why many observers of Tapies' work have spoken of his 'magical' power. These vast surfaces, like untilled earth, some black, some pale, are not merely works of art. Tapies' creativity has managed to concentrate an intensely vivid and personal experience in each of them and has proceeded to make it communicable. It is obvious that the secret of the magical fascination which these haunting surfaces exert, derives not only from their content but also from the surfaces and textures.

In his essay "Nothing is Mean", Tapies discusses the difficulties of trying to explain his art and its purpose. In his oeuvre he voices his intentions and convictions. He is not a religious man yet his work possesses a spiritualism - he calls this pan-naturalism. His view of the world is implicit in his work. We can conclude that the art of Antoni Tapies is directed towards metaphysical and human goals; the union of man with nature and the importance of man's participation in everything.

FOOTNOTES.

- 1) Antoni Tapies: Mixed Media Works on Paper.

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