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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FORM AND CONTENT IN TAPIES WORK

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INTRODUCTION

Tapies' world is present in the range of materials he uses. The materials are iconography of the suffering and anguish of his people due to the effects of the Civil war in Spain and World War 11. The influence of the East has always been of significance, and this element comes across mainly through his imagery and themes.

Tapies' wall like surfaces of plaster, glue, sand, accentuated with scratches, signs, lines, give the works a stratified relief. The tactile quality gives his 'walls' a charm conducive to meditation. However Tapies' work is often subject to superficial and stereotypical interpretations. The most common of these is the association of his paintings with earth colours, tactile qualities and the use of everyday materials as media. Early critics labelled his work as 'matter painting'. Many of his contemporaries or post-war artists were also coined under 'matter painting'. Thus it is necessary to view Tapies' work alongside his direct contemporaries, with reference to the effects of the wars. I will also discuss Tapies' background and early years which are vital in understanding the development of his personal style in the 50s. It is not a coincidence that Tapies' painting began to receive an international audience at the time that an interest in Zen Buddhism and Oriental philosophies were reawaking in the West. Tapies interest in the Orient began when he was a teenager, in the late thirties and early forties. He found in it's literature an alternative to the religious dogmatism that dominated Spain at that time. Thus the influence from the East has been a continued source of inspiration. Tapies' work will be looked at largely from the mid fifties to the seventies. During this phase, which is approximately twenty years, the development of Tapies work under the influence of the East and his own direct circumstances will be examined. Chapter 11 is mainly concerned with the influences of the East and the West on his imagery, and how in the final analysis he unites both. The

final chapter is concerned with his themes which again relate to his Eastern influences and his own personal environment. Throughout the major areas, I have mentioned the manner in which Tapies manipulates his materials, and some of his techniques. This aspect of his work is an underlying part of the overall thesis. However I feel, it is important to understand how the artist approached his work from a technicial point of view, because his materials and his method of work are vital clues to his aims and intentions. It is through the physical process and the materials used that he achieves a sense of mystery and presence.

CHAPTER 1

TAPIES BACKGROUND & WESTERN INFLUENCES

The general consensus in European artists work after the Spanish Civil War and World War 11 was a feeling of tragedy and suffering which had been fundamental to everyday life. There was a sense of isolation with the world or the artists own alienated state. Many of the works at this time evoke this mournful sensation of mans inner aloneness and fear. Ruined bodies, anguished features were a familiar sight to the European man.

THE EARLY YEARS

Tapies was at an extremely vu nerable age when General Franco began his campaign to crush the Republican government of Spain. He was left at the end of the war feeling alienated in a shattered country under an oppressive leader. He had to face a fascist dictator who was opposed to the idea of freedom and independance which Tapies and his aquaintances had grown up to consider as part of their heritage. He too was a victim of family loss and friends. Even his native Catalonian flag was a forbidden symbol. Hopes of a Catalonia independant of the ancient oppression of the central government of Madrid were completely gone. Barcelona was reduced to a city marked with the physical violance of the war and the stillness of its people. Tapies had a strong hatred of the oppressive severity of his government, who had absolute power and were backed by the army and the church and an animosity against bourgeoise complacency. This sense of life and death inbred in every corner of Tapies' city , has been very influential artistically and has always intrigued him. His work evokes deep feelings about his native environment, its architecture, its landscape, its history and intellectual, social and economic traditions. These feelings are the direct result of the strong impressions created in his mind during the upheaval in Spain. The attachment to Catalonia is an innate instinct in Catalonians who have

a proud ancient tradition. In "Communication Concerning the Wall", Tapies described how the evocative quality of mural images initially took shape in his mind.

"First there are memories that come from my adolescence and early youth shut up by the walls between which I lived throughout the years of the war. The dramatic suffering of the adults and all the cruel fantasies of those of my own age, who were abandoned to their own impulses seemed to inscribe themselves on the walls around me. The walls of the city which family tradition made me consider so much my own, were witness of the martyrdoms and inhuman sufferings inflicted on our people".[1]

As early as 1945 Tapies said his work
"had something of the graffiti of the street and a whole world of protest - repressed clandestine, but full of life".[2]

Tapies early work began under the influence of the Surrealists to Abstraction and matter painting in the fifties. His initial period from 1945 to 1948 was characterised by images to denote an envisioned world and artistic processes which gave it physical reality. He was greatly attracted to Surrealism and its basic concepts into the sources of inspiration, the subconscious and the world of dreams. The years from 1948 to 1950 have been described as his Magical period. His paintings evoked a sense of mystery through his drawing and colour effects. Technically his work was characterised by colourful luminous effects which enhanced his light and dark modelling, thin brushwork and illusionistic space. This type of work replaced his thick pigment, grattage, brushmarks and his handling of more expressionistic colour. The paintings were very theatrical and almost suggested backdrops for stage scenery. His paintings also described scenes of mysterious shadows, trapdoors and boxes with false bottoms. This indicated

that the idea of metamorphis, which was to become quite significant in his later work was important to him even at this early stage. Tapies admits the influence of Klees and miros work on him and the literary implications that his work of this period manifests.[3] Tapies poetic titles such as "The Conjuring of Wotan", The third transformation of Arromoc the Lion", "Boutique of the barbarism of the cursed and the elect", "Parafaragamus", also added to the magical or mythical connotations in this work where he is referred to as painter of fantasies and dreams. However titles such as "Box of Strings", "Thread and Curtain Ring Collage", "Newspaper Cross", from his early phase, illustrate his taste for worthless materials which was to become of major significance in his work. The poetical and metaphysical elements entering into his work relates to his interest in Zen Buddhism, Oriental Philosophies, Schopenhaur Nietche and Heidegger. The above implications combined with a sense of mystery come across in his work mainly through his material content and his treatment of the materials or his rendering of the image.

TAPIES AND POST WAR EUROPEAN ART

For most artists the war was six years of deprivation. There were material and informational shortages, travel restrictions and food rationing. The only cross cultural activity was military. The war reduced the contact that artists had with their own traditions. Access to museums and galleries was also restricted and friendships and discussions with fellow artists were disrupted.

"When we recall the conditions under which many artists worked during the second World War, we cannot help being deeply stirred by the perseverance with which they pursued the work that alone interested them".[4]

Haftmann indicates that most of the artists continued their own work, but were detached or helpless before the issues of the war. It must be remembered that the onset of another war meant that Tapies was further out into the background and possibilities of contact with the rest of Europe did not exist. It was during

this time of confinement that he first began to take an interest in Oriental Philosophies, Zen Buddhism and Existentialist ideas.

Despite the energies that were built up during the war and a sense that the energies of the earlier twentieth century were waiting to be recovered, Europe came together sluggishly. Artists deprivations were slowly overcome. The dominant note set by artists was that of survival, joined by anxiety and confusion, with an ambiguity common to responses initiated by dramatic events.
"It was as though the aftermath of World War 11 demanded that any idea of continuity or of starting again, could be conceived and justified in confrontation with mans origins and could only be developed if it pursued the one morally acceptable course - the break which could become a new point of departure".[5]
The inner need for direct communication as a result of the artists emotional state and a desire to break with traditional materials and forms implemented the improvisation of different or often crude materials. This aspect echoed the work of the Dadaists and gave new prominence to the work of Kurt Schwitters. He used the contents of his ash-can and wastepaper basket to make his sculpture and pictures.[6] The utilization of existing objects and materials isolated from their normal context and as a result altered in meaning, was seen in Tapies early Surrealist work and it reached its heights in the materialism of his mature paintings.

The Eupopean attachment to native land and strong feelings towards historical and political bach ound is translated into plastic form in various ways. However due to their background social standards and geographical positions, Eupopean artists can not be grouped together as a unit with similar concepts and influences. As a result of the war, the continent was divided into a Western and an Eastern stronghold. Western Europe was striving to find a new cultural identity whilst to the east of the iron curtain Russian Europeans tried to escape the political

domination of Russian Social Realism. Artists questioned their allegiance to Europe as an historical entity and their obligation to their own birthplace. It is the artists geographical position along with their individuality and their own personal experiences that separates and identifies their work. Through Tapies own experience of the war and deeply felt cultural roots, his work evokes a particular Spanish flavour. However his work has been related to various post-war European movements, Tachism, Art Informal, Matter Painting and Art Povera. Fautrier, Wols, Dubuffet, Burri and Millares have also been connected with these groups and were among the general radical wing of post-war European painters. The connection between Tapies work and such contemporaries was mainly through the visual impetus. This was revealed in their use of humble or often crude materials such as sand, rags, burlap, rough builders materials. Concern for surface texture and the medium itself emphasised a European attitude, but it is also appropriate to the attitudes that were formed due to direct surroundings and conditions. These new movements emphasised the artists connection with the landscape but were also related to the general upheaval and unrest.

The new trend in art, typifies what the critic Michel Tapie meant in 1952 when he published 'Un Art Autre'.[7] This was an argument for the really new in art, which developed after the war from circumstances totally different to traditional ones. Tapie classified Art Autre as

"art of high physicality and of primal iconography, the combination of which makes the skills of earlier twentieth century artists look frail and over laborated".[8]

Lawrence Alloway further clarifies Art Autre by saying there is "art and other art".[9] Tachism and Art Informal were associated with Art Autre. The process or action involved in painting and the improvisation of spontaneous, unplanned brush work were important aspects of these groups. Tachism placed more emphasis on irregular dabs of colour created spontaneously which expressed the emotional state of the artist.[10] Art Informal looked more an abstraction as an unconscious

form of calligraphy. Both groups were characterised by their tactile qualities and their emphasis on the unconscious and spontaniety.[11] *These aspects associated Tapies art with such groups.*

The exhibitions of work by Jean Fautrier and Wols in the 'Galerie Rene Drouin' in 1945 and of Jean Dubuffet's figure painting in the following year were the first examples of the new positions acclaimed by artists after the war. The crude and provocative nature of their work was merely a reflection of the fears of contemporary society. The animal instinct of mans hatred towards man was rawly expressed in their canvases. The French man Fautrier who like Tapies has been coined under Art Autre referred to victims of the Nazis and the huge departations during the war in the series of paintings l'Otages Rough builders materials or very exposed matter finished with delicate pastel tints acted as a metaphor of a corpse. The work placed great stress on the tactility of the painters materials and the evocative quality of the surface itself. Fautrier was able to rely on the surface qualities to make known the realities of the war without using conventional methods of traditional art. Tapies also presented his world or made known the realities of his experience through his range of materials. He penetrated his surfaces, scratched through the mortar or thick paint revealing the canvas or stretcher beneath, thus metaphorically describing his own inner desires. Wols handling of the surface, his violent scratching of the paint too were revelations of his inner turbulance and to the mess of his external world. During the war he suffered the humiliation of being confined as a German citizen in six French camps. Wols insensitive or often brilliant colours and the treatment of his paint were symbols of explosion and disintegration. The surfaces of Dubuttet's paintings resembled the cracked sidewalks and crumbling walls which relate visually to Tapies' work. Dubuffet was also influenced by the graffiti of the walls that surrounded him. The spontaneous marks gave him some of the motifs he employed in his "Corps de

Dames" series 1950 - 51. For Tapies the graffiti was another reminder of the mutilated state of mans surroundings. The main factor that singles Dubuffet's art from that of Tapies is its association with childrens art, amateurs and in particular the work of the mentally ill.[12] His work was a reaction in favour of the elements specific to art which the Nazis had classed as degenerate. This type of art tried to get rid of the old idea of the distinction between normal and degenerate. Dubuffet's crude materials and irrelevant subjects were an anticultural reaction which were a shock to the French tradition. The Italian Alberto Burri has been referred to as an Art Informal painter and also a matter painter. His use of rough collages of stained and charred sackcloth stitched together revealing in glimpses the black or red beneath, were reminders of the blood soaked bandages and his experiences as a doctor during the war. In these rotten, burned, torn materials he found that he could transmit in almost the crudest reality mans suffering and the wounds of the world. Thus his rotten sacks became a universal metophor and for him an emotional means of self expression.

Millares another Spaniard was probably closest to the struggles and frustrations of Tapies. He uses canvas torn, twisted and hardened with two basic colours black and white with touches of red which were symbolical of his past. His work reflected the effects of the civil war, the brutality, suffering, the emptiness and the strangled hope. Millares mutilated his humble materials of burlap bags and recreated the wounded bodies and abandoned blood-stained corpses. His canvases were a mere reminder of his world of pain or his lingering past. Millares use of colour and his handling of materials related to the work of Tapies. However the constant reminder of the passage of time and a sense of the complete and semi-complete in Tapies work set them apart.

The war was the occasion of a huge realignment of world power. Before the war Europe was dominant both artistically and politicially, afterwards it was not. The

feeling of uncertainity and disillusionment among artists help thread new styles together, despite their formal differences. The path Tapies and his contemporaries pursued owed little to the traditional ideas of 'belle peinture'. The upheavals and horrors of the war initiated the birth of new movements, new techniques and gave way to the notion of painting as a beautiful object which had stood in the way of radicalism. Tapies involvement in the struggle against oppression is revealed in his choice of imagery and the material content in his work. His Spanish handling of colour, with his greys and earth colours and the dramatic inclusion of red, black and white enchance this impetus in his work. The manner in which Tapies manipulates his materials, the way he slashes or penetrates his surface with foreign objects are metaphors of his own inner desire for an unobtainable freedom, his own inner freedom and his outer freedom which relate to his links with his hertiage. There is a sense of urgency in his work as he comments on the passage of time which again is revealed through the treatment of his materials. Even the physical immersion of his own hands and feet into the matter leaving an imprint or human trace, is another commentary on the passage of time. The works taken literally echo the mutilated state of his surroundings left in the silent oppression after the war.

FOOTNOTES

1. Roland Penrose, Tapies, p. 59
(Tapies, La Pratique de l'art Communication sur le mur , p. 224, French version 1974)

2. Ibid, p. 59.

3. Due to Tapies contact with the poets and writers of the Dau-al-set group, many writers and critics have presupposed that the intention of his 'Magical years' are to be interpreted within the general aesthetic orientations of that group. His imagery for these paintings comes intuitively from within.

4. Warner Haftmann, Painting in the twentieth century, p. 312

5. Aftermath France 1945 - 54, p. 16

6. The Dadaists adopted Bakunin's slogan: "destruction is also creation".
Herbert Read, A Concise History of Modern Painting, p. 119
Almost thirty years earlier the Dadaists were using rubbish and scandalous objects, such as urinals to the dignity of art objects and paintings. The antiaestheticism was to characterise many of the future manifestations of the movement.

7. Michel Tapié had great influence as an art critic and the director of an art gallery in Paris on the development of post World War 11 European art. The French critic established a friendship with Tapies in 1955 and was among the artists Tapié sponsored. Tapié was not only a supporter of Tapies' work but also an enthusisatic promoter and defender of Japanese art.

8. Contemporary Art 1942 - 72, collection of the Albright Knox Gallery, p. 195

9. Lawerence Alloway, Art in Western Europe, The post-war years 1945 - 1955, Catalog p.11
Art means the art of Picasso, Braque and the older generation of painters. Other is a synonum for new. The surviving artists of early part of this century were promoted to the status of Cultural heroes with the support of the mass media. They were no longer struggling under the alienation of earlier days. For example the major prizes for painting at the Venice Biennale, the large international exhibition which resumed in 1948 went to Braque (1948), Matisse (1950), Raol Dufy (1952), Ernst (1954), and Jacques Villion (1956).

10. This term was introduced in 1954 by the French critic Charles Estienne. It took its name from the French word 'tache' - meaning stain.

11. Art Informal and Tachism have many connections with Oriental Calligraphy. The process of Informal art and calligraphy coincide to a certain extent but this is mainly through the Oriental method.
Siegfried Wichmann, Japanisme, p. 396

12. Paul Klee took inspiration from childrens drawings. The Surrealist and Miro exploited the possibilities of irrational drawing, naive and automatic drawings; the kind that reveals unexpected and erotic themes.

CHAPTER 11

EASTERN AND WESTERN IMAGERY

Tapies mature style came about through a "soul searching resolution to associate himself with matter and the very nature of material things in order to penetrate their meaning and their fundamental significance".[1] *He evolved from a painter who's paintings originated in literary ideas to a painter who created mysteries in matter itself. He made a complete change from his delicate and disturbing Surrealist work to more abstract work such as "Collage with banknotes" 1951 (fig. 1) to a concern for the medium itself.*

Tapies developed and used a specific repertoire of images. However his work did not develop serially. Tapies chronological list of images for 1954 - 56 includes increase in mural qualities, architectural ornaments, scaling walls, walls with bullet holes, street graffiti, more doors, corrigated metal doors, shop windows,ruins, an increase of powder images. In addition to the architectural elements, other broad thematic categories such as the four elements of the physical universe, human presence, mans furnishing and mans language. His images are not conventional representations of the outside world. His intention behind such works has more to do with images and signs that evoke thoughts or ideas about their counterparts in reality due to their various degrees of resemblance. Tapies continued to develop his nonfigurative work with a tendancy from the mid-sixties to incorporate more concrete images or in many cases real objects into his work. The continuous appearance, disappearance and interconnection of images and signs at times emanate a deep sence of mystery and on other occasions have a disquieting effect on the viewer. This aspect again relates to his interest in Zen Buddhism and Oriental philosophies. He adopted many of their symbolic forms and applied or immersed

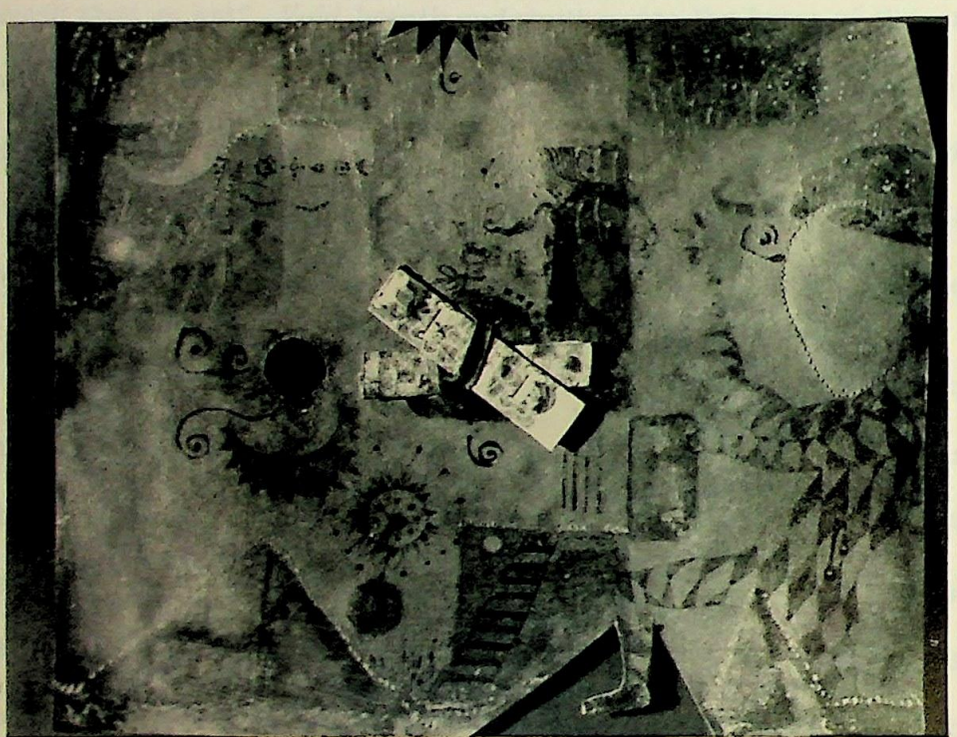


Fig. 1 ***"Collage with banknotes"****, 1951.*

Gouache, inks and sizing on paper.
26 X 31.5 cm.

them into his own Western language . He immersed hinself deeply in to Oriental philosophy, reading meditating and contemplating the works. From the end of the fifties he gave greater importance to elemental and insignificant things: emptiness, ashes, the ephemeral banal, everyday things. The principles of Chinese painters and artists such as Wang Wei became more important in his work. All Chinese painters from Wang Wei to Shih-t'ao have used and developed in their writings . poetry and of course their painting the basic element of the Tao or (The Way) which was that "Painting is the art par excellence, and more a way of being in the world than an art". Void breath and rhythm are the bases of Chinese art. When painting one is advised to use sparingly the large empty spaces (in a proportion of 2/3 to 1/3) on which the elements only partially represented, find their support.[2] Tapies used or adopted many of the devices or elements from Oriental art and in particular Zen but gradually absorbed them into a more Western idiom.

Tapies from an early stage investigated the expressive physical qualities of the materials and pigments he was using. He obtained striations with imprints of cardboard, reticulations with imprints of muslins, linear patterns, chromatic tensions and the reversal of figure and ground relationships were also investigated. The basic concept of the painting as a 'wall' in turn led to an enlargement of the format. This aspect plus his Eastern influence led to great simplicity through the composition with the use of colour, materials and texture, very sparingly articulated. Incidentally the carefully raked sand paths of the Zen gardens and temples forming strips or grooves were echoed in Tapies work. But his mutilated or worked surfaces too bear the marks of the fighting and suffering of Barcelona's poeple.

IMAGES FROM THE EAST

One of the most obvious motifs taken from the East and adopted into Tapies' language is Calligraphy. In the East writing is the universal medium of communication present even in visual art. Calligraphy rises above the level of the spoken

language and verbal communication. For the Orientals it precludes any search for meaning; except in the case of certain signs or signals which are recorded on the basis of familarity. The Calligraphic Zen master expressed his inner self and was no longer concerned with the outer form. He was thus more interested in his inner visions than to the external phenomena of the world around him.[3] *Many of Tapies all over works are deeply imbued with Zen. Like the Calligraphy of Zen Masters they express the inner self and are no longer concerned with the outer form alone. Writing can be categorised under letters, graffiti numbers, hieroglyphies and ideogrammatic writing which is highly akin to the Chinese or Japanese masters. The ideogram is like a drawing, it represents the idea without the word. "The same ideogram can be read by a Chinese or Jananese person each in his own language, the ideogram is independant of language, it is a picture of the things of the world."*[4] *Mans language is a vehicle for communicating intuitions and feelings, according to Tapies writing is only another aspect of the condensation of the matter. It is always linked to the matter and is often totally lost in it. It tends to be disordered and illegible. This aspect relates to Zen where their calligraphy often began with chaos and veered towards order. As Tapies absorbed Oriental principles, his work became calmer and was akin to Zen principles in a Western vain.*

"Large Grey Painting", 1955 (fig. 2) is one of the first examples of the Eastern imagery entering into his oeuvre. The empty centre seems to repel or force the writing towards the edges of the painting, thus the obliterated writing and incisions are found only on the margins. The Chinese masters who were at the once painters, poets and philosophers often inserted a poem in the margins of their drawings. The beaten surface also suggests a spontaneous process. This approach to the rendering of an image echoes the spontaniety of Oriental art. The nature of their materials cancelled out any question of modifying their work as they went along. What was committed to the surface could never be undone. Thus speed of execution and a great sense of certitude was necessary. The image

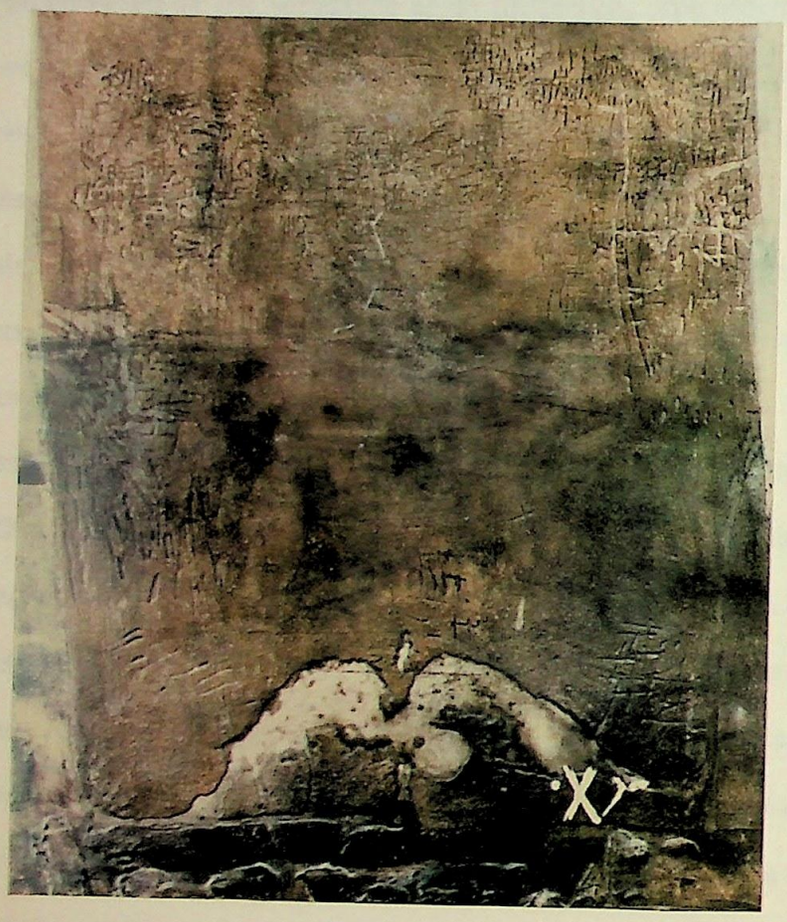


Fig. 2 ***"Large Grey Painting"****, 1955.*

Combined process on canvas.
195 X 170 cm.

was fully recorded in the artists minds eye and he did not take from an external model. Tapies seems to have become totally absorbed in his own 'calligraphic wall'. The nature of his mortar and quick drying Western materials thus exacted of him great certitude and decisive rendering. At the bottom of the painting is the sign of the cross quickly written in the form of an X, which can also be interpreted as the signature of an illeterate. The starkness of the white X contrasted with the muted grey background adds greater significance to the work. "Grey with Black Cross", 1955 (fig. 3) embodies similar ideas. However here the empty space lies diagonally and incites the sketched lines into long deep ridges towards the upper left hand corner. Incidentally the diagonal was used as a compositional device in Japanese woodcuts, but the image was more important in Tapies' re-interpretation of Oriental art. The long fluid graceful lines are again reminiscent of the poems or the calligraphy on the side of Oriental works. Even the signature of the Oriental artist on his work is echoed here. Another interesting feature in Tapies adaptation of Eastern calligraphy is the way his horizontals and verticals are inscribed on the mortar. In the East, horizontals and verticals rarely lie in a strict horizontal or vertical plane. The brushstroke imitates the dynamic asymmetry of the forms of nature.[5] Despite Tapies disciplined Western stroke, (which is to a degree determined by the implement used for writing) he adapts the essentially irregular flow of the Easterns work. The double sign of the cross is placed at the opposite corner to his indecipherable message. The opaque textured space which totally blocks our view is enlivened with haphazard bumps and scratches. The negative existing incised marks that are immersed into the matter are contrasted with the positive conditioning marks on top. In this case the brushed on opaque X causes tensions with the other negative marks where the matter is removed. In "Calligraphy" 1958, Tapies has adopted the Oriental methods but has translated them into a more Western format. The calligraphy is depicted from left to right

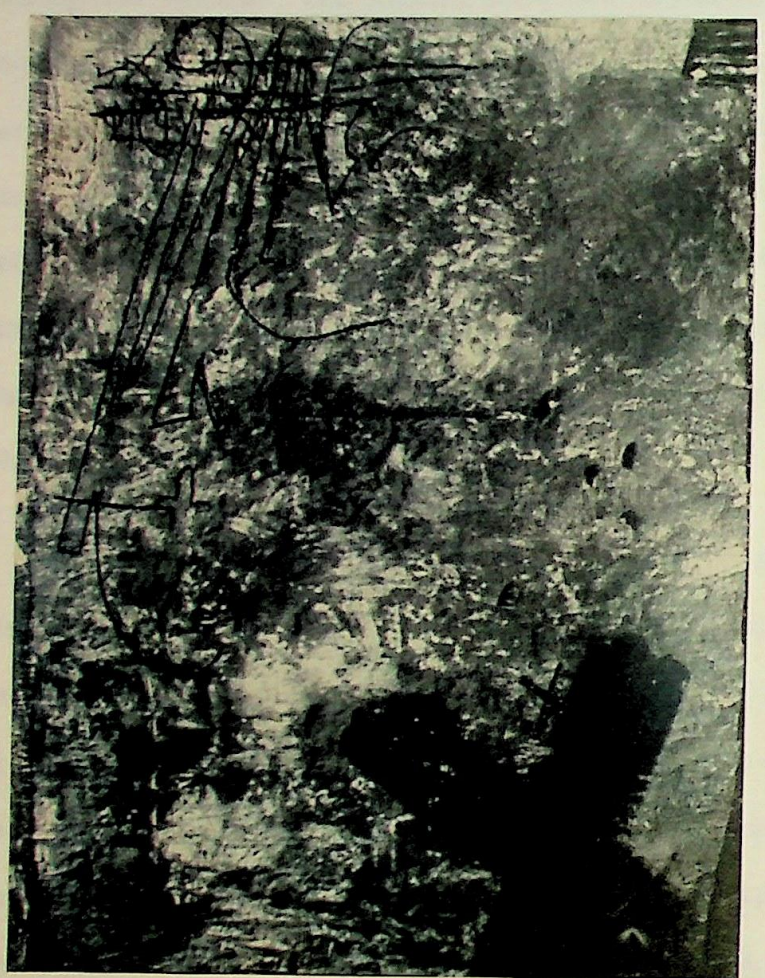


Fig. 3 ***"Grey with Black Cross"****, 1955.*

Combined process on canvas.
146 X 114 cm.

instead of from top to bottom or along the margins. Despite the habitual format of the painting, the monochrome all over work does not loose the precise spontaneous touch of the calligraphic artist "Graphic signs in Green", 1961 (fig. 4) is an example of how he developed from the earlier works to an absorbtion of the Oriental feeling and methods , and adopted them into his native language. It is still similar in format to "Grey with Black Cross" but the speed and spontaniety of the brush and economy of strokes is enough to make a statement. The creativity came from his inner self thus he revealed the sudden truth. It is as if Tapies too felt that the material he was working on was absorbant and that this called for quick rapid lighty rendered brushstrokes so that the inks would not spread.[6] Tapies has evolved from a tendancy to chaos to more ordered and calmer works which suggest a feeling of the void.

Tapies utilses such Eastern symbolic forms as the mandala. The mandala or disc divided in four and set in a square, is an emblem symbolizing the universe and is used as an aid in meditation. This symbol often takes the form of a square in a circle or vice versa. The four points of a compass enclosed by a circle is akin to the Oriental instrument of meditation which represents "the wholeness of the psyche of self which consciousness is just as much a part as the unconsciousness".[7] The influence of the mandala reached its heights in "Sardona", 1972 (fig. 5). The footprints are arranged in a circle which clearly relate to the circular format of the mandala.[8] Through its literal implication it refers to the attributes of a group of people. It may also be an underlying reference to the traditional Catalan dance. The group is polarized by an X shaped cross which invokes the power of the unknown. The intersection of the two lines in the centre clearly alludes to the four directions of the compass or if continued the X would lend itself to the four divisions of the mandala. The scarlet imprints on the ochrish terse mortar, revealing in places the smooth opaque wood are a reminder of the passage of time.



Fig. 4 ***"Graphic signs in Green"****, 1961.*
Drawing on paper.



Fig. 5 ***"Sardona"**, 1972.*

Combined process on wood.
97 X 130 cm.

The scooped out names also penetrated the surface and the opaque surface is enlivered at the bottom with the entrance of haphazard bumps of granular material, which half obliterate the imprints. Again Tapies leaves the opaque surface in the centre empty, except for the intrusion of the X

The geometric form, the triangle is another device used in the East. Tapies adapts the Oriental conception of the triangle and incorporates it into his work. The triangle also relates to the mandala. The Shri Yantra which is akin to the mandala consisted of a square outer frame around concentric circles in whose centre was nine interpenetrating triangles. This indicated a temple with four towers and according to Buddhist concepts is the heart of all believers.[9] *The downward triangle was meant to signify the female principle, whereas the upward triangle signified the male principle. One of the first examples of this image in Tapies work is "Triangle", 1960 (fig. 6). The extracted triangular image paradoxically enters the vastness of the space. One of the most noticeable aspects of Zen is its asymmetry. The Westerners immediate impulse's try to straighten things up, like in symmetrical art where everything is perfectly complete. Asymmetrical art invites the observer in, to expand his imagination and to become part of the creation.*[10] *Despite the fact that Tapies used a closed image, he managed to draw the viewer away from the preconceived notion of a triangle. He is not referring to the external world. The withdrawn image and its small dimensions add to the disquietning effect. The Western logical mind would probably want to increase the dimensions of the image to give it a more 'common' appearance. "Triangular Form on Grey" 1961 , encompasses the same idea except this time the upward triangle stands boldly on a grey uninhabited space in a threatening way. This time the triangle is placed on top of the space. About* $\frac{3}{4}$ *of the space above the intrusion is left totally uninhabited just a vast empty space. This aspect relates to the Eastern division of composition with the partial representation of the element.*

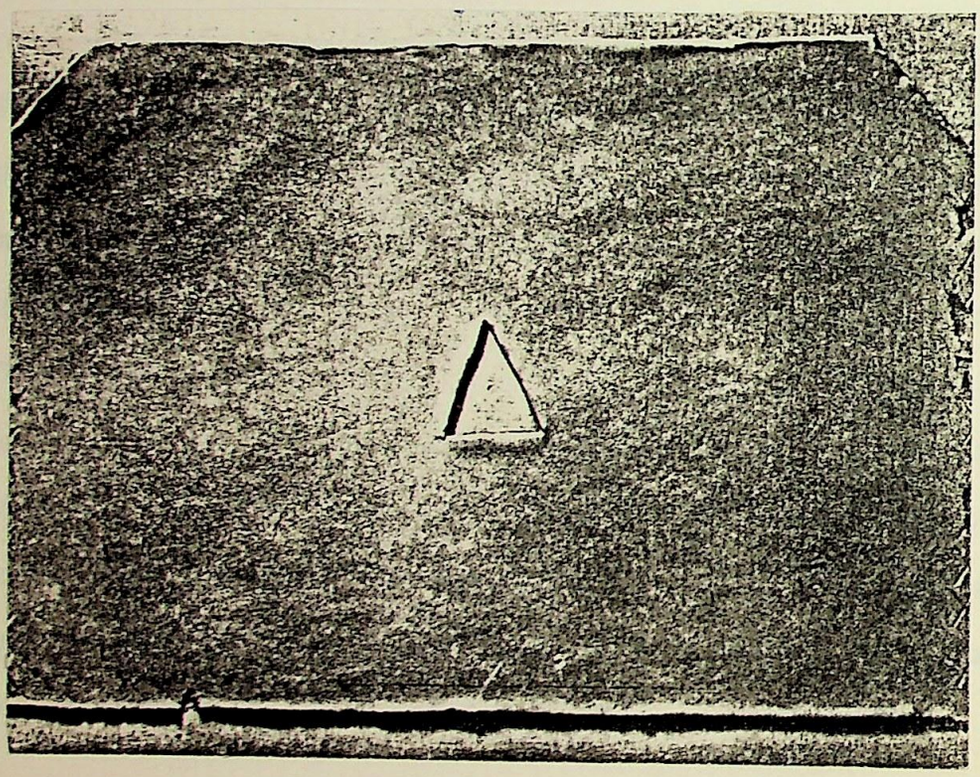


Fig. 6 ***"Triangle"**, 1960.*

Combined process on canvas.
89 X 116 cm.

The vertical line used as a spatial divider in many of Tapies' paintings relates to the post or pillar that were used as spatial dividers in the tea houses.[11] *In many cases the post was a specially chosen tree trunk, which still bore the bark on its outer surface. It had a symbolic meaning as the centre of the primeval hut. To the Japanese and the Chinese, the tree was something to be revered, a fundamental element of nature. In "Straw and Wood" 1969, (fig. 7) Tapies reinterprets the wooden post or pillar and instead uses a modern piece of planed wood. He physically seperates the two sides like the Japanese seperated the tokonoma (prayer niche) from the chigaidana (storage niche with shelves). Tapies has absorbed the spiritual feeling associated with the pillar device and through it has managed to evoke a feeling of complete harmony or as the case may be disharmony . The division the straw makes on the sized canvas further strengthens the wooden divider. Every stray wisp is revealed in the empty space. Tapies also contracts the white smooth backround with the entangled mass of straw the flow of which is interrupted by the hard wood. "Large White canvas joined" 1969, is a less typical example of Tapies interpretation of the image of the post. Instead of using a post as a spatical divider he used the irregular pattern of interlaced string. The string is the divider and the support. The intrusion of this divider is the only element that breaks up the empty spaces.*

IMAGES FROM THE WEST

Despite the influence of Eastern images in Tapies work, images of his native Catalonia feature throughout his work. Such mundane images can be categorized widely as architectural elements and furniture, imagery of man and writing or the graffiti of his native walls. Doors, windows, archways, breaches and openings in general take up a major part of his work. "Blue Arch" 1962, (fig. 8), blatantly refers to its common source. Marks, reticulations and brick-like shapes echo the wall that surrounds the arch. In "Covered Gate" 1971, Tapies depicts the image



Fig. 7 ***"Straw and Wood"**, 1969.*

Sizing on canvas.
150 X 160 cm.

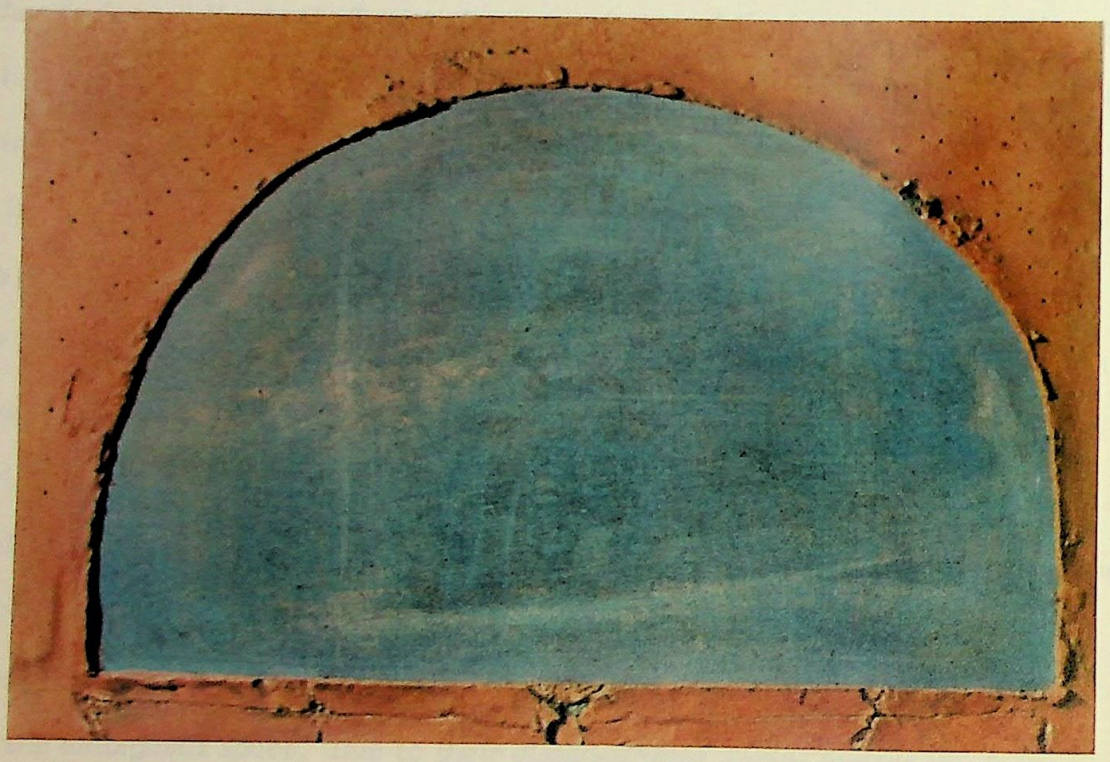


Fig. 8 ***"Blue Arch"***

Combined process on canvas.
55 X 82 cm.

with a white sheet firmly wrapped around it, which could imply 'no entry'. In both cases Tapies utilizes the image but instead of their usual associations he presents both images as definite barriers. Instead of bringing theviewer through the entry he seals off all connections with what is behind. In the latter work Tapies, in an almost amusing sort of way depicts green flecks of paint on the white sheet as a suggestion of grass. Tapies utilizes the image of the closed door in "Closed Doors" 1971, (fig. 9). He reinforces the image by tying the handles of the double door together to form a H. Again Tapies simple rendering of the image on canvas through his handling of the material are in evidence. The economy with which Tapies treats his images add to the foreboding quality of the barred doors. Tapies interprets the image of the window in various ways. This is probably due to its connections with light and the eye which poses greater significance to Western man than the door. Tapies often uses the image as a barrier to light covered with a cloth to its surface, or a window that opens out into an opaque mass. The ambiguity of space or an area close enough to be touched is less obvious in "Square" 1969. The eye is led from the faint diagonals in the corner which are probably unclarified window panes, into deep open space or emptiness in the centre , where the lines have suddenly dissapeared. If the lines were to continue an X would cut off the link with the ambiguous space. Due to their dissapearance Tapies incites the feeling of ongoing space. In "Windows and Red Stains", Tapies encompasses both extremes. He blocks and releases our vision through his use of matter and paint, literally thrown at the window pane in a rage.

Tapies imagery of furniture clearly allude to his architectural elements. He uses vertical elements which resemble the sides of beds or chairbacks, also concealing elements such as drawers or cupboards, ordinary mundane household objects. However, in some of his work there are hints of nostalgic memories but these are treated with the usual severity and given an architectural sense. Thus



Fig. 9 ***"Closed Doors"**, 1971.*

Combined process on canvas.
200 X 270 cm.

his childhood memories or pains should not be regarded as sentimental mush.[12] The mirror is one of the most significant images he features. Tapies interperts its symmetrical associations in a most unusual way. "Double oval in Blue" 1959, reveals his usual concept of the mirrors duality. Tapies depicts two identical ovals to illustrate its symmetrical characteristics - mans own reflected image. Tapies incorporates an actual mirror into his work in "Looking glass and collage" 1971. In this case the symmetrical image is recorded on the one plane. The reversed numbers and collage can only be viewed properly if viewed through any other mirror. However, the ongoing scene within the mirror is a reflected symmetrical image from outside. The bed and its accessories is another frequent image. He utilizes such images to hint at erotic happenings, while placing them in structures of basic frequent symbols. For instance linen sheets is used symbolically in many of Tapies works. It is essentially feminine and traditionally a sacred heart of a womans domain. "Brown Bed" 1960, is a very simple rendering of the image. the all over monochromatic work is merely intruded at the bottom by two finger prints. The work is left open to the viewer for interpretations. It evokes a feeling of tranquility through its subdued simplicity.

For the first time since Tapies consciously childlike drawings of 1944 - 47, images of man appear in his work. This aspect occurs in his work around 1965 - 66. Tapies is not representing the human figure , he is merely representing the matter which clothes the figure. Matter chastised, split, scratched is constantly developed in his work. The wounds suffered by the flesh could parallel the wounds inflicted on the surface of the wall. " Material shaped like a foot" 1965, "Material shaped like an armpit" 1968, (fig. 10) and several others, leg, hand, ear dismembered parts of an unidentifiable body are among the images he uses. In the latter painting, Tapies treats his image like his walls in a monumental forceful way. This may also be a reference to the powerful affirmation of mans existance. The body is gnarled, scarred and compressed. Tapies reveals the pain and ugliness of the wounded flesh in a stark realistic manner. The fact that the shoulder is a very literal example



Fig. 10 ***"Material in the shape of an armpit"****, 1968.*
Combined process on plywood.
81 X 100 cm.

of mans existance, enhances this crude realisation. Wounds and lacerations in the surface are opened up, which causes the skin outside to crinkle with pain revealing in harsh realism the raw redness of the torn flesh beneath, which is a metaphor of the victims agony. The expressive physical quality of his materials and marks accentuated with colour enhance the power of the over all work. The light and dark areas are used for dramatic aesthetic effects. Overall, Tapies creates a sence of tonal unification. Even the edges of the body blend and bleed with the dark opaque ground, through the use of colour. Relief in "Ochre and Pink" 1965, (fig. 11) gives different insight to images of man. Tapies presents dismembered parts of two bodies, probably male and female. The upper part of the female body is presented, but through use of quick decisive strokes he wounds the body. A shadow area suggests the outline of the shoulder and neck but this part of the body seems to be lost behind a vertical bar. A hand on both sides of the painting seems to grab on to the bar in agony. The male body is bent over on his knees, his feet tied and half mutilated at the bottom of the panel. Lines , marks and stains are smeared over the bodies, which seem to be struggling for freedom. The helpless gesture of the grasping hands and the worn bodies are a striking assersion of this. His bodies are lost in the matter of the wall. The incising, marking, drawing, and simple colouring are inter-dependant in the work and increase the dramatic effect of the work. Tapies has utilised the image of man in this work, but has also brought it down to the level of the native Catalonian, who had witnessed the suffering and had struggled for freedom.

Writing or rather graffiti is also a Western influence. Tapies interpretation of graffiti is clearly taken from his native walls. Graffiti is one of mans major abuses, it is exhibited blatantly clear or totally unclear. Initials, numbers, stains gashes, obsenities gradually accumulate in time which too, could relate to the effects of age and abuse on man, in the form of wrinkles and scars. Its information gives Tapies limitless scope to recreate and re-intrepret some of its surfaces and hidden meanings.



Fig. 11 ***"Relief in Ochre and Pink"****, 1965.*
Combined process on plywood.
162 X 114 cm.

It may be seen as legible writing or as printed trivalities on pieces of paper, as in "Newspaper pages and signs" 1964. In "Matiere on Canvas and Collage" 1964, it relates to the insignificant news from yesterdays paper. Writing is another aspect of drawing but never explicit. From 1960 - 63 certain letters were predominant in his work. X - T - M - A-I. They often dominate the whole work. The single isolated character is revealed in "Painting on Wood" 1960, (fig. 12). The M is presented upside down. The blood red background with black smeared on the bottom and the ochreish grey, depicting the M in granular material add to the strength of the image. The silent mass imposes itself but remains inexplicable and mysterious. Such letters lend themselves to other Western images or elemental signs. I can be interpreted as H and T echoes the set square, A the triangle and L the right angle. Through his letters, names, slogans, his self expressed remnants are exposed to the public to decipher them. Tapies' Western images refer to his childhood, his experiences during the war, his native environment and the suffering of man.

THE IMPRINT

In 1966 an exhibition in Paris at the Galerie Stadler introduced a new concept of the object or image, the imprint. The object is not drawn, it's contour is hollowed out in the matter. The monochrome canvases of rich matter obtained from the marble dust reveal the absence of the object, its withdrawal. The outline is enough to identify it and certify to its physical reality while also concealing it. The use of the imprint encompasses Eastern and Western concepts. The reference to banal images is symbiotically a reference to the East through the withdrawal of the object - absence, and to the West or his environment through the inference of the image or presence of the object. The Imprint is presence in absence. Tapies also uses the imprint of mans hands , and feet which unite both Eastern and Western imagery in his work.



Fig. 12 ***" Painting on Wood",*** *1960.*
51 X 91 cm.

FOOTNOTES

1. Roland Penrose, Tapies, p. 40

2. Jean Frémon, Pictures of an exhibition, p. 13

3. Siegfried Wichmann, Japanisme, p. 403

4. Frémon, p. 15

5. William Willetts, Foundation of Chinese Art, p. 303

6. The picture surface is very important in the Oriental ink painting technique. The surface is symbiotically united with the painterly writing process. The picture surface or ground has a direct connection with the painting process. Thus complex preparation of the surface is avoided. Very often the surface isn't primed, thus the brush work had to be done lightly and rapidly.

7. Penrose, p. 109

8. In Taoist Magic Art, the circle combines simplicity with perfection, emptiness with fulness: it harmonised the visible with the invisible, the linear with the cyclic..... (In China there are three different religions, Buddhism, Taoism and Contucianism).

9. Wichmann, p. 294

10. Thomas Hoover, Zen Culture, p. 9. The absence of bilateral symmetry in Zen art, mysteriously compels the observer to reach past the surface form and touch the individuality of the work. Zen denies the significance of the external world and underscores the point by never depicting it in static, stable, or closed terms.

11. Wichmann, p. 251. The post is connected with the religions tradition due to its importance in the tea houses and temple buildings, but they were used in private houses as a practical stake-like post to support roofs.

12. Red Velvet Powder and Collage 1967 evokes the furniture he knew as a child in his mothers bedroom, with its closed drawers and trays of knick-knacks, but in the mixture of emotions connected with earlier memories he covered the work with a coat of red velvet. He slashed this with a rain of small cuts resembling the pins he had been forced by the nuns to pick as sins from a blood red Sacred Heart. Penrose, p. 120

CHAPTER 111

EASTERN AND WESTERN THEMES

Tapies images and themes are presented quite simply but this does not lend his deliberately ambiguous works to simple interpretations. Even his lack of elaborate titles which would give added insight to his thoughts, increase the difficulty. His works become understandable through paradox. They cannot be summed up by classifying some as being evocative of graffiti, or that others are reminiscent of rubble or crude materials. This type of analysis does not explain the mysterious aspect of the works or the almost paradoxical impression of great inner delight that is expelled from them. Even the disquieting appearance of certain symmetrical elements, signs or symbols, compels the viewer to seek for more. The viewer must get at the internal lines of the images or objects, the wear and tear marks which reveal the truth. His work must be viewed beyond the surface texture and its similarity to the organic environment. "Let us learn to look in the same way as one listens to a concert . . . . Music is a composition of sonorous forms, in time. Painting is a composition of visual forms, in space".[1] According to Tapies, the viewer had to accept the illusion presented and enter into the 'game' in order to attain the real truth. He also refers to those who see nothing in his work or never enter into game even after he has revealed all in his literal explanations. " A picture is nothing. It is a door that leads to another door.... And the truth we seek will be found in a picture, it will only appear behind the last door that the viewer succeeds in opening by his own efforts. For art is like a game and only by becoming very innocent - and perhaps this is true of all human activities shall we grasp the profound meaning that it possesses".[2] Tapies has also said that the artist must never lower himself to try to speak at

the popular level, but should instead require the people to rise to his vision. In an essay entitled "Nothing is Mean" Tapies gives insight to the origin of his thought. The Zen influence in his work not only comes across in his imagery but also in the content of his work. Sabi and Wabi which are an aesthetical appreciation ofabsolute poverty in Zen and were important principles of the tea ceremony and play an important role in his work. Sabi denotes objects pleasantly mellowed with age. It also brought melancholy overtones of loneliness,of age left behind by time. Sabi is first and foremost the essence of beauty, whether objects are weathered or frayed. Sabi however can still encompass snobbery thus Wabi, which is the glorification of artifical poverty, artifical because there has to be an element of forced or deliberate restraint. Wabi permits no hint of wealth. Together they encompass the ideals of unpretentious grace, and the desired state of tranquility and emptiness .[3] "Where tranquility is lacking, the art will lose its significance all together".[4] "The man who sees with the eye and hears with the ear cannot go further than that. Unless he makes the eyes hear out the ears see, he has to stay confined within the senses. It is only when he goes out of them that he can achieve miracles by plunging into the realm of emptiness, for emptiness is the fountain of all possibilities."[5] Tapies work gradually requires a feeling of emptiness or the void. His paintings do not contain a sense of superficial beauty, thus the influence of Wabi and a feeling for the void. The Wabi tea ceremony permits no hint of wealth, wordly status was left at the gate, even the floral arrangement had one or at the most two flowers. Their pots were also plain and undecorated. Tapies also says in "Painting and the void" that "It is certainly not by chance that nothingness has always been considered a kind of invisible motor for philosophical speculation. It is infact a concept which all logical research can hardly get a grasp on. This is why many people believe that the idea of the void needs rather to be apprehended in the world of the mythical tradition from Eckhart to Saint John of the Cross..... to an entire series

of experiences in Oriental Christianity".[6] It was by using the most humble means or by bringing "art down to commonplace level" that Tapies achieved the spirit and mystery of Zen in his work.

DUALITY

It is clear from Tapies writings and above all his work that influences from the East and the West enter into the overall themes in his work. Certain themes veer more towards an Eastern concept whereas others lie deeply in his native environment. The overall theme however has more to do with the mystery of matter than the revelation of its physical attributes. The underlying theme of duality in many of Tapies works clearly relates to many of the Oriental concepts. Even the composition of the calligraphic ink has overtones of duality which is more or less dry or wet, more or less diluted or concentrated, more or less light or dark. Even the role of the Oriental ink artist as painter and simultaneously a writing master. He unites both without destroying the spontaniety of his artistic method.[7] One of the most obvious areas where the theme of Duality enters into Tapies work is his architectural elements. His openings, gaps, archways, doors, windows, opened or closed, carry implications of another world, the world outside and the hidden world, even their restricted use of colour and sheer technical simplicity with their added metaphysical character brings the viewer deeper into the unknown. Barred entrances, walled up openings, the ambiguous space behind the open door are revelations of a new reality, of the old concept that is generally taken for granted, with such utilitarian objects. This aspect of the wall could be regarded as being beyond the wall. The mystery within and behind the wall. For instance in "Blue Arch" (fig 8), the walled up niche gives the idea that there is somekind of hidden world behind the barrier. The wash of heavenly sky blue inhances this idea, it suggests the ambivalence within the work. The colour is a contradiction to the walled openings but yet it suggests the duality of the

work. Tapies openings are like signs of wholeness of the Buddhist "idea with no exist" which deny the possibility of passing through.[8] *Even the fact that the signs of the Zen artist often float in empty space due to the fact that reality lies behind the surface has bearing on the theme of duality in Tapies work.*[9] *Duality is almost like the mirror image of what our eyes see outside and what is interpreted in the brain, thus the idea of duality becomes a harmoniously confused state. In "Painting on Stretcher" 1962, Tapies reveals the nuts, bolts and all the hidden entities that are normally shielded behind the canvas which acts like a skin in hiding the 'unspeakable'. Tapies opens the door to the invisible space generally hidden against the wall. The concept of Duality is also found in some of his geometric works where he makes use of the half, such as "Straw and Wood". (fig. 7). "The picture I am describing also has a piece of wood that divides it in two .... Duality opposition, conflict, reflection balance (or potential imbalance) the creator and the thing created, black and white, masculine and feminine, yin and yang, life and death, good and evil, high and low. The picture is indeed divided, forming an upper and lower space. They are both white. White the colour of beginning and end of those about to change their condition of absolute silence..... not the silence of death but that of the preparation of all living possibilities, of all youthful joys. Two white spaces full of whirlpools of straw which seem to be wanting to pass from one to the other. Two enormous young locks of hair caught up in each other, two pubes touching. The straw, tremendously twisted accentuates this sensation of movement, of expansion, a real stormcloud of nerves intertwines or collides with another, the upper world against the lower world and vice versa.....everything is divided in two: light and shade, earth and sky, positive and negative, dualism in short, complementary elements in cosmic processes, thesis and anthesis blending into a synthesis or the embrace of lovers".*[10] *Tapies reveals in this exerpt that the fundamental principle of duality in his work is the mingling of matter with spirit.*

Some of Tapies predominant letters and signs also signify duality. X is the most significant because of its associations with the cross, the cross at a 45^{0} angle. The cross forms a double duality, it can be reflected horizontally and vertically, "The cross, a ubiquitious motif in his work..... at different interpretive levels it can stand for the dualities between matter and spirit, horizontal and vertical, death and rebirth".[11] Its pattern of lines can also form triangles which relate to the mandala, which express "the union of the personal temporal world of ego with the non personal timeless world of the non ego".[12]

PRESENCE

Tapies paintings never omit some trace of human presence or the feeling of a presence in his work. This trace may be man's accessories, his furnishings clothes, objects which are personified through their close relation to man. This sense of presence is expelled from his imprints and his intrusions or interferences that break up his empty spaces of well prepared grounds. Some of his works are without the slightest mark or sign, they just breathe. "No image no sign but 'all over', a vibration, a breathe, a being and through only the nuances of light on one colour, the tonal quality that Wang Wei with his exclusive use of black ink".[13] The overall theme of presence in Tapies work is the intergration and transformation of the principles of Zen into his personal language. The mere intrusion of a simple mark or worthless object relates to Zen. One of the first examples of this presence in Tapies' work is "Three Stains on Grey Space" 1955. (fig. 13). The stains are not aesthetic revelations, they suggest or may be a reminder of the presence or trace of a Living being. They inhabit the 'space' and may be a reference to events that marked his past. They resemble marks left by three finger prints. In "Circle of Cord" 1969, (fig. 14) Tapies uses an object of little or no importance to inhabit the vast empty space of the canvas. Even the fact that Tapies uses worthless small objects to inhabit space or evoke feelings of an

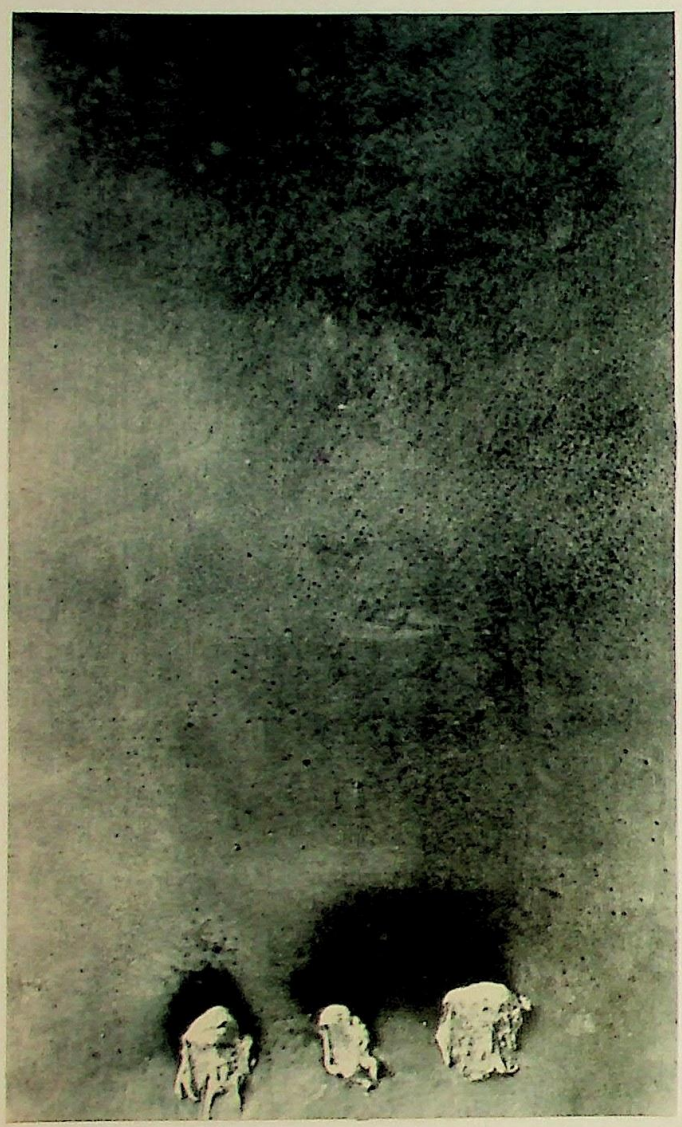


Fig. 13 ***"Three Stains on Grey Space"****, 1955.*
Paint on canvas.
146 X 89 cm.

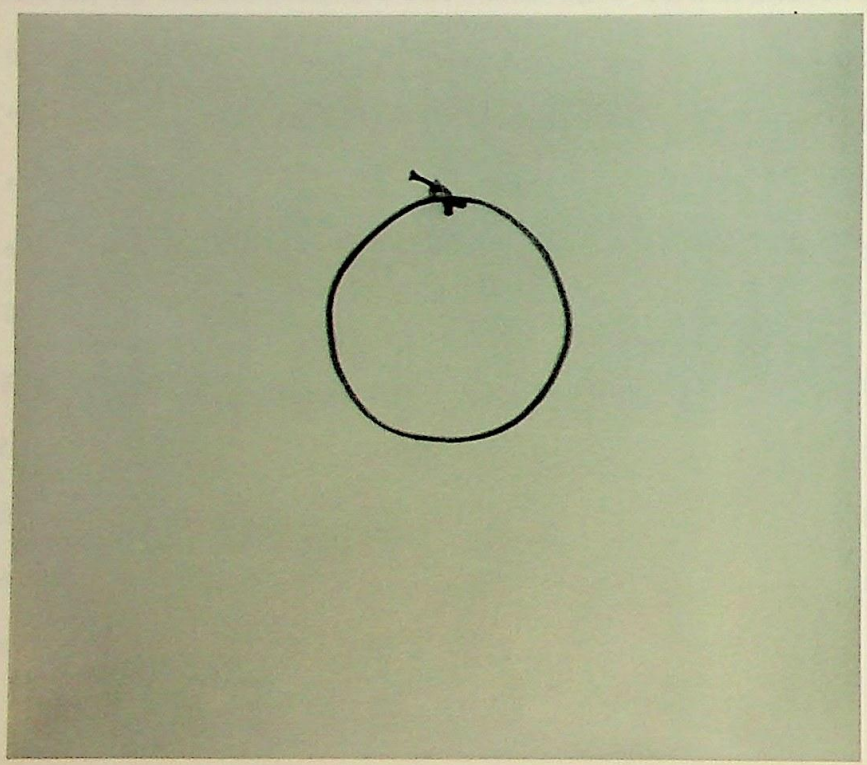


Fig. 14 ***"Circle of Cord"****, 1969.*
Sizing on canvas.
100 X 10 cm.

immutable presence is a further clarification of the 'Zen Presence' in his work. 'The Art of the Little' is one of the elements that characterises Zen.[14] The Wabi and Sabi ideals also enter into this vain of work. The object does not have to be of massive dimensions to exude an almost forbidding presence. "Triptych" 1970 (fig. 15), encompasses the idea of passing time and human presence. The footprints start from nowhere and go beyond the bounds of the three panels into infinity or the unknown. Man has paced through the sand and gone beyond. Incidently this painting is a commemorative work dedicated to the memory of a deceased person Martha Jackson. Its central meaning Tapies says "is the passage of a person". The deliberate pacing of footprints from left to right are signs of actual presence in time, "Sardona" (fig. 5), implies the presence of his family, nine in all, by one footprint for each member. In the latter two paintings the footprints are like a 'spiritual breath, a being' as in Zen painting which suggests the passage of a friend and the presence of friends. In these works Tapies has not alone obtained a sense of presence but also a feeling for the void, for a total emptiness, an inner calm and tranquality. He achieves this presence through his materials, his physical process and his simplistic approach to his motifs and images.

THEME OF INJUSTICE

Throughout Tapies work he has chosen forms that are sympathetic to his own inner self. Thus he manages to arouse his emotions in us. Influences, themes and images from the East are quite significant but his personal Western environment has always been another of the major factors in forming his visual language. One underlying factor that helped in forming his style of work is that of injustice. Mans injustice to man as was seen during the war. This theme of injustice has political undertones, but it clearly relates to his personal environment, his people, his strong cultural and historical roots - thus it could be dessignated, 'the Catalan

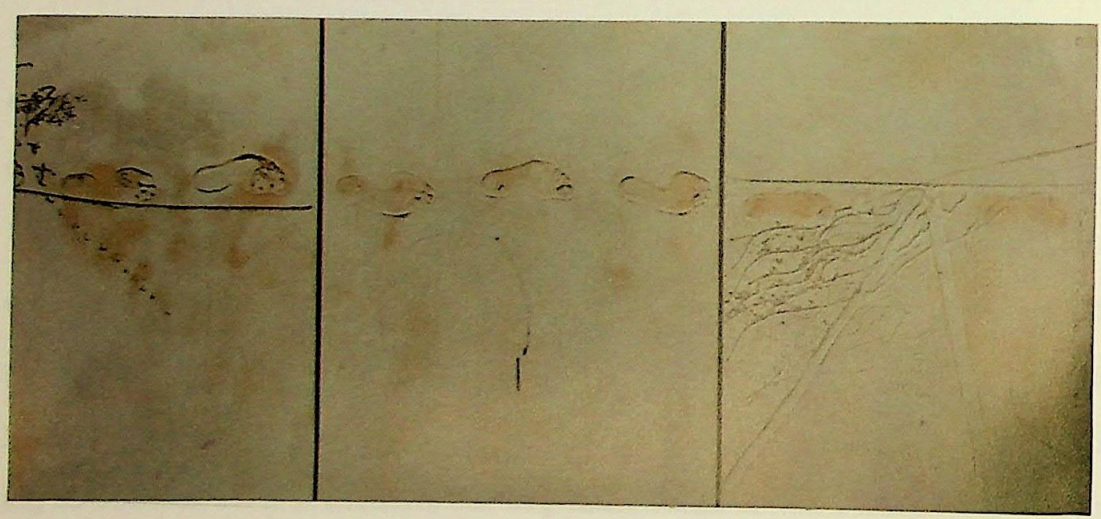


Fig. 15 ***"Triptych"**, 1970.*

Mixed media on canvas.
57½ X 133½ cm.

theme'. Tapies found ways of getting his 'theme of injustice' across. On the surface his work has the creative element of the piece followed by that of destruction which comes across in the form of slashes, marks, lacerations into his carefully built up surfaces. This creative, destructive element in his work is a familiar feature in mans life and Tapies was undoubtly aware of this due to the tragic sense of mans destiny which he witnessed between 1936 and 1945. It is a literal interpretation of how the artist expresses his own emotions and feelings. However it rises above the literalness of the theme and fulfils both his needs and those of the viewer.

Tapies preoccupation with his personal environment first made its decisive appearance in his iconology towards the end of the 1960s. He generally uses the emblem of the flag as a device to proclaim his message. This characteristic emblem of Catalonia was seen as early as 1964. The four bars which were originally four strokes smeared on with blood stained fingers are really an 'epic theme'. They could on a historical level be a lament for the dead. The large - scale painting "Esquincalls" 1970 (fig. 16) and "L'esperit Catala" 1971 (fig. 17), sum up the general commitment of Tapies to Catalonia. In "Esquincalls" 1970, Tapies ties four strips of red worn cloth with string to a yellow painted canvas. The meaning os obvious, he is presenting the degraded image of the Catalan flag, which is a reference to the dramatic moment of the contemporary history of Catalonia and in general the fate of the Catalonian people. Even the yellow background is partially destroyed. The palimpsest is partially collaged with strips of paper which help erase with the yellow paint, the writing underneath. The top is covered over in indecipherable marks and letters. However despite the literal interpretation of the work and its importance as a piece, the work does not loose its power aesthetically. The tatters symbolise the remains of a world destroyed, the emblematic colours, blood red and yellow adding further significance. "L' esperit Catala" (fig. 18) is covered in a maze of incised words. These words



Fig. 16 ***"Esquincalls"****, 1970.*

Paint with rags and strings on sized canvas over cardboard.



Fig. 17 ***"L'esperit Catala"****, 1971.*
200 X 270 cm.

designate the positive aspects of the Catalan character or allude to slogans that reflect it, such as 'VISCA CATALUNYA' which is boldly inscribed at the bottom. This declaration, 'long live Catalonia' is a powerful manifestation of the qualities which he and his people had so long been deprived of. On top of the yellow ground he painted on the main feature which is the imperative stripes. In the same blood red, his four fingers which were compellingly plunged into the paint, created wild rythmic patterns all over the work. The quick decisive smears of the four fingers intermingled with the splashes, the four decisive marks and the frenzy of writing convey a sense of urgency which relates to his desire for freedom. From this palimpsest,the Catalan words for Liberty, democracy, truth and culture are detected. This work is certainly a revelation of his fight against oppression. Another painting done around this time lists names from the tortured history of Catalonia. For Tapies the 'theme of injustice' has merely revealed his ties and contacts with "the deeper regions of communal spirit". He thus clarifies his own inner emotions for a people who were subject to the injustice of man or oppressed by society.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Jean Frémon, Pictures of an Exhibition, p. 12*

2. *Roland Penrose, Tapies, p. 173*

3. *Thomas Hoover, Zen Culture, p. 182 - 185*

4. *Ibid, p. 178 (D.T. Suzuki, Zen and Japanese Culture, Bollingen Series, p. 305)*

5. *Penrose, p. 172, (Ibid)*

6. *Antoni Tapies, Painting and the Void, p. 1 - 2*
   This interest for the void, for nothingness is to be found in numerous disciplines, especially in an important branch of modern philosophy. Philosophers such as Heidegger and Sartre made nothingness the centre of their thought,with Heidegger even going so far as to say that being is the extreme void which is at the same time its richness.

7. *Siegfried Wichmann, Japonisme, p. 385*

8. *There is nothing in Zen which does not apertain to the whole, Ibid, p. 402*

9. *Ibid, p. 403*

10. *Penrose, p. 173*

11. *Manuel J. Borja, ' A note on Tapies ', Artforum International, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, (October 1985), p. 113*

12. *Suzuki, p. 172, (Union with nature), (Carl G. Jung, Man and his symbols, p. 240)*

13. *Frémon, p. 13*

14. *Frémon, p. 13*

15. *Penrose, p. 14*
    The yellow and Scarlet flag was a forbidden symbol. According to proud tradition these colours had been awarded in the 9th century to Guifre el Pilos, Count of Barcelona on the battle field in gratitude for his bravery by his ally Charles the bald, King of France. The four red strips were drawn across a golden shield by the kings fingers dipped in Guifre's blood.

CONCLUSION

"These painting of today, with their "Emptiness" which many see as cold with their solemn fulnesses, these nude or entirely covered works, giving off sometimes such a sense of distant and sovereign silence that people may think they have no paint of contact with the social and political cares which underpin them, these paintings then, contrary to what their detractors believe, offer us the proof oftheir perfect attunement with theories relating to society and politics, and to their link with the fundamental problems of life and thus of current events".[1]

Tapies reveals personal fundamental aspects of his environment intertwined with an Oriental feeling throughout his work. He synthesises these in terms of imagery and theme particularly towards the end of the sixties. This synthesis is seen indirectly in some of his earlier works such as "Iron Curtain and Violin" 1956, (fig. 18). The imagery is Western. Tapies attaches a violin to a rusty derelict shutter from an old shop window, similar to the corrugated shutters which close the booths on the narrow streets of Barcelona. A large X painted at the bottom of the curtain seems to pursue the elegance of the violin on the right. The cross or X is often depicted with affirmation, but it too is a sign of negation; it suggests both in this situation. It suggests the cancelling out of the doors function in real life, which negates the door, but it is a positive X that is depicted with affirmation. Thus Tapies leaves his personal mark of presence. Duality again enters the piece, due to the fact that it was first exhibited in a display window in a large store. The exterior was interior, the closed was open. The violin was not displaced due to the fact that it could be played inside or outside. However in its present situation it is displaced. The piece relates to the concept of the imprint. The violin



Fig. 18 ***"Iron Curtain and Violin"***

and curtain like the imprint of an object certify to their reality, but are not true to reality in the normal sense. The absence of the object relates to the withdrawal of the violin and shutter from their normal circumstances. It too is a dual theme of presence in absence. The synthesis of human intention and experience enters into the work symbolically. Nineteen fifty six is the year of the uprising in Hungary. The iron curtain is symbolical of the Hungarians who are located on the crossroads between East and West. The curtain may also be a reference to the Hungarians who are trying to get out of the iron curtain block, in order to achieve their freedom. Through their music, thus the symbol of the violin, the Magyar gypsies can express their irreducible freedom. The violin expresses the unobtainable freedom, the curtain is the block. The Zen scholar Suzuki sees the mountain as a mountain and not a mountain.[2] This statement relates to the duality and the symbolism within the work - the curtain is a curtain and not a curtain.

"Great Door" 1969 (fig. 19) is an example of the culmination of Tapies influences of images and themes from the East and the West. The imagery is Western, but his taste for simple lines and the void emphasise an Eastern feeling. The great empty luminous space symbolises the open door, which is a reference to his architectural elements. The simplicity and meditative quality of the painting, through his simple materials and soft delicate colours relate to Zen concepts of beauty and echo the aesthetics of their Tea houses and Zen gardens. The work too has a metaphysical quality which relates to his openings, beaches and archways. The reference to the door is a reminder of his environment, and the contact that man has with everything. The open door for Tapies may be a suggestion of the door to freedom, where he and his fellow Catalonians can rid themselves of their prolonged sufferings and struggles. The ambiguous emptiness suggests the unknown fate for Tapies and his people. In this painting Tapies has combined his Western imagery with the Oriental influence of simplicity, to convey underlying themes of

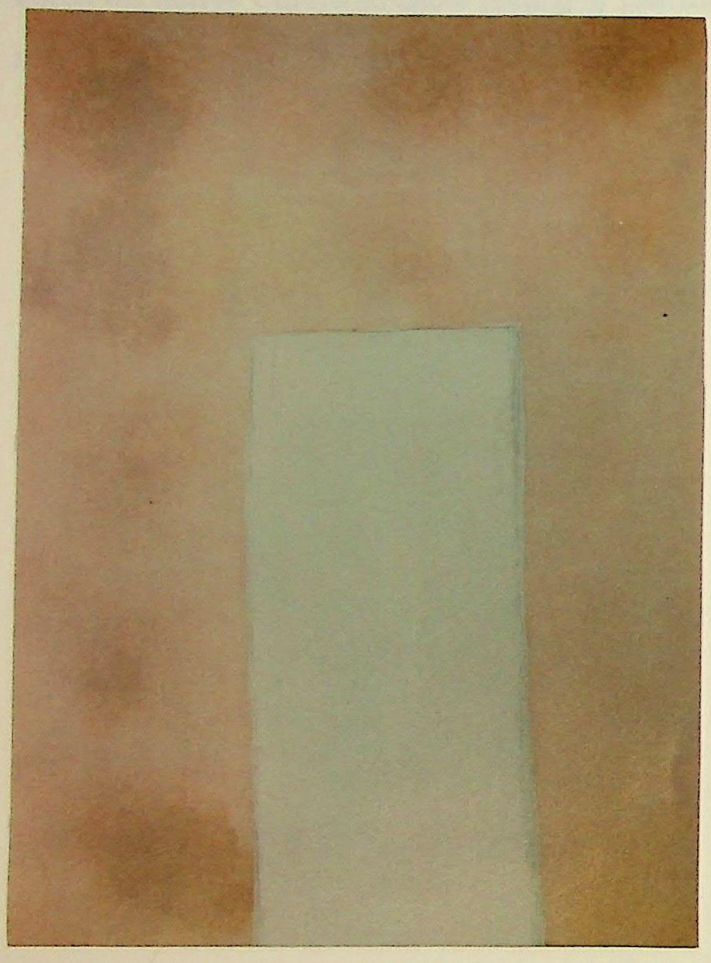


Fig. 19 ***"Large Door"**, 1969.*

Combined process on canvas.
270 X 198 cm.

duality, presence and of course a feeling for his native environment. Tapies heritage, personal drive and circumstances enticed him to give a role to images and themes from his personal environment and from the East in his work. Thus in the synthesis of form and content in Tapies work he evokes strong feelings about his native Catalonia and a feeling of identity and collaboration with nature that is so strong in the East.

FOOTNOTES:

1. *Antoni T apies, Painting and the Void, p. 5*
2. *Roland Penrose, p. 172 (D. T. Zuzuki. Zen and Japanese Culture, Bollingen Series p. 305)*

BIOGRAPHY

1923. *Born in Barcelona. Upper middle class family. His father Josep Tapies was a lawyer. His mother Maria Puig i Guerra was the daughter of Puig i Alfonso, a family of booksellers, who also took an active role in politics.*

1936-1939 *The Spanish Civil War. Deeply effected by the memories of the war.*

1940. *On completion of his secondary studies, he had a heart attack, followed by a serious illness. Spend almost two years convalescing in the mountains. Profound spiritual crisis, abandons his Catholic religion entirely. He began to read the works of Schopenhaur, Nietzche, Dostoivesky and Ibsen. He also took an interest in Yoga, the Vedas, Zen Buddhism and Okakura Kazuzo's Book of Tea which was translated into Catalan before the Civil war.*

1943. *He studies law at the University of Barcelona,as a result of his fathers influence.*

1944. *He attended art classes for two months.*

1945. *For the next two years he does a number of works with thick impastoes and mixtures of strange materials, earth etc.*

1946. *He abandons his studies to devote himself entirely to painting. He also begins to take an interest in Existentialist Philosophy.*

1947. *He became attached to a small group of artists known as the Blaus. The beginning of his friendship with the poet Joan Brossa and also the Catalan poet J.V.Foix. Also visited Miro.*

1948. *He collaborates with a group of writers and painters in Barcelona and thus becomes a member of the Dau-al-Set group, which also published a magazine of the same name. He exhibits for the first time in 1948 Salo d'Octubre of Barcelona.*

1949. *He shows a considerable number of works at the French Institute of Barcelona in an exhibition called "An aspect of Catalan painting". He becomes more interested in Miro, Klee, Ernst and Oriental art and Philosophy.*

1950. *First one man show at the Galeries Laietanes in Barcelona. He takes an interest in Marxism.*

1951. *Visit to Picasso. Retrospective exhibition of the Dau-al-Set group in the Sala Caralt of Barcelona, dissolution of the group.*

1952. *He exhibits at the 26th Venice Biennale. Another one man show in Barcelona.*

1953. *One-man shows at the Marshall Field Art Gallery in Chicago and in Madrid. Reappearance of thick impastoes of his first period. One-man show in New York, at the Martha Jackson Gallery. He signs a contract with this Gallery.*

1954. *Martha Jackson makes arrangements for him to take part in numerous exhibitions in the United States. Another one-man show in Barcelona. In Paris he meets the writer Michel Tapie. He marries Teresa Barba Fabregas. He*

participates again in the Venice Biennale.

1955. *One-man show in Barcelona. Michel Tapie puts him in touch with Rodolphe Stadler, with whom he signs a contract.*

1956. *One-man show at the Galerie Stadler in Paris, with works from 1954 - 55. Birth of his son Antoni. He makes a deeper study of Oriental techniques for achieving knowledge.*

1957. *One-man show at the Galerie Stadler, Paris. One-man show at the Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf.*

1958. *Journey to Venice on the occasion of his individual room at the Biennale. One-man shows in Milan and at the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York. Birth of his daughter Clara, and a few days later death of his father. He takes part in the Osaka Festival, Japan.*

1959. *Second journey to the United states. He meets Franz Kline, De Kooning, Motherwell, Hans Hoffman, etc. One-man show at the Martha Jackson Gallery and the Gres Gallery in Washington. One-man show at the Galerie Stadler, Paris. He shows a desire to give importance to elemental and insignificant things: emptiness, ashes, the ephemeral, banal, everyday things.*

1960. *Another one-man show in Barcelona. Prize at the International Engraving Biennale Tokyo. He takes part in the exhibition of New Spanish Paintings and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Birth of his son Miquel.*

1961. *Third visit to the United States. One-man showat the Martha Jackson and the Gres Gallery, Washington. One-man show at the Rudolf Zwirner Gallery in Essen. Exhibition with Sam Francis, in Munich. One-man shows at the Galerie Stadler, Paris, the National Museum of Buenos Aires and at the Blanche Gallery, Stockholm.*

1962. *He visits England and Germany. In Germany Werner Schmalenbach organises his first anthological exhibition of work done between 1945 and 1962, in Hanover. Retrospective exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum, where he shows works done between 1945 and 1962. One-man shows at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Caracas and in Zurich, Switzerland. Another one-man show of lithographs in Rome and at the Pierre Gallery in Stockholm.*

1963. *One-man shows in California and at the Gallerie Notizie and the International Centre of Aesthetic Research, of Turin, Italy. One-man show in St. Gallen, Switzerland. One-man show at the Martha Jackson Gallery to mark the tenth anniversary of his first presentation to this Gallery.*

1964. *One-man show of cardboards and papers at the Zwirner Gallery, Cologne. One-mans shows in Rome and at the Galerie Stadler, Paris. He takes part in the international exhibition "Painters and Sculptors of a decade", at the Tate Gallery, London. Exhibition of a selection of the works done over the previous twenty years at the Sala Gaspar, Barcelona.*

1965. *Roland Penrose organises a one-man show at the London Institute of Contemporary Arts.*

1966. *Tapies is imprisioned and fined, along with about thirty intellectuals, for*

attending an unauthorised students' meeting at the Capuchin Monastery of Sarria, Barcelona. One-man shows in Paris (Stadler), Stockholm (Buren Gallery), Cannes (Galerie Jacques Verriere) and Toulouse (together with Clave and Pelayo). The 15th International Congress of Artists, Critics and Art Students' of Rimini - Verucchio - San Marino, sends him a gold medal in recognition of the moral endeavour of his artistic work.

1967. *He signs a contract with the Galerie Maeght of Paris, followed by exhibition.*

1968. *Visit to Vienna on the occasion of his anthological exhibition at the 20th century Museum. Anthological exhibitions at the Kunstverein of Hamburg and of Cologne. Exhibition at the Martha Jackson Gallery. He does some screens with pieces of sheets for the windows of the Capuchin Monastery of Sion, Switzerland.*

1969. *Presentation of the book Fregoli by Tapies and Joan Brossa, together with three tapestries and other recent work at the Sala Gaspar, Barcelona. Exhibition of large-scale paintings and colages at the Galerie Maeght, Paris.*

1970. *He is invited to take part in the Carnegie International of Pittsburgh. He does new collages and assemblages and, for the first time some sculptures.*

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