

Tàpies at 30

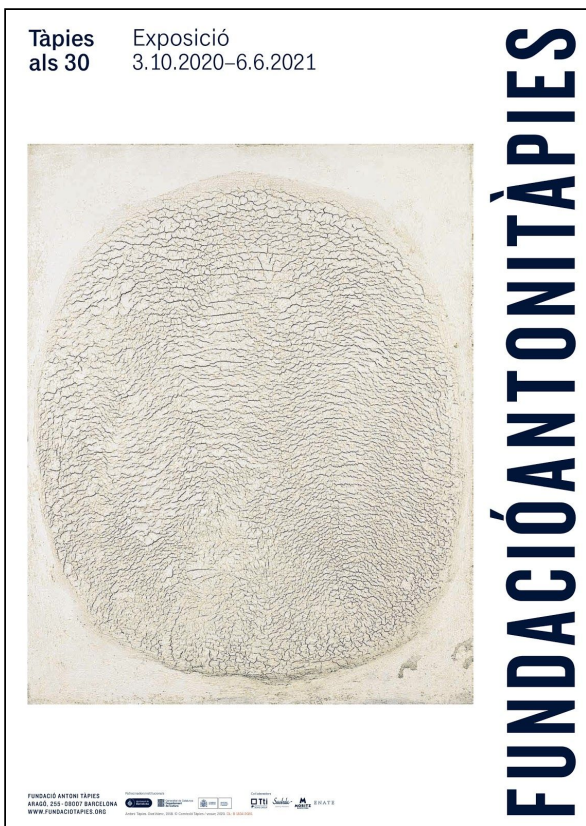
Fundació Antoni Tàpies



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Tàpies at 30

From October 3, 2020 to June 6, 2021

Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

Curator: Núria Homs

Opening: October 2, 2020, from 6pm. Registration is required on the fundaciotapies.org website.

This exhibition is part of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies. It focuses on the period 1953–63, when Tàpies was in his thirties. These were decisive years in the evolution of the artist's work and its reception for three reasons. Firstly, from 1954 he discovered his own language through which he would achieve artistic maturity. Secondly, it was from this time that he achieved international resonance and recognition in the form of awards and participation in

competitions and exhibitions, both in Europe and the United States. Thirdly, he refused to be exploited by the Franco regime, which at this time sought to use modern art to present a more liberal image of itself before the international community.

In 1953, Tàpies left behind the influences of Surrealism and the social line his work had previously taken: he experimented with pure colours and contrasts between tones, with elementary shapes and lines. He also began experimenting with texture, which was to prove especially relevant to the subsequent evolution of his work. Tàpies used tarlatan, fabrics and cardboard on the surface of his paintings; he made stains with solvents or materials that don't mix, such as oil with gouache or acrylic; he scraped the varnish, overlaid transparent forms, and covered the support with thick layers of matter, including the use of earth for the first time. Influenced by the evocative powers of music, Tàpies also tried to make his painting suggest emotions and moods.

In 1954, this research led him to accentuate the material quality of the paintings. Tàpies used all sorts of elements – such as sand, coloured earth, whitewash, marble dust, hair, thread, rags, paper – and the textures became more evident. His colours favoured the earthy and grey range, while his paintings took on the characteristic wall-like appearance of his mature work.

This interest in materials was part of a widespread focus on matter, which, after the Second World War, was shared by artists on both sides of the Atlantic. Experimentation with materials allowed him to evoke reality, not through the kind of a naturalism that relies on the artist's ability to represent, but utilising the suggestive force of matter itself, either through textures, or the use of outlines or other shapes in the painting. The images that emerged in his work became more iconographic from 1965 onwards, when he began to title some paintings with the formula 'matter in the form of', e.g., *Matèria en forma de peu* [Matter in the Form of a Foot], *Matèria en forma d'aixella* [Matter in the Form 1953 was an important year, marking the entry of

Tàpies' career onto the post-Second World War international circuit. That same year he received an award at the II Bienal de São Paulo and, above all, had his first two exhibitions in the United States: at Marshall Field & Company, Chicago, and the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York (Martha Jackson also offered to represent him in the United States). The paintings he showed were from 1948 to 1951, and therefore did not reflect the change that was taking place in his most recent work. Despite the poor response to the exhibitions, his trip to New York allowed him to encounter American Abstract Expressionism in situ and to see works by artists such as Tobey, Pollock, Kline, De Kooning and Motherwell.

Two years later he exhibited his matter paintings for the first time, to great critical acclaim. First in Paris, as part of the collective exhibition *Phases de l'art contemporain*, organised by the poet and art critic Édouard Jaguer at the Galerie Raymond Creuze. And later in Barcelona, at the *III Bienal Hispanoamericana de Arte*, where he was awarded a prize by the Republic of Colombia. In Paris, he met the French art critic Michel Tapié, a theoretical exponent of Informalism and a very influential figure in contemporary Parisian artistic circles. Interested in his work, Tapié invited him to join the Galerie Stadler, which was about to open in Paris.

It was in this gallery in 1956 that Tàpies had his first solo exhibition in the French capital. Featuring exclusively his matter paintings, the show proved a great success with both public and critics. For a little while longer, Paris remained the capital of the avant-garde. Tàpies signed a contract with Rodolphe Stadler that offered him continuity and a certain degree of economic stability. Martha Jackson, on the other hand, was reluctant to show Tàpies' recent work, and although she exhibited it in 1957, it was not until 1959 that she fully accepted the artist's new language. This change of heart was due to the successes Tàpies achieved in 1958. On the one hand, he received the first prize from the Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh with an all-star jury: Marcel Duchamp, Lionello Venturi, Raoul Ubac and the Americans James Johnson Sweeney, Mary Callery and the famous B-movie actor and important contemporary art collector, Vincent Price. In the same year, he presented fifteen

works in the Spanish Pavilion of the *XXIX Biennale di Venezia*, where he won the UNESCO Prize and the David Bright Foundation Award.

From then on, his works travelled increasingly around Europe and the United States: he participated in the II Documenta in Kassel (which in 1959 was devoted to abstract art) and in the inaugural exhibition of the Guggenheim Museum in New York; and had solo exhibitions in, among other places, Paris, Milan, Stockholm, Eindhoven, Essen, Munich, Washington DC and Buenos Aires... In 1962, the first retrospective exhibitions of his work took place in Germany, the United States and Switzerland: at the Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hanover, curated by Werner Schmalenbach, an exhibition that toured to the Kunsthaus, Zurich; and at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, curated by Thomas Messer. By 1963, when Tàpies reached 40, his work was consolidated and he had established an international reputation. On moving into his new studio-house designed by J.A. Coderch, he finally fulfilled his dream of a 'true' studio where he could work more comfortably on the large format paintings that he had begun making in recent years.

In the context of the Cold War, Franco's Spain was an interesting proposition for the anti-communist bloc. In 1953, Spain and the United States reached a military and economic agreement in exchange for military bases, which, together with the concordat signed with the Vatican that same year, signalled the beginning of Spain's emergence from diplomatic isolation. The inclusion of Barcelona in the tour of the influential exhibition of modern American art from the MoMA collection, incorporated into the *III Bienal Hispanoamericana de Arte* in 1955, was made possible thanks to the bilateral relations between the two countries. In its official position, the Spanish regime began to accept modern art, though only in an attempt to appear more liberal to Western democracies.

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Persevering in the strategic attempt to offer an image of modernity that suggested things were changing in Spain, in 1958 Luis González Robles, an experienced professional in both artistic and political circles, was commissioned to curate the Spanish Pavilion of the XXIX Biennale di Venezia. González Robles had the good sense to choose artists that best suited current international trends, and offered each an individual space. The success of the Pavilion was unquestionable. However, Spain remained a dictatorship, as some critics in the international press made clear. The situation troubled many artists, including Manolo Millares, Antonio Saura and Tàpies himself, who, feeling used, decided to play no further part in exhibitions organised by the regime.

For this reason, in 1959 Tàpies refused to participate in the exhibition *13 peintres espagnols actuels* organised by the Spanish government at the Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris, and in 1960 in the exhibition *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture* to be held at MoMA, New York. However, Tàpies did finally participate in the latter exhibition because, in a strategy designed to overcome the reluctance of certain artists to collaborate in exhibitions organised by the Spanish government, the coordination of the exhibition and the selection of works was put in the hands of the museum staff. In 1962, the Tate Gallery, London, co-organised the exhibition *Modern Spanish Painting* with the Spanish government. Against the will of the artist, who refused to participate, a collector from Barcelona lent three paintings to the exhibition. Tàpies opposed this by evoking the intellectual property law giving artists rights over the public exhibition of their work, and won the case in court in 1963. On

this occasion, he also took the opportunity to make some anti-Franco and pro-Catalan statements in the English weekly newspaper *The Observer*.

Biography

Antoni Tàpies' first artistic attempts began during a long convalescence following a serious illness, after which his increasing dedication to painting and drawing led him to abandon his university education. By the 1940s, he was already exhibiting work that distinguished him among the artistic scene of the moment. Co-founder of the magazine *Dau al Set* in 1948, and influenced by Miró and Klee, he became increasingly interested in iconographic and magical subjects. He gradually began to incorporate geometrical elements and colour studies leading to an interest in matter through the use of heavily textured canvases of great expressive and communicative possibilities.

With these works, Tàpies achieved international recognition by the mid-1950s. In the 1960s, he began incorporating new iconographic elements (writing, signs, anthropomorphic elements, footprints and references to the Catalan situation), and new technical methods (new surfaces, use of everyday objects and varnish). Tàpies' pictorial language has continued to develop ever since, resulting in a creative and productive body of work that is admired throughout the world.

He has exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Institute of Contemporary Art and the Serpentine and Hayward Galleries, London; the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; the Kunsthaus, Zurich; the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Jeu de Paume and the Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Valencia; and

the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, among many other prestigious institutions.

In parallel to his artistic production, Tàpies is also the author of numerous publications: *La pràctica de l'art* (1970), *L'art contra l'estètica* (1974), *Memòria personal* (1977), *La realitat com a art* (1982), *Per un art modern i progressista* (1985), *Valor de l'art* (1993) and *L'art i els seus llocs* (1999).

Antoni Tàpies created the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in 1984 with the aim of promoting the study and knowledge of contemporary art, paying special attention to art's role in forming the conscience of modern man.



Antoni Tàpies and Martha Jackson [and an unknown person], Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, 1953

Chronology 1953-63

This chronology includes the most important events in Antoni Tàpies' biography. It also incorporates some national and international historical facts to help contextualize this period.

1953

First solo exhibition in the United States is held at Marshall Field and Company, Chicago, organised by Josep Gudiol. He exhibits thirty-two works made between 1949 and 1950, such as *L'escarnidor de diademes* (The Scoffer of Diadems) and *El rapte de Batafra* (The Abduction of Batafra). He travels to New York to exhibit at the Martha Jackson Gallery, where he shows twenty paintings, most of which are from the Chicago exhibition. During his stay in New York, he acquires a greater knowledge of American Abstract Expressionism, in which he discovers affinities and coincidences with his own work. He resumes the material investigations begun eight years earlier into working with earth, collage, incisions, etc. Travels to Madrid for his exhibition at Galería Biosca, where he meets Vicente Aleixandre. Receives an award at the II Bienal de São Paulo.

Franco and the Vatican sign the Concordat, an international agreement to regulate relations between the Franco regime and the Catholic Church. Spain reaches a military and economic agreement with the United States, leading to the assignment of Spanish land for US military bases.

The Panmunjom armistice is signed, ending the Korean War. / Death of Stalin. / Dwight D. Eisenhower's becomes President of the United States.

1954

Solo exhibition at Galeries Laietanes, Barcelona. Participates in the *XXVII Biennale di Venezia* with five new works: *El crit. Groc i violeta* (The Cry. Yellow and Violet), *Himne* (Hymn), *Coral* (Chorale), *Amorós* (Lovestruck) and *Orfeu* (Orpheus), all from 1954. Also takes part in the *64th Annual Nebraska Art Association Exhibition and Reality and Fantasy 1900–1954* (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis). Marries Teresa Barba Fàbregas.

Almost three hundred prisoners of war, most of them from the Blue Division, arrive in Barcelona from the USSR on board the *Semíramis*.

France is defeated at Dien Bien Phu. End of the Indochina War. / Beginning of the Vietnam War (which will last until 1975). / Beginning of the Algerian War of Independence against France.

1955

Tàpies travels to Paris to present some works –for the first time in the French capital – in the exhibition *Phases de l'art contemporain* (Galerie R. Creuze), invited by the poet and critic Édouard Jaguer. During this trip, and with a letter of introduction from Martha Jackson, he gets to know Michel Tapié, with whom he sympathises

aesthetically. Tapié suggests he joins the gallery of Rodolphe Stadler, which opens in the autumn. Visits the exhibition *50 Ans d'Art aux États-Unis at the Musée national d'art moderne*, organised by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, featuring works by Clyfford Still, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Franz Kline, Mark Tobey, Willem de Kooning and Robert Motherwell, among others. Participates in a seminar on art organised by the Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo (Santander). Awarded the prize by the Republic of Colombia in the *III Bienal Hispanoamericana* (Barcelona). At the end of the year, he participates in the inaugural exhibition at the Galerie Stadler (Paris). Presents the work *Vençut (Defeated) 1953* in the *Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting*. Solo exhibitions in Stockholm, Santander and Barcelona.

The Eisenhower government officially recognises Franco's regime. Spain joins the UN. Franco opens the SEAT car factory in Barcelona.

Signing of the Warsaw Pact. / West Germany joins NATO. / Winston Churchill resigns as Prime Minister. / Bertrand Russell reads a statement from Albert Einstein (who died this year), warning that a nuclear war would mean the end of humanity.

1956

First solo exhibition in Paris (Galerie Stadler) in which he shows the matter paintings characteristic of this period. Michel Tapié publishes the monograph *Antonio Tàpies et*

l'oeuvre complete, the first dedicated to the artist. Participates in the *XXVIII Biennale di Venezia* with three matter paintings, and takes the opportunity to travel in Italy for the first time. In December, he creates the first version of *Porta metàl·lica i violí* (Metal Shutter and Violin, 1956) for the shop window of the Gales shop (Barcelona), organised by Alexandre Cirici. Participates in the exhibition *Recent Abstract Painting* (Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester), together with Karel Appel, Alberto Burri, Hans Hartung, Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko, among others. He is

selected for the exhibition *Pentagone*, organised by the magazine *Cimaise* at Galerie Arnaud (Paris). Birth of his son Antoni.

End of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco. The per capita income and real wages of Spaniards recover their pre-war levels (1935). In February there are clashes at the University of Madrid between students of different tendencies. Workers' strikes in the steel industry. The more radical Falangist ministers are replaced by technocrats linked to Opus Dei.

Soviet troops invade Hungary. / Nikita Khrushchev, first secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR, condemns Stalin's crimes. / Suez Crisis: Israel, Britain and France invade Egypt. / Eisenhower is re-elected President of the United States.

1957

Along with Michel Tapié, promotes the exhibition *Art altre* (Sala Gaspar, Barcelona), which introduces the work of Karel Appel, Alberto Burri, Jean Dubuffet, Jean Fautrier, Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline and Lucio Fontana, among others, to Spanish audiences. Receives the X Premio Internazionale per la Pittura de Lissone (Milan). In Paris, he meets Roland Penrose and Lee Miller. Exhibits again at the Martha Jackson Gallery (New York), where his recent works are shown for the first time. Solo exhibitions in Paris (Galerie Stadler) and Dusseldorf (Galerie Schmela). Participates in the *IV Bienal de São Paulo*.

In Barcelona, a general boycott and anti-Franco demonstrations in reaction to the increase in the price of tram tickets. Student protests at the Paranymph Hall of the University of Barcelona. In the Register of Births, names can only be registered in Spanish. The SEAT company begins the production of the 600 model. Significant increase in the migration of Spanish workers to Europe.

Konrad Adenauer is elected Chancellor of West Germany. / The Treaty of Rome establishes the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC).

1958

Participates in the exhibition *The Exploration of Form* (Arthur Tooth & Sons Ltd., London), the catalogue of which includes a text by Lawrence Alloway. Takes part in the exhibition *Neue Malerei in Frankreich*, which will tour to several cities in Germany. During that period, Tàpies is often referred to as being part of the School of Paris; under this label, he will participate in the exhibition *Nouvelle École de Paris. Französische Malerei der Gegenwart* at the Kunsthalle in Mannheim. First solo exhibition in Italy at the Galleria dell'Ariete (Milan), presented by poet and art critic Jacques Dupin, with whom he establishes a long-lasting friendship. On this occasion, he meets the painters Lucio Fontana and Emilio Scanavino and is photographed by Ugo Mulas. Participates in the *XXIX Biennale di Venezia* with fifteen works, where he is awarded the UNESCO Prize and the David Bright Foundation Award. Meets Luigi Nono and Nuria Schönberg, Emilio Vedova, Will Grohmann, Alberto Burri, Shuzo Takiguchi, Yoshiaki Tono, Eduardo Chillida and the collector Giuseppe Panza di Biumo. Awarded first prize at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh for the work *Composició grisa* (Grey Composition, 1958); meets Marcel Duchamp, member of the jury. Participates in the Osaka Festival. Birth of his daughter Clara.

Spain is admitted to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Nikita Khrushchev is appointed Prime Minister of the USSR. / In Britain the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is founded, and the first march is organised to the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston, marking the beginning of the peace movement. / Charles de Gaulle is elected President of the 5th French Republic. / Germany becomes a member of the EEC.

1959

Travels to New York with Stadler and Tapié for his new exhibition at the Martha Jackson Gallery. Meets painters Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Hans Hoffman, Saul Steinberg and Fritz Bultmann. Publication of the monograph

Antonio Tàpies, with text by Michel Tapié. Exhibitions in Munich and Paris. Is a member of the jury for the Premio Selezione Biennale di Pittura Internazionale organised by the Galleria dell'Ariete in Milan, where he meets Herbert Read. Is selected for *Documenta II* in Kassel and participates in the group exhibitions *4 Maler* (Kunsthalle, Bern), *15 Maler in Paris* (Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne), Arte Nuova. Esposizione Internazionale di Pittura e Scultura (Palazzo Graneri, Turin) and European Art Today. 35 Painters and Sculptors (Minneapolis, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, among others). Takes part in the inaugural exhibition of the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Exhibits at the Städtisches Museum (Leverkusen) and at the Galerie Beyeler (Basel). Refuses to participate in 13 peintres espagnols actuels at the Musée des Art Décoratifs (Paris), produced by the Spanish government.

The Economic Stabilisation Plan (and the liberalisation of foreign investment) is implemented. Eisenhower makes an official visit to Spain. ETA is created, a radical Basque nationalist organisation split from the PNV that will evolve into terrorism. The Valley of the Fallen is inaugurated in El Escorial (Madrid). The Galinsoga Affair (Barcelona). Triumph of the Cuban Revolution. Fidel Castro is proclaimed prime minister. / The United Nations approves a Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

1960

Juan Eduardo Cirlot publishes the monograph *Tàpies*, and the journal *Papeles de Son Armadans*, edited by Camilo José Cela, devotes a special issue to him with contributions by Giulio Carlo Argan, Umbro Apollonio, Jacques Dupin, Pierre Restany, Herbert Read and Joan Teixidor, among many others. Participates in the exhibitions *New Spanish Painting and Sculpture* (Museum of Modern Art, New York), *Before Picasso, after Miró* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York) and *Neue Malerei. Form, Struktur, Bedeutung* (Städtische Galerie, Munich). In the exhibition *New Forms – New Media* (Martha Jackson Gallery, New York), his works are shown alongside those of Arp, Burri, Calder, Chamberlain, Cornell, Dine, Dubuffet, Flavin,

Johns, Kaprow, Klein, Nevelson, Rauschenberg and Oldenburg. At the 東京東京東京東京 (Tokyo Biennale) receives the prize from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Makes poster – the first of many during his long career – announcing the creation of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (1960–63), for which Cirici Pellicer is director. Asks Francesc Vicens to edit an anthology of Michel Tapié's texts to be published in Barcelona. Buys a farmhouse in Campins in the Montseny. Birth of his son Miquel.

The Public Order Law is promulgated. Protests at the Palau de la Música Catalana (Barcelona)

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OPEC founded. / Sharpeville massacre (Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa). / The Belgian Congo and sixteen other African countries gain independence. / Brasilia, the new capital of Brazil, is completed, with buildings by Oscar Niemeyer.

1961

Travels to New York for his new exhibition at the Martha Jackson Gallery, on the occasion of which Tapié's *A Catalog of Paintings in America* is published, with a text by James J. Sweeney. Together with Tapié, visits composer Edgar Varèse, whose work he has long admired. During this year, several galleries in Europe and America host exhibitions of his work: Gres Gallery (Washington DC), Folkwang-Museum (Essen), Galerie Stadler (Paris) and Museo de Bellas Artes (Buenos Aires). Participates in the exhibitions *Arte e Contemplazione* (Palazzo Grassi, Venice) and *Paris, Carrefour de la peinture 1945–1961* (Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven). Makes theatre sets for Joan Brossa's play *Or i sal* that is presented at the Palau de la Música Catalana (Barcelona). In the summer, Hans Namuth photographs him in Campins.

The Basque organisation ETA's first acts of violence against the regime. Òmnium Cultural is constituted, with the aim of furthering national resistance and Catalan cultural institutions.

The Berlin Wall is begun. / John F. Kennedy is elected President of the United States. / Breakdown of diplomatic relations between the US and Cuba. / De Gaulle supports a referendum on the independence of Algeria. / Adolf Eichmann is put on trial in Jerusalem.

1962

First retrospective exhibitions: Kestner-Gesellschaft (Hannover), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York) and Kunsthaus (Zurich), organised by Werner Schmalenbach, Thomas Messer and Eduard Hüttinger, respectively. Attends the World Congress for Peace in Moscow, presided by Bertrand Russell. Spends the summer in the Swiss city of St Gallen, where he paints a large mural for the library of the Handels-Hochschule [currently the University of St Gallen]. Creates the work *Dominant gris-morat* (Purple-Grey, 1962) for the victims of the devastating floods in the Vallès region (Catalonia). J.E. Cirlot publishes *Significación de la pintura de Tapies*. Exhibition Modern Spanish Painting, Tate Gallery (London), co-produced with the Spanish government. Against the wishes of the artist, who refuses to participate, a collector from Barcelona lends work to the exhibition. Tàpies initiates legal action under a law granting artists rights over the exhibition of their work, and wins the case in 1963.

Strike movement in Asturias, Catalonia and the Basque Country. Birth of the first Comisiones Obreras (Trade Unions). Spain applies to join the Common Market.

Algeria obtains independence. / Cuban Missile Crisis. / Start of the Second Vatican Council.

1963

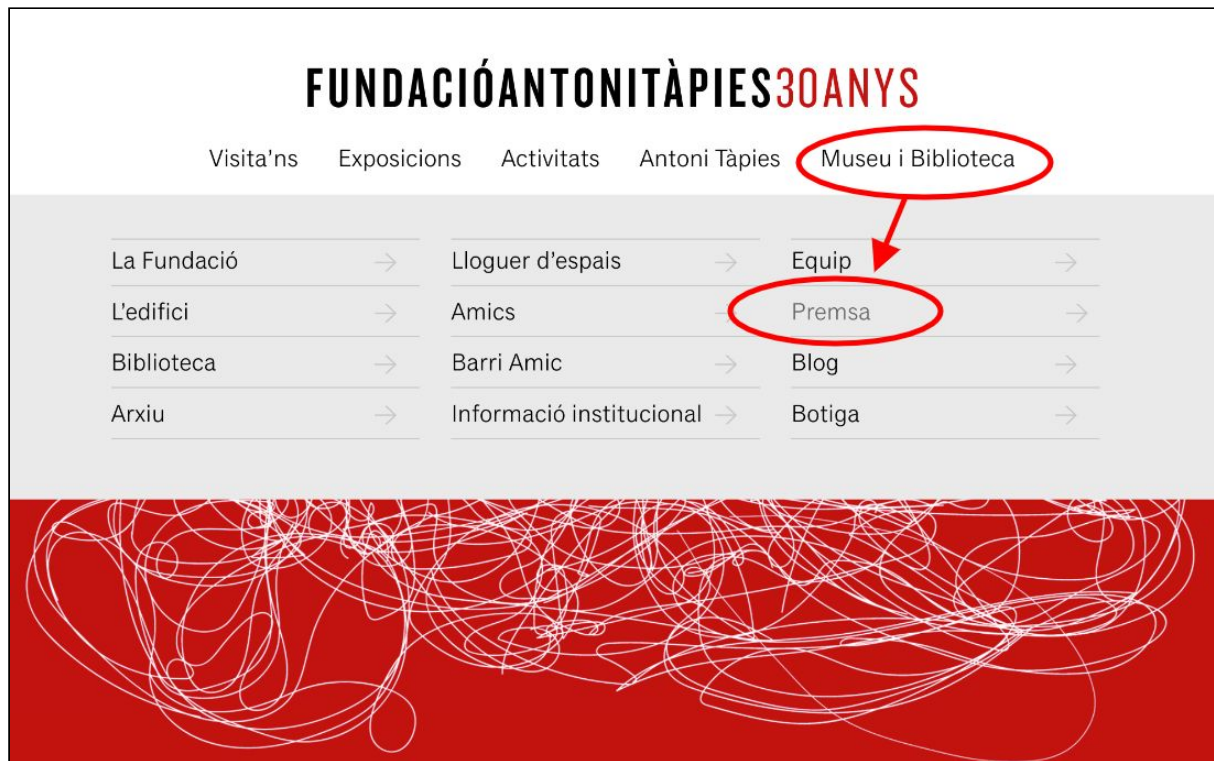
Moves to his new house-studio in Barcelona, designed by J.A. Coderch. With more space, he can more comfortably produce the largescale works characteristic of this period. Awarded a prize by the Providence Art Club (Rhode Island). Together with Brossa, publishes the artist's book *El pa a la barca*. First solo exhibition at Galerie Im Erker (St Gallen), with which he establishes a long professional relationship and where he often coincides with Eugène Ionesco, Friedrich Dürrenmat and Hans Hartung, among others. Solo exhibitions in New York (Martha Jackson Gallery), Turin (Galerie Notizie) and Paris (Galerie Berggruen). Signs a petition to the government demanding full rights for the Catalan language and a manifesto against torture and in support of an inquiry into the crackdown on the Asturian miners' protest movement. Solo exhibitions in New York, Turin and Paris.

Spain and the United States renew the continuity of mutual defence and economic cooperation agreements for five years. Spain joins the GATT. Julián Grimau, the Spanish communist leader, is executed in Madrid despite international protests. Raid and suspension of the activities of the grassroots organisation Òmnium Cultural, and closure of their headquarters by the Franco government. Despite this, it continues working in secret.

Assassination of President Kennedy. / The Soviet Union, Britain and the United States sign the Treaty on the partial prohibition of nuclear testing. / President John F. Kennedy is assassinated. He is succeeded by Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson. The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in defence of the civil and economic rights of African Americans takes place; Martin Luther King gives the speech 'I have a dream'. / The Soviet Union, Britain and the United States sign the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

Press documentation

Access to the press documentation through the menu in the upper margin of the screen, under the Fundació Antoni Tàpies logo, in the section titled 'Museum and Library'. Press kit and images for the press are included.



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