

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## ANTONI TAPIES IN PRINT

May 7 - August 9, 1992

The extensive printed *oeuvre* of the celebrated Catalan artist Antoni Tàpies (born 1923) is the subject of a major exhibition on view at The Museum of Modern Art from May 7 to August 9, 1992. Organized by Deborah Wye, curator, Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, **ANTONI TAPIES IN PRINT** surveys more than 100 prints and illustrated books from the 1940s to the present.

The exhibition and accompanying publication are made possible by generous grants from the Generalitat de Catalunya (autonomous government of Catalonia) and the Institute of North American Studies, Barcelona. Additional support was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Unlike American Abstract Expressionists of his generation, Antoni Tàpies followed a tradition in which printmaking was a major creative effort in its own right. Tàpies's prints, which are integrally related to his work in painting, assemblage, and sculpture, are among the most significant contributions to this area of artistic activity. The artist continually explores the aesthetic and expressive possibilities of printmaking, using such techniques as collagraph (a specialized form of embossing), collage, flocking, tearing, folding, and cutting to redefine in paper and ink the scarred, layered, and weathered appearance of his paintings. Through this constant probing and experimentation, Tàpies enriches both the tactility of his printed surfaces and the density of meaning in his abstract language.

**ANTONI TAPIES IN PRINT** is organized thematically, in order to emphasize Tàpies's long-standing vocabulary of forms---a vocabulary repeated so

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consistently as to constitute a visual language of surface and symbol. Among the recurring themes in Tàpies's work, that of Catalan culture is an especially powerful and poignant one. Catalonia was one of the last footholds of resistance to Franco during the Spanish Civil War. When the war was over, Franco banned the Catalan language, the very foundation of Catalan culture. Signs of Catalan culture and language appear frequently in Tàpies's work: some pieces incorporate the red and yellow bars of the flag; others include footprints remaining after a folkdance. Still other works illuminate poetic odes to Catalonia written by Tàpies's friend Joan Brossa, a Catalan poet, or pay homage to odes by Ramon Llull, the first major poet and prose writer to work in the Catalan language.

The human being and the familiar objects of everyday life are important themes that provide earthbound counterpoints to the spirituality of Tàpies's calligraphic signs. People inhabit the work as figures or fragments of figures -- both explicit and veiled -- and as simple imprints of fingers, hands, feet, and limbs, all serving as reminders of the human presence. Such elements as scissors, clothing, chairs, and beds combine associative and calligraphic functions and offer easily legible signs to the more suggestive forms.

Writing, or marks that suggest it, dominates the surfaces of Tàpies's work. The marks range from bold, graffiti-like phrases, to barely intelligible words, to isolated letters and numbers buried within the compositional structures. Book illustration is a natural extension of this use of writing that is so critical to the artist's style (actual newsprint has even formed the background for some of his compositions). Tàpies has illustrated more than thirty *livres d'artist*, often restructuring the book's format as part of his expression. Many of these are included in the exhibition.

Finally, **ANTONI TAPIES IN PRINT** includes some of Tàpies's monumental intaglio prints, in which many of the artist's thematic and stylistic elements are combined. The intaglio processes used in these powerful printed murals, which measure up to six-by-six feet, create works that are rich in association and range of expression.

Together, the works in the exhibition reveal Tàpies's belief in an art that is at once transcendent and earthly, that stands at the nexus of the worldly and spiritual. As Deborah Wye says in the book that accompanies the exhibition, Tàpies's "art acknowledges the inescapability of bodily functions, the intrusiveness of one's environment, the deep pull of cultural heritage, and the ever-present quest for the spiritual; it does not accept their separateness."

After **ANTONI TAPIES IN PRINT** closes in New York, a reduced version of the exhibition travels to The Art Museum, Florida International University, Miami (September 11 - October 17, 1992); The Detroit Institute of Arts (December 11, 1992 - February 10, 1993); and the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Caracas (March 1993). It had been previously seen at the Centro Cultural Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico; the Long Beach Museum of Art, California; and The Meadows Museum, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

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**PUBLICATION** *Antoni Tàpies in Print* by Deborah Wye. 128 pages. 50 black-and-white and 25 color illustrations. Covers, endpapers, and text annotations designed by the artist. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. Hardbound, \$37.50, and paperbound, \$19.95, available at The MoMA Book Store. Hardbound distributed to the trade by Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

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