

THE GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM BILBAO

presents on October 4, 2013

Antoni Tàpies
From Object to Sculpture
(1964–2009)



Sponsored by



GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Iberdrola is pleased and proud to sponsor this exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, dedicated to the great Antoni Tàpies's facet as a sculptor. The show, comprising works that employ a wide variety of materials and media, explores the thematic and conceptual continuity which Tàpies maintained over the course of five decades, offering new insights and perspectives on how this artist influenced the art of his time.

Walls, doors, chairs, closets, dishes, books, baskets and bathtubs parade through the galleries of the Museum, inviting visitors to see the world around them in a whole new light. The entire display radiates the aura of austerity and essentialness of a mystical vision that characterizes the objects which Tàpies rescues from reality to endow them with a new dimension.

With his sculptures, the artist attempts to penetrate to the root of things, linking reason with intuition and plunging us into his rich symbolic universe, a world full of mystery yet also intensely playful. Authenticity, pain, the passage of time, the human condition, and spirituality are among the themes addressed in his pieces. These works also offer reflections on the art of sculpture itself, such as the difficulties inherent in working with different materials or the sculpture's interaction with the public space.

Iberdrola's participation in this show at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is a reflection of our unswerving commitment to this institution and our firm support of art and culture as part of our corporate social responsibility policy. We believe that sharing and popularizing art is a fundamental task, which is why we dedicate our resources and efforts to ensuring that as many people as possible have a chance to enjoy and appreciate artworks from the past and the most avant-garde present, which give us a better understanding of ourselves and our society.

I trust that audiences will enjoy this splendid exhibition, which offers a sweeping overview of Tàpies entire objectual and sculptural output, and I encourage all art lovers to take advantage of this unique opportunity to bask in the creative genius of a universal artist.

Ignacio S. Galán
Chairman of Iberdrola

Antoni Tàpies. From Object to Sculpture (1964–2009)

- Curator: Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya
- Dates: October 4, 2013 – January 19, 2014
- Sponsored by: Iberdrola

To commemorate the first anniversary of the artist's death, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents [*Antoni Tàpies. From Object to Sculpture \(1964–2009\)*](#), the first comprehensive, in-depth survey of a fascinating facet of an artist who marked the second half of the 20th century.

Sponsored by Iberdrola, the exhibition features nearly one hundred works spanning the Tàpies's sculpture production spanning almost five decades: from the early objects and assemblages of the 1960s and 70s, to his more recent fire-clay and bronze pieces, including the last sculpture signed by the artist in 2009.

Objects and sculptures were central to Antoni Tàpies's artistic development and featured heavily throughout his career, constituting a unique and autonomous body of work. According to exhibition curator Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya, the exhibition "reveals Tàpies's lifelong preoccupation with the sculptural problem and for the first time brings his sculpture face-to-face with itself."

Organized both thematically and chronologically on the Museum's second floor, the exhibition features works in a range of dimensions, from the monumental to the small. By examining the chronological continuity, themes, materials, and mediums used by the artist, viewers are offered insight into the oeuvre of Antoni Tàpies—from his idea of the wall to re-creations of commonplace objects such as chairs, beds, skulls, and books.

Antoni Tàpies. From Object to Sculpture (1964–2009) is the fourth Guggenheim exhibition dedicated to the work of one of Spain's most international artists. The first was a major retrospective curated by Lawrence Alloway at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1962; the next was at the Guggenheim Museum SoHo, curated by Carmen Giménez in 1995; the most recent was a presentation of the Permanent Collection, *Chillida/Tàpies: Matter and Visual Thought* at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, curated by Petra Joos in 2001 and later travelling to the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin in 2002.

Tàpies produced his first autonomous, clearly three-dimensional objects in the mid-1960s. However, it was not until the 1980s that the word "sculpture" was formally introduced into his vocabulary.

The 1960s and 1970s

The exhibition begins in the Museum's classical galleries with Tàpies's sculptural output from the mid-1960s and 70s. This was a period of intense political activity for the artist, during which time he incorporated everyday objects into his research. These objects not only had ties with Art Informel, but also aligned him with other conceptual art movements that were emerging at the same time such as Arte Povera. Tàpies's early objects also had their roots in Dadaism and Surrealism.

This is evident in some of the works in the first part of the exhibition: *Cadira i roba* (Chair and Clothes, 1970), *Pila de plats* (Pile of Plates, 1970), and *Armari* (Wardrobe, 1973). Made of furniture, paper, clothes, sawdust, or wood, these are the pieces that marked the birth of a language of "three-dimensional objects" in Tàpies's career. The diversity of symbolic resources that characterize these works opened up many creative directions for the artist, as seen in *Farcell* (Bundle, 1970) and *Cartó corbat i corda* (Curved Cardboard and String, 1970).

Collage was the direct forerunner of his sculptures. In *Rotllo de tela metàl·lica amb drap vermell* (Roll of Chicken Wire with Red Rag, 1970) and *Maqueta per a "Núvol i cadira"* (Model for Cloud and Chair, 1988), Tàpies used mesh and chicken wire, malleable metals that helped to divide space and stand in opposition to natural organic elements, which he would also use in later decades.

Early Fireclay Works

In the early 1980s there was a significant change in the artist's creative process. He temporarily set aside his *assemblages* and entered the world of ceramics, producing his first ceramic sculptures in 1981.

Sculptor Eduardo Chillida, art dealer and gallerist Aimé Maeght, and ceramicist Joan Gardy Artigas played a fundamental role in this discovery. The exhibition includes some of his earliest ceramic pieces, including *Cub* (Cube, 1983) and *Díptic* (Diptych, 1983) made in Artigas's studio in Gallifa, Catalonia. The artist would later work at the Galerie Lelong studio in Grasse, France, assisted by German ceramist Hans Spinner.

Of all of the possibilities offered by ceramics, Tàpies concentrated on fireclay, or *terras xamotadas*, a blend of clay and fragments of crushed fired pottery. The mixture allowed him to create weather-resistant, sturdy, large-scale sculptures. An example is *Sabatilla* (Slipper, 1986), the over two-meter-long piece that dominates the center of the gallery.

The artist also experimented at the time with other ceramic materials and mediums such as enamel, stoneware, and porcelain. In works like *Llit* (Bed, 1988) and *Divan* (1987) we can see how he applied enamel to his fireclay sculptures, generally using brushes, brooms, or sponges. On most of these sculptures Tàpies inscribed marks or symbols, employing grinders and even the teeth of a key. In the exhibition catalogue, Alvaro Rodríguez Fominaya explains that the symbols "are interpretive devices and they do not 'reveal' anything. Instead they are like veils that add their own private meaning to the pieces."

In the book *La poétique de la matière*, Jean Frémon asks the question "What is sculpture?" to which Tàpies replies: "Why not, for example, thirty kilos of clay shaped into a premolar and hastily covered with white enamel that looks like it's still dripping?"

The artist inscribed letters and symbols in his objects and, in this way, transferred to them part of his symbolic repertoire, as can be seen the works *T tombada* (Fallen T, 1986) and *Cub-creu* (Cube-Cross, 1988), for example, which reflect perfectly Tàpies's imagery.

From Clay to Bronze

One of the Museum's large, curved galleries contains important examples of Tàpies's three-dimensional pieces, demonstrating his mastery of fireclay. Also highlighted here are his first experiments with bronze (*Armari* and *Matalàs* dominate the gallery), made in 1987 at the Foneria Vilà foundry in Valls, Catalonia. The artist worked with both materials in a set of pieces in which he repeated a series of everyday objects and motifs, such as books and skulls.

Among Tàpies's 1970s three-dimensional, furniture-based assemblages are his chairs, an extraordinary development in its own right. Later, in the 1980s, the artist revisited this theme.

The exhibition features a number of ceramic chairs produced in Grasse, France, in which Tàpies worked with ceramicist Hans Spinner. These pieces succinctly summarize part of the artist's symbolic universe: *Cadira coberta* (Covered Chair, 1988) bears the shape of an ear and a T; *Cadira amb barra* (Chair with Bar, 1988) includes a horizontal piece that transforms the chair into a T; and *Cadira* (Chair, 1987), features a cross. In all of them the artist used enamel on fireclay, a medium that introduced a certain level of uncertainty since heat can produce textural and color variations—aspects that captured the artist's interest.

Alongside these works is Tàpies's bathtub, dating from 1988. The bathtub, an object generally associated with private, intimate spaces, takes on new meaning when transported to the semi-public museum gallery. The basket, represented here in ceramic form, reappears later in a number of bronzes cast in the 1990s.

Walls and Doors

The concept of the wall, a fundamental idea in the iconographic imaginary of Antoni Tàpies, is also represented in a selection of works grouped together under the theme "Walls and Doors." *Tríptic* (Triptych, 1991) and *Composició* (Composition, 1991), made from refractory concrete, particularly reflect how the artist came to constructive abstraction.

"The story of how the evocative power of wall images took shape in me goes way back. They are memories from when I was a teenager and young man, trapped within the walls where I lived during the wars." In his 1969 article "Comunicación sobre el muro" (Communication on the Wall), the artist explained the ambivalence and many meanings of his walls: "How many suggestions can be derived from the image of the wall and all its possible permutations! Separation, cloistering, the wailing wall, prison, witness to the passing of time [...] So many things arose that appeared to establish a proud kinship between me and those philosophies and wisdoms I so esteemed!"

Along these same lines, the door theme also appeared which the artist created in ceramic and bronze. Examples include two bronzes cast in 1987, *Porta II* (Door II) and *Porta* (Door); and the most literal of these pieces, *Mur* (Wall, 1991).

Laden with symbolism, Tàpies's doors and walls stand before the visitor's gaze.

Summer 1993

In 1993 Antoni Tàpies presented the installation *Rinzen*—a Japanese word meaning “sudden awakening”—in the Spanish Pavilion at the 45th Venice Biennale, where his work was featured alongside that of Basque artist Cristina Iglesias. The piece, which was awarded the Leone d’Oro, was a symbol of protest and a reflection on the effects of the Balkans war.

After finishing this piece, the artist began the summer of 1993 with renewed energy. In his studio in Montseny, he created a series of objects, turning his attention back to *assemblage* in its purest form. *Capçal i metall* (Bedhead and Metal), *Paquetes metàl·lics* (Metal Packets), and *L’hora del te* (Teatime) were all created in 1993. This impulse was solidified in 1994 in an exhibition held in London, entitled *Antoni Tàpies: A Summer’s Work*, which featured works created from the time of the Venice Biennale, a turning point in the artist’s sculptural career.

In a sense, these new pieces embody all of his past, as they are connected with his earlier objects from the 1970s but they also give us a glimpse into the future sculptural work of the artist by introducing new textures and elements.

1995–2009

The exhibition concludes with a number of sculptures dating from 1995 to 2009, covering the artist’s production until his death. This period saw Tàpies embrace a wide range of mediums and materials which the artist had collected and perfected over the decades.

Tàpies did not stop at merely re-creating past techniques. Instead, he alternated materials and processes with remarkable alacrity, at the same time creating assemblages, bronzes, and ceramics, adding new elements to his vocabulary. In bronze, he worked with varnishes and new formats—*Caixa i cadira* (Box and Chair, 1999); in ceramics, he set mineral against organic matter and stoneware against earth—*Creu invertida* (Inverted Cross, 2002); and in objects he created new perspectives and volumes—*Composició amb Cistella* (Composition with Basket, 1996).

Nonetheless, in his imagery some aspects remained unaltered: the signs, the letters, the crosses, the mathematics, the rural, and the familiar, everyday objects. In one of his last essays, Tàpies included this quote by Shi Tao: “I speak with my hands, you listen with your eyes.”

The artist’s last sculpture *Threshing Board* (Trill) dates to 2009, closing this exhibition dedicated to Antoni Tàpies the sculptor, one of the least-known yet most relevant facets of the great Catalanian artist.

Educational space

The educational space designed for the show provides visitors with an overview of the most important landmarks in the artist’s life, with special emphasis on highlights related to his sculptural production. This section also looks at Tàpies’s facet as a creator of public art, focusing on *Rinzen*, *Núvol i cadira* and *Mitjó*, among other projects. Although created for public spaces, they are related to the works on display by the same techniques, materials, or ideas.

Catalogue

The exhibition catalogue features essays by curator Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya, Tony Godfrey, and Anatxu Zabalbescoa, introducing readers to the Catalanian artist's three-dimensional production. *Antoni Tàpies: From Object to Sculpture (1964–2009)* contains nearly one hundred reproductions as well as short comments by artists Mirosław Balka, Cristina Iglesias, Marjetica Potrč, and Jessica Stockholder on specific works by Tàpies. The catalogue also contains a timeline and a glossary compiled by María José Balcells.

Cover image:

Pila de plats (Pile of Plates), 1970

Object-assemblage

40 x 23 x 23 cm

Collection John Cage Trust

© Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona / VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013

Photo: Joerg Lohse

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Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

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At the press area (prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es/en) you can register and download high resolution images and videos featuring the exhibitions and the building. Sign in to get access. If you are already a user, log in here (you need your username and password).

For further information, please contact the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Press Department: tel. +34 944 35 90 08 and email: media@guggenheim-bilbao.es

1. *Cadira i roba* (Chair and Clothes), 1970

Object-assemblage

94 x 76 x 63 cm

Collection Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

© Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona / VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013

Source of the images: VEGAP Image Bank



2. *Pila de diaris* (Pile of Newspapers), 1970

Object-assemblage

29 x 45 x 43 cm

Collection of Michael Straus

© Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona / VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013

Photo: Jason Wallis



3. *Pila de plats* (Pile of Plates), 1970

Object-assemblage

40 x 23 x 23 cm

Collection John Cage Trust

© Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona / VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013

Photo: Joerg Lohse



4. *Farcell* (Bundle), 1970

Paint on object-assemblage

75 x 55 x 45 cm

Private collection, Barcelona

© Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona / VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013

Source of the images: VEGAP Image Bank



5. *Armari* (Wardrobe), 1973

Object-tapestry

231 x 201 x 156 cm

Collection Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

© Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona / VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013

Source of the images: VEGAP Image Bank



6. *La butaca* (The Armchair), 1987

Paint on bronze

88 x 90 x 87 cm

Collection Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

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Source of the images: VEGAP Image Bank



7. *Llit* (Bed), 1988

Enamel on fireclay

27 x 175 x 86.5 cm

Maxine and Stuart Frankel Foundation for Art

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Photo: PD Rearick



8. *Banyera I* (Bathtub I), 1988

Enamel on fireclay

78.5 x 143.5 x 63.5 cm

Private collection

© Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona / VEGAP, Bilbao 2013

Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd



9. *Composició* (Composition), 1991

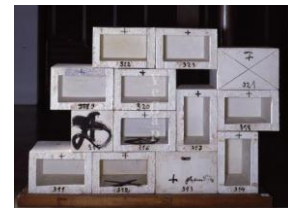
Oxide paint on refractory concrete

160 x 243 x 59 cm

Collection Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona

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Source of the images: VEGAP Image Bank



10. *Panera de roba* (Linen Basket), 1993

Paint on object-assemblage

48.5 x 118.5 x 156 cm

Private collection, Barcelona

© Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona / VEGAP, Bilbao, 2013

Source of the images: VEGAP Image Bank



Portraits of the artist:

Antoni Tàpies at his workshop, Barcelona, 2002

Photo © Teresa Tàpies Domènech



Antoni Tàpies at his workshop, Barcelona, 2002

Photo © Teresa Tàpies Domènech

