

**JOSEP GRAU-GARRIGA**

*Grau-Garriga. L'expérience imaginée*

February 24 - April 15, 2023

3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri, Paris 4<sup>e</sup>



Josep Grau-Garriga, *Le combat du marin*, 1989  
Wool, cotton, 200 x 350 cm (78 3/4 x 343 1/4 in.)  
Photo Credit: Bertrand Huet / Tutti image  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia Paris / Brussels

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is pleased to present *Grau-Garriga. L'expérience imaginée*, the third solo exhibition of the artist Josep Grau-Garriga in the gallery in Paris, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri. His paintings are held in important collections and museums around the world, such as the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the MACBA in Barcelona and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

A classical training in painting can, paradoxically, allow the artist to achieve an utter liberty: Pablo Picasso is the most eloquent example of this kind. Josep Grau-Garriga, born in 1929 in Sant Cugat del Vallès near Barcelona, began by learning drawing at the San Jordi School of Fine Arts; he painted his first frescoes at the Hermitage of San Crist de Lleceres, in the tradition of Catalan medieval mural art. The artist gradually shifted towards heterodoxy, adopting an experimental and daring practice, thereby leaving a powerful legacy: his great mastery of the art of tapestry and painting has given his creations a high degree of freedom, both in the form used and the content expressed. Arnau Puig points out in the reference book on the artist: "Inside him was confirmed a project that he was gradually pursuing, which consisted in demystifying the high traditional value given to the art of weaving in order to make it an act, no longer of submission to established principles and rules, but one of creative and expressive freedom"<sup>1</sup>. Matter becomes an expressive force. Superpositions and insertions of materials enhance everyday objects, giving rise to unique textural impressions and reliefs all becoming progressively part of his creative resources over the years.

*Grau-Garriga. L'expérience imaginée* shows this creative effervescence by bringing together a heterogeneous body of works, all dated between 1972 and 2009. Tapestries, works on paper and a video share the exhibition space: they highlight the artistic evolution of this virtuoso of contemporary tapestry, from early examples burdened by Spain's historical upheavals to serene and timeless tapestries of the 2000s. The exhibition shows the artist's ability to imagine new plastic combinations, whose readings - sometimes clear and sometimes indirect - reflect personal and collective experiences. *Grau-Garriga. L'expérience imaginée* plunges the visitor into the heart of a continuously expanding thought, nurtured by a raw sensibility: Josep Grau-Garriga thus succeeds in creating "the miracle of a beauty that is both primitive and beyond sophistication"<sup>2</sup>.

He cultivated this acute sensitivity early on, growing up in a rural environment, in contact with nature. He observed the immensity of the landscape, its redrawing by the work of the laborer, the plough digging the earth. The geometry of the furrows, the textures and smells emanating from the soil awakened his sensitivity. This deep attachment to pungent, tactile nature, to objects and to society, constitutes the foundations of the subjects that will inspire him throughout his life.

<sup>1</sup> Puig Arnau, *Josep Grau-Garriga*, preface by José María Valverde, Éditions Cercle d'Art, 1986, p.208

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13

In the 1950s, Grau-Garriga began to practice the art of tapestry, setting up experimental textile workshops in his hometown. Meanwhile, his various journeys raised his awareness of the world's artistic movements - the Art informel of Fautrier, Dubuffet and Burri in France or Pop and Conceptual Art in the United States. These geographical journeys also confronted him with the different political and cultural contexts of each country.

From the 1970s to the end of 1980s Grau Garriga elaborated a body of work opposed to the aesthetics of the time and punctuated by social denunciations and strong political messages. From Francoism in Spain to May 1968 in France, from international conflicts to the workers' struggle, everything seemed to affect the artist's sensibility. The bags and strings that are intertwined in his works are symbolic elements, soaking up the sweat and blood of humanity. The most significant parable in the exhibition is the flag with the colors of Catalonia, *Com bandera (Like Flag)*, 1974. This charged motif symbolizes the Catalan national identity, disfigured by the violence of the dictatorship. By seeking free expression in his artistic practice, Grau-Garriga attempts to restore the lost freedom of the people of his country.

*Grau-Garriga. L'expérience imaginée* thus reveals the artist's ability to imagine new artistic horizons, to overcome established frameworks, rules and conventions. The viewer's imagination is stimulated by these abstract compositions made of unidentified objects. The assigned titles provide multiple possibilities of imagination, vaguely figurative interpretations: a date, *Agost 86 (August 86)*, could embody a key event; *Rastre de naufragi (Trace of a shipwreck)* can evoke a painful experience and *Mals lligams (Bad ties)*, links that intertwine into knots. Within one and the same work, porosities between the real and the fictional world are established, inspired by both the common history and the intimate history of the artist.

For the underlying principle of the exhibition seems to trace the path of Josep Grau-Garriga's life: the visitor wanders through works of the 1970s marked by the Spanish Civil War, to the quiet of the 2000s, when the artist moved to the French countryside. Although wool or hemp fibers, copper wire and plastic cord retain their substantial thickness, the artist's latest creations seek to unify skills and materials. They reflect a harmony that he found in his workshop in Anjou, with its luminous and serene atmosphere, the years that marked the end of his life. In the Anjou region, Josep Grau-Garriga once again rubs shoulders with the immensity of the landscape: a return to his origins confirming his infinite love of the natural world, this *field* of creation with unlimited potential.

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**Josep Grau-Garriga was born in 1929 in Sant Cugat del Vallès (Spain). He died in 2011 in Saint-Mathurin-sur-Loire (France).**

In the 1960s, Josep Grau-Garriga's tapestries attracted the attention of Philippe de Montebello, a young American curator and future director of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. This encounter gave the artist his first major retrospective at the Houston Fine Arts Museum (Texas, USA) in 1970. This collaboration marked the beginning of an international career that led Josep Grau-Garriga to carry out numerous international projects with solo exhibitions in institutions such as the Birmingham Museum of Fine Arts (Birmingham, United States) in 1971, the LACMA (Los Angeles, United States) in 1974 and the Museo Tamayo (Mexico City, Mexico) in 1987.

From November 2022 to September 2023, a solo exhibition is dedicated to him at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona (MACBA), where the large installation *Diàleg de llum (Dialogue of Light)* is presented. The year 2020 is marked by the exhibition of one of his major installations, *Retaule dels penjats (Altarpiece of the Hanged)* (1972-1976) at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, as part of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Biennial of Sydney, *NIRIN*. The year 2019 also marks the opening of the Grau-Garriga Center for Contemporary Textile Art in Sant Cugat del Vallès, in the province of Barcelona, where the artist was born and lived for many years. In 2018, Galerie Nathalie Obadia presented a monumental and historic work by the artist at Art Basel Unlimited in collaboration with the Salon 94 gallery in New York. That same year, his work was presented at the Quadrilatère de Beauvais as part of the exhibition *Muralnomad* and at the Fondation Villa Datriis (L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, France) as part of the exhibition *Tissage / Tressage... quand la sculpture défile*.

Josep Grau-Garriga's work is also shown in major group exhibitions, such as *From Shadow to Light. Tapestries from Picasso to Grau-Garriga* at the Musée Jean Lurçat in 2011 (Angers, France); *Decorum. Tapis et tapisseries d'artistes* at the Musée d'Art moderne de la ville de Paris (France) in 2013; *Creative Crossroads: The Art of Tapestry* at the Denver Art Museum in 2015 (Denver, USA); *Tapisseries nomades. Fondation Toms Pauli. Collection XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* at the Musée cantonal des Beaux-arts de Lausanne in 2016 (Switzerland); and the reopening exhibition of the Musée Hyacinthe Rigaud in 2017 in Perpignan (France).

Josep Grau-Garriga's work is included in important collections in France and abroad, such as those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum (New York), the Denver Art Museum (Denver), the Houston Museum of Fine Arts (Houston), the Cordoba Museum (Lincoln) and the Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center (Oklahoma) in the United States; in Switzerland, the Toms Pauli Foundation (Lausanne), the Gandur Foundation for Art (Geneva) and the Ghisla Art Collection (Locarno); in Mexico, the Museo Tamayo de Arte Contemporaneo (Mexico City); in Chile, the Museo Salvador Allende (Santiago); in Spain, the Museums of Contemporary Art of Barcelona, Vilafamès, Elche and the Museums of Fine Arts of Seville and Alicante, the Museo Montserrat (Montserrat), the Fundacio Vila Casas, the Fundacio Banco Sabadell in Barcelona and the CA2M Centre d'art Dos de Mayo in Madrid; in France, the work of Josep Grau-Garriga is present in the collections of the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Musée Jean-Lurçat and the Musée des Beaux-arts d'Angers, the Musée Réattu (Arles), the Musée Cantini (Marseille), the Musée Hyacinthe Rigaud (Perpignan), the Musée du château des ducs de Wurtemberg (Montbéliard), the Musée de la Ville de Montpellier, the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Saint Lo, as well as in several FRAC.

Josep Grau-Garriga's work has been represented by Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels, since 2016.

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