

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS - BRUXELLES

JOSEP GRAU-GARRIGA

Tapisseries: 1970-2011

September 10th - October 29th, 2016

3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri - 75004 Paris



Josep Grau-Garriga, *Couleurs communes* (Couleurs communes), 1980 © Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is pleased to dedicate its fall exhibition to the great Catalan artist, Josep Grau-Garriga, who died in 2011. The importance and singularity of his work, which had not been presented in France in a solo exhibition since 2010, were in evidence at the group exhibition, "*Decorum*" at the *Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris* in 2013.

This first exhibition of Josep Grau-Garriga's work at the Galerie du Cloître Saint-Merri, a retrospective, proposes a remarkable group of eighteen tapestries which trace, from 1970 to 2011, the evolution of this pioneer in contemporary tapestry, from the most tormented and political works of the 1970s to the serene and timeless pieces from the years 2000.

"Tapestry is the logical complement to architecture," says Josep Grau-Garriga as early as the 1970s, a decisive decade during which the artist pushed the genre to its limits. "*I was not satisfied with only the language of forms and colors. I longed for the suggestive sensuality of the reliefs woven into the irregular weft, or on the contrary, exalted through the rigorous rhythms of the warp threads.*"¹

Josep Grau-Garriga was born in 1929 in Sant Cugat del Vallès, near Barcelona and grew up in a farming environment. He was the grandson of an anarchist hairdresser and the son of a republican farmer. As a teenager he witnessed the defeat of the republican troops and the establishment of the Franco dictatorship, traumatic events that marked his future work. Having started drawing lessons, he studied at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* in San Jordi before painting his first frescoes at the Ermitage de Sant Crist de Llaceres in the medieval Catalan mural art tradition.

In 1957, during a stay in Paris, he met the master weaver, Jean Lurcat, at whose side he made his first tapestries. During this voyage, he discovered the principal representatives of Informal Art: Fautrier, Dubuffet, Burri. Their influence can be seen in his textile works whose organic character became increasingly important over the following years and was affirmed through the uneven surfaces which featured voluminous protuberances, tentacles or roots. This was particularly the case in the work of 1974 "*...I també la mort*" (... Et la mort aussi) which can be seen in the exhibition.

¹André Kuenzi, *La Nouvelle Tapisserie*, Éditions de Bonvent, Genève, 1974, p. 100

Marked by this first trip to France – which was to become his second country starting in 1992 – Grau-Garriga remained an artist who was resolutely Catalan in identity. Like his compatriots Gaudi, Miró, and Tapiès, Grau-Garriga made tapestries that reflected his rural background, with material that was often “poor” holding an essential place beside political references made perceptible through the presence of symbolic details, evidence of the artist’s patriotic commitments, like the works “*Aixecats com símbol (Soulevés comme symbole, 1974)*” and “*Record de soldat (souvenir de soldat, 1977)*” also included in the exhibition. Working without cardboard, Josep Grau-Garriga rapidly abandoned the traditional technique and claimed to favor, “a tapestry for our times, coarse and harsh, that expresses our history.”



Et la mort aussi (...Et la mort aussi), 1972 © Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels



Record de soldat (Souvenir de soldat), 1977 © Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Through the years, having acquired a virtuosic mastery in the art of weaving tapestries, Grau-Garriga decided to definitively renounce all high wrap processes, virtually revolutionizing the genre. Arnau Puig, in his work of reference on the artist writes, “*In his mind a project came into being that he realized little by little, and that consisted of demystifying the high value traditionally accorded to the art of weaving in order to make it an act, rather than a submission to established principles and rules, an act of creative and expressive freedom.*”² Rather than weave, he manipulated the fibers like a sculptor. His tapestries, more and more personal and complex, became the almost baroque incarnation of intimate emotional states in the presence of which the viewer cannot remain insensitive, like for example the majestic and poignant, “*Ferides I*” (Wounds I, 1970), which is the first piece, chronologically, in the exhibition.

With an attraction for art brut as well as for pop art, Grau-Garriga uses string, hemp, jute, sisal, old burlap bags, wool scraps. From 1972 on, the artist even used clothes, bringing the real world into the weave of his tapestries. Unclassifiable, these works elude, through the jubilant practice of collage, the paradigms of figuration and abstraction. They bewilder the general public because of their “bizarre expressionism” and seduced artists and intellectuals such as Miró and Picasso who went to his studio in Sant Cugat to make their woven works.

In the 1970s and 1980s, having become veritable textile sculptures, Grau-Garriga’s tapestries attracted the attention of Philippe de Montebello, the young American curator and future director of the *Metropolitan Museum of New York*, who proposed to present Grau-Garriga’s first big retrospective at the *Houston Fine Arts Museum* (Texas) in 1970. This collaboration marked the beginning of an international career that led the artist to realize numerous projects in the United States, Canada and South America, with solo exhibitions in institutions such as *LACMA* (Los Angeles) in 1974 and the *Museo Rufino Tamayo* of Mexico in 1987.

In 1992, in response to a commission from the city of Angers for the commemoration of the bicentennial of the French revolution, Josep Grau-Garriga moved permanently to Saint-Mathurin-sur-Loire thus inaugurating a decade of sensual and gentle creation. These years were those of a fruitful bliss; there the artist went back over the history of French painting, from Clouet to Bonnard and from Fragonard to Corot, a history marked by the homage made to a certain quality of light that he contemplated on the banks of the Loire.

The tapestries from the 1990s and years 2000 in the Angers period reflect this appeasement. Unburdened of the militant and subversive dimension of the Catalan period, these works evoke natural landscapes, voluptuous embraces and playful pleasures.

²Grau-Garriga, Arnau Puig, Éditions Cercle d’art, monography 1986, p. 208

Using a remarkable economy of means, “*Amarra*” (2006) is therefore an ample monochrome whose deep blue is pierced by a thick cord visually recreating the rocking sensation of a moored boat. Also presented in the exhibition is “*Sense tito*” (from the years 2000), of a more sophisticated composition, which offers for contemplation another type of pearly white monochrome, with overlapping materials, which is his attempt to capture the twinkling of light in the sparkling mesh of the cloth. These mature works, of a great subtlety, conjugate visual and tactile qualities, allowing a discreet yet confident lyricism to emerge as a luminous counterpoint to the striking tapestries, full of drama, from the Spanish years.



Amarra, 2006 © Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels



Portrait of Josep Grau-Garriga in his atelier in Saint-Mathurin-sur-Loire

JOSEP GRAU-GARRIGA

1929, Sant Cugat del Vallès (Catalonia, Spain)

2011, Saint-Mathurin-sur-Loire (Angers, France)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS SINCE 1970 (SELECTION)

- 2015 Josep Grau Garriga. Textile sculptures from the 1970s to the 1990s. Galerie Michel Soskine, Madrid, Spain
- 2010 Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Angers, Cabinet d'arts graphiques, Angers, France
- 2009 Abbaye de Saint-Florent-le-Vieil, France
- 2002 Abbaye de Ronceray y Musée Jean Lurçat d'Angers, Angers, France
- 1999 Canals Galeria d'Art, Sant Cugat, Spain
- 1993 Templo romano de Vic, Vic, Spain
- 1992 Centre Cultural Can Mulà, Mollet del Vallès, Spain
- 1990 Museu d'Història de Sabadell, Sabadell, Spain
- 1989 Musée Jean Lurçat, Angers, France
- 1987 Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico DF, Mexico
- 1985 Claustros del Monasterio Real, Sant Cugat del Vallès, Spain
Musée du Château des ducs de Wurtemberg, Montbéliard, France
- 1983 Arras Gallery, New York, USA
- 1982 Claustros del Monasterio Real, Sant Cugat del Vallès, Spain
- 1981 Palais de la UNESCO, Paris, France
- 1975 The Birmingham Museum of Fine Arts, Birmingham, USA
- 1974 Los Angeles Country Museum, Los Angeles, USA
- 1973 Museu Textil, Terrassa, Spain
- 1972 Sala del Consell de les Valls, Andorre la Vielle, Andorre
Galeria Antoñana, Caracas, Venezuela
- 1971 The Birmingham Museum of Fine Arts, Birmingham, USA
- 1970 The Houston Fine Arts Museum, Houston, USA
The Córdoba Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts, USA

GROUP EXHIBITIONS SINCE 2011 (SELECTION)

- 2016 «Tapisseries nomades. Fondation Toms Pauli. Collection XXe siècle», Musée cantonal des Beaux- Arts de Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland
- 2015 «Creative Crossroads: The Art of Tapestry», Denver Art Museum, Denver, USA
«Del segundo origen. Artes en Cataluña, 1950-1977», Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain
«Tapisserie? De Picasso à Messager:», Musée Jean Lurçat, Angers, France
- 2013 «Decorum. Tapis et tapisseries d'artistes», Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France
«Hay más rutas que la nuestra. Las colecciones de Tamayo después de la modernidad.», Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico DF, Mexico
- 2011 «De l'Ombre à la Lumière, Tapisseries catalanes, de Picasso à Grau-Garriga», Musée Jean Lurçat, Angers, France

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

MACBA - Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona (Spain)
Fundació Vila Casas, Barcelona (Spain)
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Elche (Spain)
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Seville (Spain)
Museo de Bellas Artes Gravina, Alicante (Spain)
Museu Tèxtil, Tarrasa (Spain)
Museo Provincial de Teruel (Spain) Museu de Villafamès, Castelló (Spain)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (USA)
The Brooklyn Museum, New York (USA)
The Denver Art Museum, Denver (USA)
The Houston Fine Arts Museum, Houston (USA)
The Cordoba Museum, Lincoln (USA)
The Oklahoma Art Centre, Oklahoma (USA)
Fondation Toms Pauli, Lausanne (Switzerland)
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (France)
Musée Jean-Lurçat, Angers (France)
Musée des Beaux Arts, Angers (France)
Musée Goya-Jaurés, Castres (France) Musée Réattu, Arles (France)
Musée Cantini, Marseille (France)
Musée du château des ducs de Wurtemberg, Montbéliard (France)
Musée de la Ville, Montpellier (France)
Musée Hyacinthe Rigaud, Perpignan (France)
Musée des Beaux Arts, Saint Ló (France) Frac Ile-de-France, Paris (France)
FRAC Lorraine, Metz (France)
Museo Salvador Allende, Santiago de Chile (Chile)
Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico DF (Mexico)

Galerie Nathalie Obadia

Paris
Bourg-Tibourg

Valérie Belin

All Star
September 10th - October 29th, 2016

Andres Serrano

Torture
November 10th - December 30th, 2016

Galerie Nathalie Obadia

Paris
Cloître Saint-Merri

Josep Grau-Garriga

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Group exhibition

Photographies
November 10th - December 30th, 2016

Galerie Nathalie Obadia

Brussels

Rodrigo Matheus

Ornament and Crime
September 7th - October 22th, 2016

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