

*“Like a researcher in his laboratory, I am the first spectator of the suggestions drawn from the materials. I unleash their expressive possibilities, even if I do not have a very clear idea of what I am going to do. As I go along with my work I formulate my thought, and from this struggle between what I want and the reality of the material – from this tension – is born an equilibrium.”* (Antoni Tàpies)

The Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen is devoting a retrospective show to the impressive creative oeuvre of Catalan artist Antoni Tàpies with its exhibition “Image, Body, Pathos”. Here, it will be possible to see 47 paintings from more than seven decades, many of which are being presented in Germany for the first time ever.

Antoni Tàpies was born in Barcelona in 1923. Alongside Dalí, Miró, Chillida and Picasso, he is one of *the* great Spanish artist personalities, who had a decisive influence on European painting in the second half of the 20th century. The early presentation of the 4th Rubens Prize to Tàpies by the city of Siegen in 1972 was more than justified. The exhibition “Image, Body, Pathos” permits us to take an up-to-date view of the artist's astounding, lifelong productivity. In Siegen it will be possible to see his works since the 1940s – including 10 works from the Lambrecht-Schadeberg Collection – as well as the late work, which is scarcely known in Germany.

While the early work is still characterised by self-portraits, in the 1950s Tàpies developed an understanding of painting that presented a completely new pictorial corporeality. He began to produce pictures using sand, clay, marble dust and lime, which resemble impenetrable walls. The crannied backgrounds to his works, incorporating various materials, have an almost physical impact on the viewer. At the same time, he repeatedly breaks open this wall-like surface by scratching in grooves or cryptic signs, making imprints or including other objects in a collage-like manner. In addition, he experiments with different paints and varnishes.

When we look very closely, the signs inscribed into the surface become letters or crosses and all at once they develop an aura of significance. A pale outline in varnish or a raised ridge suddenly metamorphoses into a body.

Depictions of the human body appear repeatedly in the material paintings, whether in imprints, symbolic suggestions, relief-like plasticity or the integration of everyday objects. A chair, bed, door or clothing, as depictions or as real objects, points to the simplest of human needs and opens up diverse associative possibilities to the viewer. Suddenly, one finds oneself thrown back upon oneself, questioning one's own basic existential needs. The viewer participates actively in the

constitution of the image. Tàpies develops an impressive iconography with a motivation that is both personal and universal.

The more recent paintings from the late work, which appear almost bare and colourless, also create a fascinating effect through their reduction. They confront the recipient with an intensity that almost seems like a magical power of attraction. After the paintings of the 60s with their overwhelming wealth of material, the canvases of the 90s remain positively empty. Tàpies has allowed himself to be inspired by far eastern philosophy, so that the colourless canvases are primarily reminiscent of contemplation and meditation. In particular, the square formats of the late work radiate an integral harmony.

Tàpies' paintings evolve in a dialogue with the body of the image and the materials; on occasion, he explicitly emphasises the picture carrier by piercing the canvas. In principle, the production of a painting is a process with an open end. Tàpies' artistic work resembles philosophising about polarities: the poles of spirit and matter, form and formlessness, or reality and the imagination. In this context, the body, physical experience and investigation of the self are the extreme points of reference in a never-ending search for images. Once these images have been created, they develop a life of their own, unfolding a magical power and demanding the viewer's participation.

*“With my work I attempt to help man to overcome his alienation; I do this by surrounding his daily life with objects, which confront him in a tactile way with the final and deepest problems of our existence. I want the means that I employ to create the necessary stimulus to be as direct as possible. Instead of giving a sermon on humility, I often prefer to depict humility itself.” (Antoni Tàpies)*

The exhibition “Antoni Tàpies. Image, Body, Pathos” has been developed in close cooperation with the artist and the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona and will be shown in the Art Museum of Reykjavik following its presentation in Siegen.

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