



Museu Tàpies  
Barcelona



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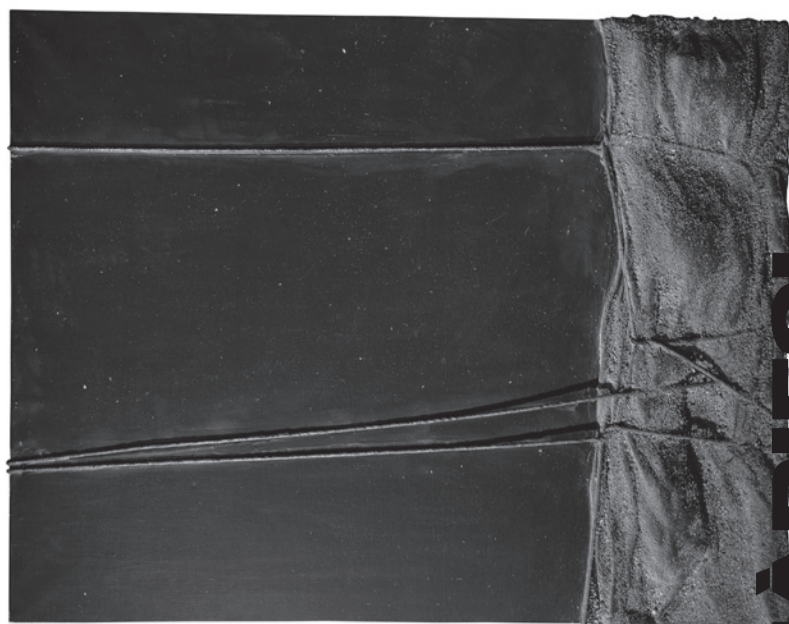
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ENG

GUIES D'ARQUITECTURA I URBANISME DE BARCELONA



# TÀPIES! BARCELONA

## Barcelona in the 1920s was an effervescent, tempestuous city

Barcelona in the 1920s was an effervescent, tempestuous city. On the one hand, the Eixample district was taking shape, the underground railway was being built (between 1924 and 1926 the first sections of lines L3, L1 and L4 were inaugurated, in that order) and the 1929 International Exposition was being organised on Montjuïc. On the other hand, a war was brewing between the trade unions and bosses, while the military dictatorship of Primo de Rivera fiercely repressed any left-wing and pro-Catalan independence movements.

## Transformations in present-day Ciutat Vella

The opening of Via Laietana, completed in 1913, left a great scar on the present-day Ciutat Vella district and the city's historical centre began to be developed with the creation of the "Gothic Quarter". The district changed further due to the damage caused by the Spanish Civil War: Plaça Nova, badly affected by bombs, was renovated and annexed to the newly opened Avinguda de la Catedral. Since 1959, the headquarters of the College of Architects have stood where the Llibreria Puig used to be.

## The bourgeois Sant Gervasi district

Until the beginning of the 20th century, the districts of Sarrià and Sant Gervasi were mainly summer retreats for the Barcelona bourgeoisie, with villas surrounded by gardens. Over time, this bourgeoisie settled permanently in the neighbourhood and little by little, in order to make the most of the land available, the houses gave way to blocks of flats.

*"The narrow streets of Sant Gervasi! Those houses with their stained glass and arrogant gardens; the fountains, the smells of the tavern or herds of cows."* (Tàpies, 2009: 109)

## The grey Barcelona of the post-war period

The Spanish Civil War and the beginning of Franco's dictatorship left a city which, to paraphrase Salvador Espriu, could be defined as "poor, dirty, sad and wretched": in 1949 there were 5,000 people living in caves and 60,000 in shantytowns. A city where progressive ideologies were persecuted and where the artistic avant-garde had disappeared. A city without hope.

## Sant Gervasi still as a village

Tàpies recalls the Sant Gervasi of the 1940s thus: *"The lives of all the grey people who can be seen behind the balconies with their carnations and geraniums [...] have always aroused in me a terrible melancholy and a strange compassion. Those Sunday afternoon silences; so many details that have been the setting for the paths we've taken"* (Tàpies, 2009: 110).

## The beginning of a cultural renaissance

After the first few post-war years, various cultural and publishing initiatives began to emerge from this absolute greyness (the magazine *Ariel*, Club Cobalto 49, the Experimental Cycles of New Art at the El Jardí gallery, the COAC's "Spring Conferences", etc.) which, together with the Sala Gaspar and Galeries Laietanes, reenergised Catalan culture, which slowly began to open up again to the rest of the world.

## A window onto the inside

The Institut Francès helped Catalan artists to develop abroad and to establish relations with other international artists. Acting as a bridge to the outside world in the midst of Franco's dictatorship and with a large library, the Institute offered "clandestine" freedom for several generations of Catalan intellectuals. Moreover, together with the Lycée and the French écoles, it also made it possible to avoid the conservative, repressive education controlled by the regime.

## The composition of the arts sector

During the 1950s, Sala Gaspar held exhibitions of artists such as Picasso, Miró, Chagall, Braque, Calder and Tàpies. Group exhibitions, such as "Art Autre" (1957), also brought the work of international avant-garde artists such as Pollock, Kline, De Kooning, Dubuffet and Burri to the people of Barcelona. Moreover, in 1956 the Association of Contemporary Artists (AAA in Catalan) was set up and, in 1960, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona was opened in the dome of the Coliseum cinema, a venture that lasted only three years but which is seen as the embryo of today's MACBA.

## A return to architectural modernity

The R Group, founded in 1951 and of which J. A. Coderch was a member, was the catalyst for a revival in modern architecture. Highly active in organising activities, its members also joined the School of Architecture, the COAC (from where they directed the magazine *Quaderns*) and the FAD, where in 1958 they promoted the FAD awards and, in 1959, the School of Art. This school would only last one year but it sowed the seed for the later Elisava (1961) and Eina (1967) schools.

## The first demands for democracy

The protest known as the Caputxinada took place from 9 to 11 March 1966 at the Capuchin monastery in Sarrià (Carrer Cardenal Vives i Tutó, 2), a clandestine assembly of over 400 students, intellectuals and artists to form the Democratic Union of Students of Barcelona University. A raid on the monastery by Franco's police prompted a citizens' solidarity movement, sowing the seed for the Round Table platform (1966-1973) and a forerunner of the Assemblée de Catalunya.

## The Assemblée de Catalunya

On 7 November 1971, at a clandestine meeting in the church of Sant Agustí, in the Raval district, with more than 300 people representing political and civil society, the Assemblée de Catalunya, a united platform of opposition to Francoism, was created. An agreement was drawn up based on four demands: freedom, amnesty, restoration of the 1932 Statute and coordination with the democratic forces of the other peoples of the state of Spain. This Assembly was dissolved in 1977 when the first democratic elections were held.

## A commitment to urban art

The arrival of democracy brought about a significant change in the city's public art policy. From that moment on, a clear commitment was made to contemporary art and the incorporation of works by renowned artists, both local such as Miró, Brossa, Chillida and Tàpies, and international such as Richard Serra, Mario Merz, Rebecca Horn, Beverly Pepper, Claes Oldenburg and Roy Lichtenstein. This policy has continued up to the present day, albeit without the drive of the 1980s and 1990s.

## The transformation of the city's museums

Until the return of democracy, the only two centres in Barcelona dedicated to contemporary art were the Picasso Museum, opened in 1963, and the Fundació Joan Miró, inaugurated in 1975. The opening of the Virreina, in 1980, and the The Fundació Antoni Tàpies museum, in 1990, sparked a great transformation and modernisation of the network of centres dedicated to art and culture in Barcelona: Santa Mònica Art Centre (1988), CCCB (1994), MACBA (1995), MNAC (1995, reopened) and CaixaForum (2002).

## Art and power

Throughout history, political and economic powers have used art as a way of legitimising themselves and visualising their position in the world. Taken to the extreme, this can lead to critical artists being silenced or manipulated for the benefit of such powers. Since democracy returned, the new institutions have also used art to demonstrate their ideological renewal and new commitment to the past and, above all, to the future of society.

## Citizen solidarity

The end of the Cold War, a consequence of the decline in the socialist bloc in the early 1990s, was the spark for new conflicts in Eastern Europe such as the Yugoslav Wars. The response of the citizens of Barcelona and Catalonia was immediate and massive, especially towards Bosnia and its capital, Sarajevo. Large demonstrations, the sending of humanitarian aid, the creation of District 11 (Sarajevo) in Barcelona City Council and the collaboration in its reconstruction demonstrated the commitment of the people of Barcelona to peace and their solidarity with the Bosnian people.

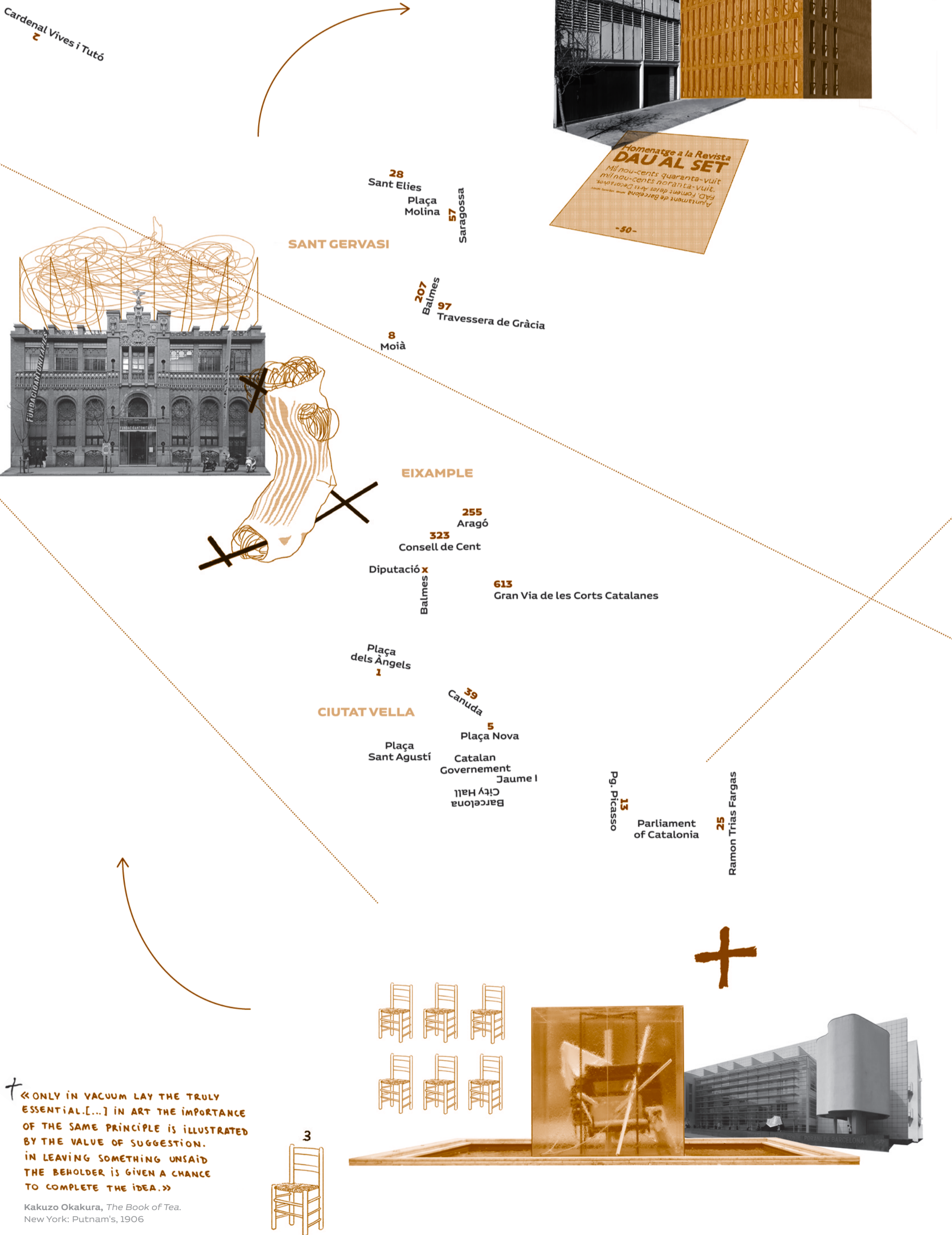
## A profit-based society and individualism

Back in the 1990s Tàpies had already spotted the trend towards "the excesses of agitation, of mental dispersion and the innumerable cults of "false realities" to which we're subjected in today's societies." Tàpies had foreseen, very early on, what now seems so obvious to us (with new technologies and social media constantly overstimulating us and reality being manipulated by economic interests). And this is also the function of artists: to capture reality and respond to it before anyone else.

\* (Tàpies, A. «The reflection room». Justificatory text dedicated by Antoni Tàpies to the Sala de reflexió, where his work is exhibited. Barcelona, October 1996 [online]. <https://www.upf.edu/en/web/campus/sala-de-reflexio> (consulted: 17 July 2024).

« THE EMOTION OF OPENING A BOOK, OF DISCOVERING LITTLE BY LITTLE ITS CONTENTS, WHAT'S INSIDE, HAS SOMETHING OF THE RITUAL ABOUT IT, OF MAGIC, AND THIS UNDOUBTEDLY FORMS PART OF MY WORK. »

Borja-Villel, Manuel J. (1994). «La expresividad del papel. Una conversación con Antoni Tàpies», in: Antoni Tàpies. *Obra gráfica 1947-1990*. Zaragoza: Gobierno de Aragón and Diputación de Zaragoza, p. 9 (original quote in Spanish)



« ONLY IN VACUUM LAY THE TRULY ESSENTIAL.[...] IN ART THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SAME PRINCIPLE IS ILLUSTRATED BY THE VALUE OF SUGGESTION. IN LEAVING SOMETHING UNSAID THE BEHOLDER IS GIVEN A CHANCE TO COMPLETE THE IDEA. »

Kakuzo Okakura, *The Book of Tea*. New York: Putnam's, 1906

## INTRODUCTION

While he was still young, Antoni Tàpies (Barcelona, 1923–2012) achieved great international renown and is considered to be one of the most important artists of the 20th century. At the same time, he constantly maintained and preserved close ties with Barcelona, the city where he always lived and on which he left an indelible mark, both by opening his own Foundation and also by creating several public works.

This publication focuses on *Tàpies in Barcelona* by means of a complete chronology and also reveals *Tàpies' Barcelona* with a fascinating map of the city.

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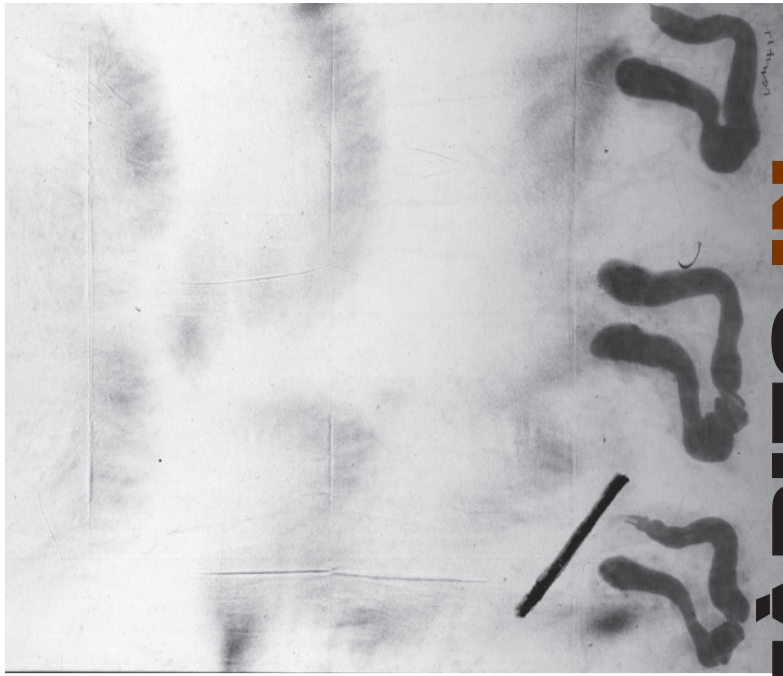
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Antoni Tàpies, *Relieu amb cordes* (Relief with Strings, 1963). © Museu Tàpies, Barcelona / VEGAP. Photograph: © Gasull Fotografia, 2024.

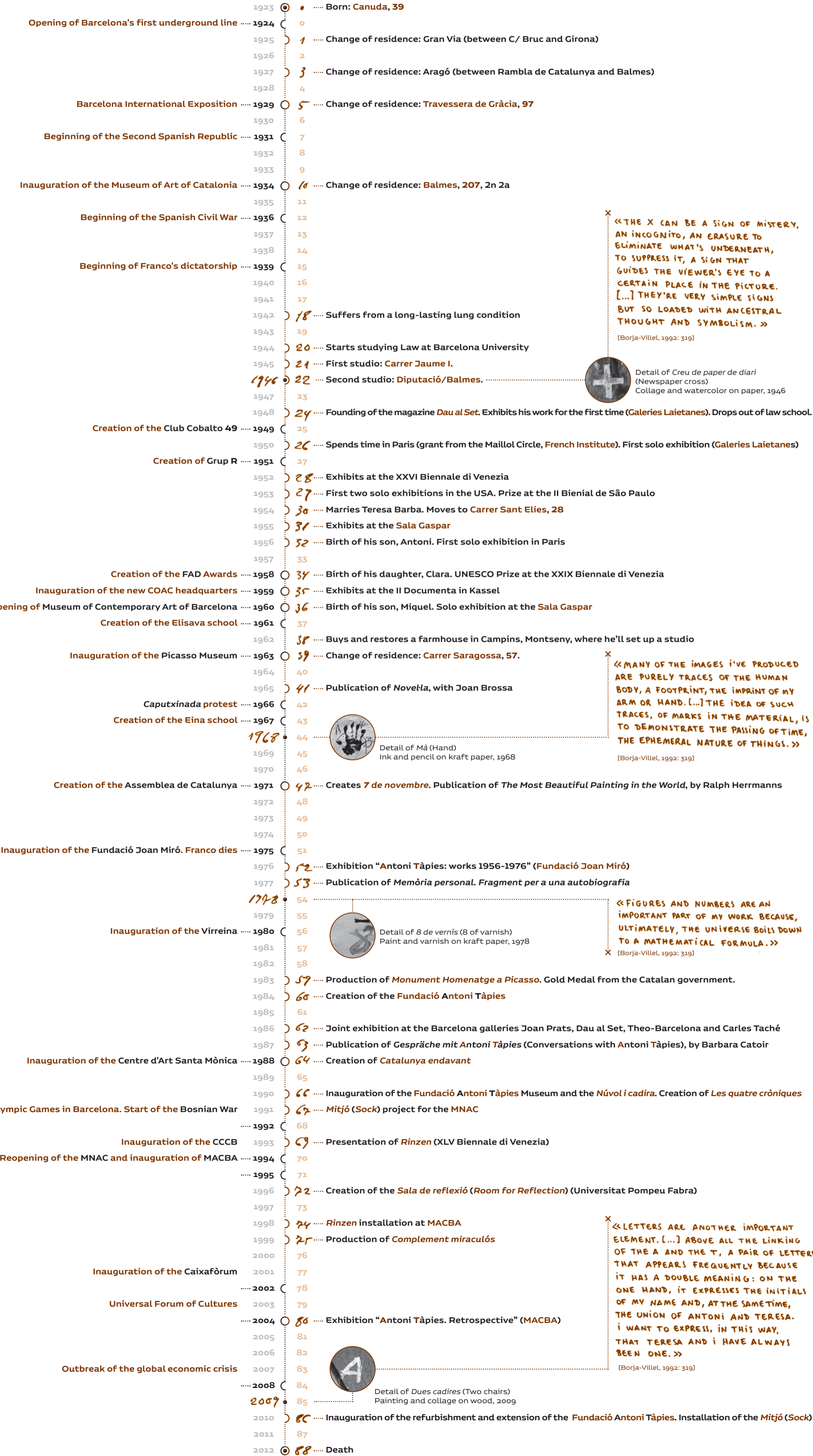
Antoni Tàpies, *Tres peus* (Three Feet, 1981). © Museu Tàpies, Barcelona / VEGAP. Photograph: © Gasull Fotografia, 2024.

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GUIES D'ARQUITECTURA I URBANISME DE BARCELONA



TÀPIES IN BARCELONA



## Childhood and family aspirations

Antoni Tàpies was born in 1923 at number **39**, Carrer Canuda (present-day Ciutat Vella), very close to the Barcelona Athenaeum where his father, Josep Tàpies i Mestres, was a regular at debates and gatherings. However, Tàpies only lived here for the first two years of his life, as the family moved several times to find a place that suited the social aspirations of his mother, Maria Puig i Guerra, finally settling in Carrer Balmes.

## Childhood settings

The life of Antoni Tàpies' maternal grandparents revolved around number **5**, Plaça Nova, where his grandfather, a politically active publisher, ran an important bookshop called Llibreria Puig. Nearby, on Carrer Arcs, they had a flat where his grandmother, a painting enthusiast, used to give the young Tàpies oil paints, palettes and easels, influencing his future calling. The beauty and smells of the neighbourhood and the sound of church organs remained forever in Tàpies' memory.

## Arrival at Sant Gervasi

In 1934 the Tàpies Puig family settled permanently on the first floor of number **207**, Carrer Balmes, where Antoni Tàpies lived for twenty years and where he took his first steps as a painter. At the age of 18, he suffered from a lung condition that forced him to rest for a long time. With little else to do, he drew and read constantly. *The Book of Tea* introduced him to oriental culture. He moved house when he married Teresa Barba but he would never change neighbourhoods again.

## The beginning of his artistic career

Between 1946 and 1947, Antoni Tàpies used his sister Maria dels Àngels' flat in Diputació / Balmes, next to the University of Barcelona where he was still studying law, as a studio where he would produce his earliest work: *“There I made a series of collages, with waste paper, of cardboard with crosses, glued string, scratches and peelings of the base material, of burnt wood...”* (Tàpies, 2009: 187)

## Everyday landscape and sowing the seeds of *Dau al Set*

From the age of eleven, Tàpies lived in Sant Gervasi, which became the setting for numerous personal experiences throughout his life: walks with his parents and siblings, meetings with friends and strolls with his wife and children. The neighbourhood was also the backdrop for the creation of the magazine *Dau al Set*, founded in 1948 by J. Brossa, A. Puig, M. Cuixart, J. Ponç and J. J. Tharrats, as well as Antoni Tàpies. Almost all of them lived near Plaça Molina.

## First exhibitions

Tàpies exhibited his work in public for the very first time in 1948 at the Galeríes Laietanes (Gran Vía, **613**), as part of the 1st Saló d'Octubre. He exhibited a collage and a painting with grattage. Two years later, he held his first solo exhibition: *“That exhibition [...] was one of the largest I've ever done in Barcelona. I hung fifty-four oil paintings, not counting numerous drawings, watercolours and illustrated publications that I placed in the showcases”* (Tàpies, 2009: 227)

## A window onto the outside, to the world

In 1950 the Maillol Circle of the Institut Francès (Moià, **8**) awarded Antoni Tàpies a grant to spend some time in Paris. In the French capital he experienced first-hand the resurgence of the avant-garde, became interested in Marxism and social inequalities and, in comparison, became clearly aware of the political situation in Spain. The works he produced at that time reflect all these experiences and thoughts.

## In the spotlight of avant-garde art

The Sala Gaspar (Consell de Cent, **323**) was the gallery that did most to promote avant-garde art in Catalonia during the 1950s. Tàpies exhibited there for the first time in 1955, with the collaboration of Club **49**. Later he would hold numerous solo exhibitions, the first in 1960. *“Despite the fact that almost all my pictorial work usually went abroad [...], I tried to make the effort, as far as possible, to continue exhibiting something of my work regularly in Barcelona, so as not to lose contact with my people and perhaps to be of use to them”*. (Tàpies, 2009: 336)

## A new home and, at last, a “real” studio

In 1960 Tàpies and Teresa commissioned J. A. Coderch to build a new house/studio at Carrer Saragossa, **57**, with the instruction that it should be “very practical and comfortable, with the best materials but extremely austere, with no superfluous luxuries”. *“I'd spent fourteen or fifteen years of working in small rooms, with bad light, and the dream of getting a “real” studio was already becoming vital. [...] We decided to entrust the new house and studio to the architect J. A. Coderch, who seemed to be able to grasp our needs, both the material ones and those required by our temperament, which inclined towards sobriety and the necessary calm”*. (Tàpies, 2009: 334–335)

## A transformational experience

In 1966 Tàpies took part in the Caputxinada (anti-Franco protest) and was arrested and fined after the police raided the monastery. He produced a series of works based on this experience that referred to the lives of Franciscan monks, evoking humble objects such as a broom and a pile of plates. *“There can be no doubt that all that was important! [...] it was a real slap in the face for the regime”*. (Tàpies, 2009: 353)

## Political engagement under dictatorship

Shortly after the Assemblée de Catalunyaaa was set up, Tàpies painted *7 de novembre* to record the event. *“If the mission of artists and poets is to promote reflection, to unveil, attract attention, raise awareness, illuminate reality and, in short, to promote everything that makes us freer and more perfect as humans, should we forget or underestimate the fact that the history of the formation of our country coincides precisely with the history of the conquest of freedom and the process of democracy in the world?”* (Tàpies, 2011: 158)

In 2005 Tàpies donated this work to the Parliament of Catalonia.

## Homage to Picasso

In 1981, as part of the commemoration of the centenary of Picasso's birth, Barcelona City Council commissioned Tàpies to dedicate a monument to him, which was finally inaugurated in 1983 at Passeig Picasso, **13**. *“I chose as my materials some furniture which corresponded [...] to the period against which Picasso fought and which represented the comfort or conformism of that time, and I crossed these with iron beams, which had become a symbol of anti-comfort. The whole resulting ensemble was to be riveted by that phrase of Picasso's which says that “Art is not made to decorate rooms. It is an offensive weapon in the defence against the enemy”*. (Tàpies, 2011: 722)

## Tàpies creates his own foundation-museum

The Fundació Antoni Tàpies was set up by the artist in 1984 with the aim of promoting the study and awareness of modern and contemporary art. It opened its doors in June 1990 in the premises of the former Editorial Montaner y Simón (Aragó, **255**), designed by the Modernist architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner and crowned by Tàpies with the work *Núvol i Cadira* (Cloud and Chair, 1990). The museum houses the most complete public collection of Tàpies' work.

## Political engagement under democracy

Tàpies' commitment to the political and social events of his time is evident. He created works to support various causes and made donations to public institutions. At the seat of the Catalan government (Palau de la Generalitat) we can find *Catalunya endavant* (1988), *Les quatre cròniques* (1990) and a number of graphic works, while *Complement miraculós* (1999) is on display at Barcelona City Hall. *“Culture cannot be neutral; [...] it has its own ethical, ideological and even political commitments”*. (Tàpies, 2011: 471)

## Japanese influence

*Rinzen* (“sudden awakening” in Japanese) is a plea against the barbarity of war and a denunciation of the genocide committed in the Balkans (1992-1995). At the same time, it's also an invitation to concentrate and reflect in order to achieve a deeper understanding of reality. *“There's a meditative side to Zen but there's also the element of shock rocking the foundations of thought... There are moments when I immerse myself in contemplation and completely dissolve myself in nothingness. But then there are moments when I try, in a different way, to suggest the idea of nothingness and thereby give the viewer a jolt”*. (Catoir, 1991: 84)

Presented at the Venice Biennale in 1993, this was installed at MACBA in 1998.

## The need for silence and reflection

The *Sala de reflexió*, created in 1996 at the Ciutadella Campus of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF) (Carrer Ramon Trias Fargas, **25**), is conceived as a place for silence and meditation, containing various elements that invite thought and inner meditation. *“At a time [...] so dominated by the “cultures” of distraction and business, when even some museums are turning to noisy and often alienating spectacles of the masses, I think it's very important that, in the academic world, we remember the need for spaces of silence and reflection via which art can perform its most noble and surely most useful functions for citizens”*.