

**Sabrina Amrani is pleased to present 'Contextura',
Josep Grau-Garriga's first solo exhibition at the gallery**



Josep Grau-Garriga (Sant Cugat del Vallès, 1929 - Angers, 2011) embodies one of the practices most marginalized by institutions and recent art history. His research in the textile field and the recovery to which they are now subject could be the mark of an interest that has oscillated between vindication and oblivion, and now again, rediscovery. The career of this artist, whose virtuosity can dazzle, is also the reflection of what the art system has considered an object susceptible to being valued or ignored based on what the British art historian Griselda Pollock judged to be the canon. Pollock was referring to cultural practices – like the one Grau-Garriga would represent – that are often degraded because they are mistakenly identified with the domestic, the decorative, the functional, that which is associated with skills, "that is, with everything that patriarchal logic negatively characterizes as essentially feminine".¹

Since 1957, Grau-Garriga undertook a rehabilitation of textile techniques that would free the tapestry from its sumptuary function, and as he himself said, "from mimetic submission to other arts."² Based on his apprenticeship with Jean Lurçat, a key figure in the tapestry renewal process, and his own experience as artistic director of the Casa Aymat Tapestry Factory in Sant Cugat del Vallès, from which the Escola Catalana del Tapís was born, Grau-Garriga led one of the most radical transformations. And he did it relying on practices until then relegated as artisanal techniques. The introduction of new materials outside the tapestry tradition, as well as the autonomy of the resulting

¹ Griselda Pollock. 'Differencing the Canon. Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's History'. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

² Josep Grau-Garriga. "El tapís avui", *Batik. Panorama General de las Artes. Extra Basel tapiz*, núm. 72, may-june 1983, p. 7

object, equated his achievements with those of postminimal sculpture concerned with issues such as material, gravity, and the increasing importance of the viewer's phenomenological experience. Grau-Garriga had turned the tapestry into the object that, within the artistic system of the early seventies, could revitalize objects no less suspected of having incurred historical obsolescence, such as sculpture and painting.

'Cofi' (1972), 'Textures fan mar' (Textures make the sea, 1974) and 'Pell del poble' (Skin of the people, 1976) condense that extraordinary moment of invention and formal transgression. They are still tapestries but the hanging points that accentuate the drape and folds of the material, the exposed warp and the uncomplicated use of jute, rope and hemp demonstrate that, although the tapestry would continue to be measured in relation to the standard of value that marked the object of painting, these findings significantly expanded its possibilities. In the development of Grau-Garriga's work we will literally see how textile practices expand and take over open public spaces, leaving behind the wall from which the tapestry was held. Throughout the 1970s and beyond, Grau-Garriga undertook the installation of environnements (environments) that involved what today we would call community practices and collective pedagogies. His ephemeral interventions in natural sites and historic buildings in the United States, France and Spain survive through catalogues, illustrated books and monographs. The only traces are the photographic documents suggesting an overflowing epic intensity, a qualitative leap that has not received the recognition it deserved.³

If in 1965 the legendary Bauhaus textile artist Anni Albers published 'On Weaving', a text that read at the same time as a history and a manifesto of textile techniques and in which she suggested the possibility of reversing the evolution and industrialization that had led to the loom, Grau-Garriga carried out his own deconstruction of the tapestry manufacturing process. To achieve this objective he returned the tapestry to a collective dimension and eliminated the technical device that had gradually been dispensed with the body of the weaver. Thus, the logic of innovation in regards to the tapestry is no longer strictly related to its materiality or form. The relations of the fabric with the body that – at one point in the historical evolution and as Anni Albers proposes – functioned as a substitute for the device of the loom, reappear in Grau-Garriga's practice. The introduction of fabrics that have been linked to personal use suggests this retreat. Pieces of garments used by close relatives, household trousseau or fragments of fabric intended for the making of clothing will flood his works in parallel to the explosion that his textile installations launch on a public scale.

The large tapestry titled 'La lum i el temps' (The Light and the Time, 1987) presents in its lower part a collection of used and industrially manufactured garments. The chromaticism of this work suggestively blends natural and artificial fibers. However, an earlier work from 1978 includes a folded towel with embroidered initials. 'De l'àvia Rosa II' (Of Grandmother Rosa II) completes the withdrawal to which we alluded a moment ago with a type of composition in which all vestiges of the loom have disappeared. This work is once again a painting. However, the flatness it claims is still owing to a critical genealogy with the genre of painting itself, just as Robert Rauschenberg had imagined with his iconic bed turned into a painting, 'Bed' (1955). This is how Grau-Garriga contaminates the genres of painting and tapestry until they become transitional objects, that is in practices that maintained their value to the extent that they rejected established categories. In 1993, a date clearly advanced in Grau-Garriga's career, the philosopher José María Valverde was surprised that taxonomic issues still posed a

³ The Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona MACBA recently presented 'Josep Grau-Garriga. Diálogo de luz' between 28 November 2022 and 11 September 2023, a re-installation of three monumental tapestries dated 1983.

problem when naming the works of this artist. From nowadays' perspective, this ambivalent definition would be an advantage. Grau-Garriga's work comes back with the force of a project that can correct our most deeply rooted ideas about what the recent history of art has been.

'Josep Grau-Garriga. La pregunta de Valverde'

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