

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

BRUSSELS

JOSEP GRAU-GARRIGA

Wednesday 9 January - Saturday 16 February



Josep Grau-Garriga, *Porta oberta (Open door)*, 1974.
Jute, wool, and synthetic fibers, 220 × 165 cm (86 5/8 × 64 31/32 in.)

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is very pleased to present Spanish artist Josep Grau-Garriga's first solo exhibition in Belgium. On this occasion, the gallery will exhibit a group of tapestries, spanning the artist's long career, with the earliest dating from the 1970s and more recent works dating from the 2000s. Four decades of creation during which Josep Grau-Garriga, who died in 2011, developed his own visual language, while at the same time revolutionizing the art of tapestry. The exhibition will also include a series of drawings by the Catalanian master, whose pictorial work is relatively unknown, in comparison with his woven work, with which his name has become synonymous. The joint presentation of these two bodies of work—a rare event indeed—reveals the fertile emulation between the two media.

When Josep Grau-Garriga was born, in 1929, in Sant Cugat del Vallès, near Barcelona, his village was small and rustic. As a child, he helped his parents with their rural activities, which taught him about the realities of daily life. Marked by the village's customs and touched by the pastoral landscapes that surrounded him, he soon developed a taste for drawing. He recalls a happy, bucolic childhood, until the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936. Three years later, he witnessed the defeat of the Republican army, then Franco's rise to power and the establishment of his dictatorship. These traumatic events would deeply influence his work. Despite the vicissitudes, Grau-Garriga was able to graduate, in 1952, from the School of Fine Arts of San Jorge, Barcelona. In 1954, influenced both by Catalan Romanesque art and by the art of inter-war Mexican muralists, from David Alfaro Siqueiros to Diego Rivera, he made frescoes for the Sant Crist de Llaceres Hermitage. This marked the beginning of his recognition.

In 1957, Josep Grau-Garriga was commissioned to make his first tapestry for the Casa Aymat, the local producer of carpets and tapestries that employed "haute lisse" (or high-warp) looms, based on a technique developed by the Gobelins Manufactory. Encouraged by Casa Aymat's new owner, Miquel Samaranch, the artist traveled to Paris for the first time, to study gothic tapestry and familiarize himself with the latest trends in contemporary French tapestry, led by Jean Lurçat. It was also in Paris that he underwent his first profound aesthetic shock, by discovering, in particular, the informal painting of Jean Fautrier and the "Art Brut" of Jean Dubuffet, along with abstract works by his fellow compatriots, Antoni Tàpies and Antonio Saura. Equipped with all these visual experiences, he joined the atelier of Jean Lurçat, in Saint-Céré (Lot, France), in 1958.

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His time with Lurçat marked a decisive turning point. It made him realize that tapestry could be something beyond a merely decorative object, that it could, in fact, become an arena for formal research, as relevant as other fields of visual arts. Armed with this certainty, Josep Grau-Garriga returned to Catalonia with new ambitions that he would apply without further delay, by taking over the artistic direction of Casa Aymat, which had supported him from the beginning. To modernize the production, he invited artists to make tapestry cartoons. These first collaborations laid the foundations of the new Catalan school of tapestry, with Sant Cugat del Vallès at its epicenter and Grau-Garriga as its inspired leader. Over the course of nearly thirty years, a number of artists would come to experience his new conception of textile art, including Josep Royo, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Antoni Tàpies, Josep Guinovart, Ràfols Casamada, and Joan-Josep Tharrats.

The studio he directed soon became a laboratory for research that inexorably led him away from the legacy of Jean Lurçat. While the latter still preferred to have clear lines in his drawing compositions, Josep Grau-Garriga headed in the opposite direction, by exploring the possibilities of three-dimensionality. Thus, his tapestries increasingly resembled sculptures. Grau-Garriga often claimed that he wove like a sculptor, working textile in relief and attempting to give the fibers an exceptional variety of textures. This novel preoccupation with texture and relief—breaking with the two-dimensional art of traditional tapestry—found its deepest roots in the artist’s rural childhood. His friend and biographer Arnau Puig recounts that Josep Grau-Garriga had, as a child, been intoxicated by the fragrance of freshly tilled soil, and was often struck by the geometry and relief of the deep ruts traced by the plow. Very early on, he remembers having tried to bring back that memory, which was both olfactory and visual. At first, he tried to do it with drawing, before finding, in weaving, the surest and most exalting way to proceed. His very first tapestry, in which texture takes primacy over motif, dates from 1960 (*Chien et Lune*, 1960).

Two particularly rich and technically and stylistically audacious decades ensued. One of the innovations—and not a small one—consisted in progressively abandoning the tapestry cartoon in the early 1970s, with the artist tackling his composition directly on the loom. This new attitude, which favored spontaneity, unleashed Grau-Garriga’s imagination. The total freedom he acquired allowed him to abandon the exclusive use of “noble” fibers (silk, wool, gold and silver thread), in favor of all other materials, whether natural or artificial. Thus, he began to mix in, without hierarchy, cotton, hemp, jute, spart grass, iron and copper wires, and even plastic cords. This transgression echoes the research conducted by his contemporaries, including his fellow countryman, Antoni Tàpies, or Italian artist Alberto Burri, who, like him, incorporated “non-academic” materials in their work. The use of these new “poor” materials, combined with increasingly complex visual solutions, contribute to the rugged topography of Grau-Garriga’s tapestries and are “materials employed by the artist both for their intrinsic qualities and for the aesthetic and expressive impact they were susceptible of causing.” Arnau Puig adds that these materials, while retaining their primitive nature, “do not speak only of their nature; they also express a universe and a reality that seeks to critique and document, that speaks of our world.”

The 1960s and 1970s, decades that were so fertile in artistic research, are also when the artist showed himself to be particularly sensitive to the contemporary political and social context. Repression ran rampant. Freedoms were attacked from all sides. One had to fight to live and even more to express oneself, especially as an artist. In reaction to this, Grau-Garriga wove, painted, and drew some politically engaged works that denounced the many violences perpetuated at the time. On an allegorical level, his tapestries, with their red stains, pay homage to the blood of Republican martyrs, while the gaping holes and the crevasses incarnate the assaults against fundamental human rights. The jute sacks and clothes that are incorporated amongst the fibers are the tangible proof of the sweat spilt by laborers and factory workers in their daily fight for survival. Some of his works on paper—drawings and collages of press cuttings—directly reference Franco’s oppression.



Josep Grau-Garriga, *Dos camins i una paret*, 1978.
Indian ink, gouache, pencil and flyer mounted on paper, 50 × 70 cm (19 11/16 × 27 9/16 in.).



Josep Grau-Garriga, *Papers de consum*, 1975.
Acrylic paint, spray paint, gouache, flyers, sales receipts, theatre tickets and coffee bags mounted on paper, 65 × 50 cm (25 19/32 × 19 11/16 in.).

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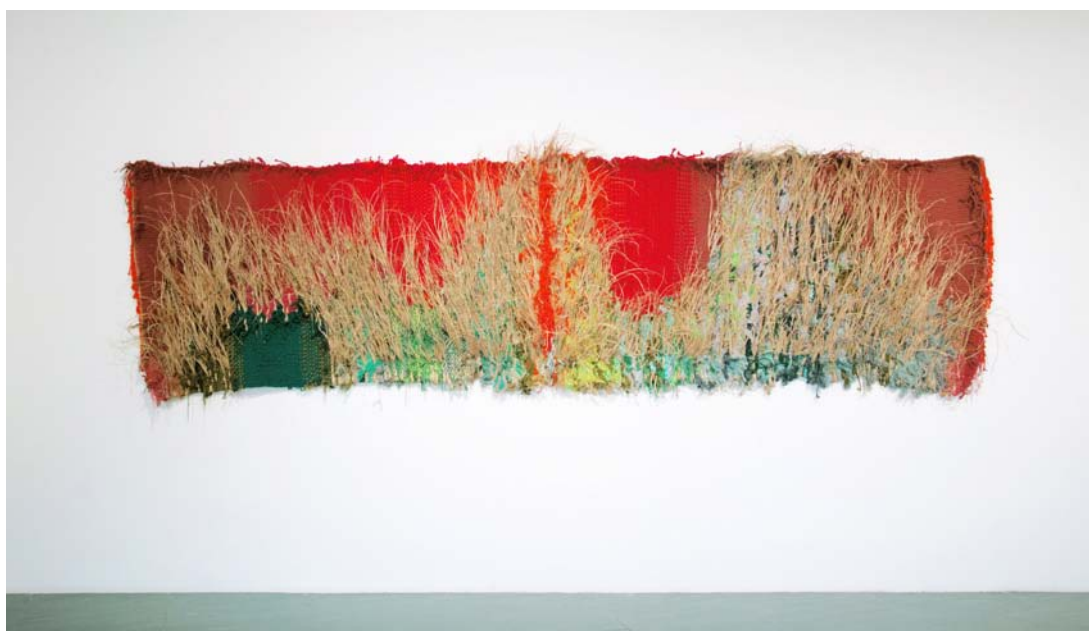
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In May 1968, he was in Paris, where he witnessed the protests. The following year, he was in New York, where he discovered Pop art, and in the wake of this, produced works that denounced the Vietnam War, the Israeli-Arab conflict, or the consumeristic society. Like Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg, Grau-Garriga inserted manufactured objects and promotional packaging into the compositions of his drawings and paintings.

By presenting his works on paper in Brussels, Galerie Nathalie Obadia aims to recreate the fertile connection that exists between Josep Grau-Garriga's pictorial and woven works. While tapestry certainly allowed him to familiarize himself with three-dimensionality, it is the visual findings that appear in his paintings and drawings that led to the innovations he introduced in his tapestries. One of these, and a remarkable one at that, is the addition of heterogeneous fabrics: canvas bags, sheets, or even clothing, that he mixed into his paintings and drawings before integrating them into his tapestries. Surprisingly, it is when his style has become properly abstract that the reality of everyday life bursts into his work, in the shape of objects and second-hand clothes. They invade the compositions and are often the key to deciphering the work's iconography.

In 1991, Josep Grau-Garriga moved to Angers, in France. The works produced after this date are no longer particularly political in nature. They focus, rather, on an exploration of visual and chromatic effects that reach their peak, at the turn of the 2000s, as is evident in works such as *Record d'Estiu (Summer Memory)* and *D'un Estiu (That Summer)*, both exhibited at Galerie Nathalie Obadia. They share similarly vibrant, iridescent colors that are the signs of a more serene creation, warmed by the mild climate of the Anjou region. Thus, the tender greens, orangey reds, and teal blues, which make their appearance in *D'un Estiu*, reflect the chromatic richness of the light on the banks of the Loire, which has become his new *plein-air* studio. Joan Mitchell had been struck by the same visual shock when she and Jean-Paul Riopelle moved to Vétheuil, a peaceful village on the Seine, then to Giverny, near Claude Monet's famed garden. Like the painter of waterlilies before them, Joan Mitchell and Josep Grau-Garriga developed, in the idyllic calm and the sensorial intoxication of their new surroundings, a luminous and lyrical abstraction, entirely dedicated to the translation of the energies and emotions that animate them.

By abandoning the classical approach to tapestry—which was still relevant for Jean Lurçat, one of the great reformers of his time—Josep Grau-Garriga revolutionized the genre. Thanks to him, tapestry, which was until then static, became dynamic, active even, since it was founded on movement. His experiments on new materials, relief, and textures allowed him to “capture and fix light in its most expressive modulations.” By basing his aesthetic on risk and accident, Grau-Garriga follows in the footsteps of the American Abstract Expressionists. Over the years, he gradually freed himself from conventions and, in doing so, his art became organic—he even tried to transcribe olfactory memories of his childhood home. He revolutionized tapestry to imagine a new, decidedly contemporary textile art. A true sense of presence emanates from his work: it is life itself, at once harmonious and exalted.



Josep Grau-Garriga, *D'un estiu (That Summer)*, 2006.
Wool, cotton and raffia, 125 × 360 cm (49 1/4 × 141 3/4 in.).

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

JOSEP GRAU-GARRIGA

1929, Sant Cugat del Vallès (Catalonia, Spain)

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

INSTITUTIONAL MONOGRAPHIC EXHIBITIONS SINCE 1970 (SELECTION)

- 2010 Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Angers, Cabinet d'arts graphiques, Angers, France
- 2009 Abbaye de Saint-Florent-le-Vieil, Saint-Florent-le-Vieil, France
- 2002 Abbaye de Ronceray et Musée Jean Lurçat, Angers, France
- 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 City, Mexico
- 1985 Musée du Château des ducs de Wurtemberg, Montbéliard, France
- 1982 Claustros del Monasterio Real, Sant Cugat del Vallès, Spain
- 1981 Palais de l'UNESCO, Paris, France
- 1975 The Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, United States
- 1974 Los Angeles Country Museum, Los Angeles, United States
- 1971 The Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, United States
- 1970 Houston Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, United States
The Córdoba Museum, Lincoln, United States

INSTITUTIONAL COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS SINCE 2011 (SELECTION)

- 2018 *Unlimited*, Art Basel, Basel, Switzerland
Tissage / Tressage... quand la sculpture défile, Fondation Villa Datris, L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, France
Muralnomade, Le Quadrilatère, Beauvais, France
- 2017 *Accrochage de réouverture*, Musée Hyacinthe Rigaud, Perpignan, France
- 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, United States
Del segundo origen. Artes en Cataluña, 1950-1977, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain
Tapisserie? De Picasso à Messenger, 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 City, Mexico
- 2011 *De l'Ombre à la Lumière, Tapisseries catalanes, de Picasso à Grau-Garriga*, Musée Jean Lurçat, Angers, France

COLLECTIONS:

- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, United States
- Brooklyn Museum, New York, United States
- Denver Art Museum, Denver, United States
- Houston Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, United States
- The Cordoba Museum, Lincoln, United States
- Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center, Oklahoma City, United States
- Fondation Toms Pauli, Lausanne, Switzerland
- Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Geneva, Switzerland
- Ghisla Art Collection, Locarno, Switzerland

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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 de Saint Ló, Saint Ló, France
FRAC Ile-de-France, Paris, France
FRAC Lorraine, Metz, France
Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain
Fundació Vila Casas, Barcelona, Spain
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Elche, Elche, Spain
Museo de bellas artes de Sevilla, Seville, Spain
Museo de bellas artes de Gravina, Alicante, Spain
Centre de Documentació i Museu Tèxtil de Terrasa, Terrasa, Spain
Museo Provincial de Teruel, Teruel, Spain
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Villafamés, Vilafames, Spain
Fondation Banco Sabadell, Barcelona, Spain
Museo de Montserrat, Montserrat, Spain
Museo del Tapís Contemporani, Sant Cugat del Vallès, Spain
Museo Salvador Allende, Santiago, Chile
Museo Tamayo de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, Mexico

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Josep Grau-Garriga
9 January - 16 February, 2019

Carole Benzaken
...toi
12 January - 23 February, 2019

Carole Benzaken
Là-bas...
12 January - 23 February, 2019

Gaetano Pesce
Je suis content d'être ici
26 February - 6 April, 2019