



Ferides I, 1970, Wool, jute, and silk, 82.68 x 70.87 inches

Josep Grau-Garriga *Tapestries 1970-2011*

Salon 94 Bowery
April 25th – June 3rd, 2017

...art is a weapon, more than an aesthetic problem, manifesting something from oneself. Making art means discovering what exists and not be afraid of it.

Josep Grau-Garriga, 2011

Salon 94 is proud to present *Tapestries*, a solo retrospective of pioneering Catalan tapestry artist Josep Grau-Garriga (1929-2011). This is the artist's first solo exhibition in New York since 1980 and will feature experimental tapestries from 1970 to 2011. *Tapestries* celebrates his elevation of the form from craft to art and his avant-garde approach to textiles, reflecting upon the political context of his practice.

Grau-Garriga grew up on a farm in Sant-Cugat-del Valles, near Barcelona. He was the grandson of an anarchist hairdresser and the son of a republican farmer. At the age of seven, the Spanish Civil war broke out; when he was 10 years old, his father was arrested and imprisoned by Franco's forces. This fascist regime left indelible scars on the artist, and infused his art with drama, color, and the heroic and mystical voices of Catalonia. Grau-Garriga was influenced by the great Spanish painters Velazquez and Goya, who also took a political stance in their work. His 1970s tapestries, with red gashes and blue yarn, are his abstractions of wounds, bruises, and tears.

Grau-Garriga trained as an artist, studying painting between 1946 and 1952 at the Escola de Belles Arts de Sant Jordi, Catalonia. A quick hand, he was commissioned to paint frescoes at the Ermitage de Sant Crist de Llacers in the traditional Catalan art style. When Grau-Garriga was only 30 years old, he was invited to become the creative director of the Aymat carpet and tapestry factory in his hometown of Sant-Cugat-del Valles, changing the course of his practice. At the time, tapestry was a dying, slow, and costly art form associated with old aristocracy and religious practice. Under his direction, along with fellow weaver Jean Lurçat in France, the genre was revived. Grau-Garriga introduced a new dimension into the art of tapestry where he took the traditionally figurative flat form and eliminated its expensive materials such as gold threads and silks. He created abstract expressionist compositions made up of humble materials: animal and vegetable fibers, string, hemp, sisal, old sacks, and wool leftovers as seen in *Ferides I* (*Wounds I*).

This work cleverly interlocks blood red wool and earth-colored jute with blue accents in a range of different weaves, creating a multilayered textile sculpture. These developments revolutionized the genre and according to Grau-Garriga created a "tapestry of our time, harsh, that speaks to our history."

In the late 1950's, Grau-Garriga made frequent trips to Paris, where he traded techniques and ideas with Jean Lurçat in his studio, where Grau-Garriga worked in St Céré. While in Paris, he discovered the work of artists associated with *Art Informel*, a pictorial movement that developed in Europe during the 1940s and 1950s with Jean Fautrier, Jean Dubuffet, Antoni Tàpies, and Alberto Burri. From then on, Grau-Garriga pushed the tapestry genre to its limit, giving up the preparatory cardboard *cartoon* design and taking up the loom himself. Mastering each stage of the production process gave him freedom to experiment fully. By the early 1960s, his weavings gradually developed into sculptural textiles and a tactile medium, as Grau-Garriga saw his work as a volume in space. With great innovation, he explored the beauty of the backside of the tapestry, the messy underbelly of the work that is usually concealed.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, his experiments attracted weavers such as María Assumpció Raventós and Aurelia Munoz and led to the foundation of the Catalan School of Tapestry. Artists such as Miro, Tàpies, and Picasso also flocked to Sant-Cugat-del Valles to work with Grau-Garriga. In 1970, Philippe de Montebello, a young American curator and future director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, mounted Grau-Garriga's first major retrospective at the Houston Fine Arts Museum, after meeting the artist during 1969, while in the United States on a grant. In 1987, by invitation of the painter Rufino Tamayo, Grau-Garriga visited Mexico. Reacting strongly to the political and social climate in the country, he created a monumental commission for the Museo Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City.

Grau-Garriga's move to Anjou, France in the 1990s began a period of calm that reflected in his work. Unburdened from the destabilizing phase of the Catalan period, the works evoke natural landscapes and playful pleasures. The latest work in the exhibition, *Drap i més (Fabric and More)* functions as a snapshot of Grau-Garriga's career. The roughly woven and torn background of raffia and cotton depicts a red wound, while an appropriated piece of lichen green wool rests elegantly as the center. The work appears at once brutal and refined, becoming the high point of his creative experiments.

Josep Grau-Garriga's solo exhibitions include Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris (France), 2016; the Angers Museum of Fine Arts (France), 2010; MHS - the Sabadell History Museum, Sabadell (Spain), 1990; the Jean-Lurçat Museum, Angers (France), 1989; Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City (Mexico), 1987; Arras Gallery, New York (USA), 1983; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1974; the Birmingham Museum of Fine Arts, 1971; the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, 1970. His work has also been featured in the following recent group exhibitions: *Tapisseries nomades. Fondation Toms Pauli. Collection XXe siècle*, Musée cantonal des Beaux - Arts de Lausanne, Lausanne (Switzerland), 2016; *Creative Crossroads: The Art of Tapestry*, Denver Art Museum, 2015; *Decorum. Tapis et tapisseries d'artistes*, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (France), 2013; *Hay más rutas que la nuestra. Las colecciones de Tamayo después de la modernidad*, Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City (Mexico), 2013.

Josep Grau-Garriga's work is part of various permanent collections, including the Houston Fine Arts Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, the Oklahoma Art Center, the Denver Art Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MACBA - Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona (Spain), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla (Spain), Fondation Toms Pauli, Lausanne (Switzerland), Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (France), Musée des Beaux Arts, Angers (France), FRAC Lorraine, Metz (France), and Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico DF (Mexico).

Born in 1929 in Saint Cugat-del Valles near Barcelona, he moved to Anjou, France, in 1991 where he remained until his death until 2011.