Ladies and gentlemen, can you hear me? Let me welcome you and congratulate you to your courage to brave the weather and to come in on a cold day like this. I shall take a minute for a few announcements which have to do with the resumption of our staff lecture program during weekdays.

Beginning with February 15th, we shall have a regular Thursday and Friday lecture at 4:00 in the afternoon given by members of the staff. Mr. Daniel Robbins, our assistant curator, and Dr. Louise Svendsen, our curator of education, will hold alternate lectures on Thursday. And a new member of our staff, Mr. Maurice Tuchman, will be Friday lecturer.

This afternoon staff lecture program, which is oriented toward the public in general, and which deals with broader subjects not necessarily connected with the exhibition program, will be reinforced by our vice president, Mr. Anderson, who will also join this group.

The Sunday lectures, of course, will continue. But we shall take a brief break between the lecture today and the next one, skip from the usual two weeks to a four-weeks pause, and resume again on March 11th when I’ll have the privilege of starting a lecture sequence which will address itself to problems of cubism and in particular to Fernand Leger, whose exhibition is scheduled to start at the museum on February 28th.

My lecture on Sunday, March 11th, will be followed in two-weeks intervals by lectures given on the same subject, on Leger and cubism. And the speakers on Sunday afternoons will be Henry Hope, Chairman of the Fine Arts Department at the Indiana University; Dr. Robert Goldwater, Director of the Museum of Primitive Art; and Professor Robert Rosenbloom, Assistant Professor at the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University.

The final two Sunday lectures will have to do with the Phil Guston exhibition which will start later in the season. And it is Mr. Anderson and Sam Hunter, the Director of the Poses Institute of Fine Arts and the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, who will finish the lecture series on Sundays.

As you know, ladies and gentlemen, the Sunday series usually is directly related to the exhibition program and will be so today, although the exhibition to which the lecture is related is not yet in evidence. I have mentioned the Leger opening on February 28th, which will be followed by an exhibition opening scheduled for March 22nd, an exhibition devoted to the work of Antonio Tapies, the Spanish painter.

The lecture today is on the subject and is given by a very distinguished English critic, by our friend Lawrence Alloway. Mr. Alloway, who is known to audiences in New York for his primary interest in twentieth-century art, known as an interpreter of avant garde movements and organizer of important exhibitions, has been deputy director, and later program director, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. He has lectured extensively at the National Gallery and at the Tate Gallery in London and is currently writing on American abstract painting and completing a monograph on the Danish painter Asger Jorn.
Mr. Alloway is teaching at Bennington College in Vermont [05:00] and will remain in this capacity until the end of June of this year. The day after, as you may know, he will join the staff of the Guggenheim Museum. And it is therefore my great pleasure, my double pleasure, to present to you the speaker this afternoon and introduce him as the lecturer on the theme of Tapies while at the same time using this opportunity to extend to him a public welcome as a member of my staff. Lawrence Alloway.

LAWRENCE ALLOWAY

[06:00] Twentieth-century abstract art is international. It’s more global than the Gothic style was. And it’s more global than the Baroque style was. But there are, scattered round the world, within the international context of international abstract art, there are counter movements which is that roots and national sovereignty. In England for instance -- and this I know something about -- in England there’s a strong attempt to prove there is a connection between abstract art and the English tradition of landscape painting so that abstract painting is always being likened to the weather and the sunset and the sea in England. And this is supposed to be a specially British thing.

Another way in which grassroots [07:00] and sovereignty is brought in, or is attempted to be brought in, to the international style, for example, connects with America. There have been efforts made inside and outside the States to suggest that because America is a big country, then it’s natural that such big pictures get painted here -- you know, the image of the prairies, the image of Niagara and all that. This is supposed to have something to do with the big painting size.

But the extreme case of an attempt to impose some kind of national image on international painting, international post-war painting, is the case of Spain because here the romantic image of Spain, which was set up in the nineteenth century, still dominates almost everybody who writes about Spanish art. American, English, French critics, as well as the Spaniards themselves, all accept a kind of romantic national local [08:00] image as being the content of Spanish painting.

Now, this package as national image on the whole, I think, is cliché. And some of the elements that go to make it up are these. There’s Spain itself. Well now it’s barren. It’s dry. It’s rocky. It’s brown, you know? And you can find the dryness and brownness and so forth in a good deal of Spanish painting. And therefore there’s supposed to be some connection between the geography of the place and the physionomy of the paintings that have been done in Spain in the last ten years or so.

Then there’s the national temperament. It’s austere, you know? Like, in the sixteenth-century Spanish court fashion was black when everybody else on the earth was wearing colors. So, there’s an austerity which has a sort of convincing sixteenth-century root. But the austerity is always being checked by violence. And that’s all that bullfight stuff, you know? [09:00] So there’s austerity. There’s violence. Again, the national temperament, very Spanish.

There’s also the historical isolation of the Spaniards, of the Spanish painters. El Greco is pretty solitary in the sixteenth century. Velazquez doesn’t have much company in the seventeenth.
Goya is on his own in the nineteenth and so on, Picasso in the twentieth century. There hasn’t been, in Spain, an unbroken continuous spectacle, parade of painters. In Spain, all the artists have been islands. And therefore, the isolation of the artist, the austerity and the violence, supposed to be a national temperament, and the dry, bare, brown place, all these things have been said to show in Spanish painting.

It has, I think, however, a pretty misleading effect. It has the effect of making all of the Spanish artists, the newer Spanish artists, look equal. If, after all, there’s sort of a really it’s a Spanish temperament working through them, how do you tell them apart? It doesn’t matter as long. As these national qualities are exemplified, their art shows it, and that’s it. It’s not a good basis to make esthetic judgments on.

It also has the disadvantage of sealing Spanish art off from that part of European painting, international European painting, at the moment it connects with. So, what I want to do this afternoon is talk about Tapies in isolation from other Spanish painters. I think he’s better than the other Spanish painters. And also, I want to talk about him in relation to an aspect of international European art because I think that the Spanish-ness which is being projected on him is basically a nineteenth-century romantic game which is unverifiable and pretty unilluminating.

Tapies was born in Barcelona in 1923. And he is a self-taught, full-time painter since 1946. His early work, which I want to indicate incompletely on the screen, is pretty typical of later Surrealism. Images like this -- Dream Garden, it’s called, of 1949 -- stylistically this is related to a good deal that was going on outside Spain at that time in the late ’40s. There’s this immersional illusionist space with cosmic overtones. And the space, the illusionist, immersional space, is filled with solid, often automatically painted forms.

You can find this kind of art being done in New York by Matta, by Enrico Donati, By Esteban Frances. This is very much the cosmic, dramatic, immersional, spatial game of late Surrealism, when the Surrealists were exploring a space which they hoped was interplanetary and galactic. That’s a detail of Dream Garden. Another painting of this phase is 1951. This one’s called Still Life of a Hunt. And again, there’s the evocation of rather deep, illusionist space of a kind that Tapies was shortly to give up, an illusionist Surrealist space combined with increasing solidity and firmness in areas of the paint. Some of those spongy patches are produced automatically of decalcomania, the pressing of paint on the canvas and so forth. There’s an increasing stress on material elements in the work.

There’s a detail of Still Life of a Hunt which shows, despite the overlapping, the transparency and the recession, and increasing feeling for the paint making pretty substantial and solid along the picture plane, something flat. And this is something which Tapies increases in his later work.

Now, at this time, 1949-1951, Tapies, apart from being a Spaniard, was pretty well in touch, as I suggest, with late Surrealism, for example. His painting was well in line with recent sophisticated Surrealism painting in New York, which he knew from magazines. He and his friends published a magazine. And from this magazine, one can see just how in touch they were with what was going on.
Now, in 1950 or ’51, Tapies went to Spain -- excuse me, went to Paris. And in Paris he had contacts with a great deal of very recent modern art which he’d previous known only in magazines and catalogs. For example, Dubuffet. Dubuffet, I think, is a key figure in postwar European painting. And he certainly is a key figure in relation to Tapies.

Dubuffet had his first exhibition of what he called high pastes in 1946. It was called Mirobolus, Macadam and Company. And a group of these thick, highly painted, ruggedly surfaced, scratched paintings were shown in that year, 1946. Here is one of those. It’s a painting of 1945 called Archetypes. Now, the originality of Dubuffet at this time in the mid-'40s was precisely in canceling a great deal of the special complexity of the kind that Tapies showed in his earlier work in which the late Surrealists were pursuing canceling spatial complexity and illusion, and emphasizing instead this gritty, substantial, high relief surfaces.

Archetypes of ’45 is one. And that shows that one of the necessary modifications of drawing, if your surface becomes so loaded and so thick, drawing has to become a kind of graffiti. It’s the only way you can make marks is by cutting into, by incising into the surface as in that painting. Another consequence of what might be called matter painting, using paint which is solid, heavy, higher, thicker than oil paint, but like oil paint it’s absolutely continuous. There’s no connection with collage. It’s just an extremely heavy, continuous, bulky substance in matter painting.

Another consequence is that forms have to be frontal. And the four men in an automobile in this painting, also of 1945, have been steamrolled into one flat plane. There’s a denial of the spatial relations which we’re accustomed to see in terms of painting. And the work is being taken further in the direction of sculpture, relief sculpture.

Here’s another of these early Dubuffets. This one’s called The Will of Force. It’s about ’45. And again, if you’re going to use this bulky stuff, if you’re going to be a matter painter, if one calls it this, with the literal, massive surface, then form tends to be simplified to become, as in this case, highly symmetrical.

Now, Dubuffet then, in the early ’40s, set up a great deal of the technical means which all those Europeans who were later on to adopt a matter painting for their own purposes were forced to use -- graffiti-like drawing, physical modeling of the paint, a denial of pictorial space, and instead a reliance on the literal, solid mass of the material. Here, for example, is a Corps de Dames of 1950. And with the denial of pictorially organized spatial relations, something else takes over. And I think in the case of matter painting it’s texture.

Dubuffet, for example, writing about the Corps de Dames series, and this is one of them, of 1950, he said textures evoking human flesh, but also other textures, which have nothing to do with human bodies, suggesting rather the earth or things like bark and roots. And in this Corps de Dames were the steamrolled, flattened, pancake-like of the woman which is recognizable. The flesh also resembles fur, bark, geological elements and so forth. So, with matter painting, although spatial relations, although space in the sense space has been canonized in American painting, is missing, texture begins to take on some of the expressive functions that space has in American painting.
Now, during 1953-1956, during that part of the ’50s, Tapies was forming his mature style. He’s back from Paris, back in Spain. And I think if we look at a few of his works of this period, ’53-’56, you can see the way he was developing towards his material style. Here, for example, is a painting of 1956 called *Figure Landscape in Grey*. And here certainly are some of the qualities we associate with Tapies’s mature work, some but not quite all of them.

For example, on the right-hand side of the painting, your right, the way the light area on the right fades off into the background suggests a pictorial way of organizing form and not a literal, semi-sculptural way of making a statement with his material. And also the high paste has been flattened a great deal. It’s been pushed down, flattened, roughly held down on the plane. The result is, I think, that this feels as rather something graphic. It’s a bit of wood or stone which has been worked on by a graphic artist. And a lot of the lines have the texture one associates with graphic art rather than with either painting or with this form halfway between painting and sculpture which I suggest we might call matter painting.

In a painting of 1956, this one called *Evening*, perhaps this graphic quality, I think, is still very visible. The way he has incised the yellow mass with those criss-crossing lines very much suggests some kind of shading, technical hatching device such as a graphic artist might use. And viewed close up, you can see that the device on the whole is fairly linear. Although he’s cutting into the yellow, he’s not using its substantial mass as fully as he does in the later pictures and the pictures which I think really would be what Tapies’s reputation must rest on.

But nevertheless, during this time, ’53-’56, he is using of increasing confidence and fullness those means which makes, I think, his mature image. Here, for example, is a painting of 1955. It’s earlier than *Evening*, which is ’56, the last one we looked at. But nevertheless it’s stylistically closer towards what I would think his mature style is. It’s black cross on grey.

And here the material is higher than in the earlier works. It’s higher. It’s dense and dry, built up in a dense, dry manner. And the black paint, which has been laid on the grey, has the thickness and stickiness of someone who’s using tar to make an inscription on a wall. He’s balancing the substantial massiveness of his ground with the kind of marks he’s making on the top of it, just as one can’t apply any kind of precise draftsmanship to a surface like this.

So, the kinds of signs you make, the marks you make in a picture like this have to approach graffiti in one way or another, graffiti, cave painting, or what have you. Now, I think it’s probably worth mentioning that before he went to Paris in the ’40s Tapies was a member of a group that called themselves the School of Altamira. And the rugged surface of this and the feeling that the black form and the cross are following a highly characteristic broken surface is something that he might have -- something that reminds one within the flattened rectangle of the canvas, despite its rectangularity of the format, does have an analogy to a cave where the drawing follows the irregular surface of the wall.

And also, I think the fact he and his friends called themselves School of Altamira is another reason why this Spanish national image has persisted. It does seem to give a kind of support to this. But they says School of Altamira, implying something that was non-Franco, something
which was pre-political, something which was rooted in the far Spanish past. And I think it’s probably the archaic element of the caves rather than any particular Spanish note which was what was intended, although as I say the Spanish-ness of the School of Altamira has been used in another way recently.

[24:00] Now here is one of ’56 called Space. And Space, which has a large, crumbly, yellow pat on one side of the painting shoved in against this dry, stretched-out grey area, this seems to me very much a full statement of Tapies’s mature style. Now, to make the point about Tapies’s connection with other Europeans, I used Dubuffet. And I suggested that Dubuffet’s matter painting is what underlies Tapies’s use of fat material. His paint, his oil paint or his plastic paints loaded with sawdust or sand or marble dust, rising into high relief, high relief like sculpture.

Well, I’m sure Dubuffet was an influence on him. [25:00] But there is another aspect which we must talk about. And that is, this is a highly un-Dubuffet kind of image. The regularity of the pat, the way it comes in from one side, but the way in which it follows in the basic rectangle of the picture.

Let me show you a Gottlieb. This is a painting by Adolph Gottlieb of 1946. Now, this isn’t the idea work to show you right now because I don’t think Gottlieb influenced Tapies. But nevertheless, Gottlieb in this picture is showing the kind of organization which I think Tapies has had in mind. Tapies, when he and his friends put out a magazine in the late ’40s, reproduced in this magazine Paul Klee and the Uruguayan artist Torres-Garcia. Now, Klee and Torres-Garcia both went in for pictures organized on a grid system, [26:00] a system of magic squares, the constant subdivision of the basic rectangle of the picture. And Gottlieb was also influenced by, and worked with, this kind of grid system.

And since I couldn’t get the right kind of Klee, or any Torres-Garcia to show you, at least I can show you the kind of organization I have in mind by showing you this Gottlieb. Now I think that in the ’40s, Tapies assimilated the grid as his natural way, a congenial way of organizing paintings. Grids are organized rather as Gottlieb organized this painting. Now, Gottlieb has pointed out that, by using the grid, he was able to treat the edges of the painting with as much emphasis as the center of the painting, so that he has a kind of all-over-ness.

He [27:00] can place his elements within the grid anywhere from edge to edge in the center, in the corner, wherever it goes. And because of the extension of the grid over the whole area, the form, however far to the edge, will be related to the whole format. And also, you get a kind of additive composition with one area added to another. Now, Tapies, I think, has assimilated this grid as a kind of basic armature under his fat, dense, high, rugged pastes.

Here’s a painting of 1957 by Tapies. And if you look at it, under the -- if you look into this pocked, grey surface, you will notice two vertical lines following down the sides of the painting. And the wavy lines up at the top also [28:00] really concur and lie along with the verticals at -- the horizontal at the top of the painting, so that despite the rugged, heaped-up, dense skin of matter, there is a kind of armature, I think. The grid, which you got out of Klee and Torres-Garcia, persists, I think, as a kind of armature under all the paint.
This, I think, is very clear in painting a very typical Tapies painting, compositionally a typical painting like this. This is Relief without Color of 1958. Again, there’s the grid as principal of organization. It isn’t necessarily insisted on in Torres-Garcia or in Gottlieb. The grid is usually drawn. So there is a kind of network going north to south, east to west, in the painting. Tapies dispenses with the continuity, the linear continuity of the grid, but nevertheless continues placing his forms so that they are harmonious subdivisions of the whole area and are all either multiplications of or divisions of a basic grid.

Here’s a detail of that which is Relief without Color of 1958. And with this detail, if you compare this back to the detail I showed you of Evening a couple of years earlier, I think you can see that the cuts he makes are no longer like the cuts that a graphic artist would make into the material he’s cutting. His cuts here seem much more responsive to the moistness and the sort of sponginess of his sandy surface so that the cuts make a kind of spatial play. They cut through the top light grey area to the darker sandy color underneath. So he creates space, or he creates space literally, as in sculpture, by actually modeling it, by actually cutting into the substantial mass that he’s using. Again, the grid -- see, this is one of the cases in which the grid, as it subdivides the picture, has actually been drawn. And this is Grey with Two Black Spots of 1959.

Now, here’s another Dubuffet. This Dubuffet is of 1957. And it’s called Door with Couch Grass. And it’s very closely -- it’s a door which follows honest illusionistically a door in Dubuffet’s possession in his home in the South of France. If you were using matter painting as your way of making a work of art, then as I suggested earlier certain technical means and obligations are imposed on you. And in this particular one, in this particular painting, Dubuffet is using an architectural subject. Now, increasingly Tapies, too, has used architectural subjects. The grid with which he uses an armature to brace his matter has been more and more used in terms of a kind of architectural imagery. This door of Dubuffet’s, for example, is picked up in various Tapies.

Here’s one of 1959 called Spanish Square. And in this particular one, Spanish Square, with its flatness, the sequence of pocked marks across it, is another place, I think, where one might mention another influence on Tapies, another international connection one can make between Tapies and European art, and that is with the Italian painter Fontana. Fontana was using rectangular masses like this and cutting into the paint, sometimes through the canvas itself, sometime before any of the Spanish painters were doing it. And I think there’s no doubt at all that the way in which the cuts or the holes make up a sequence, like a single line of machine gun bullets along a wall or something of that kind, definitely, I think, shows the influence of Lucio Fontana.

And there’s another way in which this work seems to be typically European and not simply Spanish. And that is in the way it evokes the wall. The wall has become a kind of governing image in matter painting because a wall is flat, as a matter painting is flat. And the marks you make on it, the only marks you can make in relation to the bulky, heavy, dense surface have to be like graffiti or have to be incisions, have to be modeled marks. So the kind of
marks which naturally occur on walls, in cities, walls in public places, are an analogy of the kind of marks that the artist makes.

Again, Dubuffet is a key figure here. Dubuffet made a set of lithographs called *The Walls* in 1945. And these were published a few years later. And Fontana in 1957 also did a series of paintings called *The Walls*. And not only walls but doors, tablets, architectural features of all sorts occur in Tapies’s work.

Here’s another Tapies. This one, called *Brown and Ochre*, of 1959. Space is created literally, as I say. It’s not created by painterly means. Space is not the reconciliation of the flat surface of the picture with the space-making qualities of color or a gesture of a brush on the surface. Space is not painted in these works of Tapies. But space is modeled. And I think this is a point one can’t insist on too much because as the surface of the picture is modeled, as I say, all illusion to space is canceled. But nevertheless there is a kind of dimension of reference does take the place of the spatial play which we tend to expect to be the point of a painting.

I think what happens, you can see it well in this, in *Brown and Ochre* of ’59. Instead of space being created, time is evoked. There’s a feeling of crumbling, a feeling of peeling, a feeling of stratification. As the top slab, yellow slab of paint seems to be coming off and under it, through it, on top of it, sometimes grazing it, sometimes behind it, one sees other textures. There’s a suggestion, I think, of time being used, time being evoked by Tapies instead of space.

This can be seen in another one like *Purple* of 1960, where again both the grid is very conspicuous and also the architectural analogies. For example, the area down in the (inaudible) foreground of *Purple*, [36:00] as you see here, is rather like a tomb top. It’s rather like a classical monument—much corroded, much effaced, partly drawn and painted over. So, as I say, time is evoked by stratifications, the textures and the marks. And this again is typical not just of Spain but of matter painting as a whole in Europe.

Dubuffet in his landscapes, and in his figures, is always evoking the primal. His landscapes look like the Earth before people inhabited it. His women have tremendously archaic, prehistoric, primitive look about them. And I think that Tapies has something of this feeling of the work of art as an object thick with time and time’s deposits. But where Dubuffet is [37:00] primal, it seems to me Tapies is more archaeological. Tapies stays within the area that Man has marked out in time. And what he presents us with are images in which his grid, his organizational grid, persists half-overlaid by the great deposit of matter to suggest the work of time, decay, history, entropy, overcoming the manmade so that the interplay between the grid and the deposit of matter suggests, I think, this kind of extension in time rather than space.

This one’s called *Grey and Purple*, 1960. And here’s a detail which shows you very clearly the technical resources of matter painting, the thickness of the material itself, [38:00] the incisions and the grazing of the top surface by the addition of paint. Here’s *Untitled No. 9* of 1960. And I think again you’ll see clearly—perhaps I’m laboring the point— the combination, the persistence in Tapies’s paintings, of this grid organization, sometimes very overtly stated, sometimes, as in some of the others we’ve seen, implicit and buried under the matter.
Here’s a recent work called *White Brackets* of 1960. And again it seems to me one can see the additive grid system is being used, both in the central division of the work, in the brackets acting in, pushing in [39:00] from the very edges and yet relatable to the central vertical and the wavering line running along top and bottom, which partly pick up the edges of the canvas and partly lead inward suggesting a slightly folded, wavy grid extending its organization through and under the whole work.

I think in a way one can sort of sum up Tapies’s imagery by saying that his pictures have a mixture of stability and corrosion. The stability is presented by the orderly grid, which is more or less legible in various paintings. And he uses the matter, the substantial, the aided paint, the thickened paint, he uses this frequently as something which opposes and lies over and folds across the grid. So one has a kind of interplay [40:00] of stability and corrosion, of the orderly and the decaying.

Here’s a painting of 1961 called *All White*. And *All White* is, I think it probably is as heavy to lift as his earlier dark works with their fat deposit of matter. But the way he seems possibly to be developing is this. He has made a lot of drawings. He’s always made drawings. He’s always made drawings as well as the substantial paintings for which he’s been known. But recently, with his increasing use of white, it seems to me he’s been using a color, if white is a color. He’s been using white to dissolve away a great deal of the materiality and heaviness which marked his earlier dark paintings so that one has a much more flexible interplay between [41:00] the solid image, in this case in the middle, and the white ground, which again, as I say, is very substantial but is nevertheless much more like a painterly statement. There’s much less acceptance of the brute weight of the material here and in several recent works and much more attention being paid to pictorial problems rather than to the problems of relief sculpture, which as I suggest has marked his work to date. I think that’s all I want to say about Tapies right now.

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