ANTONIO SAURA'S *MONSTRIFICATIONS*: THE MONSTROUS BODY, MELANCHOLIA, AND THE MODERN SPANISH TRADITION

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the monstrous body in the works of Antonio Saura Atares (1930-1998) as a means of exploring moments of cultural and political refashioning of the modern Spanish tradition during the second half of the twentieth century. In his work, Saura rendered figures in well-known Spanish paintings by El Greco, Velázquez, Goya and Picasso as monstrous bodies. Saura’s career-long gesture of deforming bodies in discontinuous thematic series across decades (what I called monstrifications) functioned as instances for artistic self-evaluation and cultural commentary. Rather than metaphorical self-portraits, Saura’s monstrous bodies allegorized the artistic and symbolic body of his artistic ancestry as a dismembered and melancholic corpus. In examining Saura’s monstrifications, this dissertation closely examines the reshaping of modern Spanish narrative under three different political periods: Franco’s dictatorship, political transition, and social democracy.

By situating Saura’s works and texts within the context of Spanish recent political past, this dissertation aims to open conversations and cultural analyses about the individual interpretations made by artists through their politically informed appropriations of cultural traditions. As I argue, Saura’s monstrous bodies incarnated an allegorical and melancholic gaze upon the fragmentary and discontinuous corpus of Spanish artistic legacy as an always-retrieved yet never restored body.
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Introduction: Saura’s Monstrifications

Born in 1930, Antonio Saura (1930-1968) was one of the children of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Raised during the early 1930s, Saura belonged to a generation of Spaniards whose childhood remembrances are formed from images of cities in ruins and the disfigured, amputated, and wounded bodies of the war. His generation grew up and came of age during the social repression and cultural isolation of Franco’s Postwar Spain. One captivating childhood memory encapsulated Saura’s experiences during those distressing years. As Saura recounted, in 1938 when he was eight years old, while hiding from the air bombings in his Barcelona home, he was looking from the window when he saw a man being shot at from one of the street barricades. As he recalled, the man’s head exploded while the beheaded body walked a few more steps before falling dead into the ground.¹ This brutal image of a deformed and monstrous body has often functioned as a primal scene for Saura’s work—providing at once a visual signature-motif, an index of his artistic iconography, and a visual metaphor of his artistic practice.

Saura’s encounter with a body in pain returned during his adolescence. In 1943, when he was thirteen years old, he was diagnosed with bone tuberculosis and was forced to recover in bed for five years covered by a plaster cast from the hip to the chest. This long-term convalescence lead him to have a permanent limp in his right leg. During this time of physical constraint Saura drew, painted, and wrote in bed while immersing himself in reading novels, household magazines, teenager’s encyclopedias, and comic books which transformed his bedroom into a hospital room, an experimental classroom, and an art studio. This period of self-discovery and auto-didactism provided Saura with his only artistic and literary education. He later described those years as “a sort of permanent anguish through which nonetheless I was able to intervene in

¹ Marcel Cohen, “¡La Semana Comienza Mal!” in Antonio Saura, Pinturas 1956-1985, Madrid, Ministerio de Cultura, Reina Sofia, IVAM, 1989, s/n
reality with a more conscious attitude” adding that it was a period of unveiling since it was the “time of discovery for many complex things like my own sexuality.” Particularly significant of his auto-didacticism was an article against “degenerate art” in the Nazi illustrated magazine Signal that his father gave him. As Saura recalled, this article included reproductions of artworks by Miró, Klee, Chagall, Picasso, Marx Ernst, and Mondrian. For Saura, this article was both fascinating and transformative in that it exposed him for the very first time to a new visual language. As he explained in an interview to Julián Ríos in 1991, this article provided him with a sort of intellectual challenge and a personal liberation:

That article against degenerate art was for me a form of excitement. It was an opportunity to appreciate a series of visual forms that were politically condemned but which I intuitively, and without any previous art formation, found fascinating. Somehow, it became for me a way of living. In those compositions I found a shocking and funny exhibition. It was a paradoxical presentation of forms. A reproduction of a painting by Max Ernst painting was shown next to reproduction of works by Chagall, Picasso, Klee and Mondrian. Everything was present to me as a furious assemblage.  

As Saura described, that article was a provocation to “degenerate” the exterior world through art. An experience that, as he reported, transformed him ever since:

My vision of those pages transformed me since early on into an incipient and perhaps true painter. I was conscious of the gravity of my activity while also rejecting the stupid propaganda. I was immediately committed to liberty and I rejected the oppressive tone of that article. However, I was fascinated with the seductive possibility of contradiction — the capacity of certain artists, the artistic power to “degenerate the world.”

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2 “Empecé a pintar y a escribir realmente entonces, en esa soledad provovada por la enfermedad, en este aislamiento obligado, en esta especie de interiorización tremendamente angustiosa, porque precisamente fueron momentos de muchas cosas: de la sexualidad, de cosas muy complejas.” Antonio Saura in Julián Ríos, Las Tentaciones de Antonio Saura, Madrid, Mondadori, 1991, p. 26

3 “El azar hizo que cayera en mis manos una revista nazi, que se llamaba Signal, donde había un artículo justamente en contra del arte moderno, es decir, contra el arte degenerado. Aquel artículo contra el arte degenerado se convirtió en una forma de excitación, una forma de amar una serie de formas que eran atacadas, pero que yo intuitivamente, sin formación alguna encontraba fascinantes. Y aquello se convirtió en una forma de vida en cierto modo, pero lo más divertido y paradójico era que en aquel artículo aparecían formas contradictorias. Al lado de un cuadro de Max Ernst figuraba un cuadro de Chagall, un cuadro de Picasso, un cuadro de Klee, un cuadro de Mondrian. En fin, había una amalgama furiosa.” A. Saura, Las Tentaciones de Antonio Saura, p. 26.

4 “La visión de aquellas páginas lo apartaron del mismo para convertirlo tempranamente en incipiente y quizá verdadero pintor en el que la gravedad de un hacer quedó, de repente situada en su lugar frente a la miseria y la estulticia, resultando contraproducente la estúpida propaganda: fue inmediata la adhesión literaria, naciente del rechazo a la opresión, comprobada la diversidad de las frutas. El contrariado atractivo de la fantástica proposición—
For Saura, this encounter with modern art through poor quality reproductions of works of art in a Nazi magazine given to him by his father while recovering in bed reflected his personal circumstance of an emerging artist in the cultural parochialism of Franco’s Spain while it also pointed towards the mediated nature of artistic practice. Part self-crafted artistic mythology, part origin story, Saura’s mediated encounter with literature and modern art took place as a young adolescent suffering the physical constraints of a body in pain, and under the specific historical period of artistic censorship, moral constrictions, and political repression of the first decades of Postwar Spain. As Elaine Scarry described pain and imagination go hand by hand as each other “missing counter part”. As she wrote: “pain and imagining are the “framing events” within whose boundaries all other perceptual, somatic, and emotional events occur; thus between the two extremes can be mapped the whole terrain of the human psyche.”

Saura’s literal body in pain and symbolic tortured body has operated as an all-encompassing trope in Saura’s scholarship. As scholars have pointed out, the monstrous body encompasses the main visual metaphor in Saura’s artistic practice. Saura himself offered this interpretation of his works. As Saura explained, the monstrous body entailed a formal, semantic, and aesthetic frame as well as a platform for artistic action and social protest. Discussing the significance of the female body in his works in 1959 Saura explained:

The female body has been ubiquitous in my works since 1955. In my works I reduced it to its most essential presence as an almost a grotesque [esperpento] and subjecting it to all kinds of cosmic and telluric transformations (if we have to call them that). I use it as a visual proof of the constant presence of the human body in Spanish art, but moreover, as a visual structure for artistic action; as a tool of protest; as a visual guide not to loose myself; as a means not to immerse

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myself into chaos. In reducing the body to its most essential condition my goal is to activate an obsessive image without creating a visual regression to classic models, quite the opposite. My aim is to find an emotional, physical and mental structure that goes beyond the excessive intellectualism of synthesis, transposition or visual elimination. My aim is to be immersed into the most elemental gesture against the bull of the white canvas; to face death in an extreme action; to abandon myself into the mystic void; into absolute nothingness. This cannot lead me but to total annihilation. We are already testimonies of an epoch and yet we have to reach far beyond.⁶

As Saura’s described, the agonized body functioned for him as an obsessive image as well as a deforming lens through which he expressed his pictorial and social anxieties as a young artist under Franco. As I explore in this dissertation, for Saura the monstrous body is both melancholic and allegorical since it entails both a reminder of physical pain and a vehicle for imagination.⁷ Rather than metaphorical portraits of the artist, as Saura and most of his critics have argued, this dissertation offers a chronological, theoretical, and political analysis of Saura’s systematic rendering of monstrous bodies.

As this study examines, Saura’s career-long gesture of rendering monstrous significant bodies of his artistic ancestry in discontinuous thematic series across decades (what I called Saura’s *monstrifications*) destructed and reconstructed the fractured corpus of the Spanish pictorial legacy (in particular El Greco, Velázquez, Goya and Picasso). This dissertation argues that Saura’s *monstrifications* of emblematic works of the national pictorial legacy operated as introspective reflections of his own artistic practice, while allegorizing the artistic and symbolic

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⁶ “El cuerpo de mujer presente en todos mis cuadros desde fines de 1955, reducido a su más elemental presencia, casi un esperpento, sometido a toda clase de tratamientos cósmicos y telúricos (si así queremos llamarlos), puede parecer una prueba de la constante presencia del ser humano en el arte español, pero es sobre todo un apoyo estructural para la acción, para la protesta, para no perderme, para no hundirme en el caos. Se trata de hacer activa una imagen obsesiva sin que suponga una regresión a la estructuración clásica, sino precisamente el camino inverso seguido por la mayor parte de los pintores de nuestra época, es decir, encontrar un soporte emocional, físico y mental no dependiente de un proceso intelectual de síntesis, transposición o eliminación. Sumirme en el gesto más elemental contra el toro de la tela blanca, enfrentarme cara a cara contra la muerte en una acción llevada a los límites más extremos, o bien perderse en el vacío místico, en la nada más absoluta, no puede conducir más que a una aniquilación total. Somos ya el testimonio de una época, pero es necesario ir más lejos.” Antonio Saura, *3 Notas*, first published in *Papeles de Son Armadans*, Abril 1959, republished in *Escritura como Pintura*, op. cit. pp. 44-45
⁷ Elaine Scarry, op. cit. p. 162-165.
body of Spanish artistic ancestry as a dismembered and melancholic corpus. In examining Saura’s monstrifications, this dissertation also explores Spanish urgency at establishing a coherent narrative of Spanish modern tradition under three different political periods: Franco’s dictatorship, political transition, and social democracy. Under these shifting political contexts, Saura’s monstrous bodies incarnated an allegorical and melancholic gaze upon the fragmentary and discontinuous corpus of Spanish artistic legacy as an always-retrieved yet never restored body.

Saura’s deformations of the body of his artistic ancestry as an allegorical gesture were paradigmatic in his Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II series. In 1967 Saura painted a series of canvases identical in size in which he transformed the iconic portrait of the Spanish Emperor Phillip II (r. 1527-1598) into a monstrous and grotesque physiognomy. Saura’s Imaginary Portrait of Phillip II (1967) (Fig.0.1) evoked the austere color palette of El Greco’s portraits and the monochromatic backgrounds of Velázquez’s portraiture, while at the same time, it echoed the dramatic surfaces of French Informel and the expressive visual syntax of New York School painting. In conjuring this dual pictorial tradition Saura’s portrait of the Spanish monarch offered an Oedipal confrontation with the pressing influence of baroque painting in Spain and a delayed formal conversation with the pictorial vocabulary of the tortured body of the late 1950s.

In carefully distorting the pictorial idiom of Spanish Habsburg royal portraits, Saura’s paintings deformed the symbolic corpus of the Spanish early-modern sovereign as a historical national emblem—thus undermining the historical dimension of the cultural and military status of baroque Spain as a worldwide Catholic Empire.8 In rendering monstrous the pictorial and

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8 As Davies writes: “These distinctive social mores and their reflection and promotion in Spanish portraiture were rooted in a society that was hierarchical, insular and elitist. Its code of honor was based on purity of faith, purity of blood (‘limpieza de sangre’) and legitimate birth, and was manifested in the practice of virtue.” David Davies, “El Greco’s Portraits: The Body Natural and the Body Politic”, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004, p. 250-262.
symbolic body of the Spanish baroque monarch, Saura’s portraits of Phillip II subverted the emblematic image of the Spanish baroque Emperor while obliquely commenting on Franco Regime’s ideological appropriation of Spanish early-modern.9

As Jorge Luis Marzo has reasoned, both Francoism and Spanish social democracy have recurrently instrumentalized the Spanish baroque as the national Golden Age by conceiving it as the founding national myth of Spanish cultural and political common identity. As Marzo describes:

Spanish Baroque was conceived as an identitary starting point. More importantly, it was Spanish arriving point. From all of European countries ascribed to the narrative of the baroque, it was in Spain where the identity problem was most dramatically imposed. Indeed, in Spain the baroque became the most significant metaphor of what being a Spaniard meant. It was through the baroque Empire as a universal territory that Spain created its own national ideal and therefore the paradigmatic example for its political avenues. It is through this ideal of universality that Spain aspired to conquered history.10

As Marzo argues, Francoist appropriation of the Spanish baroque (a controversial historical and cultural period which included the great works of Velázquez, Zurbarán, Quevedo, Góngora, and Cervantes, as well as the Spanish Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Inquisition, the expulsion of the Jews, the wars against Protestantism, and the colonization of the Americas), attempted to erase the memory of the recent past while imposing a coherent political and cultural national narrative.11

10 “El Barroco, así, será concebido como punto de partida identitario, pero, todavía más importante, también como punto de llegada. España, de entre todos los países europeos adscritos a estos relatos, será por lejos el que lo perfilará y fijará con más ahínco. Para España, el barroco ha sido la metáfora más concreta de lo que significa ser español, y gracias a su imperio, coincidente en el tiempo con el periodo barroco, el mejor exponente de la capacidad de la nación para ser universal, para vehicular nociones de humanidad válidas para los españoles y su extensión hispana, el Estilo Histórico, el medio por el cual los hombres pudieron alcanzar la historia.” Jorge Luis Marzo, La Memoria Administrada, Katz Conocimiento, Buenos Aires, 2010, p. 34 and p. 232.
11 Jorge Luis Marzo, La Memoria Administrada, op. Cit.
In responding to Franco’s political and cultural instrumentalization of Spanish artistic legacy, Saura’s *monstrifications* of the portrait of Phillip II operated in a dual sense. On the one hand, they perpetuated the cultural status of El Greco’s and Velázquez’s portraiture as foundational figures of the Spanish early-modern pictorial tradition — and thus confronted the ideological appropriation of the international prestige and cultural status of the “Spanish School” by Francoism. Eugenio D’Ors defined the cultural preeminence of the Spanish pictorial school as a moral and aesthetic narrative in his famous motto: “that which is not tradition is copy”. On the other hand, they undermined the emblematic condition of the Spanish baroque sovereign as the embodiment of Spain as a military and Catholic Empire and its ideological revival by Francoism. As such, Saura’s monstrifications of Phillip II operated as melancholic and black humorous gestures responding to ideological appropriations of the Spanish baroque while demystifying Franco’s repressive national-catholic identity.

A contemporary to Saura, Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo (Barcelona, b. 1931), described Spanish artists’ anxiety in searching for their own expressive voice under Francoist ideology. In “Writing in an Occupied Language” (1974), Goytisolo wrote: “Our Spanish language, that language we use everyday, is constantly being mutilated by the Fascist mind. And this mind controls the government. This all-powerful force by exercising a covert violence on the virtual significance of words and meanings, mutilates the possibilities of expression.” Like much of Saura’s works, Goytisolo’s words summarized the contradictory conditions of art production under Franco. As explored throughout the chapters, both the Francoist Regime and Spanish democratic governments attempted to ideologically refashion Spanish modern tradition for

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political purposes—thus showing the fractured corpus of Spanish cultural and artistic modernity and the political urge to repair it.15

In 1992, the Social Democratic Party (PSOE), in government from 1982 to 1996, celebrated the long-desired political and cultural normalization of Spain as a European modern democracy by promoting a series of state-sponsored exhibitions commemorating the Fifth-hundredth Anniversary (Quinto Centenario) of Spain's emblematic year of 1492. These international events—which included Barcelona’s Summer Olympic Games, the World Fair Exhibition in Seville (Expo’92) and Madrid as European Capital of Culture—refashioned Spanish democratic cultural and political identity in the 1990s. Saura participated in the Aragones Pavilion at EXPO’92 showing a selection of works from his career-long thematic series Imaginary Portrait of Goya (1957-1996) and The Dog of Goya (1960-1998)—in which Saura monstrified Francisco de Goya’s iconic beheaded dog in Half-Submerged Dog (1820) (Fig. 0.2). In Imaginary Portrait of Goya (1981) (Fig. 0.3) Saura transformed the dog of Goya into a monstrous body. Saura’s two-colored portrait suggested the idea of both emergence and disappearance. Also, Saura’s monochromatic yellow toned background resonated with the gravity and solemnity of Velázquez’s baroque portraiture and with the pictorial vocabulary of Goya’s composition. In the midst of the euphoric events of 1992, which celebrated Spain as a normalized European democracy, Saura’s monstrous dogs gazed into the disjointed nature of Spain's modern political and cultural legacy while responding to the self-congratulatory facade of Spanish postmodern identity. As I will argue, both Phillip II and the dog of Goya embodied for Saura emblematic bodies of Spanish pictorial ancestry that he monstrified in discontinuous

series as deploying an allegorical gesture towards the cultural and political situation and also enacting a melancholic gesture towards his own artistic practice.

As Freud argued in *Mourning and Melancholia*, in melancholia the ego punishes itself for the loss of the loved-object as a continuous narcissistic and painful introspection. As Freud wrote, melancholia “behaves like an open wound”. Julia Kristeva extended Freud’s analysis on the introspective condition of the melancholic subject arguing that in melancholia the ego becomes cannibalistic and ultimately devours itself. As she argued: “‘Better fragmented, torn, cut up, swallowed, digested… than lost.’” As I examine in the different chapters of this study Saura’s career-long monstrifications of emblematic works from Picasso, Goya, and Velázquez systematically reevaluated his previous works while also performing melancholic exercises over the symbolic body of Spanish pictorial legacy —hence symbolically devouring his own body of works and those of his artistic ancestry.

As I posit throughout this dissertation, Saura’s monstrifications functioned through five intersecting levels. First, they operated formally. Saura’s works distorted iconic works from El Greco, Velázquez, Goya, and Picasso by transforming them into monstrous physiognomies. In doing so, Saura’s works assaulted their own pictorial heritage while also dialoguing with the leading artistic idioms of the 1950s and early 1960s —namely, *French Informel*, *American Action Painting*, *Nouvelle Figuration*, Pop Art and CoBRA. Second, they functioned structurally. Saura organized his artistic production in thematic series —thus displaying a fragmentary and dismembered artistic corpus for over four decades. Each work sets up a lateral visual dialogue with the rest of the works of the series, while it also relates vertically with

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17 Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), op. cit. p. 252.
previous works of the same thematic series —thus offering a constant historical re-evaluation of his artistic practice. Third, they functioned *semantically*. Saura’s career-long reinterpretations of emblematic works of the Spanish pictorial heritage symbolically distort the corpus of the Spanish pictorial tradition —thus showing the Spanish pictorial legacy itself as a gallery of monstrous physiognomies. Fourth, they functioned *self-reflectively*. Saura’s systematic strategy in rendering monstrous specific emblems of his cultural ancestry questioned the political refashioning of the Spanish modern narrative (first under the Francoist dictatorship and later under the Constitutional Democracy). Finally, Saura’s monstrous bodies functioned *self-critically*. They deployed an introspective gaze looking simultaneously towards his own artistic practice, while confronting the validity of Spanish pictorial legacy during the second half of the twentieth century.

The task of this dissertation is two-fold. On the one hand, it provides a comprehensive analysis of Saura’s artistic practice by cross-examining his monstrifications of the Spanish artistic tradition across different media (in particular, his paintings, works on paper and book illustrations). On the other, it is structured chronologically, thus paralleling Saura’s works with the cultural and political process of the normalization of Spanish political and cultural identity under three significant political moments: the diplomatic opening of the Francoist regime during the mid 1950s, the post-Franco political transition (1975-1981), and social democracy (1982-1996).

Moving chronologically, this study examines Saura’s systematic rendering of monstrous bodies from 1956, the year of his return from his first stay in Paris, to his death in 1998 at the age of 68. Saura’s monstrous bodies operated as a deformed lens across the recuperation of tradition during Francoism of the late 1950s, his incorporation of vernacular and commercial imagery
during the domestic economical development of the 1960s, his return to painting in 1978, and his illustrations of books during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In following a chronological and theoretical interpretation rather than a thematic or psychological one, this dissertation interprets Saura’s abandonments of and returns to previous visual motifs not as stylistic breaks or inconsistencies on a single thematic narrative, but rather as crucial instances of Saura’s artistic introspection and cultural self-reflection.

Saura’s monstrifications present an epistemological and interpretative challenge. As I explore, they offer contested artistic and cultural sites that assess the conflictive nature of the monstrous body as physical and imagined pain while also questioning the validity of national legacies under antithetical political regimes. From Latin *monere* (to warn from a divine threat) and from *monstrum* (to show or reveal), the monstrous body incarnates both the profanation of the order of nature (as a creature *contra-natura*), and the transgression of the order of reason (as a product of imagination). The representation of the monstrous body exceeds and yet delineates the dichotomy between nature and culture. Indeed, it incarnates an aesthetic, cultural and moral transgression of the same limits it necessarily recognizes. As Immanuel Kant argued in the *Critique of Judgment*, the monstrous is at once sublime and horrifying; in escaping both reason and the limits of imagination it produces both horror and fascination. In similar terms, Jeffrey Cohen has defined the monstrous body as an artistic, cultural, and metaphoric-cross road that testifies a specific social and historical circumstance. As he argues, “Full rebuke of traditional

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19 “The colossal is the mere representation of a concept which is almost too great for presentation, i.e. borders on the relatively monstrous; for the end to be attained by the presentation of a concept is made harder to realize by the intuition of the object of being almost too great of our faculty of apprehension” Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, s.23-26, London, Oxford Classics, p. 88 and 94
methods of organizing knowledge and human experience, the geography of the monster is an imperiling expanse, and therefore [it is] always a contested cultural space.”

Marianne-Hélène Huet has described the unstable ontological status of the monstrous body as that image that disrupts mimetic representation. As she writes, the plastic nature of monstrosity is both originally and radically unique thus transgressing the laws of representation:

… the plastic nature of monstrosity might be said to lay in the difference between “likeness” and “appearance”, eikastiken and phantastiken. But at the same time that monstrosity takes art as its model, its mimesis is devoid of aesthetic intention. Far from dissimulating its artificial nature, that is, its own artistic origin, the monster reveals its genesis. There is no faux-semblant in monstrosity. On the contrary, the monstrous creation does not mislead, it reveals; it does not hide its nature, it exposes the shameful source of its deformity, its useless and inappropriate model. As art, the monstrous creation could be said to be the most straightforward of all artistic pretenses. It makes images from images; it is the art of reproducing oblivious to taste and judgment, a disproportionate art of gratuitous resemblances that repeatedly reveals its origins, or reveals that its origins are merely appearances.

Like Huet, Saura interpreted the monstrous image (“el monstruo plástico”) as a visual phenomenon that conveys a “fascinating cruel intensity” and a “beautiful abhorrence.” As Saura described in “The Cruel Gaze. The Sublime Cruelty and the Monstrous” (“La Mirada Cruel. La Crueldad Sublime y lo Monstruoso”) (1984) and in “Obscene Beauty” (“La Belleza Obscena”) (1988), the artistic monstrous embodies a contradictory force resulting from the cruel, yet beautiful profanation of forms. Echoing George Bataille’s notion of art as an act of cruelty in La literature et le mal, Saura embraced the paradoxical beauty of the monstrous body as incarnating the constant transgression of aesthetic laws (the blasphemous, intense, and cruel aspects of the beautiful destruction) without resorting to moralizing impulses. As he wrote:

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I believe in the beauty of the monstrous, in the beauty of obscenity and in the beauty of the ‘eye that laughs’, and these three beauties combined. Appearing explicitly or subtly, they correspond with my own pictorial genres; that is, with my own structures and themes […] The beauty of monstrosity, as the obscene beauty, is only possible by the very transgression of the artistic activity.  

As Saura interpreted it, the pictorial monstrous becomes simultaneously a disseminative force of fascinating cruel intensity. As he described, he found this cruel and beautiful monstrosity at the core of the disfigured bodies in the works of Velázquez, Goya, and Picasso that his works dialogued with. As Saura wrote in “The Imaginary Prado” (“El Prado Imaginario”) (1989) quoting Tod Browning’s film *Freaks*, monstrous bodies at the Prado Museum are interrelated, “offend one and you offend them all.” As Saura described, in the works of Spanish painters, the monstrous body manifests a phenomenology of pictorial intensity:

In Velázquez’s painting the monstrous (for instance in his portraits of dwarfs) is neither pedagogic nor moralizing. Instead, it reflects the human condition. In Velázquez, Goya and Picasso, the monstrous embodies a plastic reflection not a moralizing or ideological dogma. It is indeed, the manifestation of a pictorial phenomenology […] It incarnates a beauty that does not depend on the beauty of forms or the seduction of the pictorial themes, not even in their technical mastery but in their ability of convulsion, destruction and permanence. That is, another kind of beauty which I can only define as “intense”.

Certainly, Saura was not the only artist of mid twentieth century reassessing the Spanish pictorial school as a symbolic monstrous legacy. As Jonathan Brown pointed out in *Picasso and the Spanish Tradition*, for modern artists, and specially for Picasso and Bacon, El Greco’s and

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23 As Saura wrote: “La belleza de lo monstruoso, como la belleza de lo obsceno, solamente son factibles mediante la transgresión ejercida por aquella actividad que terminamos por definir como artística.” A. Saura, “Crimen y Capricho, Épilogo a la Familia de Pascual Duarte” en *Escritura Como Pintura, Sobre la Experiencia Pictórica*, Barcelona, Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de Lectores, p. 111-119.
Velázquez’s paintings were formally modern in suspending the subject of the composition in a purely visual plane in which “the illusion of depth became unnecessary if not undesired, and thus was minimized or eliminated.” In 1950, Picasso painted Portrait of El Greco (Fig. 0.5) in which he echoed pictorial idiom and sober iconography of El Greco’s iconic Portrait of A Man (1600) while resonating with the earth colors tones of Velázquez’s portraiture. In 1953, Francis Bacon reinterpreted Velázquez’s iconic portrait of Pope Innocent X (1650) in his series of Study After Velázquez Portrait of Pope Innocent X (1953) (Fig. 0.6). As Wieland Schimied observed in analyzing Bacon’s revisions of Velázquez’s painting, modern painters challenged and questioned the masterpieces of the pictorial tradition as an irresolvable legacy. As he argued:

> conceiving their works in necessarily fragmentary terms, modern painters were fated to remain aware of a discrepancy that could never be resolved. However, there were two sides to the coin: on the one hand, the realization that the masters were insuperable forced the modern artist to acknowledge and accept his own limitations, but on the other, it represented a continual challenge, spurring him to renew his efforts in the pursuit of an impossible goal.

Just as Bacon was fascinated by Velázquez’s psychological depth in his portraits of the pope, Picasso was mesmerized by Velázquez’s collective portraiture. In 1957, Picasso painted a series of forty-four canvases re-interpreting Velázquez’s Las Meninas (Maids of Honor, 1656) in which Picasso dialogued at once with Velázquez’s group portraiture as well as with his own pictorial vocabularies. In Las Meninas according to Velázquez, (1957) (Fig. 0.7) Picasso composed a large black and white canvas echoing the color palette and large scale of the Guernica. In this painting Picasso portrayed Velázquez as a giant and Janus-like symmetric painter looking into himself. As Malcom Warner argued, part homage, part takeover bid, Picasso interpreted Velázquez “through the looking glass.” As he wrote, “In making Las Meninas so raucously his own, he gave form to an idea that runs throughout modern portraiture, that of tradition as a theme.

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ripe for variation.”28 In 1960, Salvador Dalí also painted Velázquez’s *Las Meninas*—hence restating the persistent influence of Spanish painting, and El Greco and Velázquez in particular, in postwar European painters.

Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* has also been approached as a theoretical riddle. In the introduction to *The Order of Things* (1966), Michel Foucault interpreted Velázquez’s painting as interrupting the organic bond between the gaze of the viewer and the represented subject. As he described, Velázquez painting disclosed the essential void in which the viewer, as both the subject and the object of representation, has been elided. For Foucault, the void at the center of the composition (that the mirror simultaneously conceals and discloses) reveals the self-awareness of the painting as a play of gazes. As Foucault argued, Velázquez’s painting instituted modern representation as a self-reflective space and hence, it inaugurated the self-awarded condition of modern representation.29

Whereas for philosophers like Foucault, the significance of Velázquez’s painting could be extracted from its position within Spanish history, for Spain’s modern artists El Greco’s and Velázquez’s painting functioned as an emblem of Spanish national identity and therefore inextricably tied to the country’s recent and more distant past.30 As I explore in the different chapters of this project, El Greco’s, Velázquez’s, Goya’s, Picasso’s artistic legacies were instrumentalized both by Francoism and by Democratic parties in order to normalize Spanish cultural and political singularity, and moreover, functioning as a means to construct a coherent national identity. More than participating in the debate on the actual existence of a canonic

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“Spanish school,” Saura’s monstrous bodies revealed the disjointed and discontinuous nature of Spanish modern tradition — as it was interrupted sequentially, throughout Spain's modern history: by Fernando VII’s political absolutism, the Spanish Civil War, and forty years of Franco’s dictatorship.

Saura’s monstrous bodies conjured two modern allegories of the monstrous body: Frankenstein’s monstrous creature and Gregor Samsa’s cruel metamorphosis — what Valeriano Bozal has called Saura’s “metamorphoses of the monster.”31 In revealing the monstrous body as at once subject and object of cruel transformations, they offer disturbing and yet fascinating allegories of the fragile condition of the modern subject while also questioning the coherence of a continuous artistic body.

In Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein the monstrous creature embodied a dual monstrosity. First, it incarnated a motherless body crafted from dismembered and dead fragments. Secondly, it embodied an impure ancestry that revolts against its own creator. In performing this Oedipal gesture, Frankenstein’s creature symbolized a modern Prometheus who defied his own genealogy, and ultimately confronted itself.32 Like Frankenstein’s creature, Saura’s monstrifications disjointed and reassembled disparate fragments from divergent artistic legacies (Spanish Baroque, Informel, Abstract Expressionism, Nouvelle Figuration, CoBRA) thus offering a discontinuous artistic corpus in interrupted thematic series across decades.

32 Barbara Freeman has used the verb “monsterize” to describe Frankenstein both as a creature and as a cultural gesture. As she writes: “Indeed, "frankensteen" is even a word in its own right: according to Webster's, it means a monster in the shape of a man; a work or agency that proves troublesome to or destroys its creator; and a law unto itself, interested largely in its own perpetuation and expansion. "Frankenstein," then, is an example of a word that monsterizes, for the Monster has appropriated not only the novel's title, but his creator's very name.” Barbara Freeman in “Frankenstein” with Kant: A Theory of Monstrosity or the Monstrosity of Theory”, SubStance, vol. 16, no.1, issue, 52, 1987.
Saura was intrigued and captivated by Kafka’s fragmentary and allegorical texts. In the mid 1980s Saura illustrated *The Metamorphoses* and *The Journal of Kafka*. In Kafka’s enigmatic short story, *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa is transformed into a monstrous body. Samsa’s inexplicable metamorphosis into a monstrous body provides a horrible yet riveting allegory on the meaningless condition of the modern self. Describing his fascination with Samsa’s enigmatic vision, Saura described Kafka’s metamorphic creature as a monstrous body confronting our modern identity:

> The insect that contemplates us with his monstrous eyes would be astonished by the landscape that they might see: that the eyes that contemplate him are not less monstrous than its own; our eyes placed in cavities, next to holes from where we breath and listen— the monstrous vision of the ex crescencies and convex forms of the human face. 33

Echoing Kafka’s metamorphosis as an open-ended parable,34 Saura’s monstrified a set of deformed bodies that he recurrently displayed in fragmented and discontinuous thematic series revealing the introspective and self-reflective nature of his work, while also signaling the lack of continuation of the Spanish modern legacy.

Like in Frankenstein’s and Samsa’s monstrous allegories of the fractured and discontinuous nature of the modern condition, Saura’s career-long monstrifications offer an artistic and theoretical frame of interpretation from which, to borrow Rosalind Krauss’ expression, modernity can be read *against the grain*.35 In quoting Kafka’s and Frankenstein’s strategies as allegories of the monstrous, I interpret Saura’s monstrifications as providing a particular reading of the pressing influence of the Spanish artistic legacy under critical political times while also allegorizing his own artistic practice.

33 “El insecto que nos contempla quedaría asombrado frente al paisaje que ante sus ojos monstruosos se presenta: los ojos que le contemplan no son menos monstruosos, encajados en agujeros, acompañados de orificios para respirar y oír, montículos y excrecencias gratuitas.” A. Saura, “La Mirada Cruel, La Crueldad Sublime y lo Monstruoso”, (1986) published in Fíjeza, op.cit. p.166
Walter Benjamin’s notion of allegory in Spanish baroque drama as a discontinuous and fragmentary compositional strategy is crucial for my interpretation of Saura’s monstrifications as an allegorical gesture. As Benjamin described, allegory disrupts unique meaning in that: “In allegory any person, any relationship can mean anything else. With this possibility a destructive, but just verdict is passed on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which the detail if of no great importance.” Hence for Benjamin, “Allegory is in the realm of thoughts what ruins are in the realm of things.” As he added, this was exemplary in Spanish baroque drama in which expression is ultimately fractured and discontinuous and hence melancholic “In the spirit of allegory it (the baroque drama) is conceived from the outset as a ruin, as a fragment. Others may shine resplendently as on the first day; this form preserves the image of beauty to the very last.”

Throughout the dissertation, I point to several instances in which Benjamin’s description of the fragmentary and melancholic condition of baroque allegory parallels fundamental aspects of Saura’s work.

Saura’s monstrifications of the baroque Spanish monarch Phillip II alluded to both, the catholic baroque Emperor and to dictator Franco— hence they operated as political commentaries on the tragic historical recurrence of political absolutism in Spain (what Bozal called Saura’s “lessons of history.”) As Benjamin described the baroque monarch embodies a paradoxical figure as becoming both martyr and tyrant of its absolute power. As he wrote:

In the baroque the tyrant and the martyr are but the two faces of the monarch. They are necessarily extreme incarnations of the princely essence. The theory of sovereignty which takes as its example the special case in which dictatorial powers are unfolded, positively demands the completion of the image of the sovereign, as tyrant.

37 Valeriano Bozal, “Temas de Antonio Saura”, op. cit.
38 W. Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, op. cit. p. 69.
In conjuring Benjamin’s analysis of the melancholic condition of the baroque sovereign, Saura’s distorted and disseminated portraits of the Spanish monarch operated as visual interpretations of El Greco’s and Velázquez’s solemn portraiture, and as Valeriano Bozal has noted, they function as mockeries of the Catholic Emperor and the fascist dictator. As such, Saura’s recurrent monstrifications of the emblematic Spanish monarch undermined both the historical and political monstrosity of the Spanish baroque and its monstrous ideological appropriation by Francoism.

Saura’s monstrifications of the body on the cross in his Crucifixion series paralleled Benjamin’s description of the melancholic allegory of the Golgotha. As Benjamin described, the image of the Golgotha renders a melancholic metaphor of human suffering and hence it provides as an “allegory of resurrection”. As he wrote:

The bleak confusion of the Golgotha, which can be recognized as the schema underlying the allegorical figures in hundreds of the engravings and descriptions of the period is not just a symbol of the desolation of human existence. In it transitoriness is not signified or allegorically represented, so much as, in its own significance, displayed as allegory. As the allegory of resurrection.

Following Benjamin’s description of the crucifixion as an allegoric immersion, I interpret Saura’s Crucifixions series as melancholic emblems that functioned as self-appointed metaphors of his personal circumstance as well as allegories of Spanish social and political circumstance under Franco. In simultaneously embodying a devotional image, an intense spectacle of pain, and pictorial instances of irreverent sexuality, Saura’s Crucifixions offered a teratology of the sacred body, while at the same time functioning as allegories of his own act of painting, of his own body in pain, and of the delirious national-Catholicism of Francoism.

Finally, Saura’s career-long monstrification of Goya’s dog in thematic series The Dog of Goya and Imaginary Portraits of Goya resonated with Benjamin’s analysis of the dog as an emblem of modern melancholy. Following Erwin Panofsky’s analysis of Dürer’s, Melancholia, Benjamin identified the melancholic disposition of the modern artist as an introspective and critical gesture. Following Benjamin’s interpretation of the dog as a melancholic emblem of the modern subject, I interpret Saura’s persistent monstrifications of Goya’s dog for over four decades as allegories of the melancholic condition of Spanish modernity.

Benjamin’s analysis of allegory as a fragmentary strategy has functioned as a theoretical trope for contemporary criticism and theoretical debates on modernity. Following Benjamin’s revival of baroque allegory, Paul de Man described allegory as a dual rhetorical code that is both meta-reflective and deconstructive. In Allegories of Reading, de Man described allegory as essentially temporal functioning as a meta-commentary of the rhetorical compositions.

De Man’s understanding of allegory as both temporal and ironic helps me to frame Saura’s structure of thematic series and the repetitive quality of his works as ironic and self-reflective. Saura’s repetition of the same iconic motifs across a limited number of thematic series across decades (the dog of Goya, female on armchairs, the body on the cross, the multitude, Dora Maar), provided an ironic act of self-reflection across decades while enacting a cultural commentary on the value of artistic tradition under pressing and convulsive cultural and political realities.

Borrowing Benjamin’s and de Man’s analysis, American art historians Clive Owens and Benjamin Buchloh described the recurrent strategies of appropriation, confiscation, montage, and

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41 W. Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, op. cit. p. 142.
42 Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, p. 205.
distortion of the emblems of modern art in the early 1980s as allegorical and melancholic. As they argued, these allegorical strategies of contemporary artists reveal the meta-referential condition of postmodern art under the cultural and ideological pressures of late capitalism. As Buchloh reasoned, the ideology of postmodernism resides in this dialectical relationship with the past in which the strategy of allegory embodies both a critical re-evaluation of modernity as well as its melancholic commentary. As he wrote: “The ideology of postmodernism seems to forget the subtle and manifest political modes of internalized retrospection. If one realizes that melancholy is at the origin of the allegorical mode, one should also realize that this melancholy is enforced by prohibition and repression.”

In 1989 Spanish critic José Luis Brea returned to Benjamin’s concept of allegory as a means to describe post-Franco art in Spain. Echoing Buchloh’s and Owens’s revival of Benjamin’s allegory, Brea defined Spanish art of the 1980s as “neo-baroque conceptualism.” As he explained, contemporary Spanish artists displayed a concave mirror-like effect of the baroque by constructing a space of representation constantly looking inwards.

In “End of the Century,” Fin de Siglo (1985) Saura responded to the theoretical discussion on postmodernity as running the risk of banalizing the cultural debate as essentially self-referential and critically futile. As he argued, postmodernism functioned ultimately as a market label:

That which some have defined as postmodernity, rather than a proper consequence of a revised historical reconsideration and a critical response to the rapid acceleration of cultural tendencies, responds instead to an unproductive search for novelty for its own sake, to the needs of frugal fascination, and to momentary fashions and commercial interest.

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46 “Aquello que pretende definirse como postmodernidad, pudiendo haberse obedecido a una necesidad de asentamiento y revisión, parada reflexiva y reconsideración histórica, y siendo también reacción frente a la fatiga causada por la desmesurada —y fomentada— aceleración de las tendencias, comporta en realidad resabios de la
As this study posits, in rendering monstrous emblematic works from the national modern body Saura’s (Picasso and Goya) in the 1980s and early 1990s, Saura’s works created a self-referential artistic practice while offering an allegorical commentary on the disjointed nature of the Spanish modern artistic corpus under the self-complacent celebration of Spanish democratic normalization.  

I have not structured this thesis as a biographically-driven monograph on Saura. Instead, this dissertation offers four different instances of Saura’s artistic practice (his paintings, his works on paper, his undoing of Picasso and Goya, and his book illustrations) that I organized chronologically so that the reader has a greater sense for the progression of Saura’s life and work in relation to Spain’s political development. By setting Saura’s monstrifications in their proper cultural, political, and historical specificity I intend to shed light on the theoretical aspects of Saura’s work that have not been considered in previous analysis.

Chapter One, The Teratology of the Monstrous Body (1956-1968) examines Saura’s painting from the time of his return from Paris in 1956 until his abandonment of easel painting for a decade in 1968. It explores four teratological iterations of the monstrous body in Saura: the teratology of the sexual body in Imaginary Portraits of Brigitte Bardot, as a deformation of the desired body; the teratology of the sovereign in the Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II, as a deformation of the political body; the teratology of the communal body in the Multitudes, as a deformation of the collective body; and the teratology of the sacred body in the Crucifixions, as the deformation of the religious body. As this chapter argues, under the diplomatic opening of

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adquirida dinámica de la vanguardia, es decir, la búsqueda de la novedad a ultranza, la momentánea fascinación, el influjo de la moda y el sustento eminentemente comercial.” A. Saura, “Fin de Siglo”, published in Fijeza op. cit., p. 128.

the Franco Regime during the mid 1950s, Saura’s teratology of monstrous bodies dialogued with his pictorial ancestry while consolidating his artistic and intellectual position in postwar Spanish art.

Chapter two, *The Monstrous Body as Humorous and Grotesque, The Graphic Works (1964-1978)*, examines the satiric, irreverent, and humorous aspects of Saura’s monstrous body in his graphic series — *Cocktail Party Series* (1960), *Narrations* (1962-1966), *Montages* (1972-1977) and *Postcards* (1974). During the mid 1960s, Saura experimented with collage and montage techniques and mass media imagery of Pop Art and Narrative Figuration in order to create an ironic self-inquiry on his pictorial vocabulary while also exploring the ludic aspect of the monstrous body (in particular in his collaboration with artist Alberto Greco). As this chapter argues, Saura’s works on paper experimented with the grotesque body as socially irreverent while allegorizing the repressive political atmosphere of mid 1960s Francoist Spain.

Chapter three, *Picasso, Goya, and the Melancholic body of Spanish Modernity (1978-1992)*, examines Saura’s recurrent appropriation and distortion of the works of Goya and Picasso — mainly in *Dora Maar Revisited* (1983) and *The Dog of Goya* (1982-1996). In 1978, concurrent with Spain’s transition from dictatorship to Constitutional Democracy, Saura returned to easel painting by deforming symbolic works of Picasso and Goya. As this chapter argues, in the cultural refashioning of Spanish social democratic postmodern identity during the 1980s and early 1990s, Saura’s symbolic undoing of Picasso and Goya functioned as a melancholic revision of his works and on the fragmented and exiled corpus of the Spanish artistic legacy.

Chapter four, *Saura and the Spanish Literary Body (1986-1998)*, analyzes Saura’s illustrations of significant books from the Spanish literary corpus as well as his role as a public intellectual. Saura’s illustrations of singular texts of the Spanish literary body (Francisco de
Quevedo’s *Dreams*, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, Baltasar Gracián’s *El Criticón*, San Juan de la Cruz’s *Poems*, Ramón Gómez de la Serna *Greguerías* and Camilo José Cela’s *The Family of Pascual Duarte*) as monstrous images echoed Valle-Inclán technique of esperpento while functioning as an allegorical gesture of his artistic practice. As this chapter posits, Saura illustrations and his articles of the late 1980s and early 1990s consolidated him as one of the most intellectual painters of his generation while offering instances of his consistent self-referential and allegorical artistic practice.

Throughout this dissertation I use Saura’s terminology (*monstrous, teratology, cruel gaze, obscene beauty, cruel intensity* and *melancholy*) as yet another level of Saura’s self-reflective practice. In quoting repeatedly Saura's critical voice my aim is to show Saura’s work not only as an artist but also as a public intellectual. I also demonstrate that in guiding the interpretation of his own work through the coining of terms that are specific to his theoretical concerns, Saura scripts for the art historian provided a method that is, in itself, self-referential and melancholic in its constant returns to the artist's own voice.

This study is in indebted to the works of Valeriano Bozal, Francisco Calvo Serraller, Dore Ashton, Gerard de Cortanze and Guy Scarpetta. Their critical analyses on Saura’s work have established his artistic and cultural significance in the renewal of postwar Spanish art, as well as his use of the monstrous body as a self-metaphor. In constant dialogue with their analysis, this study attends to the theoretical aspects of Saura’s artistic practice. As I examine, career-long Saura’s monstrifications operated as a structuring principle, as a critical gesture, and as a political commentary. As this study posits, in distorting the symbolic emblems of the Spanish pictorial tradition in fragmented thematic series, Saura’s monstrous bodies allegorized the melancholic and discontinuous nature of the body of Spanish artistic modernity. By situating
Saura’s works and texts within significant political moments of recent Spain this dissertation aspires to open conversations and cultural analyses on political appropriations of cultural traditions. As this dissertation argues, Saura’s systematic monstrification of his self-appointed artistic ancestry revealed Spanish symptomatic urgency at restoring the discontinuous and fragmented legacy of its modern tradition while presenting a fragmented and discontinuous body.
Chapter 1: The Teratology of the Tortured Body (1956-1968)

Chapter Abstract

This chapter examines Saura’s display of monstrous bodies from 1956, the year he returned to Spain from a two-year Parisian sojourn, to 1968, when he abandoned easel painting for a decade. In 1957, Antonio Saura began a set of series of thematic paintings —including Ladies, Crucifixions, Imaginary Portraits and Multitudes— in which he positioned the monstrous body at the center of his artistic practice while monstrifying significant works of masters of Spanish painting. Strategically timed during the Francoist government's diplomatic aperture to Western democracies in the late 1950s, Saura’s paintings created an open dialogue with the internationally celebrated masters of the Spanish pictorial tradition (in particular, El Greco, Velázquez, Goya, and Picasso) and with the pictorial languages of the 1950s (mainly, Informel and Abstract Expressionism). This chapter examines four different aspects of the monstrous body in Saura: the sexual, the political, the sacred, and the collective. As it argues, Saura’s monstrous bodies revealed Saura’s self-conscious participation in the domestic and international pictorial movements of the late 1950s and early 1960s, while also functioning as allegories of the political and cultural situation in Francoist Spain.

1.1. Saura and the Tortured Body in the 1950s

On February 15, 1956, Antonio Saura presented a selection of small paintings and works on paper at the exhibition Antonio Saura, Recent Paintings, organized by the Direction of Fine Arts (Dirección de Bellas Artes) at the National Palace of Libraries and Museums in Madrid.48 This was Saura’s first one-man show after his two-year stay in Paris between 1953 and 1955. Saura’s most recent work attested to the abandonment of his early Surrealist-inflected

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compositions and showed his renewed interest in experimental techniques.\textsuperscript{49} As Saura explained, these works defined his artistic practice ever since:

In my 1956 exhibition in Madrid, I showed two black and white paintings that were later destroyed. I also showed experimental compositions that I did while I was in Paris, and a series of works on paper in which I experimented with the visual archetypes that reappeared constantly in my work thereafter. In all of those works I began to use black and white colors almost exclusively and soon after it appeared a set of structural morphologies of certain baroque asceticism that defined my work ever since.\textsuperscript{50}

Saura’s new interest in formal techniques opening new avenues for his art can be seen in works such as \textit{Phenomenon} (1954) in which Saura experimented with the material properties of paint, color, pictorial texture, and dripping paint. Saura’s splattered application of paint and the intense color contrast resonated with Jackson Pollock’s visual syntax in works of the early 1950s such as \textit{Brown and Silver I} (1952) (Figs. 1.1 & 1.2.).\textsuperscript{51} Probably introduced to Pollock’s works by Michel Tapiè while in Paris in 1953, Pollock’s bold color contrast and the energetic application of paint proved decisive for Saura’s pictorial development in the mid 1950s. In \textit{Notes on Pollock} (1958), Saura praised Pollock’s \textit{Brown and Silver I} (1952) as an example of intense calligraphic exercise revealing an anthropomorphic figure through color. As he noted, “the bruswork of the upper part of the painting suggest wing-arms that melt into the messy head. They can also be seen as gigantic orbits that coronate a monstrous and disintegrated figure.”\textsuperscript{52}


\textsuperscript{50} “En la exposición realizada en Madrid en 1956, se mostraron junto a las obras de carácter experimental realizadas en París, dos pinturas en blanco y negro hoy destruídas así como una serie de pinturas en papel en donde bajo una aparente estructura abstracta, aparecían arquetipos que condicionaron mi trabajo posterior. Comencé a trabajar utilizando exclusivamente el blanco y el negro, y estructuras morfológicas diferentes acabaron por definirse en el barroco ascético que habría de mantener en el futuro.” Antonio Saura in \textit{Antonio Saura}, Cirici Pellicer, Fundació Miró, Barcelona, 1980, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{51} French critic Françoise Choay used the term \textit{pseudomorphosis} describing the practice of mimetically appropriating visual forms taken from different artistic contexts in order to seem up-to-date. See Françoise Choay, “La XXVIIIé Biennale de Venise” \textit{L’Oeil}, nº 45, Sept. 1958 p. 28-35. Quoted in Manuel Borja-Villel, Dissertation, unpublished.

\textsuperscript{52} “los trazos de la parte superopr del cuadro pueden sugerir brazos alzados que confluyen en una confusa cabeza, o bien enormes órbitas que presiden una monstruosa y desintegrada figura.” A. Saura, fourth letter of El Paso (Carta nº
Saura’s renewed interest in intense visual gestures and monstrous anthropomorphism is also visible in *Flamenco Dancer* (Bailadora) (1954) in which he rendered the agony and drama of the female body in the act of dancing (Fig. 1.3.). The sobriety of the color palette enhanced the gravity of the composition while the dramatic distortion of the female body forms offered a platform for formal and artistic transgressions. The upward-turned head and the opened mouth evokes a scream, a cry, and a guffaw — thus equating the intensity of flamenco’s passion to the transformation of the female body as a monstrous figure. If New York School artists embraced jazz music as a source for pictorial improvisation and rhythmic applications of paint, Saura embraced flamenco’s music as a contested cultural expression of freedom and rage.\(^5\)

Saura’s interest in flamenco was constant in his artistic career. In summer 1955, Saura collaborated with his brother Carlos, photographer and filmmaker, in an experimental film that they titled “Flamenco”. Filmed by Carlos outside Saura’s house-studio in Cuenca, the film documented Saura’s execution of an abstract painting painted outdoors. The footage, today lost, showed Saura’s pictorial process while he listened to flamenco singers who were banned by the Franco Regime as subversive and immoral. Carlos’s film echoed Paul Haesaerts 1949’s *Visit to Picasso*, and Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg’s 1952 film of Pollock’s drip technique as a compositional process, and it was created one year before Henri-George Clouzot’s *Le Mystère Picasso* (1956). Saura’s equation of his gestural painting technique to flamenco’s music functioned as an allegory of his personal and cultural circumstance under the constraints of artistic life under Franco.

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\(^5\) In 1987 Saura designed the scenography of Bizet’s *Carmen*. See Antonio Saura “El Espacio de Carmen” in *Fijeza*, op. cit. pp. 235-239.
In a letter to Spanish art critic Juan Eduardo Cirlot in 1956, Saura described his aesthetic concerns as a young artist living under the cultural isolation of Francoist postwar Spain. As he described, “for any artist under 30 [Saura was then 26] the Spanish political and cultural circumstance is monstrous.”

In an interview with Yvon Taillander at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in 1960, Saura summarized the preeminent role of the distorted body as a propitious structure revealing his personal and political commitment. As he explained:

When I returned to Madrid in late 1955 I was about to have an exhibition in January 1956 at the Museum of Contemporary Art. This was the period of student demonstrations. One student died and others, friends of mine, were imprisoned. I felt that I could not go on working as before. I had to decongest my painting, to free it from chaos and confusion. And to achieve this result the method that suggested itself to me was to begin with a form, or rather a structure, inspired by the female body.

Saura’s distortion of the organic forms of the female body, and his aggressive gestures over the canvas during the mid 1950s were paradigmatic in Clea (1957) and Clara (1957). In these paintings Saura used a black and white color palette while experimenting with the traces of brush that resembled the act of pictorial writing (Figs. 1.4 & 1.5). Saura described his paintings of the late 1950s as enacting a physical combat and a pictorial quest that resembled a battlefield.

As he wrote: “The canvas is an unlimited battlefield. In it, the painter participates in a tragic yet sensual face to face, hence transforming with his gestures a lifeless matter into a passionate tornado; into a cosmogonic and irradiant energy.”

Echoing Harold Rosenberg’s definition of Abstract Expressionism as “an arena in which to act”, Saura’s description of Informalist painting as a battlefield reflected the aspirations and desires of Spain's young artists to search for new

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pictorial languages in their resolute attempt to terminate nearly two decades of artistic isolation. As Michel Tapiè explained in his review of Saura’s show at the Staedler Gallery in Paris in 1961, Saura’s bichromatic compositions of the late 1950s created an ambiguous semantic space displaying a “tragic sublime” that produced a “dramatic trace of the evolution of the human being”.

In his *Grey no. 7* (Gris no. 17) of 1959, Saura distorted the monstrous body as a formal and polysemic structure functioning at once as an expressive vehicle of personal social rage and as a visual platform for formal pictorial dialogues with international tendencies. (Fig. 1.6). In it Saura depicted a deformed body with an animalistic head while echoing the iconography of the crucifixion. Saura’s mural canvas invoked a symbolic white wall, while his gestural splitting and dripping of paint around the figure conveyed a sense of artistic urgency conjuring the pictorial grammar of Abstract Expressionism. Saura’s displayed the arms of the figure opened into the void participating in the modern iconography of the cruciform—which included Goya’s tragic figure at the center of the *Shootings of the Third of May at Principe Pio in 1808* (1814), Picasso’s dramatic black and white vocabulary of *Guernica* (1936), and Robert Cappa’s iconic photograph *Death of a Miliciano* (1936) (Figs. 1.7, 1.8 & 1.9). In quoting simultaneously the Spanish modern artistic legacy and the visual vocabularies of the international avant-garde, Saura’s *Grey No. 7* at once recalled the violence of Spain's recent history while it visualized the crucified body as a secular allegory of the tragic yet silenced wounds of the Spanish Civil War.

58 “L’œuvre d’Antonio Saura est riche de cette ambigüité resultant de l’alliage tradition et avant-garde, pour une continuité qui est rien moins que celle du devenir humain. Elle participe aussi bien des expériences les plus audacieuses des expressionnismes vivaces que du message hautement dramatique (et ici drame soit être compris dans son sens le plus général) du devenir ibérique ou la courbe de plusieurs civilisations a toujours été constructivement chaotique sinon sublimement tragique. A la suite des quatre ou cinq grands noms de la peinture espagnole qui nous hantent comme des sommets paroxystiques du monde artistique, Saura dit tout cela avec ses blancs, argents et noirs comme seuls les espagnols savent les manier, gage de la transcendance, haussant à son possible sommet à la fois le plus actualisé et le plus eternal la trace dramatique du devenir de l’Individu.” Michel Tapié, *Antonio Saura*, Stadler Gallery, Paris, Exh. Cat. 1961
In Saura’s own words, his paintings from the late 1950s stand as “a beautiful scream in the midst of disaster.”

George Bataille had summarized the forceful capacity of intense beauty as an act of cruelty. As he wrote in “The Cruel Practice of Art”: “If, cruel, it does not invite us to die in ravishment, art at least has the virtue of putting a moment of our happiness on a plane of equal to death.” As Baitailled described, this very act of transforming art into an act of cruelty calls into question the very ground of our humanity:

What attracts us in the destroyed object (in the very moment of destruction) is its power to call into question — and to undermine — the solidity of the subject. Thus the purpose of the trap is to destroy us as an object (insofar as we remain enclosed — and fooled — in our enigmatic isolation)[…] Art, no doubt, is not restricted to the representation of horror, but its movement puts art without harm at the height of the worst and, reciprocally, the painting of horror reveals the opening onto all possibility. That is why we must linger in the shadows which art acquires in the vicinity of death.

Saura invoked Bataille’s description of art as an act of beautiful cruelty in the vicinity of death, in “Art and Evil” (“El Arte y el Mal”) (1986) Saura described the visual paradox of “beautiful monstrosity” as the cruel transgression of preexisting artistic forms. In “The Cruel Gaze” (“La Mirada Cruel”) (1988), Saura summarized his career-long fascination with intense and cruel beauty, as the process of rendering emotion through dramatic destruction. As Saura explained, art, pleasure and evil, walk alongside each other, and are intimately related in the intercourse of

59 “[La pintura Informalista] puede ser todavía la expresión de una protesta desgarrada, un acto de nihilismo, un flujo violento del subconsciente colectivo, incluso un simple grito, pero aun siendo solamente esto, sería un grito hermoso entre tanto desastre.” Saura, Espacio y Gesto, (1959), in Fijeza, op.cit., p. 19
61 “La belleza de lo monstruoso, como la belleza de lo obsceno solamente son factibles mediante la transgression ejercida por aquella actividad que terminamos por definir como artística. Las imágenes objetivas de la monstrosidad humana, tanto como las de la crueldad o las del imposible erotismo, pueden resultar insorportables,” Antonio Saura “Arte y el Mal” in “Crimen y Capricho”, (1986), published in Escritura Como Pintura, Barcelona, Galaxia Guttenberg/Círculo de Lectores, 2004, p.119
their intense gathering. 62 Echoing Bataille’s description of art as a cruel act of beautiful destruction, Saura’s distortions of the body in thematic series in the late 1950s operated as a visual and also rhetorical vehicle for artistic conversations with the Spanish tradition, and as an intrinsic dialogue with the pictorial syntax of American Expressionism and French Informel. As Dore Ashton has pointed out, Saura’s twofold aesthetic allowed his works to participate in the lingua franca of Informalism as the most prominent pictorial grammar of the late 1950s.63

Saura was not the only artist deforming the human body as an allegorical platform for representing personal despair, political derision, and social commentary in the late 1950s. European painters such as Pablo Picasso, Jean Dubuffet, Jean Fautrier, Alberto Giacometti, Francis Bacon, Karel Appel, and Asgern Jorn had tortured the organic forms of the body in their pictorial responses to the horrors and cruelty of World War II and its dramatic aftermath. As Antonin Artaud noted cruelty disclosed our most human condition. As he wrote in Theater as an Space of Cruelty, “Hence this appeal to cruelty and terror, though on a vast scale, whose range probes our entire vitality, confronts us with all our possibilities.”64 In distorting the human body as an intense act of cruelty, these artists testified to the devastating effects of the war and the neurotic condition of human annihilation during the first years of the Cold War. As Pepe Karmel described it, this fear of human destruction activated the urgency for an international humanism, “The rising tensions of the Cold War seemed to call for a new humanistic art that would assert the possibility of hope in the face of the threat of nuclear destruction.”65 Valeriano Bozal

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64 Antonin Artaud, Theatre as a Space of Cruelty, p. 85.
described this convulsive period as “the time of stupor” in which, as he argues, the tortured body functioned as a collective allegory for the anguish and “dread of the times.”

Peter Selz’s 1959 exhibition at MoMA *New Images of Man* epitomized the preeminence of the body in pain as an international sensibility for a “new human imagery as an existentialist affirmation of the artist”. As Seiz argued, for these artists the body provided an existential proposition that described their experience of anguish and dread:

Like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Camus, these artists are aware of anguish and dread, of life in which man- precarious and vulnerable - confronts the precipice, is aware of dying as well as living […] They are individuals affirming their personal identity as artists in a time of stereotypes and standardizations which have affected not only life in general but also many of our contemporary exhibitions.

Borrowing Bataille’s and Artaud’s notion of art as a “space of cruelty,” Saura’s recurrent deformation of monstrous bodies of the mid 1950s, functioned as allegorical spaces for the denouncement of a collective sense of humanity and as allegories of his social and cultural circumstance under Franco’s dictatorship.

As this chapter explores, Saura’s pictorial series from the late 1950s displayed a typology of the monstrous body on four different levels: the sexual, the political, the religious, and the collective. Rather than metaphorical vehicles for self-expression as it has been argued in previous approaches, I contend that Saura’s tortured bodies provided formal dialogues with the international avant-garde while offering a platform for exploring the implications of the tortured body under Francoism. As this chapter argues, in fragmenting and disjointing the body in his thematic series (*Ladies, Crucifixions, Imaginary Portraits* and *Multitudes*) Saura’s paintings of the late 1950s allegorized his artistic and political circumstance under Franco, functioning as a

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melancholic revision of his artistic ancestry while also displaying a teratology of the tortured body.

Established in 1836 by French embryologist Étienne Geoffry Saint-Hilarie, teratology (from the Greek terato-logia, the account of extraordinary things) defines the scientific study of biological malformations.⁶⁹ In “The Tauromachia from Within” (“La Fiesta por Dentro”), (1983) Saura described teratology as the “fascinating and yet horrifying beauty of the pictorial monster.”⁷⁰ Borrowing Saura’s use of the term teratology, this chapter examines four instances of Saura’s pictorial teratology: the deformation of the erotic body in Imaginary Portraits of Brigitte Bardot series, the deformation of the sacred body in Crucifixions series, the political body in Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II series, and the collective body in Multitudes series. As described below, Saura’s consistent teratology of tortured bodies was effective in establishing artistic conversations with international pictorial vocabularies while enacting allegorical instances of cultural protest under the political recasting of the Franco Regime of the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁷¹

1.2. Spanish Informalismo: Saura, El Paso and Francoism

Saura’s domestic consolidation and the international reception of his works during the late 1950s and early 1960s took place under the auspices of rising international diplomacy on the part of the Franco Regime. As Dore Ashton noted in 1957, this historical circumstance was

⁶⁹ See E. Wolff, La Science des Monstres, Gallimard, 1948, p. 15. As Wolff writes: “L’organisme monstreux et l’organisme normal obéissent aux memes lois, ils sont doués des memes propriétés. Certaines d’entre elles sont latentes et ne se manifestent pas chez le normal, elles s’extériorisent chez le monstre. Suivant une formule dont on a abuse, mais qui dans ce cas n’est pas fausse, le monstre est l’exception qui confirme la règle.” See E. Wolff, p. 236.
⁷⁰ “La imagen humana, ya convertida en monstruo artístico, se transforma en manos del pintor, al reflejarse a sí mismo, en objeto de blasfemia, no debiendo suceder lo mismo, lógicamente, con la representación fidedigna del monstruo teratológico.” Saura “La Fiesta Por Dentro”, in Arte y Tauromaquia (1983), pp. 76-77
not accidental. Indeed, Saura’s works was presented as an actualization of the dramatic quality of the Spanish pictorial school.\textsuperscript{72}

As Jorge Luis Marzo has pointed out, for the Franco Regime, Spanish early-modern tradition embodied Spanish classicism and the spiritual, political and military unity of the Spanish Empire. As he described, in Spain the baroque incarnates Spain's cultural and military Golden Age (Siglos de Oro) as well as the national myth of a territorial and religious organic unity.\textsuperscript{73} Art critic Eugenio D’Ors argued for the artistic and moral supremacy of Spanish pictorial school during Francoism in his famous motto, in Spanish art “that which is not tradition is copy.” Following the legacy of D’Ors aesthetic premises, during the 1950s Francoist Regime conceived Spanish \textit{Informalismo} as an updated revival of the Spanish school that provided an organic continuation of the drama of Spanish pictorial tradition while offering the local version of French \textit{Informel}.

As many artists of the postwar generation, Saura participated in some of the most significant of Franco’s state-sponsored exhibitions during the late 1950s: the Spanish Pavilion at the 1958’s Venice Biennale, \textit{13 Spanish Painters} at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris in 1959, and the double exhibition of Spanish contemporary art at New York’s Guggenheim Museum and MoMA in 1960 —which Spanish critic Gabriel Ureña described these exhibitions as “diplomatic embassies of Francoist art.”\textsuperscript{74}

In an interview with Spanish writer Julián Ríos in 1990, Saura energetically repudiated any involvement with Francoism stating that:

I never received any award from the Francoist Regime. It is true, nonetheless, that I did several trips to Cuba. In one of them I travelled along with Danish painter Asger Jorn. Despite this, I never joined the Cuban communist party. I did collaborated with the Spanish Communist party.

\textsuperscript{73} J. L. Marzo, \textit{La Memoria Administrada}, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{74} See Gabriel Ureña, \textit{Las vaguardias artisticas en la postguerra}, op. cit. p. 135.
At the time, the Communist party was the only coherent Spanish political force against the Regime. I do not regret any of those things, quite the opposite.75

Despite Saura’s clear anti-Franco political assertion and his energetic denial of any political sympathy for the Franco Regime, the reception of his paintings in the late 1950s provided a more complex negotiation between art and politics that showed the conflicts of several postwar Spanish artists under Francoism. On the one hand, Saura’s recurrent monstrifications of works by El Greco, Velázquez and Goya, Saura’s paintings of the late 1950s and early 1960s were seen as actualizations of the dramatic quality that was stereotyped for Spanish pictorial school. On the other hand, they dialogued with the pictorial syntax of the pictorial avant-garde thus manifesting a physical and pictorial urgency for exploring new visual techniques and expressive languages that moved beyond the ideological constraints of the Regime. Informalismo’s complex relationship with Francoism was most visible in the state support of international exhibitions of Spanish modern art in the late 1950s.

For Spanish art critics Dolores Jiménez-Blanco, Calvo Serraller and Valeriano Bozal, the domestic success and international careers of the leading figures of Informalismo cannot be critically disengaged from Francoist cultural diplomacy.76 As they have described, Francoism saw Informalismo as a propitious actualization of the aesthetic drama and visual gravity of the Spanish school and attempted to instrumentalize it for ideological purposes. As Jorge Luis Marzo has described, during the late 1950s Informalist artists were walking on a thin blade. On the one hand, their formal language was received as visually analogous to the pictorial

75 “Nunca recibí ninguna distinción del régimen franquista. Es cierto, sin embargo, que he hecho múltiples viajes a Cuba, uno de ellos en compañía del pintor danés Asger Jorn, y que colaboré, no siendo militante, con el Partido Comunista Español, dado que en aquellos momentos dicho partido era la fuerza política más coherente de la oposición española. No me arrepiento de ambas cosas, sino más bien lo contrario.” Saura in “El Paisaje del subconsciente”, (1992) in Escritura como Pintura, Sobre la Experiencia Pictórica, op. cit. p. 20.
76 For a fuller discussion of the artistic and political impact of these exhibitions see Gabriel Ureña, Las vanguardias Artísticas en la Postguerra, and Julián Diaz Arte Abstracto y Franquismo, Madrid, Cátedra, 1990.
international avant-garde painting of the mid 1950s and it was successfully exhibited in
national and international venues of contemporary art which consolidated the artistic careers of
most prominent Informalist artist such as Tàpies, Chillida, Saura and Millares. On the other
hand, the gravity and dramatic quality of the artworks strategically conformed Francoist
curator’s aims at internationally promoting modern Spanish art as the organic continuation of
the drama and austerity of the Spanish pictorial tradition.77

As Marzo has also emphasized, the Francoist Regime's paternalistic attitude towards
contemporary art as a matter of national identity created an institutional dependences of art
production from government support for over forty years.78 As discussed in chapter 3, this
symbiotic relationship between government’s instrumentalization of contemporary art as a
national identity was also recurrent during the democratic recasting of Spain as a normalized
democratic European nation during the mid 1980s and early 1990s.79 As I examine below, the
state recognition and support of Informalismo, and was inextricable from the diplomatic
openness of Francoism.

1.2.1. Spain in the 1950s: Francoist artistic diplomacy and Spanish Informalismo

Amid the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War, the Franco Regime re-oriented itself
from its wartime seclusion of the early 1940s towards a mild form of diplomatic openness in
pursuit of international recognition and economic support from Western democracies, and the

77 As he explains: “Los pintores vanguardistas españoles de los cincuenta y sesenta se van a encontrar caminando en
el filo de la navaja, creyendo estar pintando un arte liberador cuando al mismo tiempo era el arte que el régimen
deseaba que pintaran.” Jorge Luis Marzo, ¿Puedo Hablarle con Libertad Excelencia? Arte y Poder en España desde
1950, Murcia, CENDEAC, 2010, p. 173
78 “La política artística que el franquismo emprendió en aquellos años otorgaba al arte la capacidad de expresar
tanto la indetidad nacional como las manifestaciones de vitalidad del régimen, tan necesitado de una imagen de
liberalidad en los nuevos tiempos diplomáticos y económicos que se avecinaban.” See J. L. Marzo, op. cit. p. 35.
79 “La vanguardia fue sometida a un manoseo cínico del que no saldrá incolúmne. La asociación entre barroco y arte
moderno será cultivada por muchos artistas y académicos no sólo en el ámbito de la institución sino también lejos de
los restaurantes y los despachos franquistas. […] Esta última tendencia, impulsada desde la lógica del régimen de
fomentar a una burguesía despolitizada mediante apelaciones al bienestar personal pero no al colectivo (cuyo éxito
se plasma en la duración testada de la dictadura) será la que otorgue al barroco una perspectiva que podrá ser
United States in particular.\textsuperscript{80} For the Truman administration, Spain’s geographic location between North African territories and Western Europe and Franco’s fervent anti-communist ideology presented Spain as a strategic military ally.

During the early 1950s, the Francoist Regime began a series of diplomatic gestures aiming for international political attention and cultural legitimacy attempting to put an end to the nation’s diplomatic isolation that followed Franco’s victory on the Spanish Civil War in April 1, 1939. On September 4, 1950, the U.N. committee reestablished Spanish diplomatic relations with Western democracies. On September 26, 1953, Eisenhower visited Spain and reopened the Spanish borders to Western democracies by offering a series of Hispano-American economic agreements in exchange of the use of military bases on the Spanish Mediterranean coast— in particular, the naval base of Rota (Cádiz).\textsuperscript{81} That same year, Franco signed the concordat with the Vatican, which guaranteed the dictator’s status not only as a political ruler but also as a defender of the Catholic faith —indeed Franco was presented in church under dossal thus signaling him as an ecclesiastic authority. Finally, on July 14, 1955, Spain was accepted at the U.N.’s general assembly as full member. As it was becoming more and more apparent, Francoist diplomatic efforts in reclaiming international attention required a large-scale refashioning of the Regime’s international image leading to a refashioning of cultural institutions. This diplomatic interest was conspicuous in the international exhibitions of modern Spanish art during the 1950s.

In 1951, the Franco’s Regime sponsored the \textit{I Hispano-American Biennial}, showing the works of Spanish artists along with a selection of works from Latino-American artists. As Miguel Cabañas Bravo has described, the show was conceived as “a cultural bridge” to strengths

\textsuperscript{80} See Paul Preston, \textit{Franco a Biography}, pp. 650 and ss.
\textsuperscript{81} As discuss in chapter 3, this military coalition will be important in the national referendum on October 1986 and the definite the ingress of Spain in NATO in December 1986.
cultural ties with South America, aiming for a “central position of Spanish culture in the Spanish-speaking world.” In 1955, Jose Luis Fernández del Amo, director of the Direction of Fine Arts, organized the *III Hispano-American Biennial*, in which the Francoist government showed a selection of artworks by contemporary American artists from MoMA archives — which included works by Wilhem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still and Mark Tobey. Del Amo’s display of international contemporary artworks in culturally isolated and socially repressed Francoist Spain responded to a twofold goal. From the American perspective, the show reinforced the propagandistic display of American contemporary art in Western Europe, which, as Serge Gilbaut argued, operated as a testimony of capitalist propaganda for artistic freedom in opposition to what they considered the ideological constraints social realism in the Soviet Regimes in the countries behind the Iron curtain. From the Francoist perspective, the show served as an international promotion of the Regime’s diplomatic opening in order to obtain the political favor of Western democracies and to gain the economic support of the U.S. However, despite Francoist international efforts Spain was not included in the Marshall Plan (European Recovery Program (ERP))—and left Spain out from the process of Western Europe cultural, economic and political integration (as it was later ratified by the Rome’s treaty in 1956). Francoist vain efforts in pleasing U.S. diplomacy was charicaturized in Luis Berlanga’s self-deprecating humorous film “Welcome Mr. Marshall” (“Bienvenido Mr. Marshall”) (1953) in which a small village impersonated the most folkloric

aspects of Spanish culture for the eventual visit of an American diplomatic delegation, which actually passes by without seeing the village.

As Gabriel Ureña has argued, Francoist promotion of contemporary art was an exercise in irony in that the most repressive political regime in Western Europe was instrumentalizing international avant-garde art in order to legitimize its benign international image while actually repressing and censoring artistic practice in Spain.85 It is in this complex historical circumstance of brutal autarchic political repression, cultural censorship and, diplomatic urgency in refashioning modern Spanish art as a tool for political legitimation, in which Spanish Informalismo and Saura’s paintings were originally displayed and internationally acclaimed.

1.2.2. El Paso and the birth of Spanish Informalismo in 1957

1957 was a crucial year in terms both of Saura’s artistic career and for the political and cultural reshaping of the Franco Regime. In 1957, Spain was formally accepted into the main postwar international institutions: the International Monetary Found (IMF) and the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) hence putting to an end Franco’s international enclosure since 1936 — a period that Ludolfo Paramino defined as the “cesarist period of the dictatorship”.86 Also, in 1957, Franco’s government inaugurated his five-years economic plan (Stabilization Plan (1957-1962)) implementing a series of political and economical measures aimed to transform the former military autarchy into a capitalistic National-Catholic economy. This technocratic reconfiguration of the dictatorship as a capitalistic state was lead by members of the Ultra-Catholic Spanish organization Opus Dei, who gradually transformed Franco’s

86 See Ludolfo Paramio, in Vanguardia Artística y Realidad Social.
military dictatorship into a consumer-oriented and Western-friendly economy.\textsuperscript{87} Indeed, this technocratic political and economic reorganization of the Franco’s government had decisive consequences in the configuration of the state cultural institutions. Modern art was assigned to the Ministry of Foreign Office (Ministerio de Exteriores) and Jose Luis Fernández del Amo and Luis Robles were appointed as designers of future exhibitions of Spanish modern art. This decision proved especially relevant in the design of Spanish international exhibition of modern art of the late 1950s —which included the Spanish Pavilion at the Venice Biennial (1958), \textit{I3 Spanish painters} in Paris (1959), \textit{New Spanish Painting at MoMA} (1960) and \textit{Before Picasso, After Miró} at New York Guggenheim (1960). As explored in the following pages, this set of international exhibitions of modern Spanish art at the epicenters of the avant-garde of the late 1950s, (Venice, Paris and New York), consolidated Saura’s international success while increasing the significance of Spanish \textit{Informalismo} as a cultural phenomenon.\textsuperscript{88}

In February 1957, along with artists Manolo Millares, Manuel Viola, Luis Feito, Rafael Canogar, Manuel Chirino, Rafael Rivera and critics Manuel Conde, Juan Eduardo Cirlot and José Ayllón, Saura founded the artist collective \textit{El Paso} in Madrid. Cirlot compared El Paso with German’s artist’s collective \textit{Die Brücke} as promoting a collective response to the cultural and artistic urgency in moving Spanish art forward.\textsuperscript{89} In \textit{El Paso’s} first manifesto, written on February 1957, Saura argued for the socially revolutionary aspects of Informalist painting. As he wrote:

\begin{quote}
We believe that our art will not be valid until it will not show the anxiety of the political times and create a dialogue with the new artistic movements […] We are leading towards a
\end{quote}

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{87} For a detailed examination of this political change see Jesús Ynfante, \textit{La Prodigiosa Aventura del Opus Dei, Gênesis de La Santa Mafia.}
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{88} See Dore Ashton, \textit{À Rebours}, op. cit.
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{89} J. E. Cirlot, “El grupo “El Paso” de Madrid y sus pintores” Carta de El Paso, 9 Enero, 1958.
revolutionary practice — in which our dramatic tradition and our personal expression are manifested— that would be able to historically respond to a universal practice.\footnote{“Creemos que nuestro arte no será válido mientras no contenga una inquietud coincidente con los signos de la época, realizando una apasionada toma de contacto con las más renovadas corrientes artísticas. Vamos hacia una plástica revolucionaria —en la que estén presentes nuestra tradición dramática y nuestra expresión— que responda históricamente a una actividad universal.” Saura, \textit{Manifesto}, summer 1957. Published in \textit{Papeles Son Armadans} (1959) in Escritura como Pintura, op. cit. p. 141} 

Along with Catalan artists’s collective \textit{Dau al Set} — formed in Barcelona in 1948 by artists Joan Brossa, Ponç, Tharrats, and Antoni Tàpies — \textit{El Paso} became a major catalyst in the domestic consolidation and international display of Informalismo as the leading Spanish artistic avant-garde movement in the late 1950s.\footnote{Ureña, \textit{Las Vanguardias Artísticas de Postguerra}, op. cit. 169.} From its inception on February 1957 to its final dissolution in May 1960, \textit{El Paso} capitalized the domestic success of Spanish \textit{Informalismo} making possible the international careers of some of its most prominent members, primarily Millares, Feito, Canogar, and Saura. As Louis Toissant argued, \textit{El Paso} was crucial in achieving an internationally recognized status for Spanish contemporary artistic practices for the first time since the Spanish Civil war in 1936.\footnote{For a detailed analysis of \textit{El Paso}'s history see Louis Touissant, \textit{El Paso}, and Chus Tudelilla: \textit{El Paso a la Intensa Modernidad}.} 

Indeed, in the short lapse of less than three years, \textit{El Paso} championed the international exhibitions of modern Spanish art and monopolized the theoretical discussion on Spanish \textit{Informalismo}. 

In May 1959, Camilo José Cela’s prestigious journal \textit{Papers de Son Armadans} dedicated a monographic number to \textit{El Paso}. This monographic issue of Cela’s journal consolidated El Paso as the leading artistic group of Spanish Informalismo and it increased its preeminent position in the renewal of Spanish postwar art. In these pages, Saura published his article “Space and Gesture” (“Espacio y Gesto”) (1959) in which he reflected on his own artistic practice and
argued for the new space for Informalist painting. Saura’s role as artist, critical and curator of El Paso visualized the new Spanish artists’ need in visually homologating Spanish postwar art to the international languages of the pictorial avantgarde. Indeed, Saura’s canvases, manifestos, and art exhibitions of the late 1950s, positioned him as one of the preeminent artists of Spanish Informalismo and an active participant in the renewal of Spanish postwar art. For Ureña, instead, Saura’s cultural activity defined him as an opportunistic cultural diplomat that secured his consideration and appraisal for the Franco Regime’s cultural leaders. As discussed in chapter 3, Saura’s active role as a cultural figure defined his meta-reflective quality of his artistic practice and it was crucial in his self-appointed position as a cultural critic during his return to painting in the late 1970s and during the mid 1980s.

1.2.3. Saura, El Paso, and the renewal of the modern Spanish art scene

In April 1957 Saura curated the show An Other Art (Un Arte Otro) at Gaspar Galleries in Barcelona showing Spanish artists’ “inspiration based on their anguishes, anxieties, and fears” (the show was later exhibited at the Black Room at the Museum of Modern art in Madrid). Echoing Michel Tapiè’s book title, “Un Autre Artre” (1952), Saura’s show juxtaposed artworks by members of El Paso along with works from Tàpies, and Chillida. The show also included works from the international avant-garde including works from Appel, Burri, Fautrier, de Kooning, and Pollock. Art critics Juan Eduardo Cirlot and Carlo Popovic wrote the exhibition catalogue. Saura’s exhibition of European Informalism operated as a platform showing social and personal anxiety of a new generation of young artists under repressive Spain while also it

94 See Gabriel Ureña, La Vanguardias Históricas de Postguerra. op. cit. p. 170
95 “El otro arte (Informalismo) está completamente de acuerdo con la época en la que vive, como ha sido siempre a través de su historia. Es la fiel expresión de angustia, de la inquietud, del desequilibrio en el que se halla nuestro mundo… La juventud no encuentra en su forma de expresarse más que una inspiración sacudida por trastornos, angustias, inquietudes y temor. El arte moderno es pues, una consecuencia de todo esto que el artista, —pintor o escultor— se ve obligado a plasmar en su obra.” A. Saura, “La Abstracción Expresionista en el Arte,”in Heraldo de Aragón, Zaragoza, January 1958, quoted in Calvo Serraller, Medio Siglo de Arte en España, p. 438 -440.
worked as a means to homologize Spanish postwar to the leading tendencies of international art. In conjunction with this exhibition Saura delivered the talk, Space and Sign (Espacio y Signo), in which he argued for the liberating expressivity of Informalismo as an existential necessity for the individual artist.96

Saura’s group show also promoted the image of Spanish Informalismo as a collective and coherent generational attitude that was contesting the drama of the times. This aesthetic and political urgency in abandoning the endogamic and confined atmosphere of postwar Spanish art was corroborated internationally one year later at the group exhibition of Spanish Informalismo in the Spanish Pavilion at the XXIX Venice Biennial (1958).

1.2.4. El Paso and the International Success of Informalismo (1958-1960)

Planned and designed by Luis González Robles, the Spanish Pavillion at the 1958 Venice Biennial displayed a survey of Spanish Informalismo as a means to introduce Spanish postwar art to a large and very specific international audience. González Robles’s conceived the Spanish Pavilion as a means to promote Spanish postwar art as a modern stylistic movement in its own right while also pointing towards the aesthetic equivalence of Spanish Informalismo to Informel and Abstract Expressionism. In his show, González Robles exhibited four paintings by Saura, (Salvatierra, Lola, Marta, Rota, and Fame) all from 1958.

In the prologue of the exhibition catalogue, González Robles argued for the moral quality and the ethical value of Spanish new painting while emphasizing the stylistic continuity of the drama and austerity of Spanish art as an expression of national identity. As he wrote, “The

96 “El Informalismo es antetodo una proposición de libertad total, el último estado de un proceso que dura ya dos siglos, en el que se observa como principal característica una indiferencia, vis à vis, de los problemas tenidos como fundamentales hasta ahora (como son, por ejemplo, figuración y no figuración, composición o ausencia de composición, equilibrio o desequilibrio, armonía tonal, belleza o fealdad, decorativismo o antidecorativismo), unidos probablemente por la unidad que entrega “un repudio básico de toda geometría clásica.” Antonio Saura, “Espacio y Gesto”, (1959), published in Fijeza, op. cit. p. 16.
ethical character of Spanish art form anytime is remarkable; certainly there is a persistent aspect
of rigor, austerity and simple spontaneity all across Spanish great artistic tradition” —thus
establishing an organic correlation between the moral gravity Spanish pictorial tradition and the
dramatic surfaces of postwar Spanish artists’s works. 97

González Robles’s exhibition successfully promoted the idea of a stylistic continuity
between Spanish modern art and the Spanish pictorial school. González Robles’s description of
the visual austerity and ethical drama of Spanish Informalismo prefigured the critical parameters
from which Informalismo was internationally interpreted. In October 1959, a selection of El
Paso’s paintings was shown at 13 Spanish painters curated by Francoise Choay at the Museum
of Decorative Arts in Paris. In April 1960, El Paso’s main advocate and leading art critic, José
Ayllón curated the exhibition Four Spanish Painters, at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York
including artworks from Canogar, Feito, Millares and Saura. During the 1960s, the Staedler
Gallery in Paris and the Pierre Matisse gallery in New Yoir both exhibited one-man shows of
the definite international artistic consacration of Saura, and of Spanish Informalismo at large,
took place at the double exhibition in New York City in 1960. This double show of Spanish
modern art consecrated Spanish Informalismo and the artistic careers of its leading members. In

97 “Questa caratteristica etica dell’arte spagnola di orgni tempo mi sembra notevole, poichè indubbiamente esiste
una constante di rigore, d’austerità, di spontanea simplicità in tutta la grande arte spagnola.” In the essay Robles
affirms: “L’Astrazione Drammatica è rappresentata da Canogar, Millares, Saura, Suáres, Tàpies a Vela, le cui opere
comprendono alcune caratteristiche particolari che mi sembrano definire perfettamente ciò che intendiamo per valori
dramatici. In tutti quanti vi ha una potenza di urto, una fuga ritmica e un’austerità che unifica la loro espressione in
una costante, che non esclude la singolarità del linguaggio individuale.” See Luis González Robles, in Venice
Biennial Catalogue Exhibition (1958), pp. 331-332. See also Julián Diaz, La Crítica de Arte en España, Madrid,
Crítica.
May 1960, after several disagreements among their members on the new steps for the future of the group, *El Paso* was finally dissolved and their members continued individual careers.98

1.2.5. Spanish Informalismo in NYC: Saura at the Guggenheim and MoMA in 1960

James Johnson Sweeney, curator of the Guggenheim’s New York museum, was fascinated with the work of Spanish Informalist artists exhibited at the Spanish Pavilion at the Venice Biennial and in June 1960, he curated the exhibition *Before Picasso, After Miró* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York showing Spanish modern art. Sweeney included in a selection of artworks by the most celebrated Spanish modern painters —from postimpressionist artworks of Catalan painter Isidro Nonell to the works of Spanish Informalismo, (including Tàpies, Feito, Millares, Saura, Chillida, and Canogar). The show also included works by Picasso, Miró and Dalí —thus reaffirming the view of *Informalismo* as a continuation of the dramatic component of Spanish modern art. Sweeney exhibited four works by Saura, (*Agnes* (1960), *Goodbye* (Adiós, 1959), *Large Reclining Nude* (1959-1960) and *Infanta II* (1960)) in which Saura deformed the female body in white and black compositions. As Sweeney wrote in the catalogue essay, the show intended to illustrate the richness and complexity of Spanish postwar art as both a new avenue on Postwar European painting and as a complex dialogue with the long tradition of Spanish pictorial school:

What is striking about the work of the younger Spanish artists is the variety of expression they achieve in their pictures in spite of the fact that for the most part, they limit themselves to an austere color gamut of browns, grays, slates, gray greens and ochres so characteristic of Spanish taste, and, at the same time, concentrate principally on the exploration of textural effects and on the suggestion of space relationships through contrasts of picture surface […] the art of the younger Spanish contemporaries of today most surprisingly and effectively illustrates is the links which they have with the enduring tradition of Spanish painting in certain quarters where one might not normally look for such a common denominator: namely, in their basic regard for the material expression, in their pride of independence from alien influence, in their chromatic

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constraint and understatement, in their concrete, pictorial, yet basically non illustrative, intensity.99

Just as González Robles’s show had predicted two years before, for Sweeney Spanish contemporary art actualized the transhistorical condition of Spanish pictorial school hence emphasizing the introspective condition of Spain art as looking always to itself. Nonetheless, what Sweeney was able to perceive was that Spanish contemporary artists were strategically using the Spanish tradition as an international platform for expression of their personal and artistic condition under dictatorship?

In September 1960, the Museum of Modern Art in New York presented *New Spanish Painting*, displaying the works of the most recent generation of Spanish *Informalismo* including works by Tàpies, Chillida, and El Paso’s artists. Frank O’Hara, MoMA’s director and curator of the show, expanded Sweeney’s perception of the historical and political constraints of the Spanish avant-garde artists under Franco. As he argued:

> The isolation of Spain culturally and economically from the period of its tragic civil war until after World War II is well-known. This isolation was not new in Spanish history, and its geniuses did not fail to be heard by the world through one means or another and at whatever cost, even expatriation. But if the most remarkable products of Spanish culture were, in truth, developing apart from their own legacy of cultural vitality, the Spanish expatriates themselves, looking backwards, seems always to have clung to their identification with the Spanish people. France may claim Picasso but Spain, in a sense, owns him. […] But beyond them in time loom the figures of greatness which, as much as its geography, give Spain its special flavor: the Catalan masterpieces in Barcelona; Velázquez and Goya (especially the late Black Paintings of Goya which have had a pervasive influence); the Roman antiquities and the Roman ruins; the caves of Altamira: all elements which previous Spanish culture had absorbed to an important degree, but which also briefly indicate some of the enthusiasms held by contemporary Spanish artists.100

As Sweeney’s and O’Hara’s shows manifested, these two exhibitions of Spanish postwar art at the most prominent museums of modern art in the U.S., constructed a propitious narrative of Spanish modern painting as a consistent transhistorical drama for American Audiences.

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According to this narrative, the drama of Spanish painting begun with the baroque and was actualized in Goya’s *Black Painting* series. The art critic of the *New York Times* John Canady described Saura’s paintings as a continuation of Goya’s *Disaster’s of the War series*:

One of Goya’s records of factual horror is called “This I Saw”. Señor Saura’s invented apotheoses of horror might be called “These I relish”, and it is in fact this relish that gives the pictures their extraordinary force […] Aesthetically Señor Saura’s paintings have the rush and the immediate impact that are paramount virtues of action painting, but spiritually they also catch the observer up with brutal directness and give him a thorough, if non-specific, emotional shaking. Señor Saura throws us into the snake pit. ¹⁰¹

As Canady’s interpretation testified, these shows of Spanish postwar art at the most influential centers of contemporary art (Venice, Paris, and New York) made possible the international careers of the Spanish artist while reinforcing Francoist ideological narrative of presenting modern Spanish art as an organic continuation between the Spanish school and dictatorship.¹⁰²

For Spanish critic Francisco Calvo-Serraller, the shows exposed the very contradiction of the dictatorship as “humiliating” accepting its own “derision”.¹⁰³

### 1.2.6. Saura and Francoism

Saura’s prominent artistic position as founding member and critic’s voice of *El Paso*, and his cultural role during the international exhibitions of Spanish Informalismo inevitably raises the difficult issue of the political engagement of Saura’s works with Francoism. Whereas his personal statements are overtly anti-Francoist, his paintings offered a more complex response to Franco Regime’s cultural policies. On the one hand, they provided a complex dialectic of complacency yet critical rejection of the Francoist bourgeois taste. On the other hand, Saura’s


¹⁰² As Marzo argues: “Lo que no atinaba a concebir la mayor parte de la clase intelectual es que eso era negativo; que celebrar la fusión entre poder y arte ha conllevado un secuestro de la absoluta necesidad de unas prácticas creativas que propongan conflictos y disensiones, y que no se plieguen a los relatos identitarios y al papel otorgado al arte como mera correa de transmisión de los intereses del Estado.” Jorge Luis Marzo, *La Memoria Administrada*, Buenos Aires, Katz Conocimiento, 2010, p. 312.

¹⁰³ See Francisco Calvo Serraller, *Vanguardia y Tradición*, op. cit. p. 112.
monstrous bodies functioned allegorically—at once commenting and visually undermining the ideological instrumentalization of the Spanish school. In an interview with Julián Ríos Saura affirmed that he was self-conscious of his artistic circumstance as an emerging artist under Franco. As he stated:

I have to state that I only participated in one official exhibition organized by the Franco Regime—in common agreement with Antoni Tàpies, Eduardo Chillida and my colleagues in El Paso, which I founded in 1957. Such participation can hardly be considered as collaborative but instead, as a frontal opposition against the regime. Our participation at the Venice Biennial served us, precisely, as an opportunity to publicly express our personal rejection of the Franco’s Regime, and Tàpies and me refused to no participate in any other exhibition until democracy.

As he further explained e it was an opportunity to take advantage of the Francoist diplomatic urgency in exhibiting Spanish modern art, “The idea was to take advantage of this particular circumstance, not dominated yet by the State propagandistic aims. The idea was to show and let everyone know, with no official mediation, a counter-political aesthetics.”

Whether functioning as a calculated strategic in profiting from the Francoist Regime’s delirious desire for international legitimation through modern art, or merely operating as financial survival under the artistic constraints of Franco’s dictatorship, Saura’s participation in Francoist-promoted exhibitions of Spanish Informalism provided him a privileged position in the

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104 Dolores Jiménez-Blanco, “Variaciones de lo Apocalíptico”, in Bozal, El Tiempo del Estupor, op. cit. p. 25
105 “… debo anotar que solamente participé una vez en una exposición oficial española, en la Bienal de Venecia de 1958, y de común acuerdo con Antoni Tàpies, Eduardo Chillida y mis compañeros del grupo El Paso que fundé en 1957. Una actividad que difícilmente se puede calificar de franquista, sino más bien de franca oposición al regimen. Esta participación nos sirvió precisamente como medio para manifestar públicamente nuestro rechazo del regimen, habiéndose negado a partir de entonces, tanto Tàpies como yo mismo, a cualquier manifestación semejante hasta el advenimiento de la democracia. “ Saura, “El paisaje del subconsciente” in Escritura como pintura, op. cit. p. 20
106 “Se trataba de aprovechar una coyuntura, todavía no maleada por la posterior actitud del Estado en el terreno de la propaganda político-cultural, con el fin de dar a conocer, sin concesión alguna, una estética ciertamente contraria de la oficial.” Saura, El Paso después de El Paso, Escritura como pintura, p.135. For a discussion on Saura’s politics see Jean Schuster in Signes, Champ des Activités Surréalistes, Paris, 1990, p. 19.
Spanish pictorial scene and granted a position in the international avant-garde that would have been otherwise impossible.¹⁰⁷

Concurrent with the diplomatic aperture and cultural repression of Francoist Spain, Saura’s systematic display of monstrous bodies of the late 1950’s offered a specific pictorial dialogue between pictorial traditions and a set of allegorical references to his personal, artistic, and political lived experience. Whereas scholars such as Dore Ashton, Valeriano Bozal and Francisco Calvo Serraller described Saura’s canvases as displaying ultimately personal metaphors, I argue that Saura’s tortured bodies offered allegorical instances through which Saura explored visual conversations with distinct pictorial grammars, while examining the semantic implications of the distortion and profanation of the desired body, the sovereign body, the communal body, and the sacred body.

1.3. Saura’s Teratology of the Body

In his pictorial series Saura displayed a set of agonized bodies providing a symbolic framing for his artistic inquiry in dealing with the representation of the suffering body. As Elaine Scarry has argued the body in pain “resists objectification in language” since “Phyiscal pain does not simply resist language but activelt destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.”¹⁰⁸ This section examines four instances of Saura’s geography of agonized bodies: the monstrous female body, the body on the cross, the multitude and the portrait of the monarch. As I argue, these paintings revealed Saura’s exploration of the monstrous body while acting as his personal response to the anxieties towards the body in middle century Spain.

¹⁰⁷ Jorge Luis Marzo, ¿Puedo Hablarle con Libertad Excelencia? Arte y Poder en España desde 1950, Murcia, CENDEAC, op.cit., p. 15
1.3.1. *Ladies series*

Saura had encountered the female body as an adolescent in pain in the pages of household magazines that he read in bed while recovering from bone tuberculosis in his bedroom. Starting in 1954 during his two-year stay in Paris, Saura began a series of works in which he recurrently monstrified the forms of the female body. As I discuss below, Saura’s female bodies of the late 1950s attested his abandonment of Surrealist attitude forms while foregrounding the career-long scophilic desires and visual cruelty over the female body as it is recurrent across his artistic practice. As Spanish critic Valeriano Bozal has argued, under repressive Francoism of the 1950s, Saura’s female bodies enact sites for physical inscriptions and platforms for social protest.109

In *Portrait of Mari* (1958), Saura used of black and white palette to create and austere and intense composition. The letter “A” at the center of the canvas deployed both the tortured female body while resonating with calligraphic painting (Fig. 1.10). Saura’s use of calligraphic inscription as an intimate trace over a body in pain, (and also as the symbolic first letter of the alphabet and the first letter of his first name), echoed the biomorphism of his previous Surrealist-inflected works while displaying his conception of painting as a battlefield for pictorial forms and semantic gestures. Saura’s visual tension between the construction and destruction of the organic forms of the female body also echoed previous visual his previous canvases such as *Clea* and *Clara* in which had use the female body as a visual support for both creation and destruction of forms while also opening new avenues for his pictorial grammar.

In *Goodbye* (Adiós) (1959) Saura depicted a contorted female body evoking the iconography of a Spanish folkloric dance (hence resonating with his previous iconography in

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Flamenco Dancer (1954)—in which Saura rendered monstrous a Flamenco female dancer) (Fig. 1.11). Saura’s schematic figure and the monochromatic background echoed the color palette of Grey no. 7 (1959) while resonating with the visual syntax of the dramatic portraiture of the 1950s as in Giacometti’s Portrait of my mother (1951). In constant dialogue with his previous works and with those of the European modern legacy, Saura explored the boundaries of visual profanity and pictorial obscenity while also revealing the latent eroticism as distinct instances of the visual representation of an intense yet repressed desire. As Gerard de Cortanze described, Saura’s female bodies of the mid 1950s created a terrible intensity. As he reasoned, Saura’s female bodies represented a polysemic site for visual transgressions and semantic interventions under Francoism, and ultimately operating as visual signifiers.\textsuperscript{110} As he wrote, the female body in Saura:

is a guardian of good and evil; of passion and ecstasy. As a deadly seductor, [Saura’s] woman is subjected to all sorts of teratological treatments that drive her to meeting three realms: the ritual, the natural and the responsible. Visible in Saura’s canvases and paper since 1954, the female body evokes the desire for painting; this force displaces color, matter and the composition to a secondary register. Everything that builds the false barrier that opposes beauty to ugliness.\textsuperscript{111}

Phillipe Sollers defined the female body as incarnating a primary signifier. As he argued, the female body symbolizes “the field of that symbolic determination attained in the trembling of desire” and therefore, he concludes, it functions as a sign capable of eliciting a limitless desire.\textsuperscript{112} Saura’s recurrent display of monstrous female bodies operated both as pictorial and rhetorical instances of erotic desire under dictatorial repression and catholic censorship.\textsuperscript{113} As explored below, Saura’s paintings of monstrous female bodies incarnated pictorial and semantic allegories in which the destruction of organic forms they incarnated a pictorial and moral space for artistic,
moral and social contestation. Saura’s allegorical dimension of the tortured female body operating as a teratology of desire is paradigmatic in *Imaginary Portraits of Brigitte Bardot* series.

### 1.3.2. *Imaginary Portraits of Brigitte Bardot* and the teratology of desire

In 1958 Saura painted a series of canvases *Imaginary Portraits of Brigitte Bardot* series in which he transformed the eroticism of Brigitte Bardot into a grotesque and monstrous body and hence monstrifying Bardot’s iconic status as a sex symbol. In *Imaginary Portrait of Brigitte Bardot* (1958), Saura portrayed the French actress as a squared and giant body that borders the boundaries between figuration and abstraction. Saura’s monstrous portrait of the French actress bore no physical resemblance to her erotic forms (Fig. 1.12.). The head resembles the animalistic face of a ferocious dog while. The black and white color palette and the violent surface of the canvas invoked Dubuffet’s *Females* series from the late 1940s, while the gestural brushstrokes, and the mural-size composition echoed the pictorial syntax of American Action painting. As such, Saura’s monstrous portrait established a visual dialogue between the leading international pictorial grammars of the 1950s, while also deforming the legibility of the mass-produced sexual icon as a teratological body.

In *Imaginary Portrait of Brigitte Bardot* (1958) Saura reduced Bardot’s body to a tortured and dismembered body by rendering it as a flat surface (Fig. 1.13). In it Saura depicted monstrous Bardot in a vertical flat plane and in a grey and black color-palette composition Saura’s brushstrokes are light and charge with paint recalling his previous gestures deforming the female body (as in Clea and Clara) while echoing to the visual aspect of calligraphic painting. Saura’s use of split of paint over the contours of the body also resonated with the pictorial grammar of Abstract Expressionism as in de Kooning’s *Women series* (1950-1952). As
Saura explained, in his *Imaginary Portraits of Brigitte Bardot* series he explored the distortion of Bardot’s body as a popular cultural myth:

> In my 1958 Brigitte Bardot series, critics tended to see a satiric and stigmatizing criticism of the cult of a vedette and a criticism on the alienation of the audience; quite the contrary, I tried to represent my pulsional plastic desire, but also, as I did quite often, I tried to reveal the hidden forms of revenge in order to reveal the complex power of fascination of myths.¹¹⁴

Saura’s fascination with the modern myth as a monstrous and is conspicuous across the series. In *Imaginary Portrait of Brigitte Bardot* (1958) he transformed the desired female body to pure matter. Saura’s gesture creates a dual artistic correspondence between the formal features and the mural dimensions of the New York School painting, and the surface-texture of French *Informel* (Fig. 1.14). Saura’s recurrent gesture at monstrifying the beautiful body was also evident in *Imaginary Portrait of Brigitte Bardot* (1958) In this painting Saura undermined the body of the French actress by creating a dramatic surface in which the iconic body of the sex symbol was reduced to a black texture (Fig. 1.15). Only the tactility of thick painting indicates the presence of an actual body that is inevitably reduced to an experience of pure texture and materiality. Deprived from all recognizable forms, Saura rendered Bardot’s iconic body as a pure experience of the process of paint —not unlike the distorting appearance of a spectral image. As Saura wrote, his portraits of Brigitte Bardot embodied essential drives of his pictorial syntax:

> Sometimes, only a few signs are needed to depict famous characters, and the pure use of those signs, instead of the attempt to represent their totality, might be enough for that celebrity to be recognized —despite how deformed or transfigured her body might be. In the particular case of

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¹¹⁴ “En relación con una serie de pinturas sobre Brigitte Bardot, realizadas en 1958, ha querido verse una intención satírica contra el culto de la vedette y la alienación del público frente a ella, desconociéndose el todo poderoso deseo plástico y, como a menudo sucede, la verdad que se oculta bajo ciertas formas de venganza y la complejidad de la fascinación del mito, quedando desprovista de todo fundamento la sospecha de una personal repulsa.” Saura, “Imaginary Portraits” in *Notebook, Memoria del Tiempo*, op. cit. p. 69.
Brigitte Bardot it is surprising how the hair, the lips, even more than the breasts or the body, are enough to suggest her specter.  

For Saura, Bardot’s body incarnated a “convulsed beast” that conflated the pleasure for art and the art of pleasure. As he argued:

The appearance of the desired body, the representation of the pictorial space as a battlefield, culminates in the emergence of the convulsive beast. She shows her attributes in a confused and unique scenario: the absence of the scene; the mental and empty universe of invented ghosts; the invented space in which desire is destroyed by the pleasure of art and the art of pleasure.

Similar to the tragic fate of Dorian Gray’s portrait (in which Basil’s portrait gradually disclosed the monstrosity hidden from public appearance), Saura’s series of monstrous portraits of Brigitte Bardot revealed the other face of beauty. As such, Saura’s recurrent monstrification of the erotic European icon visualized what Artaud described as the latent violence of the modern myth. As Artaud argued, “This is why we shall try to concentrate, around famous personages, atrocious crimes, superhuman devotions, a drama which, without resorting to the defunct images of the old Myths, shows that it can extract the forces which struggle within them.”

Roland Barthes also pointed out the risk of excessive lyricism in conceiving the female body as a modern myth. In discussing Greta Garbo’s face he described it as a “fragile moment when the cinema is about to

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115 “A veces, bastan unos poco signos, que asimilamos inmediatamente a ciertos personajes, para que el empleo puro de esos signos y no el intento de reflejar la totalidad del mismo sea suficiente para que ese personaje, por muy deformado, por muy transpuesto que esté, acabe por ser reconocible. En el caso de Brigitte Bardot es curioso cómo el moño y los labios, más que el pecho o más que el cuerpo, bastan para sugerir su fantasma.” Saura en las Tentaciones de Antonio Saura, Julián Ríos, Mondadori, 1991, pp. 135-136.

116 “Un deseo totalizador en pos de la terrible y monstruosa belleza, un impulso devourador, ocupador de la superficie, un grafismo de ciega claridad, el reflejo de un ateísmo sexual a través del cual el rechazo de la mirada melancólica se transforma en una retórica enloquecida mediante la acción del sexo- pincel. La aparición del cuerpo deseado, la representación del espacio como campo de batalla, se resume en el surgimiento de la bestia convulsa que muestra sus atributos confundidos en un escenario posible: la ausencia de escenario, el universo mental y vacío donde los fantasmas se desarrollan y lo pueblan y en donde el deseo queda destrozado en la conjunción del placer del arte y del arte del placer.” Antonio Saura, “La Belleza Obscena”, in Fijezca, op. cit. p. 221.

117 See Artaud, The Theater and its Double, p. 85. Similar to Artaud’s claim, Roland Barthes described the fascination with the face of the Hollywood film star as the socially necessary imaginary archetype of the universal woman.
draw an existential from an essential beauty, when the archetype leans towards the fascination of mortal faces, when the clarity of the flesh as essence yields its place to lyricism of Woman.”

In 1956, Brigitte Bardot had starred in Roger Vardim’s *And God Created Woman*. The film was an international success, rapidly transforming the twenty-two years old into an overnight European sex symbol and into an iconic image of the late 1950s. In ultra-Catholic and autharchic Franco’s Spain, the film was censhored thus transforming and Bardot’s naked body into a symbol of men desire and of moral repression. Under these constant constraints of Francoist political and moral impositions, Saura’s serial monstrifications of Bardot’s body operated as a twofolded gesture. It portrayed the unreacheable yet desired erotic and sexualized body while simultaneously transgressing the moral codes of Catholic censorship. In transforming Bardot’s eroticism into a monstrous and grotesque body, Saura’s paintings portrayed a physical and symbolic hidden commentary, at once revealing the dark side of desire as compulsion for the admiration and the destruction of beautiful forms. Saura defined his gesture as responding to the intensity of the “obscene beauty”.

Saura was certainly not alone in deforming the desired female body in pictorial series. Both Picasso and de Kooning had distorted the iconic female body as a matrix for pictorial experimentation of the deformation of the same visual motif in series and of the distortion of the famous erotic body. In *Sylvette* (1953) Picasso had deformed the beauty and sensuality of a young French girl – Lydia David— for over a month in series of more portraits. Like Picasso, de

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119 See Bozal, “Temas de Saura”, op. cit.
122 A. Saura, “La Belleza Obscena”, *Fijeza*, op. cit. p. 221
Kooning’s *Women* series also deployed the female body as a visual matrix for pictorial experimentation. De Kooning was also interested in the modern myth as a popular icon. In *Marilyn Monroe* (1954), rendered the iconic and erotic status of the Hollywood actress as an unrecognizable body (Fig. 1.16). In this painting de Kooning flattened Monroe’s voluptuousness, only the red thin lips suggest eroticism of her physical presence. As Robert Rosenblum has observed, in both de Kooning’s and in Picasso’s works the sensuality and eroticism of the beautiful female body embody a site of destruction—hence transforming the canvas into a Pygmalion’s struggle in which the artist confronts his *femme fatale*.123

In visual conversation with de Kooning’s distortion of the erotic icon and with Picasso’s compositional technique of working the same visual motif in series, Saura’s *Imaginary Portraits of Brigitte Bardot* offered a teratology of male desire and his own artistic experimentation. In monstrifying Bardot’s body in pictorial series, Saura allegorized the iconic condition of Bardot’s body as a platform for visualizing the fragmented and disjointed anxiety of sexual desire that was highly censhorned in Spain. At the same time Saura’s series revealed the self-erotic practice of painting, while deploying an indirect response to the inescapable pressure of moral repression and artistic censorship.

As Bozal points out, under Francoist restrictive political and moral regime in which the publics display of female nudity was systematically censored.124 Under this particular cultural and political circumstance, Saura’s successive monstrifications of Bardot’s body operated allegorically. On the one hand they revealed the tensions of constructed desire latent in the body of the modern erotic icon. On the other, they acted as symptomatic restrictions of an artistic Spanish generation that grew under the repression of Francoist moral and political Catholic

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censorship. As such, from sexual myth to teratological force, Saura’s monstrification of Bardot’s body in series functioned as a pictorial and semantic matrix in which he performed formal and semantic gestures thus revealing Bardot’s sexual body as a menacing force and a deforming creature. Saura’s complex response to religious imposition and cultural repression under the omnipresence of censorship of Franco Regime was also paradigmatic his Crucifixions series in which he recurrently monstrified the body on the cross as a melancholic allegory of his cultural, artistic, and political experiences under Franco’s Regime Catholicism.

1.3.3. Crucifixion series and the teratology of the sacred body

In 1957, Saura began a series of thematic paintings in which he rendered monstrous the body on the cross. Reappearing in fragmented series since 1957, Saura’s monstrifications of the body on the cross operated as an exploration of pictorial idioms while also serving as an allegory of political repression and universal injustice. As Saura wrote in 1957:

Unlike Velazquez’s Christ, I have tried to convulse an image, endowing it with a wind of protest. These works may possibly lead some to see them as an act of humor bordering on blasphemy, but I do not believe that that is all they contain. In the image of a crucified person, I have, perhaps, reflected my own situation as a man alone in a threatening universe, in the face of which one can only scream. But also, on the other side of the mirror, I am simply gripped by the tragedy of a man (a man, not a god) absurdly nailed to a cross. It is an image that, like Goya’s fusilado –his shirt white, his arms spread wide –or the mother in Picasso’s Guernica, can still be a symbol of the tragedy of our time.125

In Crucifixion (1959) Saura transformed the image of Christ on the cross into a grotesque body (Fig. 1.17). Saura’s distortion of the body on the cross revealed Christ’s dual condition both as a sacred and secular body. In depicting Christ’s genitalia, Saura undermined the sacred body by rendering it as both erotic and mundane. Leo Steinberg addressed the depiction of Christ’s sexuality as a visual sign of Incarnation that has fallen into oblivion in modern representation. As he argued, since the Renaissance the sexualized body of Christ has been considered an

indecorous blasphemy in modern representation. In inserting his hands, Saura equated the body of the painter and the crucified body. Saura’s gesture sacralized the act of painting while also suspended it in the precise instant of becoming sacrilegious imagery. As such, Saura’s monstirification of the tortured body on the cross rendered simultaneously a deformed sacred icon and a grotesque emblem of the desperation and abandonment of the human condition— thus conflating the religious and the sexual dimension of the mystical body.

Rather than pious images for Catholic devotion, Saura’s Crucifixion series offered a consistent teratology of the sacred. For over four decades, Saura’s monstirifications of the body on the cross operated simultaneously as a visual profanation of sacred imagery, and as a means of an aesthetic interrogation to the influential and overwhelming legacy of crucifixions of the masters of Spanish painting—in particular, Velázquez, Goya, and Picasso. As I examine, Saura’s Crucifixions functioned at once as an allegory of the artists in the act of painting, a platform for artistic conversations, and as a commentary on the appropriation of the pictorial tradition by Francoism.

In Crucifixion (1959) Saura depicted Christ’s genitalia as a penis-arrow thus equating the body of Christ with the body of the painter (Fig. 1.18). Saura’s handprints appeared in the position of the handprints of the crucified body— hence creating a pictorial correlation between the symbolic, artistic, the human, and the divine aspects of the crucified body. Saura’s inscription of his own hand on the canvas humanizes the death of Christ while at the same time it sacralizes his own act as a painter as a profane and mystical gesture. This painting also offered an aesthetic conversation on Picasso’s painting. The straight black and white palette and the bold squares

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resonate with Picasso’s *Boislegou Crucifixions* of 1932 in which Picasso created a series of ink drawings based on the Crucifixion. For Phillip Sollers, they rendered the pre-history of the human body and incarnated “Guernica’s very underpainting.” (Fig. 1.19). In Saura’s painting the crucifixion enacted a visual matrix for pictorial experimentations and pictorial dialogues (Picasso) and also an intimate allegory as a painter working under the Ultra-Catholicism and political repression of the Franco Regime. As such, Saura’s monstrification of the body of Christ revealed the twofold nature of the tortured body on the cross as at once sacred and profane.

This dual condition of the body of Christ as both human and divine adorning theological transubstantiation resonated with Walter Benjamin’s description of the “bleak confusion of the Golgotha” as an allegory of a melancholic immersion. As Benjamin reasoned, in its indeterminate condition as both human and divine, the body on the cross incarnated the symbol of human desolation and thus it stood as a melancholic immersion:

The bleak confusion of the Golgotha, which can be recognized as the schema underlying the allegorical figures [...] is not just a symbol of the desolation of human existence. In its transitoriness is not signified or allegorically represented, so much as, in its own significance, displayed as allegory. As the allegory of resurrection. [...] Allegory, of course, thereby loses everything that was most peculiar to it: the secret, privileged knowledge, the arbitrary rule in the realm of dead objects, the supposed infinity of a world without hope. All this vanishes with this one about-turn, in which the immersion of allegory has to clear away the final phantasmagoria of the objective and, left entirely to its own devices, re-discovers itself, not playfully in the earthly world of things, but seriously under the eyes of heaven. And this is the essence of melancholy immersion: that its ultimate objects, in which it believes it can most fully secure for itself that which is vile, turn into allegories, and that these allegories fill out and deny the void in which they are represented, just as, ultimately, the intention does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection.129

For Benjamin then, the crucified body dying on the cross reflected the pick of human transitoriness in which ultimate meaning or destination is ultimately suspended. Following


\[129\] See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 232-233. In George Steiner’s words, ‘the twofold organizing pivot of Christ’s nature-part god, part man, and overwhelming of this world.” George Steiner, “Introduction to Walter Benjamin”, in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 17

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Benjamin’s description of the image of the crucifixion as an allegorical and melancholic emblem, Saura’s *Crucifixion* series revealed his fascination with the teratology of the sacred while offering melancholic allegories of his personal experience under political times. Furthermore, Saura’s *Crucifixion* series offers a set of indeterminate allegories revealing at once an introspective pictorial conversation with the legacy of Velázquez, Goya and Picasso’s Crucifixions, a typology of the teratology of the sacred, and specific metaphors of his artistic circumstance—thus allegorizing the body of on the cross as a disjointed, mystical, and melancholic allegorical body.

In *Crucifixion X* (1960), Saura depicted an ejaculatory Christ (Fig. 1.20). Ejaculation indicates both a sign of pleasure and also a signal of demise and consequently, an index of death. An ejaculating penis symbolizes the brush of the painter in the act of painting, suggesting then that the painting itself is a sacrilegious act and that it is also an ignominy and an indignity. Therefore, at the dramatic moment of liturgical suffering, Saura depicted the joy before death and the *jouissance* of the cruelty.130

In *Crucifixion* (1959), Saura transformed the image of the crucifixion into a triptych while reducing the chromatic palette to grey and black tones (Fig. 1.21). The cross of thorns ath the center of the composition resonated with the light bulb of Picasso’s *Guernica* — as if the menacing light bulb in Picasso’s painting had exploded in Saura’s hands. The predominance of greys and whites of Saura’s palette also echoed Picasso’s color palette while the gestural and violent application of paint recalled the aggressive brushstrokes of the New York School.

In the right-upper corner, Saura included his right handprints. Saura’s gesture of inscribing his hands mimicked the primitive act of cave painting while conjuring the sacramental act of the imposition of the hands. In Catholicism, the imposition of the hands is a sign of both

ordination and baptism as such it functioned as an indexical sign that revealed Saura’s gesture as both perpetrator and victim of his own act of painting. Therefore, with this artistic and symbolic act, Saura offered an indexical encounter in the canvas, equating his body as painter with the tortured body of Christ.131

In *Crucifixion* (1959), Saura displayed the crucifixion as a horizontal composition. In this painting, the body has abandoned the cross and remains suspended in an indecisive pictorial space (Fig. 1.22). The black and white rectangles on the background and the flexibility of the body resonated with Picasso’s *Boislegoup Crucifixions*. In dialoguing with Picasso’s influence as an aesthetic yet allegorical gesture, Saura’s *Crucifixions series* established pictorial dialogues with multiple pictorial legacies while suspending the idea of the crucifixion as a purely religious emblem.

As Ángel Llorente has pointed out, in reactionary and Francoist Spain in which the relationship between Catholicism and dictatorship was one and the same thing, the representation of the crucifixion incarnated a religious and cultural icon of its moral and military victory in the Civil War.132 Franco’s 1949 New Year’s Speech exemplified this long and fundamental alliance between Catholicism and Francoism: “Spaniards walk on truth because Spain is united to the Saint Mother Church that is blessed by God.”133 As Manuel Vázquez Montalbán has argued this examples are recurrent during the forty years of dictatorship that established dictator Franco as a political ruler but also an ecclesiastic authority. Indeed, in Cathedrals, Franco was presented under dossal.134 Hence, under Franco’s Regime fervent National-Catholicism, Saura’s series of

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131 Nicolas Sulapierre “Les Crucifixions à L’oeuvre”, in *Antonio Saura Crucifixions*, Strasbourug Museum of Contemporary Art, 2002
Crucifixions opened a pictorial dialogue between artistic traditions while also functioning as a subtly undermining of Franco’s cooptation of the cross as a personal and political symbol. As such, Saura’s Crucifixions operated as an allegory of the upheaval of the times, cultural commentary, and social protest.135

Saura’s tension between the religious and the political can be seen in Crucifixion (1963), in which Saura painted the body of Christ convulsing in extreme physical suffering and spitting blood (Fig.1.23). Saura’s rendering of Christ’s body in extreme agony is in itself a blasphemous act by transforming the sanctity of the moment of his death into an excrescence of the corporeal—as a body expelling sperm, blood, genitalia and vomit. As such, Christ’s body is the most human, and also the most cruel. It embodies the transubstantiation of flesh and the spectacle of death. By rendering the crucified body at once as a sacred, profane and erotic body Saura’s Crucifixion series displayed a teratology of the sacred body.

Saura and the representation of the Crucifixion

Without a doubt, the Crucifixion is one of the most represented images in Western Art. Indeed, the image of Christ on the cross is the Catholic image par excellence. This powerful image has captured Western imagination. As Bataille described, “The crucifixion keeps the image of sacrifice before us like a symbol offered to the most elevated reflections, and also as the most divine expression of the cruelty of art.”136 Indeed, the representation of the dying Christ as both human and divine body is the visual allegory that founds Christianity since it embodies the image of the divinity facing death and the transubstantiation of God into a mortal human being.137 As Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, the crucifixion incarnates a moment of “theological

137 In similar terms Milan Kundera has described the monstrous representation of the crucifixion in Bacon’s works. See Kundera in “Painter’s Brutal Gesture”, in Kent Brintnall, EcceHomo, p. 155.
shaking” in which both man and god question their own existence. In this double gnosis, Žižek argues, god and Christ are simultaneously human and immortal, mutually questioning their own existence.\textsuperscript{138} During the twentieth century the body on the cross has functioned as a universal image of human suffering incarnating a complex allegory for semantic interpretations.\textsuperscript{139}

As Julia Kristeva has argued, the body of Christ dying on the cross incarnates the transition between the human and the divine and in this insurmountable dichotomy, the body of Christ exceeds its own signification. As she wrote in \textit{Powers of Horror}:

\begin{quote}
Purifying, redeeming all sins, it punctually and temporarily gives back innocence by means of communion. To eat and drink the flesh and blood of Christ means, on the one hand, to transgress symbolically the Levitical prohibitions, to be symbolically satiated (as at the fount of a good mother who would thus expel the devils from her daughter) and to be reconciled with the substance dear to paganism. By the very gesture, however, that corporealizes or incarnates speech, all corporeality is elevated, spiritualized, and sublimated. Thus one might say that if the inside/outside boundary is maintained, osmosis nevertheless takes place between the spiritual and the substantial, the corporeal and the signifying—a heterogeneity that cannot be divided back into its components.\textsuperscript{140}
\end{quote}

As Kristeva reasoned, European postwar artists such as Guttuso, Picasso, Sutherland, and Bacon revealed this feeling of melancholic loss of purity and mystic transcendence of the human condition— as an allegory of the of the destruction and the human horror. As she argued, before the unspeakable horror, the imagery of the crucifixion went beyond its pure religious meaning and eventually became a universal metaphor of human suffering. From Picasso’s \textit{Boislegoup Crucifixion series} (1932) to Francis Bacon’s \textit{Fragment of a Crucifixion} (1950), the tortured body on the cross became a sign of human despair and as a universal allegory of the violence of absolute power. Functioning hence as an artistic, politic, and symbolic visual emblem, Saura’s

\textsuperscript{139} For a further discussion of the rhetorical dimension of the Crucifixion in twentieth century art see the catalogue exhibition, \textit{The Body on the Cross}, Paris, Pompidou, 1993.
Crucifixions offered a pictorial and semantic platform upon which to perform sacrilege and artistic deformations.

In Crucifixion (1960), Saura reduced the body to a cubic head while placing his right hand on either side, thus visually constructing the form of a cross (Fig. 1.24). By this ritualistic and artistic gesture of symbolically imposing the hands, Saura transformed his own painting into a profane sacrament while positioning himself both as crucified body and a cave man. Under Francoist claustrophobic cultural and political imposition of Catholic imagery of the 1950s, Saura’s Crucifixions are religiously and sexually excessive. On one level, they depicted the most charged icon of Catholicism in order to render its monstrosity, the injustice that it represents perpetrated by that same Catholicism that reclaim its sacredness. On another level, Saura’s Crucifixions deformed Spanish pictorial modern legacy. This dual gesture was conspicuous in his red and black crucifixions of the 1960s in which he echoed the drama and intensity of Velázquez’s Crucifixion and with Goya’s Black Painting series.

In Grand Crucifixion Red and Black (1960), Saura depicted a formless and brutally distorted body being swallowed into a threatening darkness (Fig. 1.25). Saura’s dramatic and intense composition echoed the solemnity of Velázquez’s Christ on the Cross (1632), and the visual dramatic agony of Mathias Grünewald’s Insenheim Altarpiece (ca. 1515) (Fig 1.26 &1.27). Saura’s tortured body abandons the cross and reveals the downfall of the human body into formlessness. This visual fall of the body in a monochromatic resonated with the monstrosity of Goya’s Saturn devouring his own child (1820), (Fig. 1.28)—in which Goya depicted Kronos’s terrifying infanticide in eating his own progeny to secure his ruling position in power (discussed in chapter 3). By leaning on Velázquez’s visual sobriety and the fierce vehemence of Goya’ Saturn, Saura rendered and monstrified the drama of the wounded
rhetorical and semantic body that is abandoned to its own suffering. This pictorial homage and introspective gesture towards his pictorial ancestry was also at work in Crucifixion Red and Black (1963) in which Saura’s body of Christ abandoned the cross and struggled with no structural support in a monochromatic dark background (Fig. 1.29).

Saura’s intense contrast of red and black echoing Goya was prevalent in Saura’s red and black paintings of the early 1960s. In Brunhilde (1963), and Hiroshima mon amour (1963), (Saura echoed the solemn and threatening black background of visual vehemence of Goya’s Saturn Devouring his own Son (1820) (Fig. 1.30 & 1.31). In these paintings, Saura depicted the dramatic condition of the wounded body as well as conjuring the mythical status of the female body as a melancholic heroine. Brunhilde refers to the mythical heroine from Wagner’s Valkyrie— which Nietzsche described as the allegory of the fall of the spir.141 Hiroshima Mon Amour quoted Alain Resnais’ and Margarite Duras’s 1959 film on the love story after the devastating circumstance of the atomic devastation. Recalling T.W. Adorno’s diagnosis of the impossibility of poetry after the concentration camps, Saura wrote, in a letter to Antonio Pericas in 1960: “After 1936, after World War II, after Dachau and Auschwitz and after Hiroshima, neither man nor art can remain the same, It is a heavy burden that will take long to liberate from.”142 Thus, in mimicking the solemn intensity of the dark background of Velázquez’s Crucifixion and the vivid color palette of Goya’s Saturn, Saura’s red and black canvases of the

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141 In Wagner’s Siegfried Brünnhilde first obeys and then disobeys Wotan’s orders. Nietzsche describes the awakening of Brünnhilde in The Birth of Tragedy he writes: “Let no one imagine that the German spirit has lost its mythical home for ever, as long as it still clearly understands the voices of the birds telling it of that home. One day it will awaken, in all the morning freshness that follows a tremendous sleep. Then it will slay dragons, destroy the wicked dwarfs awaken Brünnhilde- and Wotan’s spear itself will not be able to bars its way!” F. Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, Penguin, 2003, p. 116
142 “Después de 1936, y después de la Guerra mundial, después de Dachau y Auswitz y después de Hiroshima, ni el hombre ni el arte podrán ser los mismos que antes. Es un fardo pesado y tardaremos mucho tiempo aún en liberarnos de tan tremenda carga.” A. Saura, “Carta Abierta a Antonio Pericas,” in Escritura como Pintura, op. cit. p. 58.
early 1960s performed an intense and multi-layered Oedipal dialogue with the pressing legacy of his artistic ancestry while referring to the cultural myths of the collapse of the human condition.

Saura’s recurrent artistic quotation of the Spanish pictorial tradition and his consistent reworking emblematic masterworks of Velazquez and Goya, continued in Crucifixion (1971) (in which Saura drew over a paper reproduction of Goya’s Crucifixion (Fig. 1.32). Saura’s overdrawing over Goya’s Crucifixion created a mise-en-scene of Saura’s artistic attempt by offering a visual palimpsest that simultaneously creates a conscious visual parody of Saura’s own artistic attempts to both assault and revere his artistic predecessors.

Saura’s Crucifixions are problematically ambivalent. On the one hand they monstrified the works of his artistic predecessors (Velázquez, Picasso and Goya) hence challenging their sacred-like status as artistic masters while creating an allegorical parricide over the symbolic body of his pictorial ancestry. On the other hand, they expanded the Francoist aims at essentializing Spanish modern art as an organic and legitimate continuation of the cultural glory of the Spanish pictorial school. In their cannibalistic aesthetic inquiry, Saura’s Crucifixions allegorized the body of Christ as a space for pictorial exploration and artistic inquiry under the cultural and religious constrictions of Franco’s Spain. Overall, Saura’s Crucifixions embodied personal and pictorial allegories for pictorial exploration and melancholic introspection on his pictorial ancestry. By confronting yet paying homage to Spanish pictorial legacy, Saura’s Crucifixions display a personal museum of artistic monstrous parricides while also displaying a consistent teratology of the sacred body.

1.3.4. Multitudes: the Monstrosity of the Collective Body

In 1957, Saura began a series of thematic paintings, Multitudes, in which he rendered monstrous the collective body. As he argued in a letter to Antonio Pericas in 1960, this series
embodied a visual exercise in which he confronted “the warm multitude” and describing his artistic need to open his canvases to the collective subjtec. 143 Different from the libidinal latent force in his monstrifications of Brigitte Bardot, Saura’s *Multitudes* portrayed the menacing yet fascinating presence of the collective body as a celebratory yet threatening political subject. Formally, the multitude posed for Saura the visual challenge of rendering the multiplicity of the human face without bodies. Semantically, it revealed Saura’s urgency in representing the collective subject hence allegorizing the human mass as a teratology of the collective body. As Saura explained they were a testimony and an act of deformation:

> In these paintings I tried to give testimony to the clamor of the human masses attracted to a protest, to a cult or a to a fanatism by an indignation or a plea: the spectator getting towards the light or already inside it suddenly faces the multiplicity of faces of theses anti-forms and these anti-portraits. 144

Acting as anti-forms and anti-portraits Saura’s *Multitudes* series monstrified the collective portrait into an expansive multiplicity of impersonal masks that look and are looked at.

> Acting as anti-forms and anti-portraits Saura’s *Multitudes* series monstrified the collective portrait into an expansive multiplicity of impersonal masks that look and are looked at.

In *Foule* (1959-1960) Saura depicted a multitude in a triptych format. The grotesque accumulation of faces in the same pictorial plane conjured the tensions and intensity of the carnival masquerade and of the public demonstration. In both instances, the grotesque rendering of human faces become monstrous masks. They are at once objects and subjects of public scrutiny (Fig. 1.32). In addition, Saura’s painting operated as a public trial of collective staring in which the viewer is constantly confronted with monstrous faces-masks that stare back at him —

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143 In an open letter to Antonio Pericas in 1960 Saura wrote: “Vivimos demasiado en la torre de marfil del comfort y más valdría mezclarse un poco más con la “cálida muchedumbre”” A. Saura, “Carta Abierta a Antonio Pericas,” in *Escritura Como Pintura*, 58.

144 “He querido, por otra parte, reflejar en estas grandes pinturas el clamor de las masas humanas atraídas por una protesta o un fanatismo por una indignación o una súplica: el espectador al acercarse hasta el farol, o al situarse dentro de él, sorprende en un relámpago instantáneo la variedad de los rostros de unas antiformas que son unos anti-retratos.” *Antonio Saura*, Pellicer, op. cit. p. 97.
thus manifesting the collective body as a pictorial and personal anxiety. As Gerard de Cortanze argued, Saura’s Multitudes performed a personal and political exorcism.\textsuperscript{145}

In Foule-Paysage (1962), and Grande Foule (1963), Saura explored the menacing exchange of gazes between the individual and the collective (Fig. 1.34 & 1.35). This double gesture at confronting the viewer from a wall-eyed landscape threatens to dissolve into the singularity of personhood as an endless multiplication of anonymous fragments.\textsuperscript{146} In these paintings, the collective body becomes a human landscape in which the faces are interrogating but also objects of our gazes. As Spanish critic Santiago Amón pointed out, Saura’s Multitudes revealed the tension between the individual and its desire to belong to a common project.\textsuperscript{147}

As Valeriano Bozal reminds us, the collective political subject was prohibited and considered illegal by Francoist dictatorship and therefore any public meeting of more than three people was considered an insurrection.\textsuperscript{148} Under such exceptional political situation, Saura’s monstrous portraits of the collective body claimed a public political sphere while revealing the monstrosity of the modern multitude as indistinguishable faces, bodies and masks. In representing the multitude as a monstrous collective body Saura inquired on the metamorphoses of the collective in which the modern subject is diseminnated, and hence disappears into the menacing and anonymous mass.

In Multitude (1967), Saura’s rendered monstrous the collective subject of modernity who looks at the spectator and at the same time is looking at us —hence creating an intense confrontation of gazes that challenge collective anxieties (Fig. 1.36). Saura’s Multitude also established a conspicuous dialogue with Goya’s renderings of the collective body in Goya’s

\textsuperscript{145} Gerard de Cortanze, “Saura o Le Peinture Noire” in Antonio Saura, op. cit. p. 171
\textsuperscript{146} See Bozal, Temas en Antonio Saura, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{147} Santiago Amón, Les Foules in Saura, in Antonio Saura, G. de Cortanze, p. 204, op. cit. Originally published as “Las Multitudes de Antonio Saura” in Bellas Artes, nº38, Madrid, 1974
\textsuperscript{148} Bozal, Temas de Antonio Saura, op. cit.
Black Painting Series. His paintings equated Goya’s fascination with the collective portrait in *Aquelarre o El Gran Cabrón* (1820) and *Romería de San Isidro* (1820) in which Goya depicted the collective group as an accumulation of bodiless heads and hence as a monstrous body.

Goya’s indistinguishable accumulation of human faces as human skulls rendered the collective body at the margins of modernity by portraying the mass as a monstrous and terrifying modern pictorial subject matter (Fig. 1.37 & 1.38). 149

Like Goya’s works, Saura’s *Multitudes* deployed the human mass as a visual and symbolic entity in which the specificity of the individual subject vanishes into formlessness and hence the human collective became a monstrous element of mere quantity. As Saura reasoned, from Goya, Munch, and Ensor to Erró and Pollock, the fascination with the multitude as a pictorial subject has been at the very core of modern painting. As he described:

> Goya, Munch and Ensor are probably the painters who had been more attuned to the fascinating and horrifying sound of the mass. Along with Monet and Pollock, Goya, Munch and Ensor share the same particular field. They works not merely iconic models rather they displaye fraternal echoes in which, as a brilliant collision, the modern painter feels like a pupil and a precursor. 150

As Saura argued, these set of modern painters represented the collective as a social landscape in which the indistinctness of the subjects portrayed points to a monstrous group portrait in which individuality dissolves into an amorphous and threatening mass.

Saura’s pictorial rendering of the modern collectivity as a monstrous body continued after his return to easel painting in the late 1970s. As discussed in chapter 3, Saura’s canvases of the multitude in the late 1970s were concurrent with Spanish return to democracy after four decades of dictatorship. In 1979 Saura painted *Diada* (1978–79, in which he depicted the collective mass

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150 “Goya, Munch y Ensor son, quizás, los pintores que mejor han percibido el pavoroso fantástico rumor de masas. Los tres, junto a Monet y Pollock, permanecen sorprendentemente reunidos en la misma parcela reservada, no como modelos icónicos, sino como ekos fraternos en los cuales, como en una carambola de destellos, el pintor se siente tanto alumno como precursor.” A. Saura, “Multitudes”, in *NoteBook*, op. cit. p. 48.
celebrating Catalan national day (Fig. 1.37). The *Diada* is the national festivity of Catalonia celebrating the defeat against the Bourbon troops on September 11, 1714. Painted in 1979, Saura’s painting embodied his personal homage to the Catalan people by rendering the massive public demonstration of 1977 in which Catalan people marched over the streets of Barcelona celebrating the achievement of its regional constitution (Estatut) for the regional government after forty years. *Diada*, embodied for Saura as his response to the collective Catalan celebration of political identity after forty years of dictatorship as well as his childhood memories when living with his family in Verdi street in Barcelona during the air bombings of the city by the Francoist troops when, as he recounted, when he was a child he saw a man being killed.

As explored above, in his *Multitude* series, Saura monstrified the political body as formless-body, rendering simultaneously an amalgamation a collective celebration and collective fear in which threatening and grotesque bodiless faces stare at the spectator—who becomes both subject and object of public scrutiny. As such, Saura’s *Multitude* series embodied a pictorial dialogue with the modern pictorial tradition in rendering of the modern collective as well as political allegories of the silenced and controlled Spanish public space under Franco.

### 1.3.5. Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II: The teratology of sovereign power

In 1965, probably exhausted with his own pictorial language, Saura destroyed about a hundred canvases of his studio in Cuenca and moved to Paris. Saura never gave a definite explanation for this act. In 1967, while in Paris, Saura painted a set of canvases in which he deformed the iconic portrait of Spanish Emperor Phillip II (r. 1527-1598) in which he transformed the emblematic image of the Spanish baroque monarch into a monstrous body. Saura’s monstrous monarchs offered an indirect political commentary on the prosaicness of the Francoist ideological usurpation of Spanish baroque legacy as the problematic national cultural
and military identity Golden Age (Siglos de Oro). As Saura reasoned, this set of monstrous monarchs revealed a pictorial obsession and his need to liberate himself from the weight of history. In constructing a visual and semantic correspondence between the distorted image of the baroque sovereign and the political and cultural monstrosity of Francoism, Saura’s monstrifications of the Spanish monarch undermined Francoist arrogation of the Spanish baroque military and artistic past while restating the cultural and pictorial prestige of the Spanish pictorial school. As such, Saura’s monstrous portraits of the baroque monarch embodied melancholic allegories of the historical persistence of the Spanish political absolutism while deploying a teratology of the body of power.

In *Philip II* (1967) Saura monstrified Sofonisba Anguissola’s magnanimous portrait of the Spanish baroque monarch *Philip II* (1565) presenting the Spanish sovereign as a monstrous and grotesque body. Saura’s portrait of the Spanish ruler simultaneously fascinates and yet horrifies by rendering the moment in which the body of monarch is both emerging from and vanishing into formlessness. Saura’s color palette embraced Anguissola’s color vocabulary by echoing the tones of black, grey, brown, and beige while obliterating the red color—thus enhancing the violence of his gesture and dramatism of the composition. Saura’s brushstroke work is aggressive and yet contained. Saura’s sober expressivity and color palette resonated with El Greco’s and Velázquez’s baroque portraiture while also invoking the expressive gestures of the late 1950s — *Informel* and Abstract Expressionism. (Fig. 1.38 & 1.39), As such, Saura’s monstrous portrait of the monarch at once revived and undermined the cultural prestige and the artistic statues of the Spanish pictorial tradition hence indirectly questioning the validity of the

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152 Saura, “Retratos Imaginarios”, *Notebook*, op. cit. p. 69
153 This painting was previously attributed to Sanchez Coello. Saura refers to its former author and therefore he mentions it as Sanchez Coello’s portrait.
iconicity of the Spanish pictorial legacy in the mid 1960s. Saura’s paradoxical gesture of at once denial and affirmation of his pictorial ancestry honored the artistic heritage and yet it acted as a cultural transgression— by confronting the subjection to the political absolutism of the dictatorship. As Saura described this portrait embodied his personal obsessions towards the Prado museum and the body of the Spanish baroque pictorial legacy:

*Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II* were based on Sanchez Coello’s painting [today attributed to Anguissola] from the Prado Museum in Madrid. They evoked a whole range of historical Spanish and Netherlandish portraits of black dressed male figures. This series was my personal desire to fill the walls with a parade of fascinating visual ancestors. It was also the opportunity to show my personal affection towards the pictorial forms and to experiment with dark colors over earthly backgrounds […] It was also my need to liberate myself from the heavy “weight of history”. They embodied my need to confront certain artworks, probably not the best ones, that nonetheless had been fixed in my visual memory and had occupied a special place in my particular museum of personal obsessions since then.

In *Imaginary Portrait of Phillip II* (1967) Saura distorted the iconic image of the king. Saura’s painting presented the emblem of Spanish Empire as a comic-like figure that resembled a distorted portrait of Donald Duck. Saura’s sober color palette and austere monochromatic background resonated with the pictorial idiom of Velázquez’s royal portraiture. (Fig. 1.40) The brushstrokes on the contours around the body of monarch created an auratic effect that separates and yet inscribes the figure into the background that resonated with the pictorial techniques of El Greco’s pictorial portraiture.

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154 For a further exploration of the question of Baroque and Spanish modern art see Jorge Luis Marzo: *Arte Moderno y Franquismo. Los orígenes conservadores de la vanguardia y de la política artística en España*, 2006. For a political appropriation of the Baroque in the 1950 see also “El ideal del siglo de Oro español en la política artística de postguerra y su crisis hacia 1950”. In *Velázquez y el arte de su tiempo*, Cabañas Bravo, Madrid CSIC, Madrid, 1991, pp. 441-449

155 “La serie “Retratos imaginarios de Felipe II” han sido realizados no solamente a partir del lúgubre y luminoso cuadro de Sánchez Coello (today attributed to Argensola) del Museo del Padro de Madrid, sino también de toda la amplia Galería histórica de caballeros holandeses y españoles vestidos con trajes negros. El deseo de inundar los muros con este desfile de fabulosos ancestros también personales, la resonancia especial y la efectividad pictórica de la elementalidad de las manchas negras sobre lo fondo terrosos, el surgimiento de los rostros afirmadores y convuloses entre espuma y medusas ¿no será tan importante como la referencia implícita a la imagen detestada y a cuanto ella significa? Y la necesidad de liberarse de esta forma del “peso de la historia”, ¿no será tan fuerte como la atracción persistente mantenida por ciertas obras, no necesariamente las mejores, ya para siempre fijadas en el museo personal de las obsesiones?” A. Saura, in *Antonio Saura*, Cirici Pellicer, p. 158.
In *Philip II* (1967) Saura monstrified the body of the Spanish baroque ruler. Saura’s black contours of the face of the monarch have been dramatically convoluted (Fig. 1.41). The intense color palette and the monochromatic background echoed and refashioned Velázquez’s royal portraiture as in *Portrait of Phillip IV* (1624) (Fig. 1.42). Like Velázquez’s baroque portrait, of Saura’s portrait of the monarch followed the canonical formal disposition of the three quarter royal pose and the dramatic baroque color palette, while employing dripping paint to reinforce the expressive gesture of American Action painting.

In monstrifying the body of the emblematic baroque sovereign, Saura’s monarchs critiqued the idea of endowing the ruler with absolute power while subversively linking the monstrosity of the Catholic Emperor as the tragic fate of Spanish politics—which ran from the Catholic Empire to Franco’s facist dictatorship. As such they stood as melancholic emblems of Spanish *black legend*. This anxiety at creating a historical and moral correspondence between the baroque and Francoist Regime was persistent across the Francoist rhetoric. In 1959 commemorating his recently built personal mausoleum at The Valley of the Fallen (El Valle de los Caídos), dictator Franco stated that it was build as a conspicuous homage to honor Phillip II’s personal Palace at El Escorial: “El Escorial is the great sepulcher of our monarchs; El Valle de los Caídos it is the repository of our heroes and martyrs of our people.” Franco’s self-appointment as legitimate successor of Phillip II demonstrated the Francoist of the military prestige of the Spanish baroque Empire.

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156 Valeriano Bozal the historical relevance of Saura’s portraits of the baroque monarch. “Valeriano Bozal, Temas sobre Saura, op. cit, p. 425
Saura’s recurrent monstrification of the political emblem of Spanish imperial history as an indirect commentary on Franco’s dictatorship confronted the viewer with the desacralization of baroque authority — what Walter Benjamin called the *facies hippocratica* of history. As Benjamin wrote:

At the moment when the ruler indulges in the most violent display of power, both history and the higher power, which checks its vicissitudes, are recognized as manifest in him. And so there is this one thing to be said in favour of the Caesar as he loses himself in the ecstasy of power: he falls victim to the disproportion between the unlimited hierarchical dignity, with which he is divinely invested and the humble state of his humanity.[...]

For in the supreme form of this European theater [Taurerspiel], the drama of Spain, a land of Catholic culture in which the baroque features unfold much more brilliant, clearly, and successfully, the conflicts of a state of creation without grace are resolved, by a kind of playful reduction, within the sphere of the court, whose king proves to be a secularized redemptive power [...] The prince is the paradigm of the melancholy man. Nothing demonstrates the frailty of the creature so drastically as the fact that even he is subject to it.159

As Benjamin described, the double condition of the monarch as both the executioner and martyr of tyranny transformed the image of the baroque sovereign into an allegorical and melancholic emblem. As Benjamin argued, the baroque monarch becomes both a martyr and a tyrant:

In the baroque the tyrant and the martyr are but the two faces of the monarch. They are the necessarily extreme incarnations of the princely essence. As far as the tyrant is concerned, this is clear enough. The theory of sovereignty, which takes as its example the special case in which dictatorial powers are unfolded positively, demands the completion of the image of the sovereign, as tyrant.160

As Benjamin reasoned, the portrait of the absolute monarch incarnates a melancholic emblem: “The prince is the paradigm of the melancholy man. Nothing demonstrates the frailty of the creature so drastically as the fact that even he is subject to it.”161

Following Benjamin’s description of the baroque sovereign as a melancholic body (at once tyrant and martyr), Saura’s cruel distortions of the Spanish Emperor in *Imaginary Portraits of Philip II* depicted the early modern king as both martyr and perpetrator of history. As such,

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159 W. Benjamin, *The Origin of Tragic German Drama*, p. 70.
160 W. Benjamin, *The Origin of Tragic German Drama*, p. 81.
161 W. Benjamin, *The Origin of Tragic German Drama*, p. 142.
Saura’s monstrous monarchs provided a critical commentary on Spanish monstrous past and absolutist present past, and more broadly, they offer a teratology of the body of power.

Saura’s introspective and meta-reflective inquiry over the symbolic body of the Spanish baroque painting was recurrent during the 1960s. In 1960 Saura had monstrified Velázquez’s portraiture as symptoms of the monstrous condition of the Spanish baroque. In *Infanta* (1960), Saura deformed the resemblance of illustrious Spanish baroque historical figures as well as emblematic works of Spanish early-modern painting. In *Infanta* (1962) Saura transformed Velázquez’s *Portrait of Margarita de Austria* (Fig. 1.45) into a skull-like monstrous portrait (Fig. 1.43 & Fig. 1.44).

Whereas Saura’s *Imaginary Portrait of Brigitte Bardot* series rendered monstrous the erotic body of the popular sexualized icon, *Infanta* and *Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II* series allegorized the emblematic body of the Spanish baroque monarchy as a political and historical body. As such, his works symbolically distorted the emblematic Spanish absolutist power and subsequently undermining its significant historical implications under Francoism.

Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo described Saura’s portraits of Phillip II as specters of a monstrous national history yet to be exorcised. As he argued, Saura’s *Imaginary Portraits* incarnated a gallery of specters of a non-exorcized history on the allegory of Spain and its devotion towards the void. Furthermore, they conjure the troubling national history for an amnesic people who do not learn from its own past. Goytisolo’s description of Saura’s monarchs reaffirmed the artist’s resistance to Francoist instrumentatization of Spanish early-modern history as a means to legitimate its anachronistic regime.

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Jorge Luis Marzo has also noted how during the 1950s, the Spanish Baroque became the fundamental identity metaphor acting both as an ideological vehicle for Francoist military and historical justification. As Marzo describes, Spanish baroque becomes the historical symbol for Franco’s dictatorship:

Spanish Baroque was conceived as the starting point of Spanish national identity. More importantly, it was Spanish arriving point. From all of European countries, the identity problema of Spain was most dramatically imposed. In Spain the baroque became the most significant metaphor of what being a Spaniard meant. It was through the baroque Empire as a universal territory that Spain created its own national ideal and therefore the paradigmatic example for its political avenues. It is through this ideal of universality that Spain aspired to conquered history.”164

Like Marzo’s description of the ideological sequestration of baroque imagery by Francoism, Miriam Basilio has also discussed how in the absence of a Francoist artistic style, Franco’s Regime confiscated Spanish history in order to craft an ideological narrative that created a moral and political link between Phillip II’s Empire and Franco’s dictatorship. As she writes, in “a parallel between the desire to recuperate the missionary and military efforts that marked Spain’s imperial era, and the new regime aim[ed] to use all didactic and military means as its disposal to re-conquer and indoctrinate all sections of Spanish society.”165

As I discussed above, in systematically deforming the portrait of the monarch Saura’s Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II series revealed its inner condition as a monstrous historical and ideological emblem. They opened a double inquiry on the ambiguous and darker histories of the Golden Age—marshaled by the repressive dictatorship in pursuit of moral and historical

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164 “El Barroco, así, será concebido como punto de partida identitario, pero, todavía más importante, también como punto de llegada. España, de entre todos los países europeos adscritos a estos relatos, será por lejos el que lo perfilará y fijará con más ahínco. Para España, el barroco ha sido la metáfora más concreta de lo que significa ser español, y gracias a su imperio, coincidente en el tiempo con el periodo barroco, el mejor exponente de la capacidad de la nación para ser universal, para vehicular nociones de humanidad válidas para los españoles y su extensión hispana, el Estilo Histórico, el medio por el cual los hombres pudieron alcanzar la historia.” Marzo, La Memoria Administrada, Katz Conocimiento, Buenos Aires, 2010, p. 34 and p. 232.
legitimacy. Saura’s *Imaginary Portrait of Philip II* (1967) suggested this visual and semantic parallelism between absolutist political periods (Phillip II Empire and Franco’s dictatorship), and pictorial traditions (baroque portraiture and Spanish modern painting). In it Saura deformed the facial features of the king that fold upon each other in a centripetal swallowing. Saura’s gesture in distorting the emblematic image of the Spanish ruler visualized Franco’s instrumentalization of the Spanish cultural legacy as a monstrous gesture (Fig. 1.45). At the same time, Saura’s painting mingled the image of the ruler and the forms of Picasso’s portraiture of 1930’s — thus creating a twofold artistic dialogue between the pictorial idioms of baroque Spanish tradition and the cultural referents of modern art. This dual dialogue between disparate pictorial idoms (Spanish baroque and Picasso’s portraiture of the 1930s) created an introspective gaze towards the previous canvases of the series while at the same time creating a melancholic and cannibalistic gaze towards his artistic ancestry. Saura repeated this same gesture in his series of Dora Maar revisited in 1983 (discussed in chapter 3). Saura’s monstrification of the Spanish emblematic ruler also rendered allegories of the political body as monstrous—hence revealing a teratology of the sovereign.

As French philosopher Louis Marin has argued, the portrait of the king embodies the symbolic body of absolutist power—precisely by transposing the theological body of sovereignty into the political and juridical domain. As Marin explained, in the portrait of the king the image itself becomes the real presence and therefore the source of its authority. As he wrote:

> The portrait of the king that the king contemplates offers him the icon of the absolute monarch that he desires to be, to the point of recognizing and identifying himself through and in it at the very moment when the referent of the portrait absents himself from it. The king is only truly king, that is, monarch, in images. They are his real presence. A belief in the effectiveness and operativeness of his iconic signs is obligatory, or else the monarch is emptied of all his substance through lack of transubstantiation, and only simulacrum is left; but, inversely, because his signs

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are the royal reality, the being and substance of the prince, this belief is necessarily demanded by the signs themselves; his flaw is at once heresy and sacrilege, error and crime. 168

By becoming real presence as king only as image, Marin argued, the portrait of the absolute monarch incarnated itself the power of the sovereign as mere imaginary (as a product of image). As Marin described, this transposition from the body of the monarch to the monarch as image established the three bodies of the body of the sovereign. As Marin wrote:

The body of the king is thus visible in three senses: as sacramental body it is visibly really present in the visual and written currencies; as historical body it is visible as represented, absence become presence again in “image”; as political body it is visible as symbolic function signified in its name, right and law. And the tension that could be historically described and analyzed between the name of the living king—the seal of law- and the effigy of the dead king displayed in his representation—the majesty of royal dignity- the portrait of the king as absolute monarch resolves this tension in its triple dimension, at once, presence “imaginary” representation, and symbolic name. 169

Echoing Marin’s description of the iconic status (“the real presence”) of the portrait of the king as the portrait of power (as his real body), Saura’s systematic monstrifications of Phillip II in series transformed the emblematic image of the monarch into a melancholic allegory—as images without original. In disdaining the grandiloquence of the ruler’s baroque portrait, Saura’s Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II series charicaturized the solemnity of Spanish royal portraiture while rendering the monstrosity of sovereign power.

Following Marin’s analysis on the image of the king as the body of the monarch, Saura’s Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II testified the three iterations of the portrait of the monarch described by Marin in order to reveal its condition as mere images, that is, as allegories. In doing so, Saura’s allegorical portraits of the Spanish monarch revealed the horror of modern history as

169 Marin, Portrait of the King, op. cit. p. 13
pure repetition while visually collapsing the dramatism and solemnity of the Spanish pictorial tradition under Spanish dictorial present.  

As painter Antoni Tàpies wrote regarding Saura’s portraits of Philip II, they portrayed the latent menace of political absolutism:

Some of us, who do not believe that there are so many separations, *ad usum conservatori*, between the world of God and Caesar, we appreciate the fact that Saura does not leave out from metaphysics and from the problematic of horror his sadomasochistic images of the crucifixion; his dribbling masses –somewhere between the menace and the alienation- and finally the visual nightmare of the portrait of Phillip II with moustache that remind us so much of Colonel Tejero.

As Tàpies noted, in reawakening the terrifying specters of absolutist power in Spanish history, from Philip II to Colonel Tejero (as discussed in chapter 3), Saura’s monstrous and grotesque sovereigns reveal their nature as specters of an Imperialist ideology that haunts Spanish modern history.

In 1952, Francoist cultural deputy Joaquín Ruíz Giménez had argued for the spiritual and artistic destiny of Spanish nation. As he wrote: “If we access God thorugh our Empire, as our legend says, let’s walk the paths of the Holy Spirit towards the single Empire of Truth, Good and the beauty.” Ruiz Giménez’s words summarized the ideological pretenses of the Franco Regime in its persistent appropriation of the baroque as an ideological rhetoric enforcing Franco’s delirious religious and political destiny.

In systematically transforming significant works of the pictorial tradition into monstrous emblems, Saura’s morphologic and symbolic monstrifications of Phillip II, as the emblem of the

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171 “A quienes no creemos que existan muchas separaciones, ad usum conservatori, entre el mundo de Dios y el del César, nos parece bien que Saura no excluya de la metafísica ni la problemática del terror en sus imágenes sadomasoquistas de la crucifixión, ni la de las masas babeantes –entre amenazadoras y alienadas-, ni la pesadilla de un posible retrato evocador de Felipe II con bigotes a lo teniente coronel tejero.” See Antonio Tàpies, *Fisicameta Sauriana* in *Antonio Saura, Figura y Fondo*, op. cit. p. 140.
Spanish Empire and Catholic Counter-Reformation, rendered profane the Francoist correlation of Imperial-Baroque. In doing so, Saura’s monstrous portraits of the monarch disclosed the latent presence of Spanish Black Legend and the prosaic and instrumental confiscation of the Spanish early-modern history and artistic legacy by Franco.

1.4. The Crisis of Informalismo and Saura’s Abandonment of Painting

As this chapter examined, Saura’s systematic teratology of the monstrous body in thematic pictorial series (Imaginary Portraits of Brigitte Bardot, Multitudes, Crucifixions, and Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II) displayed a set of allegories of the body in pain while also establishing his position as a leading artist in the renewal of Spanish avant-garde art of the late 1950’s and during the 1960s.

Saura’s consistent strategy of rendering the body monstrous proved very successful during the early 1960s. In 1960, Saura won the first prize at the Black and White Biennial in Lugano. In 1964, he won the Carnegie prize in Pittsburg with Great Imaginary Portrait of Goya (1964), (Fig. 1.48), in which he deformed and rendered monstrous Goya’s Half-Submerged Dog (1820) (discussed in chapter 3). During the 1960s his works were exhibited at the Staedler Gallery in Paris (1960, 1961 and 1964) and the Pierre Matisse in New York (1960, 1961, 1969).

However, as Bozal notes, by the mid 1960s, Spanish Informalismo was perceived as an artistic formula and complacent with Francoist cultural policies and it was soon abandoned as as leading movement in Spanish contemporary art.173 During the early 1960s, a new generation of artists such as Estampa Popular, Equipo Crónica, and Eduardo Arroyo rejected Informalismo and shifted artistic gears towards a more direct implication with the new social, cultural, and political context.174 As Spanish critic José Hierro wrote, Spanish art in the early 1960’s was

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“eager for reality.”\textsuperscript{175} Contrary to the expressive gestures and existential marks of the Informalist generation, these younger Spanish artists adopted realistic figuration as a critical strategy for intervention in their own political and social context. Very much like \textit{Pop Art} and \textit{Nouvelle Figuration}, Spanish critical realism deployed new visual languages and artistic strategies as a mode of intervention in the cultural, social, and political realities of the present.

In summer 1965, Saura destroyed over a hundred canvases in his studio in Cuenca and moved to Paris. In 1967, Saura abandoned temporarily the practice of easel painting for over a decade. As explored in chapter 2, Saura’s graphic works substituted the solemnity of the tortured body of his pictorial series for a more irreverent approach to the monstrous body as grotesque and humorous. As next chapter examines, Saura’s graphic works explored the grotesque and humorous aspects of the monstrous body, while allegorizing the social and political aspects of Spanish society under Francoism during the 1960s and 1970s.

\textsuperscript{175} Jose Hierro, \textit{Ya Madrid}, 21 January 1963, quoted in Calvo Serraller, \textit{Medio Siglo de Arte Español}, op. cit.
Chapter 2: The Monstrous Body as Humorous and Grotesque (1962-1978)

Chapter Abstract

During the early 1960s, Saura created a set of series of works on paper in which he manipulated mass media imagery while experimenting with the erotic, irreverent, and grotesque aspects of the monstrous body. In using different compositional techniques such as collage, montage, and visual over-inscriptions, Saura juxtaposed diverging visual archives (vernacular imagery, photographs, erotic magazines, comic strips and touristic postcards) to works of the modern Spanish tradition. As this chapter examines, Saura’s monstrifications in his graphic works offer a self-mockery of his pictorial series while functioning as an allegorical vehicle of the monstrous body as a sarcastic and humorous platform for commenting Spanish social and political circumstance during the mid 1960s and 1970s.

2.1. Saura’s Personal Alegories in the 1960s: The Grotesque and Humorous Body

In *My superpowers will throw a Supercatastrophe* (Narration), (1963), Antonio Saura constructed a fractured visual story fictionalizing the invasion of formless creatures sent by economic superpowers to destroy the earth. Saura’s interrupted sequence of heterogeneous images ends with a crashed body covered in flames lying on the floor (Fig. 2.1). Saura’s manipulation of quotidian imagery from mass-media visual archives (photographs, film stills and comic strips), and commercial postcards in twelve randomly arranged vignettes echoed the visual display of a comic story-board while it trivialized the optical experience of the modern viewer— who is inevitably led to a symbolic collision of significations.

Saura’s composition playfully combined different visual idioms (text-labels mass-media imagery, and cultural references) thus creating a set of striking semantic correlations. At the center of the composition Saura placed a cut out of a cartoonish television broadcaster announces the earth’s invasion of monstrous creatures to a chaotic multitude that runs in fear recalling the running of the bulls in Pamplona (San Fermin). Above it, Saura juxtaposed an image of
Superman engulfed in flames with a stiff picture of a lingerie female mannequin. Below it on the right, Saura drew a pair of exaggerated black glasses distorting Liz Taylor’s face in a reproduction of a film-still from Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s Cleopatra. As Warhol argued, Taylor’s Egyptian-look positioned her as a trending defining fashionable look of the decade.\(^{176}\) Saura’s display of the derisive expression, “WHAT!” in a text bubble seems to be responding both to the invasion of monstrous creatures within the composition, as well as to Saura’s mocking intervention over her face. Saura’s grotesque and humorous gesture unsettled the glamour of the American star-system as an industrial commodity for mass consumerism of the early 1960s.\(^{177}\)

In transforming popular American images such as Superman and Liz Taylor into grotesque bodies, Saura’s gesture revealed their status as mass-produced cultural icons while also commenting on the invasion of consumer-oriented American mass media imagery during the early 1960s.\(^{178}\) Unlike Warhol’s use of the artistically branded commercial icons — as in Superman (1961), and Silver Liz (1963), Saura’s Narration series subsumed the status celebrity-icon as a part of his strategic iconography of the monstrous body. (Fig. 2.1 & 2.3) Both playful and self-reflective, Saura’s monstrifications dialogued with the detached aesthetics of American Pop Art while evoking the decontextualized montages of French Nouvelle Figuration. Saura’s Narration series expanded his career-long signature iconography of the monstrous body while opening humorous and ludic avenues for his artistic self-inquiry.

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\(^{176}\) “The girls that summer in Brooklyn looked really great. It was the summer of the Liz-Taylor-in-Cleopatra-look-long straight, dark, shiny hair with bangs and Egyptian looking eye make up…. It was a great summer.” In *Andy Warhol in POPism: the Warhol’s 60s*, Pat Hackett, New York, Hartcourt and Brace Jovanovich, 1980, pp. 28-29.

\(^{177}\) As early as 1946 Eric Johnson, President of the American Motion Picture Producers Association, writes: “It is no exaggeration to say that the modern picture industry sets the styles for half the world. There is not one of us who isn’t aware that the motion picture is the most powerful medium for influencing of people that man has ever built… We can set new styles of living and the doctrine of production must be made completely popular.” Eric Johnson, Utopia is Production, Screen Actor 14, April 1946. Quoted in Lary May *The Politics of Consumption* in Serge Gilbaut, *Reconstructing Modernism, Art in New York, Paris and Montreal, 1945-1964*, Cambridge, MIT, 1990, p. 333.

Saura’s fragmentation of the narrative and deformation of the bodies within the vignettes equated the impossibility of a coherent reading that ends, inevitably, on a tragic catastrophe. In clashing vernacular imagery and high cultural references in a fractured narrative structure, Saura’s composition blurred the borders of the art gallery, the comic strip, the teenager nostalgic memorabilia, and the iconographic arsenal of the pop artist. Much like Frankenstein’s monstrous gesture of constructing a body out of fragments of heterogeneous bodies, Saura’s graphic series compiled disparate archives of vernacular images and paper media in which he disclosed a set of different semiotic registers, text, drawings, comic strips and cinematic sequences. As discussed below, Saura’s lack of a fixed narrative order and the disruptive nature of the individual scenes creates a visual juxtaposition of high and low cultural references providing a chaotic set of personal and social symbols. Moreover, Saura’s recurrent monstrification of mass-culture artifacts in his graphic series showed the crushing demands of the social and political anxieties under Francoist Spain while revealing Spanish cultural discontinuities during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Challenging conventional understanding of mass media images as secondary and derivative, Roland Barthes interpreted popular imagery as modern myths which conveyed a “third meaning” by means of which decode and interpret modern ideological constructs.179 According to Barthes, vernacular imagery (household magazines, visual advertisements, postcards, and film stills) embodies complex semiological systems heavily charged with ideological content that offered privileged political sites for cultural and social criticism. As Benjamin Buchloh argues, Barthes’s analysis of popular mass-media archives as modern mythologies conjured Walter Benjamin’s interpretation of allegory as a fragmentary and self-reflective compositional procedure in that “Barthes’ strategy of the modern myth as a second

order of signification repeats the semiotic and linguistic devaluation of primary language by
myth and structurally follows Benjamin’s ideas on the allegorical procedure that reiterates the
devaluation of the object by the commodification.” Following Benjamin’s and Barthes’s
cultural analysis on the status of the commercial image, Saura’s series of graphic works operated
as a response to the pressing influence of Pop Art aesthetic vocabulary while acting as a site of
personal an artistic resistance against social and intellectual marginalization of the artist’s
creation under Franco’s Spain. As this chapter examines, Saura’s graphic works created a
visual dialogue with Pop Art and Nouvelle Figuration while at the same time enhancing his
career-long strategy of transforming iconic images of the Spanish modern tradition, (in particular
Goya). Furthermore, Saura’s monstrifications of iconic works during the 1960s and 1970s,
functioned a heterogeneous and fractured corpus of images grotesque bodies providing a set of
personal allegories.

Saura’s Grotesque and the End of Spanish Informalism

Saura’s recurrent manipulation of mass-media imagery was also responding to the legacy
of European art of the late 1950s. From the mid 1950s European artists such as Mimmo Rotella,
Richard Hamilton, and Eduardo Paolozzi had used mass-media commercial imagery (such as cut outs of pin up girls, commercial banners, film stills, photographs, and vernacular images from household magazines) and mass-produced visual techniques (such as decoupage, montage and assemblage) deploying a social criticism on American mass consumer culture. Richard Hamilton’s *Just what it is that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?* (1956)

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epitomized the use of popular imagery as critical vehicle for social commentary. Hamilton’s saturation of magazine cutouts of commercial images accumulated in a middleclass living-room transformed the domestic space into a commercial space thus ultimately blurring the boundaries between the household and the commercial store (Fig. 2.11). Through the visual experimentation with media techniques such as montage, collage and random assemblage of dramatically detached iconic commercial images, Hamilton’s composition testified the dystopic occupation of the domestic space as a department store as well as critiquing the invasion of mass-consumerism of the late 1950s—hence prefiguring the critical imagery of Pop Art and Nouvelle Figuration of the mid 1960s against mass consumerism. Echoing Hamilton’s random accumulation of decontextualized imagery, Saura’s montage of iconic heterogeneous images, entitled a commentary on the enormous changes that were sweeping Spanish society from the mid 1960s to the early 1970s.

Saura’s consistent strategy at monsstrificating popular images overlapped two levels of signification. First, it reinforced his career-long visual motif of the monstrous body. Secondly, the playful juxtaposition of amputated and mutilated bodies in thematic series disclosed a private set of personal memorabilia allegorizing his personal and social anxieties under Spanish Franco of the 1960s. As I examine, Saura’s recurrent monstrification of borrowed internationally iconic pop imagery as grotesque bodies also operated as a political gesture.

As Robert Storr has pointed out, the grotesque body is essentially political. As he argues, the grotesque image has the “protean capacity” of provoking disquiet, thus offering a continual space of visual resistance.\textsuperscript{184} As he describes, the grotesque acts as a “full-fledged, multi-layered counter tradition, a powerful current that continuously stirs calmer waters, sometimes redirecting

their flow.

Storr’s political reading of the grotesque image as a constant counter-tradition, allows for an interpretation of Saura’s recurrent display of monstrous and grotesque bodies during the 1960s and early 1970s operating as his own counter-tradition. Functioning as satiric self-interpretations of his artistic practice, Saura’s grotesque compositions in his graphic works provided a critical examination of his pervasive strategy of the monstrous body while enacting an allegorical counter-reading of the lack of flux of modern Spanish tradition. Didi Semin described Saura’s graphic series of the 1960s provided a palimpsest of Saura’s artistic practice.

Saura’s graphic series were also responding to the new aesthetic attitudes and social sensibilities in Spanish art of the 1960s. By the early 1960s, Spanish young artists rejected the autographic mark and the authorial presence of *Informalismo* as highly institutionalized and politically regressive and experimented instead with industrial techniques that offered a set of critical figuration that displayed meta-critical compositions. Spanish artists such as Eduardo Arroyo, and artist collectives *Equipo Crónica*, *Equipo Realidad*, and *Estampa Popular* embraced the industrial visual techniques such as montage, *decoupage*, and the juxtaposition of heterogeneous visual archives (mainly film-stills, commercial imagery, and comic books) of narrative figuration aiming for a critical figuration as a means for political agitation.

Evaluating the works of these younger artists a new generation of Spanish art critics such as Valeriano Bozal, Moreno Galván, Aguilera Cerni, and Tomás Llorens criticized the reactionary

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187 “la figuration narrative, loin d’être une pure reaction à une secousse externe, va d’abord puiser ses racines dans le constante la décadence maniériste des vocabularies formalistes de l’apres-guerre et le refus d’un certain “art pour l’art” sans portée intellectuelle, avant d’être une réflexion sur les nouvelles conditions d’une reemergence possible de l’image à partir des experiences menées précédemment par le surréalisme, Cobra et les divers réalismes. La rupture avec ces traditions picturales interviendra ensuite, à l’intérieur d’un cadre plus large donné à la fois par le bouleversement de l’univers visuel contemporain et notamment la présence croissante de la photographie, du cinema ou de la publicité dans l’imaginaire des années soixante et par la nouvelle donne artistique internationale constituée par l’arrivée en Europe des figurations anglo-américaines.” Jean-Paul Ameline in “Aux Sources de la Figuration Narrative”, in *Figuration Narrative, Paris 1960-1972*, op. cit. p. 17.
qualities of *Informalismo* as politically inefficient.\(^{188}\) Coming from Marxist perspectives, this new generation art critics rejected the self-expressive stroke of the previous generation as politically inefficient arguing instead for narrative figuration as a direct political and social engagement —what critic José Hierro called “an eager for reality.”\(^{189}\)

Moreno Galván’s, *Art’s Self-Criticism (Autocrítica de Arte)* (1965) and Aguilera Cerni’s *Panorama of Spanish new art (Panorama del arte nuevo español)* (1966) championed critical figuration as a form of politically engaged realism and they proposed instead new engagements with the immediate socio-political reality.\(^{190}\) Pepe Karmel offers a similar diagnosis on the complex and disputed legacy of American Abstract Expressionism in American artists of the 1960s by describing the ambiguous situation of new modern artists in relation to the immediate previous generation. As he explained:

> De Kooning and Pollock had radically redefined what it meant to be a modern artist. To reject their innovations was to move backward. But to follow in their footsteps was to risk becoming a mere imitator, not an innovator. It was only by rebelling against the formal and ethical values of Abstract Expressionism that the next generation of artists could establish their own individuality (even if this individuality took the form of a make-believe impersonality).\(^{191}\)

Thus, during the economic growth of Francoist Spain of the 1960s (Spanish Desarrollismo), and under the omnipresent shadow of moral and cultural Francoist-Catholic censorship, Saura’s ludic and grotesque *monstrification* of vernacular mass-media imagery was nonetheless effective in dialoguing with the new stylistic challenges of the 1960s (mainly *Pop Art*, and *Nouvelle Figuration*). As discussed below, Saura’s graphic series provided a set of allegorical platforms

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through which he explored his personal doubts and uncertainties. Indeed, during the dramatic
cultural and political resignification of the of Francoist Spain of the mid 1960s (especially with
the state-celebration of the “25 years of peace)” and later during the mid 1970s, Saura’s
monstrifications of popular physiognomies deployed a personal commentary on Spanish political
circumstance as a grotesque body while acting as a personal seismographer revealing his
intimate social anxieties towards anachronistic authoritarian regime.

2.2. Graphic Series (1960-1968)

2.2.1. *Cocktail Party* and the *Temptations of Saint Anthony*: The Portrait of the Collective
Body as Grotesque

In the early 1960 Saura created a series of graphic works, *Cocktail Party* series (1960-
1970), in which he rendered the collective body as grotesque. In exploring the communal body
as irreverent Saura’s *Cocktail Party series* infantilized the collective body. Saura’s chaotic
arrangement of buffoonish bodies and distinct compositional techniques and visual languages
such as children drawings, strident colors, and pencil writing undermined the collective portrait
while unsettling the social body. As he explained, these set of works aspired to represent “the
Western degeneration of the orgiastic and primitive party that allows the individual to participate
in the collective life.”

In *Cocktail Party* (1960,) Saura disjointed the collective body as a grotesque and
monstrous multitude. By disseminating and reassembling a collage-portrait of monstrous-like
creatures in the same visual space, Saura echoed the processes of accumulation and
reorganization of the pictorial space (Fig. 2.4. Saura’s rendering of the collective body as
monstrous was also in dialogue with his pictorial thematic series of *Multitudes* (discussed in

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192 “Ilustración de esta degeneración occidental de la fiesta orgiástica primitiva que permite al individuo participar
en la vida colectiva tribu” A. Saura, “Cocktail Party” *Notebook*, op. cit. p. 94
chapter 1). Next to the amateurish-grotesque bodies, Saura placed penciled written texts in French. Saura’s use of handwriting as calligraphic signs resonated with the influential legacy of *peinture-poesie* of Surrealism while also recalling the visual language of the comic books that he read effusively during his adolescent confinement in bed (as discussed in the Introduction).

Saura’s *Cocktail Party* (1961) also presented a chaotic social collective portrait. In it Saura created a disparate array of spermatozoid bodies rendered in strident colors conveyed a dramatic contrast with the sober black and white color palette of his pictorial series (Fig. 2.5). Unlike the tortured and agonized body in his pictorial series *Crucifixions* and *Imaginary Portraits of Brigitte Bardot* (discussed in chapter 1), Saura’s *Cocktail party* explored the colorful and chaotic disposition of comic strips and popular stamps as they began to circulate massively in early 1960s Spain.

In *Cocktail Party* (1962), Saura’s childlike features of the grotesque and infantile bodies provided a comically derision of group portraiture and a semantic sarcasm on social reunions (Fig. 2.6). Saura’s random accumulation of figures in the same visual space recalled the iconography of Spanish postwar children’s encyclopedic books such as *Lessons of things* (Lecciones de cosas) and *Almanac Chicos* (Almanaque Chicos)—which Saura read recurrently as a teenager while recovering in bed. In experimenting with children’s compositional techniques such as accumulation, cutouts and drawings over paper reproductions, Saura’s *Cocktail Party* series functioned as grotesque rendering of the social portrait as much as visual archival of childhood memorabilia.

Similar to the infantilized rendering of the collective body in *Cocktail Party* series, in *Temptations of Saint Anthony* series Saura explored the chaotic and claustrophobic optical arrangements of monstrous bodies as instances of artistic self-actualization and as parodying
allegories of his personal anxieties. In playfully self-mocking himself with the title of the series, Saura’s compositions in the series juxtaposed erotic imagery while experimenting with the obsessive manipulation of the female body. As he wrote, these series represented the possibility of experimenting with the female body as monstrous and as a sort of personal seismographer:

The multiple integration of multiple female bodies into a singular and unifying snake; the trembling of an anxious seismographer; the superimposition of beauties and the disseminative tentacle into a visual fragmentation of a single monstrous body that constructs the work. The monster is not longer tempted but pleased. It reflects more the author that the saint. 193

In *Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1963), Saura experimented with the mutilation of erotic imagery by depicting a claustrophobic accumulation of naked female bodies that he visually cancelled with a series of undulating fragile black thin ink lines (Fig. 2.7). Saura’s repetitive deployment of the female naked body and its visual cancellation as a visual technique provided an intimate, yet public, introspection on his most private and obsessive visual motifs. As he explained, “by means of collage it was the unique manner for me of possessing hundreds of women at the same time; although only by imagination.” 194

In *Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1963), Saura explored the process of visual claustrophobia while expanding his recurrent gesture in fragmenting and mutilating cutouts of female bodies from color erotic magazines (Fig. 2.8). Saura’s purposeful child-like depiction of the female body as an amputated mass-produced fetish contrasted with the sobriety of the teratology of the desired body that he displayed in *Imaginary Portraits of Brigitte Bardot* pictorial series (as discussed in chapter 1). Whereas in his canvases Bardot’s eroticism was filtered and monstrified by physical act of painting (and thus through his own boy) Saura’s

193 “La integración de los múltiples cuerpos femeniles en la serpiente unificadora, el temblor del sismógrafo desquiciado, la superposición de bellezas y la proliferante fragmentación tentacular acaba por crear un solo monstruo disperso que es la obra entera. El monstruo ya no es tentado, sino complacido, reflejando al propio autor más que a su santo.” A. Saura, “Tentaciones de San Antonio”, *Notebook*, op. cit. p. 94.
manipulation of colored reproduced photographs offered an indirect confrontation with the menacing eroticism of the naked female body. Reappearing as a recurrent visual motif across his artistic career, Saura’s obsessive display of amputated female naked bodies in paper reproductions offered sarcastic commentaries on the repetitive condition of his visual obsessions while creating an introspective gaze towards his previous iconography.

Humorously recalling the Christian legend of Saint Anthony’s heroic resistance to the devil’s temptations, Saura’s claustrophobic accumulations of naked female bodies playfully mocked his artistic vocabulary while parodying his own sexual desire as a futile attempt—hence equating the Saint’s aesthetic resistance to temptation with his hyperbolic eroticized artistic practice.

Visual accumulations of bodies in claustrophobic images were consistent in works from European artists of the early 1960s such as in Errò’s work. As Saura described Errò’s compositions of the early 1960s displayed the claustrophobic expansion of the body creating sarcastic compositions and political commentaries on the excessive consumerism of the 1960s. As Saura reasoned in “The world as a grand collage” (“Del mundo considerado como un gran collage”) (1991), Errò’s satirical and saturated works offered a ferocious commentary on the polymorphous and synchronic nature of the modern society and ultimately a “polyfocus set of moral parables”. As he argued: “By means of this dispersion of centers, in the constant dissemination and in the respect towards single identity, through the visual evidence and the metaphor, Errò’s complicit gesture and a satisfactory challenges, postulate the most ludicious and ferocious commentary of our time.”

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For French critic Jean-Paul Amilane, Errò’s compositions enacted the fascinating of accumulations as an spectacle of a grotesque massacre. As Amilane explained:

The spectacle of these monstrous accumulations is not innocent. Beyond the obvious derision and the playful massacre, Errò’s works function as a machine that abolishes the hierarchy between different interpretations. It destroys every aura of the work of art as a means to render the image detached from its original context and showing its subversive violence and its emerging fascination.196

Similar to Amilane’s description of Errò’s figurative narration as both subversive and playful, Saura’s claustrophobic accumulations of mutilated naked female bodies offered at once a grotesque and tragic visual experience. Rather than deploying a sober and dramatic teratology of the torture body as he had attempted in his pictorial series of the early 1960s, Saura’s *Cocktail Party* and *The Temptation of Saint Anthony series* embodied a sarcastic and humorous attitude towards the grotesque body while allegorizing his artistic vocabulary. At times self-depreciative and recurrently sarcastic, Saura’s graphic series functioned as derisive social commentaries on the excessive repression of Spain and ultimately, as a humorous allegories of his artistic practice.

**2.2.2. Narrations (1961-1964)**

From 1961 to 1964, Saura created a series of graphic compositions, *Narrations*, in which he fictionalized with the invasion of formless and monstrous creatures menacing to destroy the world. Saura’s *Narrations series* expanded his career-long iconography of the monstrous body by showing the monstrous as a grotesque body while revealing a set of allegorical personal emblems. As he explained, *Narrations series* operated as nostalgic memories of his readings of comics in his

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childhood recovering in bed as well as moral parables of the monstrous invader as a docile creature.

As Saura wrote:

My interest in comics since my childhood made possible this series of Narrations. It was a long, slow and elaborated process. I constructed it using printed images that I transformed in collages and superpositions that I arranged following narrative systems relying mostly in chance […] For the most part, I composed this series departing from very basic moral parables based in the monstrous invader in which the action is resolved in a domestic scene. Very rarely the monsters succeed. 197

In appropriating and also monstirying vernacular imagery (American comics-strips, erotic magazines, touristic postcards, and film stills from series B movies) Saura’s Narrations provided a set of recurrent visual motifs and personal emblems as a means of responding to the invasion of commercial imagery in the early 1960s, and as part of his personal iconographic universe of the monstrous body.

In I will send my superpowers to the earth (1961), Saura manipulated a touristic postcard of Venice’s Saint Mark Square that is invaded by a monstrous and grotesque body (Fig.2.9). Across the different scenes of the composition Saura juxtaposed cut outs from erotic magazines, and accumulated commercial photographs by drawing over them. Saura’s random visual arrangement of visual languages in individual vignettes mixed high and low cultural references while constructing a discontinuous and contradictory visual narrative of the invasion of monstrous creature that ultimately collapses in a tragic end. Saura’s strategic manipulation of mass-media references conjured the idea of Saura as a visual demiurge operating as a capricious and cruel deus-ex-machina who knows the inevitable catastrophe. Instead of a coherent visual narration with a sequential progression of information like in a regular comic strip, Saura’s Narration presented a set of failed

197 “El interés mantenido desde la infancia por los comics hizo posible esta serie de narraciones de elaborada y lenta realización, construidas en gran parte con imágenes impresas transformadas en collage y la superposición y luego ordenadas bajo sistemas narrativos donde el azar del confrontamiento azaroso no queda excluido[…]La mayor parte de esta serie fue realizada a partir de parabolas morales, muy simples, basadas en el clásico esquema del monstruo invasor y proliferante, resolviéndose las breves secuencias narrativas en el proceso de una domesticación, raramente en el triunfo o en la derrota de la injertada anomalía.” A. Saura, “Narraciones”, Notebook, op. cit. p. 113.
encounters with the monstrous creature that ultimately collapse. Saura’s cross-tracking multiplicity of random visual archives and semantic associations allegorized the experience of the viewer as the reader of the composition while also exposing a set of his most intimate memorabilia: female sexuality, the superhero, and Goya’s dog. Borrowing Rosalind Krauss reading of Rauschenberg’s *Combines* as a visual structure of his psychic process, I understand Saura’s *Narrations* as visualizing Saura’s intimate mythology and as a tentative space of cultural experimentation that is structured as a *mise-en-scène* of his psychic process.  

In *Narration* (1962), Saura combined American comics-strips iconic imagery with a set of erotic images of female bodies in the private environment of the home (Fig. 2.10). This dramatic juxtaposition of heterogeneous visual archives created a grotesque composition that culminates in a final vignette in which a monstrous-like creature with polymorphous and menacing eyes stares at the viewer. Saura’s monstrous and formless creatures attacking middle-class households invoked Cold War paranoiac American films of the mid 1950s such as *The Blob*, *The War of Worlds*, and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. In inscribing the American Cold-War neurotic atmosphere into the Spanish daily circumstance, Saura’s *Narration* series were pointing to the dramatic disjuncture between both political and artistic contexts in which Spain was dominated by a repressive and censhoring autarchic regime.

In *The New Creature will destroy the Earth* (1964), Saura constructed a fragmented narrative of thirteen scenes juxtaposing vernacular imagery with heterogeneous high and low artistic references that both conjured and mocked his previous artistic vocabulary (Fig. 2.12). In

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198 As Rosalind Krauss wrote on Rauschenberg works of the 1960s, Rauschenberg’s personal mythologies articulated a semantic mental space: “For the psyche, structure like a language, also seems to move from the specific (as in the daily residue from which dream images are in part fabricated) to the general (the dream highly repetitive “kernel”), such that the further one ‘descends’ into the psychic depths of an individual, the more rarified and the more classifiable the signs become” Rosalind Krauss, “Perpetual Inventory”, *October* vol. 88, Spring 1999, pp-86-116, p.100.
the first vignette Saura depicted a monstrous face in which the mouth is constructed out of an erotic photograph of a lingerie female body. Saura’s monstrous creature recalled the scopophilic attitude of of Dalí’s bee in the opening scene of Luis Buñuel’s film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). Saura’s insect-like arms also echoed Saura’s *Bailadora* (Flamenco Dancer, 1956) —in which Saura had distorted the body of a Flamenco dancer in the act of dancing (discussed in chapter 1). In the following vignette Saura displayed a formless creature on the surface of a waved sea. The creature’s formal disposition as a bodiless head suspended in-between two pictorial spaces resembled the iconography of Goya’s *Half-Submerged Dog* (1820) — that Saura invoked consistently across his artistic career (as discussed in chapter 3). Within the vignettes Saura deployed grotesque renderings of the female naked body, Superman and the monstrous dogs.

These have been recurrent pictorial motifs in his artistic career. In this constant repetition of a set of recurrent images within the series, Saura’s *Narrations* constructed an allegorical commentary on the iconic status of the commercial image while also enacting an introspection of his artistic practice.

As Pepe Karmel argued, detaching from the use of the expressive brushstroke as an existential trace, comic imagery in the early 1960s offered artists an archive of personal memories and a market-oriented objective-commercial style. As he wrote, “The artist’s of the 1950s and early 1960s, however, used collage to create an art of memory, juxtaposing texts and images that appeared to have important associations for the artist, even if they remained intentionally cryptic to the general public.”

Karmel’s diagnosis holds true both for Pop artists such as Hammitlon, Warhol and Litchenstein, as well as for Rauschenberg’s and Jasper Johns’s compositions in which the individual mark of the previous generation operated indistinctly from the branding gesture of industrial commercial imagery. This very tension between the legacy of the expressive stroke of

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199 See Pepe Karmel, “Art Between Era”, in *New York Cool*, op. cit. p. 34.
Abstract Expressionism and the iconicity of Pop Art reached its peak in Western Europe in 1964 with Rauschenberg’s first prize at the Venice Biennial.

American Pop Art’s arrival in Western Europe was nonetheless controversial. For several European critics American Pop Art implemented the invasion of American mass-consumption capitalism and furthermore, it was seen as a displacement of a geo-political interest moving from Paris to the U.S.A. Italy’s ABC journal reported Rauschenberg’s success at the Biennial as “Everything is Lost, Even a Sense of Shame.” On June 15, 1964, the France Observateur published an editorial cartoon depicting Superman flying away St Mark’s square with a bag of 100,000 $, — hence equating Rauschenberg’s main prize at the Biennial as the symbol of US cultural and economic supremacy (Fig. 2.13). French art critic Pierre Cabanne summarized the reaction of most European critics to American Pop Art in his article: “America proclaims the end of the French school and throws pop art in order to colonize Europe.” Cabanne’s derision of American Pop art was symptomatic of the disgust among European critics against the invasive new American formal language.200

As Laurie J. Monahan has argued, this massive display of American Pop Art in Europe in the early 1960s was strategically planned. As she explains, the American exhibition of contemporary art at the 1964 Biennial was a product of deliberate cultural and ideological engineering. As she writes: “Americans were challenging the French artistic supremacy at the moment when France was contesting American political hegemony in Europe.”201 For her, the cultural and artistic supremacy of American contemporary art at the Biennial was symptomatic of a cultural shift in political and artistic forces during the second half of the century.

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Although highly mediated by religious censorship and political control, American Pop Art was also exhibited in Spain— influencing Spanish artists of the mid 1960s who were exposed then to new expressive techniques and the critical features of commercial imagery. In 1964, the American Embassy in Madrid showed the exhibition, *American Art Now* (Arté Americano Actual), exhibiting works from the Johnson Collection, which included artworks by Warhol, Johns, and Rauschenberg.\(^{202}\) Like Rauschenberg’s, Saura’s works experimented with the appropriation and confiscation of mass-media imagery while examining the limits of the gestural stroke as a stylistic signature. Their use of montage along with autobiographic marks conflated the frugality of personal testimony and the chaotic experience of the urban modern life, thus offering a palimpsest of previous artistic legacies while embodying the attitude of an allegorist of the modern experience. As in Rauschenberg’s multi-media compositions, Saura’s *Narrations* explored his personal memorabilia with his personal vocabulary of the self-expressive agitated gestures as a consistent visual strategy. And as such, Saura’s graphic series functioned at once as a social mockery, and as a personal commentary on the reification of the body under industrial consumerism.

In Fall 1964, soon after Rauschenberg’s first prize at the Venice Biennial and concurrent with the show at the American Embassy in Madrid, French critic François Gassiot-Talabot curated the show *Mythologies Quotidiennes* at the Musée de la Ville de Paris. This show was the date of birth of *Nouvelle Figuration*. Quoting Barthes’ 1959 seminal collection of essays, *Mythologies*, for Gassiot-Talabot *Nouvelle Figuration* visualized the reconciliation of the antithesis between painting and mass media imagery as a means for political agitation.\(^{203}\) For Saura, *Nouvelle Figuration*


\(^{203}\) See Jean-Paul Amelaine, op. cit. p. 22. Jean-Paul Amelie has described narrative figuration as imitating the visual mechanisms of cinema: “On le voit, la figuration narrative vient de déborder son cadre pictural d’origine. S’il, à un premier stade, c’est la fréquentation des autres languages graphiques (bande dessinée, dessin d’humor, affiche publicitaire, photographie) qui a encouragé l’artiste à modifier son langage pictural, dans un deuxième temps, c’est désormais vers le récit imagé, vers le poème à pictigrammes, vers l’analyse sémantique de la représentation, vers sa
functioned both as an art for political commentary while critically distancing from the market success of American *Pop Art*.

Saura’s *Narration series* functioned both as a parodic and sarcastic commentary on the invasive nature of *Pop Art* imagery, and as a private revision of his own pictorial language. In self-evaluating yet mocking his previous compositional strategies of the tortured body and his pictorial motifs (the female body and Goya’s dog as monstrous), Saura’s consistent gesture of transforming a limited number of visual motifs into monstrous bodies deployed a set of personal broken emblems. Saura’s consistent strategy of appropriating visual motifs and rendering monstrous bodies included *Superman* as a monstrous icon, the obsessive repetition in the use of female breasts as a menacing symbol of visual castration and personal anxieties, and the symbolic dimension of *Veronica* as the creator of the modern icon. By appearing recurrently in the vignettes within the series, the wounded superhero, the naked female body, the amputated breasts, and the invasive monstrous creature incarnated prominent visual motifs in the series, while acting as personal emblems.

**Superman**

The image of *Superman* as a monstrous body appeared recurrently in different vignettes within the *Narration series*. For Saura, the image of Superman as a monstrous body operated as an allegorical emblem of his personal transition from adolescent into childhood,

> A single possible hero, drawn always in color. The one who was born in Crypton and who invariably substitutes complex and solid loves: the famous space traveler, the seducer of Ondina, who was in the distance. And the famous maltese. A distanced temptation from puberty to maturity.\(^{204}\)

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\(^{204}\) “Un solo héroe posible, siempre en color, aquel que naciendo en Crypton sustituye invariablemente otros amores más firmes y complejos: al famoso viajero del espacio, seductor de Ondina, varado en la lejanía, y al famoso maltés, tentación de la adolescencia de la madurez.” Antonio Saura, “Narraciones”, *Notebook*, op. cit. p. 113.
Moreover, Saura’s monstrifications of Superman dialogued with the invasive visual idiom of Pop Art as a commercial culture, while also responding to the alliance of Francoism and consumer capitalism during the 1960s.

In *A New Creature will destroy the Earth* Saura assembled a cutout of the iconic postwar American superhero at the center of the composition as destroying a womanly monster-creature with laser rays above a group of amazed journalists who are documenting the event. On another vignette, Saura situated a cutout of a gorilla dressed as *Superman* smashing a formless creature on the deck of a luxury yacht. Saura displaced the U.S. flag on the corner of the composition suggests a derision of the excessive American nationalism during the Cold War that Superman symbolizes (Fig. 2.12). In monstrifying the iconicity of the American superhero, Saura’s monstrous Superman invoked a melancholic emblem Saura’s teenager memories reading American superheroes comic strips while physically constrained as a teenager in bed recovering from bone tuberculosis (as discussed in the introduction). In 1964 a collection of re-edited volumes of *Superman* and *Flash-Gordon’s* comic strips were re-published in Spain and revived Saura’s interest in this iconic body of his adolescence. The disjointed body of the American superhero functioned for Saura as a visual reminder of his physical and emotional condition during his adolescent illness and as a caricature of the social cult by many Spaniards of Franco as a moral and military Caudillo.

In 1964, concurrent with the celebrations of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Franco’s military victory in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Franco’s political authorities screened the hagiographic documentary *Franco, That Man* (*Franco, Ese Hombre*). Directed by José Luis Sánchez de Heredia, the panegyric film celebrated Franco as “a spiritual sentinel of the West” and commemorated the image of the dictator as a heroic savior of Spain. As Paul Preston
explained, “The picture it presented was of a hero who saved a country in chaos from the hordes of Communism, then saved it again from the hordes of Nazism, and later became the benevolent father of his people.”

Stanley Payne also commented on the film’s delirious portrayal of Franco’s military and spiritual leadership. As he described, “the film “turned out to be the most effective celluloid celebration of the Caudillo and something of a hit in Spanish movie houses when it came out in the winter of 1964-1965. With the economy growing rapidly, the regime seemed stronger than ever and ready to continue for many years.”

In this context of increasingly militarization of Western countries and the euphoric celebration of Franco by the Spanish state, Saura’s deformation of Superman symbolized the invasive commercial and political forces of the U.S. while also suggested an indirect commentary on the dangers of the Spanish military support to the U.S. This fear of excessive militarization of Spain was actualized in Spain in 1966 in the Palomares incident, when four unarmed hydrogen bomb were accidentally dropped off after an American B-52 crashed above the Spanish Mediterranean coast. As Stanley Payne remarked, Francoist Regime exploited this event as an opportunity for economic profit. As he wrote:

In 1964 the regime hired the publicity firm of McCann-Eriksson (which held the contracts for Coca-Cola and Old Gold cigarettes) to improve its image in the United States. The conviction that the assistance provided and the risks run on behalf of collective security were disproportionate was reinforced by the Palomares incident of January 17, 1966, in which a B-52 crashed in the Mediterranean very near the southern coast of Spain losing four unarmed hydrogen bombs, one of which was not recovered for several months.

In this context of ideological recasting of the Francoist cultural identity during the mid 1960s, Saura’s recurrent monstrifications of Superman’s iconic physiognomy embodied personal emblems of his ill adolescence while operating as melancholic allegories of the Spanish

banalization of politics during the mid 1960s. Whereas in Warhol’s compositions, Superman operated a popular icon-commodity indistinguishable from the commercial image, in Saura’s Narrations it functioned as derisive commentary on Franco’s self-appointed leadership and a critical commentary on the invasion of American capitalism. In similar terms, Branden W. Joseph described the proposed analogy between the artworld and the supermarket during the 1960s. Writing about Rauschenberg’s subversion of the iconic dimension of Pop Art he wrote, “Rather than presenting “the world as a super market”, the artwork’s opening to difference provokes a dislocation from the habitual, reified, and uniform perception of the social realm.”

Similar to Rauschenberg’s subtlety commentary on the art co-optation of American commercial imagery, Saura’s take on popular commercial image criticized Pop Art while offering an allegory on the process of intense commodification of art practice by American industry in the mid 1960s.

In the last vignette of the composition Saura depicted Superman as a broken and wounded body descending a staircase in a fractured image. Saura’s composition visually quoted Duchamp’s famous painting of 1912 “Nude descending an staircase No.2”. The wounded superhero with a fractured arm walking with a cane echoed Saura’s permanent limp on his right leg as a result of his childhood bone tuberculosis. Therefore, Superman’s fragmented and wounded body as the ending scene of the story embodied for Saura a commentary on quotidian mass-produced mythology as well as an allegory his cultural and personal circumstance. As such, Saura’s deformed and monstrified images of Superman embodied for Saura a set of personal and cultural allegories reflecting on the status of the popular icon as politically imposed

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mass-consumerism, and more profoundly, it presents a set of intimate broken emblems of his own personal circumstance.  

**Breasts**

Saura used images of female breasts recurrently in his graphic series. Fragmented, and playfully manipulated in different vignettes within the series, the presence of female breasts is pervasive in Saura’s graphic works acting at once as an obsessive visual motif and personal emblem of his intimate sexual desire. This fragmentation of the female anatomy revealed Saura’s persistent struggle in reaching a proper language with which represent female sexuality. In *Avec la superfemelle que je prepare, je dominarai le monde* (1964) Saura displayed a cutout of female breasts in the shape of a facial mask at the center of the composition. Occupying the visual and semantic dominating position in the composition, the breast-masks image stands both as fixed center of Saura’s erotic desire and as symbolic and menacing eyes of a bodiless menacing monstrous creature (Fig. 2.13).

Saura’s repetitive and manipulation of female bodies echoed his mediated encounter with cropped female bodies in massive photographic reproductions in ladies magazines that he experienced across the years as an adolescent reader in bed. Saura’s use of the female breast as a recurrent visual subject and as a semantic mask is consistent throughout the series. In *Lady (Dama)* (1965), and in *Lady (Dama)* (1965) Saura created a collage-composition in which he superposed a cutout of Brigitte Badot’s head. Saura placed a cutout of female breasts, which operated as a mask thus constructing a Frankenstein’s, like composition created by disparate heterogeneous fragments (Fig. 2.14 & 2.15). The iconicity of female breasts resonated with the popularity of Jane Mansfield breasts during the early 1960s and its massive dissemination in

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popular magazines. In echoing the iconic eroticism of the sex symbol as a hyper-eroticized body, Saura’s compositions playfully undermined the beauty of the popular icon by revealing it as monstrous. Saura’s gesture in amputating the erotic features of the female body reaffirmed the fetish status of the breasts in Saura’s artistic practice while it echoes the legacy of Surrealist scopophilia in Saura’s works.

In reassembling, decomposing and visual re-structuring the female breasts Saura revealed his idiosyncratic artistic gesture of deforming the female body while echoing the fetishization of the body in Surrealist composition. Hal Foster described this visual and semantic procedure of decomposing and reassembling the female body as a visual geography of Surrealism leading to a “convulsive beauty”. As Foster explains:

> For convulsive beauty not only stresses the formless and evokes the unrepresentable, as with the sublime, but it also mixes delight and dread, attraction and repulsion: it too involves “a momentary check to the vital forces,” a “negative pleasure”. In surrealism as in Kant, this negative pleasure is figured through feminine attributes: it is an intuition of the death drive received by the patriarchal subject as both the promise of its ecstasy and the threat of its extinction. However transformed the map, the terrain if this surrealist sublime is not much changed from that of traditional beauty: it remains the female body. 211

Providing a fragmented territoriality of the female body and also operating as a fetishized visual motif, Saura’s obsessive deployment of the female breasts in the 1960s functioned as a visual trope of his artistic mediated practice, and as an allegorical testimony of his suppressed and erotic sexual desire. If in Imaginary Portraits of Brigitte Bardot series, Saura presented Brigitte Bardot as a monstrous emblem of the teratology of the erotic body (as discussed in chapter 1), Saura’s cropped breasts of the graphic series of the late 1960s functioned as allegories of the industrial fragmentation of the body. They revealed the monstrous female body as a visual matrix of his artistic practice while they embodied a personal emblem of his mediated encounter

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with the female body in cropped magazines reproductions. In doing so, Saura’s deployment of fragmented and amputated female bodies within his graphic series offered Saura an emblem of a desired and yet unreachable anxiety that he recurrently allegorized.

**Veronica**

Veronica (Vera-Icon) is described in the New Testament as the woman who assisted Christ on his way to the Calvary. When offering a cloth to heal his face, Christ’s sweat left the traces of his face on the textile thus creating an indexical image of Christ, a truth-icon from which she took her name. As Saura explained, “Veronica invented the monotype and, although prehistoric painters printed his hands covered in paint, she was the first one to fix an image as a monotype.”

For Saura then, Veronica symbolized the mythical body that conjures the biblical myth, as the inventor of the monotype, while she also allegorized the invasive condition of the erotic-monstrous creature that recurrently occupied semantically and visually all the vignettes throughout the *Narration* series.

Functioning as a visual matrix in Saura’s series Veronica acquired a double status. As the inventor of the monotype, she symbolized the allegory of the pop art icon. As a female archetype she symbolized the monstrous condition of the erotic body as a nostalgic recollection of the frustrated yet relished sexual desire. As Saura explained Veronica embodied a “Laborious enjoyment and a forbearing commentary of a nostalgic universe in which the physical attributes of the heroine, nonetheless encompass the complacency of the monstrous.”

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212 “Veronica inventó el monotipo, y aunque, mucho antes, los pintores prehistóricos imprimieron sus manos untadas de color, la primera fijación de una imagen mediante este procedimiento fue obra suya” Saura, “Monotypes”, *Notebook*, op. cit. p. 101
nostalgic and monstrous, Veronica allegorized Saura’s artistic practice in its constant
deformation of certain emblematic bodies of the Spanish art history.

Saura’s Narrations experimented with the iconic morphology of popular imagery, the
sequential repetition, and the fragmentation of the female body while displaying an intimate
alphabet of iconic contemporary American mythologies. This set of iconic images included the
film-star (Liz Taylor, Jane Mansfield, Brigitte Bardot), the American superhero (Superman, Flash-
Gordon) popular comics-strips (Dick Tracy) and American b movies of monsters of the mid 1950s.
In appropriating and monstrificating the symbolic body of vernacular imagery Saura’s Narrations
series demonstrated Saura’s new attitude towards the monstrous body as ludic and irreverent while
also operating a rhetorical strategy for social, cultural, and political commentary. As Narrations
series showed, Saura’s monstrifications of personal emblems (the American superhero, the naked
female body, and the monstrous figure) provided a set of visual stereotypes of popular culture that
are nonetheless distorted, dismembered and mutilated. Moreover, Saura’s Narrations series
revealed Saura’s personal emblems in his artistic production while acting as allegories of his
colorhood as a broken narrative. Ultimately, Saura’s Narrations displayed as a mise-en-scene of
personal and collectives allegories of his daily life under Franco during the 1960s.

2.3. Saura and Greco

In April 1964, while working on his Narrations series, Saura collaborated with
Argentinean artist Alberto Greco. They constructed a closed friendship and an interesting artistic
collaboration. Sadly, Greco died one year later on 12 October 1965 after attempted suicide.
Greco’s tragic death left a huge impact on Saura. As he wrote: “Alberto Greco was the first
important person who died in my life.”214 As I explore below, Greco’s artistic collaboration with

Saura revealed their common artistic interest in the derisive and humorous aspects of the monstrous body as both ludicrous and irreverent.\textsuperscript{215}

In 1964 Saura and Greco collaborated on an irreverent and parodying composition in which they rendered grotesque the body on the cross. \textit{Crucifixion and murder after the death of Kennedy} (1964), was a 6x4 meters painting in which they created a comic-like body on the cross made out of a mop and rolls of toilet paper. In a letter to Spanish painter Eduardo Arroyo on November 1964, Greco explained his excitement during his collaboration with Saura, “It is certainly Saura’s best work and probably mine too. It is barbaric; disgusting and repulsive; a truly wonderful murder. It is an atrocity, but painting should be an atrocity.”\textsuperscript{216}

Although the work is today lost, some photographs were taken in Greco’s studio in Madrid in which both artists are posing facing the camera, next to the artwork (Fig. 2.17). As this photograph shows, the work consisted of a crucifixion on a board with a grotesque body in the middle of the canvas surrounded by splatters of paint and daily day objects attached to the surface. The artist’s playful poses and relaxed faces rendered the intimacy and close affection between them. Greco is seating on a chair facing the camera while covering his head with a cloth. Saura is seating next to him facing the camera with a calmed and intense facial expression. This photograph-portrait function hence as a testimony of the work, as a document of his artistic collaboration, and also as casting of their public persona —thus revealing a derisive and ludic image of their close friendship.

In their artwork Saura’s and Greco’s included daily day objects that they placed next to the toilette-papered figure echoing Rauschenberg’s mixing of objects in his works. As he argued, “A

\textsuperscript{215} See Claudia Laudanno dissertation, unpublished.
\textsuperscript{216} Alberto Greco “es sin duda su mejor obra y también la mía. Bárbara, asquerosa, repugnante, un verdadero asesinato maravilloso. Es una barbaridad, pero la pintura debe ser una barbaridad.” Alberto Greco on a letter to Lola Mora and Eduardo Arroyo, quoted in Jorge López Anaya, La Vanguardia Informalista en Buenos Aires, p. 53.
pair of socks is no less suitable to make a painting with than wood, nails turpentine, oil and, fabric.” Like Rauschenberg’s compositions, Saura’s and Greco’s crucifixion was three-dimensional — thus challenging the dual dimensions of paintings while occupying literally the space. As Saura recalled in an interview with Francisco Rivas in 1989, Greco transformed the act of painting into a performance dancing over the painting and loosing a sense of himself, “Greco was dancing over the canvas, he was bleeding but he did not stop.” Saura’s artistic collaboration with Greco reconnected Saura with previous performative aspects of his work. As discussed in chapter 1, in 1955, Saura collaborated with his brother Carlos when they created Flamenca — in which Carlos filmed Saura during the action of painting outdoors.

Greco’s playful and irreverent approach affected and pushed Saura’s towards the grotesque and the humorous after 1964. In April 1964, Saura wrote a letter to Greco announcing his intention to hold a shared exhibition at the Buenos Aires National Museum. Greco agreed on this exhibition calling him, “Saurissimo”, thus attesting their reciprocal aesthetic interest in the body and showing their shared and paralleled artistic practices.

Greco and Saura had met in Madrid in 1963 and exhibited together at Juana Mordó’s gallery in spring 1964. My point in bringing this close affection between them to the front is that through this intense and affectionate artistic collaboration, Saura expanded the performative aspect of his work while reinforcing the monstrous female body as a humorous and grotesque visual motif. Saura and Greco’s irreverent approach towards the grotesque body offered also as a particular response to the Spanish authoritarian and repressive National-Catholic Francoist Spain of 1964. It is in the cultural and political refashioning of Franco Regime

Greco was a nomad artist. He lived a precarious life always struggling in a survival-economic situation. Thanks to the assistance of some friends and fellow artists Greco lived intermittently in Buenos Aires, Paris, Rome, Genova, Madrid and Piedralaves (a small village in Ávila, Spain). Greco’s nomadic life and wandering artistic journey delineated an itinerant and discontinuous trajectory within the American and European neo-avant-garde of the early 1960s. His artistic trajectory created a discontinuous narrative that explored and yet experimented with artistic centers, urban spaces, and artistic vocabularies. At its very core, Greco’s life embodied a fascinating crossroad that explored and experimented with artistic practices and visual vocabularies in the Spanish art context of the mid 1960s.

Like Saura, Greco began his international artistic trajectory in Art Informel—as the “degree zero” of postwar European art during the mid 1950s. Like Saura, Greco had encountered in his first trip to Paris in 1955. In 1957, Greco participated in the Sao Paolo Biennial and presented himself as the most relevant of Argentinean Informalist artists. In 1962, he wrote on the walls of Buenos Aires, “Alberto Greco the greatest Informalist painter alive”. As Argentinean art critic Jorge López Anaya notes: “Greco’s paintings at the time were explicitly baroque and they seem to be pointing to an anarchic memory which only remembers images and disseminated, unstable and fragmented writing.”

In April 1963, Greco moved from Rome to Madrid. Economically broke, he borrowed a house from a Chilean friend in Piedralaves, a small village 50 miles west from Madrid. In Piedralaves, Greco created, Great Manifesto-Roll of Lived Art (Gran Manifiesto-Rollo del Arte Vivo), a three hundred feet long paper roll in which he included collages, drawings, and texts that simulate semi-automatic writing. Functioning as a portable wall and as a public banner, Greco

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219 Jorge López Anaya: “Los cuadros de esa época, de explícita exacerbación barroca, parecen remitir a una memoria anárquica que sólo logra recordar imágenes y escrituras diseminadas, inestables, fragmentarias.” See Jorge López Anaya, La Vanguardia Informalista, 1957-1965, p. 54.
encircled the streets of the village and the people living in it with his Manifesto-Roll as a way of gesturing towards everyday life as a work of art. Greco’s Great Roll-Manifesto embodied a personal diary, and a public banner that witnessed the political and social events from his time in Franco’s Spain by creating a continuous writing-body that is ultimately displayed as a collective action. Greco’s depictions of female nudes with monstrous heads in his great roll-manifesto resembled Saura’s visual manipulation and visual monstrification of females bodies in his Narration series. As Saura wrote on Greco’s work: “Each of Greco’s works is a fragment of life. But it is also part of a whole that is incomplete, disseminative and generous as life itself is. [Greco’s works] are places for encounters of personal experiences. They are a singular space that is inhabited by random events, smart affirmations, dramatic situations and magic gestures.”

In fall 1963, Greco painted Homage to Raphael and Saura (1963), in which he combined art history’s iconicity of Raphael Sanzio’s Portrait of the Pope Julius II with the intense sobriety and dramatic pictorial vocabulary of Saura’s red and black Crucifixions of the 1963s (Fig. 2.18). This dual dialogue between antithetical artistic legacies demonstrated Greco’s awareness of Saura’s pictorial grammar in the late 1950s (discussed in chapter 1).

In 1963, Greco inaugurated his Private Gallery in Madrid — at once studio, art gallery, and public space for parties that rapidly became a meeting point for avant-garde artists in Madrid. Greco collaborated with several of Madrid’s most renowned artists of the early 1960s and he became close friends with some of them — in particular Arroyo, Millares, and Saura. In April 1964 concurrent with Franco’s commemoration of his “25 years of peace”, Greco exhibited his works at the opening of Juana Mordó’s gallery, alongside with works by Saura, Millares,

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Tàpies, and Chillida. Soon after Greco and Saura collaborated in *Crucifixion after the death of JF Kennedy*. As Saura recalled this collaborative work as an illuminating experience and a captivating memory:

One day in Greco’s studio in the outskirts of Madrid we were having a friendly meeting. We decided to make together a painting. For me it was an amusement. For him it was an authentic joy. We used found elements that we used as collaged objects into a board. We created a clown-figure [fantoche] with ephemeral life. Alberto Greco was so enthusiastic that he was walking over the canvas over tubes of paint, nails and objects on the floor. He did not feel any pain. When I realized he was bleeding we had to cure him and I forced him to put his shoes on. He decided to call a photographer so he could take some pictures of us in front of the painting. We posed next to our histrionic composition; beautiful and pathetic at the same time. In the picture we decided to open our eyes without blinking so we can enhance the pathetism of the composition.221

Saura’s vivid recollection of the event testified their reciprocal admiration as well as his intimate affection towards Greco. Greco’s intensity in the execution of the work reveals his composition process and his parodying use of the body of Christ on the cross. Saura’s and Greco’s rendering of J.F. Kennedy as a grotesque crucified body in 1964 Spain demonstrated their ironic and disjointed character of the monstrous body while it also indicated the abyssal political differences between the U.S. and Franco’s dictatorship.

In 1962, Kennedy had argued for a leading position of arts as an educational leading force for democratic societies. As Kennedy argued, art should be not only a reposity of national history but moreover, a leading force in shaping the future. As he wrote:

Above all, we are coming to understand that the arts incarnate the creativity of a free society. We know that a totalitarian society can promote the arts in its own way—that it can arrange splendid productions of opera and ballet […] But art means more than the resuscitation of the past; it means

221 “Un día en el taller de Alberto a las afueras de Madrid, durante una reunión amistosa, decidimos realizar un cuadro juntos. En realidad, aquello que para mi representaba un divertimento, se convirtió para él, durante su realización, en motivo de una gran exaltación. Utilizando elementos preexistentes, mediante el collage y la adición de objetos corpóreos que fueron en parte pintados, realizamos un fantoche condenado a una vida efímera. Alberto Greco, en el entusiasmo y casi en estado de trance, caminaba con los pies desnudos sobre los tubos de pintura, chafándolos, y clavándose las chinchetas esparcidas en el suelo. No parecía sentir dolor, y cuando nos percatamos tuvimos que limpiarle y curarle, obligándole a calzarse hasta la terminación de la obra. Tuvo incluso fuerzas para buscar un fotógrafo a fin de que nos retratara junto a aquel histriónico, hermoso y a un tiempo patético resultado. Para acentuar su condición, ambos decidimos abrir desmesuradamente los ojos frente a la cámara.” A. Saura, “Glosa con Cuatro Recuerdos”, *Visor*, Barcelona, Galaxia Gutenberg/Círculo de Lectores, p. 309.
that free and unconfined search for new ways of expressing the experience of the present and the vision of the future[...]. A free government is the reflection of a people’s will and desire — and ultimately their taste. It is also, at its best, a leading force, an example, and a teacher. 222

In comparison to Franco’s Spain, Kennedy’s political defense of the democratic capacities of art testified the dramatic backwardness of Spanish cultural isolation and political autarchy. In contrast with Kennedy’s political statement supporting modern art as a custodian of social order and instructor of democratic principles, Franco Regime’s established the Tribunal de Orden Público (the Public Order Court) to judge immoral and misleading social behaviors. As Paul Preston reasoned, Franco’s court was a repressive agent: “political offences would henceforth be treated as civilian crimes rather than a military rebellion.” 223 In other words, just after Kennedy’s speech defending the engage defense on the cultural freedom of the nations, Franco regime established Spain’s modern inquisitorial court. 1960s Spain bitter and dark pressing social and political atmosphere, was parodied and criticized with black humor in 1963 Luis García Berlanga’s film El Verdugo.

By 1963 President JFK was a worldwide political icon. His iconic portrait as president appeared in several of Rauschenberg’s photo-silkscreen compositions of 1964 in which Rauschenberg transferred to the same surface and juxtaposed media reproductions of popular icons in the same plane thus equating them visually and semantically. 224 In Retroactive I (1964), Rauschenberg transferred into the canvas a photographic reproduction of Kennedy next to symbolical images that defined Kennedy’s presidency such as an astronaut (Fig. 2.19). Whereas in Rauschenberg’s work Kennedy is presented to the viewer as a popular icon indistinguishable from other images from vernacular mass-media, in Saura’s and Greco’s composition, Kennedy is

223 Paul Preston, Franco a Biography, op. cit., p. 710.
224 Rosalind Krauss, Perpetual Inventory, op. cit., p. 95.
rendered as a ridiculous body operating as a playful and grotesque allegory of the dread cultural situation under of the Franco Regime.

As it was the case during the late 1950s, Francoist cultural institutions attempted to gain public opinion through modern art. In 1963 Franco Regime promoted the exhibitions *Art from American and Spain* (Arte de América y España) and *American Art Now* (Arte U.S. Actual), showing the works of contemporary artists from twenty-seven American countries, including the U.S. and Canada, as well as works by contemporary Spanish artists. The exhibition included works by several American contemporary artists including Rauschenberg, Warhol and Johns. As curator Luis González Robles wrote in the catalogue, the purpose of the show was “to participate in the universal avant-garde without compromising the traditional well-doing, the master of pictorial techniques and the special sensibility for artistic communication of the great Spanish art history.”

As curator Gonzalez Robles described, during the opening night in Madrid, Franco, who was not particularly well educated or had any aesthetic sensibility (quite the opposite indeed), confessed that he had actually enjoyed Rauschenberg’s compositions. As Gonzalez Robles recalled, after seeing Rivers’ and Rauschenberg’s compositions, Franco told him that the show was “a fantastic experience. I am actually very impressed. It was a reality I was unaware of.” This historical anecdote of Franco in front of American contemporary art was revealing in that despite gradually becoming a Western capitalistic economy, Spanish growth was increasing at the expenses of preserving the autarchy and social repression of the Franco’s dictatorship and that that situation was far from being over anytime soon.

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225 “engancharse a la vanguardia universal, sin renegar de un tradicional sentido del bien hacer, del dominio de la técnica y de una especial sensibilidad para la comunicación artística que nuestra historia corroboraba.” Quoted in Jorge Luis Marzo, *Arte y Vanguardia durante el Franquismo*, op. cit. p. 28.

This sense of the continuous appropriation of art by Francoism continued during the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Franco’s victory in the Civil War. As I describe below, Greco and Saura responded to this show in 1964. Unfortunately though, Saura’s and Greco’s reciprocally illuminating artistic collaboration and intimate friendship was tragically interrupted on October 12, 1965, with Greco’s death an attempted suicide in a hotel room from an overdose of barbiturics.

2.4. 25 years of Peace

In 1964, the Franco’s dictatorship commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of Franco’s military victory in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), under the ideological slogan invented by Francoist minister Manuel Fraga Iribarne: “Twenty-Five Years of Peace, Work and Prosperity” —strategically designed to promote the image of the dictatorship as a socially prosperous and economically functional regime. However, as Paul Preston described, 1964 was never actually converted into the apogee year that the Franco’s rule wanted it to be. As he argues, despite the economic growth of the 1960s, and in spite of the disappearance of the menacing threat of soviet communism in Spain, Franco was still obsessed with the spiritual purity of Spanish historical destiny that was still in ruins. As such, despite the propagandistic attempts at revitalize the dictatorship, the Franco Regime was still isolated in a narcissistic self-complacency that reinforced its social and political isolation from other Western countries hence diminishing any cultural or artistic exchange.

In 1962, Saura had parodied Franco’s historical triumphalism as well as his self-appointed military and spiritual leadership. In Dreams and Lies of Franco (1962), Saura presented Franco’s delirious ideals as grotesque. Saura’s black and white ink prints presented a series of humorous small vignettes depicting a set of grotesque yet tragic images of dead bodies.

227 See Paul Preston, Franco, A Biography, op. cit., p. 713.
and childish drawings mocking Franco’s leadership (Fig. 2.22). Saura’s series was a direct quotation from Picasso’s *Dreams and Lies of Franco* (1937) in which Picasso had ridiculized Franco’s military leadership and his cultural ignorance. Picasso intended these prints fund-raising postcards, as a means to raise money for the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War. However, the project was never actualized.

Concurrent with the Regime’s celebration of its twenty-five years in power as twenty years of “peace, prosperity, and work”, in October 1964 Franco inaugurated *España 64*, an exhibition of Spanish and international contemporary art at the Arts Palace at the Parque del Retiro in Madrid. Francoist art critic José Camón Aznar wrote the catalogue-essays, *25 years of Spanish Art* (*25 Años de Arte Español*), in which he consolidated the Regime’s ideal of presenting Spanish modern art as a preeminent expression of Spanish cultural exceptionality.\(^{228}\) Franco Regime’s political and cultural celebration of the international prestige of Spanish pictorial legacy was nonetheless concurrent with Franco’s renegotiation with the U.S. use of military bases in Spain—Torrejón de Ardoz (Madrid) and the naval base in Rota (Cádiz).

As I discussed, during the mid 1960s Francoist institutions designed and sponsored a set of exhibitions of contemporary art such which included in particular two exhibitions on American modern art: *Art of Spain and the Americas* (1963), and *American Art Now, The Johnson collection* (1964). These exhibitions of contemporary art from the U.S., attempted to instrumentalized American modern art as means to promote in Spain a false cultural and political openness of the dictatorship and hence operating as a tool for gaining political opinion. As it was the case with Informalismo during the mid 1950s (see chapter 1) these exhibitions of

contemporary art in Spain projected a self-constructed auspicious image of social liberalism attempting to homologate Spanish art with Western avant-garde.\textsuperscript{229}

However, the response of Spanish artists in the mid 1960s was drastically different from the one in 1958 at the Venice Biennial (as discussed in chapter 1). If during the late 1950s leading contemporary artists such as Tàpies, Chillida, Millares and Saura had participated in some of these state-sponsored exhibitions as a means for international reception and as means for financial survival, in 1964 Spanish contemporary artists rejected any participation in Francoist artistic projects.\textsuperscript{230} In contrast with the dramatic isolation of artists and financial needs of the mid 1950s, Spanish artists of the mid 1960s such as Eduardo Arroyo (who was exiled in Paris from 1960), and artists’ collectives \textit{Equipo Crónica}, \textit{Equipo Realidad}, and \textit{Estampa Popular} rejected any participation in State-promoted shows.\textsuperscript{231}

Saura also rejected any involvement with Francoist self-promoting exhibitions. In 1962, Saura signed an artists’ manifesto denouncing the manipulative and ideological use of their works by Francoist art institutions.\textsuperscript{232} In October 1963, Saura also signed a collective manifesto along with other 102 artists in which they protested against Franco’s Regime while demanding the end of the repressive state of censorship and in favor of freedom for artistic creation.\textsuperscript{233} In September 1964, Saura participated in the exhibition \textit{Spanish Free} (España Libre) in Italy claiming for cultural freedom and social liberties in Spain and thus manifesting his public disapproval of Francoist political regime.\textsuperscript{234}

\textsuperscript{229} See Jorge Luis Marzo: \textit{¿Puedo Hablarle con sinceridad mi Excelencia?} op. cit.
\textsuperscript{230} For a more detailed description of the politic of the 1960s in Spain see Josep Fontana. \textit{España Bajo el Franquismo}, Barcelona, Crítica, 1986, p. 161 and ss.
\textsuperscript{232} See John Gale \textit{“Spanish Artists Pleads: Don’t show my paintings,”} The Observer, London, 14 January 1962.
\textsuperscript{234} See Lea Vergine: \textit{España Libre, Arte Oggi}, 6, September 1964, p. 57-59.
Although Francoist plans in making compatible Franco’s dictatorship and Western capitalist economy were effective in the rising living standards and in the gradual depolitization of Spanish middle classes, this economic development did not prevent the Regime from social discontent and political upheaval.²³⁵ In 1962, a series of social protests in the northern mines in Asturias brought the police to the streets. Police repression of miners’ strikes in Asturias recalled the dramatic episodes at the origin of the Civil War in 1936. In May 10 1964, a series of domestic bombs exploded in the commercial district of Madrid. Also in 1964, Franco imposed the military siege on the Basque Country —which dramatically increased the recollection of the political repression months before the Civil War. In 1965, a series of student protest irrupted in the main universities in Madrid which terminated with the academic careers of the University professors who supported them — mainly Agustín García Calvo, Luis Aranguren, and Tierno Galván —out of their academic positions.

However, as Paul Preston argues, it was the trial, torture, and death of Julián Grimau the historical event that symptomatically signed the social and political domestic and foreign decay of the Franco regime. As Preston described:

The barbaric nature of the regime in general and of Franco in particular was unmasked by the trial and execution of the Communist Julián Grimau García in 1963. A senior Communist Party official, Grimau had been arrested in Madrid on November 1962. Horribly beaten and tortured, he was thrown out of a window of the Dirección General de Seguridad (national police headquarters) by interrogators attempting to conceal what they had done. Despite his appalling injuries, he was the tried on 18 April by court martial. He was condemned to death for ‘military rebellion’, an indictment which covered crimes allegedly committed during the Civil War. Grimau was merely one of more than hundred members of the opposition tried by court martial in the first months of 1963. […] Pleas for clemency for Grimau wee made by ecclesiastical dignitaries from around the world, and from political leaders including Nikita Krushchev, Willy Brandt, Harold Wilson, and Queen Elizabeth II. Franco was unperturbed.²³⁶

²³⁶ Paul Preston, Franco a Biography, p. 708-709.
Despite a wave of international demonstrations in major cities of Europe and America against the political repression of Francoism, Grimau was executed by firing squad in April 1963. It was then under this context of social repression and political repression the context in which both Greco’s and Saura’s collaborated. Their works also testified this political climate.

In October 1964, Alberto Greco created “25 años de Paz” (25 Years of Peace), a work on paper in which he combined cutouts of Franco’s family portraits, automatic writing, and childlike drawings in which he derided Franco as a spiritual redeemer. Greco’s playful and intimate composition undermined the Regime’s celebratory emotion of 25 years of peace, work, and prosperity and as an explicitly caricatured Franco’s self-proclamation as spiritual “the sentinel of the West.” (1964) (Fig. 2.24).

Like Greco, Saura also responded to Francoist triumphalism and its constant usurpation of Spanish culture production. In 1964, Saura created History of Spain (Historia de España)—a series of works on paper in which Saura deformed and turned into grotesque portraits significant emblems of Spanish early modern history. Saura’s grotesque depiction of particular historical figures of Spanish Black Legend were chosen by political exile and Buchenwald’s camp survivor, Jorge Semprún. In 1987 Saura wrote “The Styx Lagoon” (“La Laguna Estigia”) —a prologue for Jorge Semprún’s novel, The White Mountain (La Montaña Blanca). In this collaborative series, Saura monstrified historical figures of Spanish political absolutism such as Isabel la Católica, Fernando VII, and Franco as Caudillo (1964) (Fig. 2.25). Saura’s grotesque portraits subverted the delirious solemnity of the historical significance of Spanish Imperial history while at the same time ridiculing the ideological appropriation of Spanish history by Francoism. Also, Saura’s and Semprún’s derisive and monstrous reinterpretation of Spanish

237 The international protests against Francoist brutally repressive social policies reappeared years during the Burgos trial in 1970 and the last execution of the Franco Regime, the death of Salvador Puig Antich in 1975.
historical emblems undermined Franco’s arrogation of the baroque as a means of legitimating its usurpation of Spanish modern history.

Saura’s visual language of the monstrous body positioned Saura as a relevant figure for the new artistic generation. In 1986 artists’ collective Equipo Crónica created *La Hamaca* (1968), in which they parodied and yet paid tribute to Saura’s artistic relevance by appropriating Saura’s *Geraldine in her couch* (1967) and incorporating a weapon at the center of the painting (Fig. 2.26). Equipo Crónica’s work revealed Saura’s status amongst the new artistic generation while unveiling the pressing demands for a more critically and politically engaged and artistic action. As I explored in the conclusive chapter of the dissertation, Equipo Crónica’s playful quotation of Saura in the 1970s revealed Saura’s position in the modern canon and ultimately his consecration in the modern pantheon of Spanish modern tradition.

In part due to a certain fatigue on his artistic repetition and in part because of the risk of loosing his artistic status, in 1965, Saura burned hundred canvases in his summer studio in Cuenca. Soon afterwards, Saura quit the practice of easel painting for a decade and moved to Paris.

### 2.5. *Montages Series* (1972-1975)

In 1972, Saura created a series of graphic works, *Montages*, in which he explored the visual accumulation of contradictory images while experimenting with the wall as an optical and semantic structure. In mixing personal references and Spanish popular cultural motifs, Saura’s *Montages* functioned for him as baroque altarpieces of his personal iconography and as an intimate cabinet of curiosities that disrupted the perception of his works as a compositional organic coherent whole. As he argued, “Throughout my life I compiled notebooks made out of cut-outs, archives and walls in which the images that I found are displayed in a way in which

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238 There seems no clear definite explanation for this.
they exchange gazes and fight under the authority of a very particular order.” As in previous series of his artistic careers, Saura’s *Montages* displayed a set of his personal and artistic emblems as a melancholic introspection and as an allegorical comment. Ultimately, they created a personal imaginary museum of personal emblems and artistic referents.

Throughout his artistic career, Saura compiled folders with photographs, reproductions, clippings, and images taken from exhibition catalogues, art magazines, museum catalogues, and newspapers. In these folders Saura created an intimate archive of personal memorabilia and a set of images for future compositions to which he returned consistently. Saura’s wall-like visual arrangement of visual history as a visual accumulation of monstrous appearances offers a perceptual tension but also a complex network of semantic associations. As Saura described, *Montages* series constructed a contradictory tension of a visual puzzle:

Disparate panels in different formats showing in a single plane multiple artworks that I made with different formal techniques in contradictory supporting structures. It was an attempt to render the structures of “the wall of life” in which daily day memories are captured through the random associations of rupture and compensation between divergent works that are organized as a massive puzzle. I remember with nostalgia one my childhood books, today lost, that my father gave me about the Civil War. It rendered the necessity of appropriating the universe of images of daily day life and the continual transformation by superimpositions, accumulations and modifications. They render the multiplicity of the subjective image that provokes a global discontinuity. They stand as a reflection on the montage of contradictory visual elements and the formal disposition of a puzzle.  

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239 “Toda mi vida he hecho libros de recortes, archivos o muros donde las imágenes halladas entrecruzan sus miradas y combaten bajo la dictadura de un especialísimo orden” A. Saura, *Escritura como Pintura*, Círculo de Lectores, Galaxia Guttenberg. p. 70

240 “Paneles de diversos formatos mostrando, en un mismo plano, múltiples obras realizadas con técnicas muy diversas sobre soportes de procedencias contradictorias. Intento de reflejar las estructuras del “muro de la vida” donde se clavan las cotidianas capturas mediante la asociación de trabajos dispares ordenados en un rompecabezas gigante bajo ideas de compensación y de ruptura. Recuerdo del libro infantil, ya perdido y recordado con nostalgia, que el padre realizaba en Barcelona sobre la Guerra civil. Reflejo de la necesidad de la apropiación del cotidiano universo de imágenes y de su transformación bajo conceptos de superimposición, acumulación y transformación. Multiplicidad de la imagen subjetiva que provoca una discontinuidad global en el resultado. Reflexión sobre el montaje de elementos contradictorios y las disposiciones del puzzle.” A. Saura en *Antonio Saura*, Cirici Pellicer, p. 113.
Saura’s Montage (1972) resembles a baroque altarpiece of personal icons. In it, Saura displayed isolated emblems in a monochromatic black background preventing any visual sequence while showing a personal iconography —transforming Saura’s gesture into a modern allegorist collecting the icons of his own pictorial vocabulary (Fig. 2.25).

Saura’s use of the visual panel as a visual and semantic structure offered visual a series of random associations that the viewer experiments at once and thus causing an “optical discontinuity” and a literary exercise. As Saura explained:

The basic idea was to show in a single plane a simultaneity of images and at the same time to suggest a global reading that would provoke a visual collapse. In a way I intended to construct an optical discontinuity. This discontinuity does not contradict a harmonic experience of the composition… actually my intention was to implement a non-literary gaze on the viewer and to force her to jump from one image to the next one and not being able to remain in any in particular.

For Saura, in this series the viewer’s perception is trapped in a constant tension between different images that are nonetheless homogenized in the same visual plane— thus provoking new significations for the images as simultaneously artistic ruins and personal emblems.

In Montage 74 (1972), Saura presented a wall of images in which he included distorted photographs of himself. Saura’s visual arrangement of heterogeneous images equated the multiplicity of visual tensions with semantic associations between divergent images (Fig. 2.26). As such Saura’s visual grammar showed a personal collection of isolated images that became, simultaneously, a baroque altarpiece, a table of knowledge, and a form of visual memory.

Commenting on wall-images as epistemic visual devices, Didi-Huberman has interpreted Aby Warburg’s panels of images in Atlas as providing a visual heterogeneity in which any meaning or sequence is ultimately interrupted. As Didi-Huberman reasons, Warbug’s wall-

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241 See Jo Labanyi, Disremembering Dictatorship, p. 71.
formats functioned as platforms for multiple visual possibilities offering infinite visual possibilities to understand the world.243 Similar to Warbug’s display of heterogeneous images in Atlas, Saura’s Montages conveyed a sense of visual saturation while experimenting with the epistemological notion of the wall. Indeed, Saura’s Montages displayed a visual tension between multiple images offering a crisis of singular legibility, thereby allegorizing the legibility of the image.

Saura’s visual tension between divergent images as allegorical propositions within Saura’s Montage series is paramount in The Dog of Goya (El Perro de Goya) (1974) in which he compiled a wide range of different groups of black and white photographs that he semantically equates (Fig. 2.27). Echoing Goya’s ambiguous dog in Half-Summered Dog (1820) that suggested both emergence and disappearance. In The Dog of Goya, Saura substituted the dog of Goya with images evoking emergence and disappearance (such as childbirth images, an astronaut in the atmosphere, and JFK’s assassination). For Saura, Goya’s iconic dog provided a visual matrix of the infinite ambiguity of bodies at the threshold of appearing and disappearing —hence operating as a meta-reflection on the condition of the modern image.

Saura’s visual disposition of black and white photographies of radically different content recalled Gerhard Richter’s juxtaposition of black and white vernacular imagery in his panel series Atlas (1962-present), which Saura saw at the documenta 3 in Kassel in 1964. Although departing from a radically different semantics from Warbug’s and Richter’s panels —Richter juxtaposed commercial imagery, newspaper cuttings and pornographic photographs to images from concentration camps— Saura’s Montages visual disposition in panels disrupted coherent

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meaning while also suggested a personal collection of images and a dismembered visual archive, and providing a personal set of emblems and a collection of corpses of history.

In 1972, concurrent with Saura’s Montages series, Juana Mordó organized a retrospective of Saura’s works in paper in her gallery in Madrid. A group of right-wing extremist militias (the Guerrilleros de Cristo Rey) wrote on the exterior walls of the building threatening Saura’s life because of his political commitment against Francoism. As Paul Preston described, the attacks of these right-wing armed militias were not uncommon during the early 1970s. Indeed, as he argues, the radicalism of these groups personified the conflictive times of social and political repression in daily-life under Franco during the early 1970s. As Preston wrote:

The squads, working under the name los Guerrilleros de Cristo Rey, included paid thugs as well as young Falangist militants. They were organized by Carrero Blanco’s more or less private intelligence service, the Servicio de Documentación de la Presidencia del Gobierno. The Guerrilleros were linked to the neo-fascists political association Fuerza Nueva (New Force) led by Blas Piñar, a member of the Consejo Nacional and a friend of Carrero Blanco. The cabinet acquiesced in this violence because of the existence of a wild extreme right let the government present itself as somehow belonging to the center. ²⁴⁴

As this right-wing groups attack revealed, Saura’s grotesque and self-parodying compositions were concurrent with the difficult political and social climate of the early 1970s Spain. This politically charged climate became more evident one year later with the death of Franco’s appointed successor Admiral Carrero Blanco. In December 20, 1973, the Basque terrorist group (ETA) killed Francoist prime minister Carrero Blanco. This terrorist attack abruptly disjointed the natural transition of leadership within the Franco Regime. Concurrent with these climate of radical climate of ETA’s terrorism and the extreme right-wing attacks — that reached its pick with the assassination of four lawyers in Atocha Street in Madrid in January 1977 — Saura returned to the emblematic body of Goya’s Black Painting series.

²⁴⁴ Paul Presto, Franco a Biography, 1994, op. cit. p. 748.
2.6. La Quinta del Sordo Series (1972-1974)

In La Quinta del Sordo series (1972-1974) Saura interpret and monstrified Goya’s Black Painting series by displaying a set of drawings over photographic copies of works of art from art history. In these works Saura also experimented with his career-long thematic iconography of the monstrous body. Saura’s conscious “paintings over paintings” upon reproductions of emblematic works of Spanish modern art resonated with Asger Jorn’s inscriptions of images of the 1960s. As in Jorn’s compositions of the mid 1960s, Saura’s La Quinta del Sordo series deformed cultural icons while operating both as a rejection and an artistic homage of the his artistic ancestry— in particular Goya. Trapped in this logic of homage and subversion of the pictorial tradition, Saura’s La Quinta del Sordo series questioned the very possibility of the appropriation and co-optation of the Spanish artistic ancestry, as well as its artistic possibilities of its continual deformation. As Saura wrote, the La Quinta del Sordo series enacted an,

Imaginary novel without particular beginning or end. It was never truly finished and never actually written. The random chapters are inter-exchangeable as a result of the arbitrary display of its chaotic order. One hundred images from which other texts can be joined or invented without limits. It is a visual and random in which dreams scenes, reason and the monsters intersect forming a heavy persistence that emerges contemplating the closed and mental universe of the Quinta del Sordo [The Black Painting Series.] 245

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245 “Imaginaria novela sin principio ni fin, jamás terminada, nunca verdaderamente escrita, y en donde los capítulos, sin orden ni concierto, pueden intercambiarse al ser alterado el orden arbitrario de las imágenes. Cien imágenes, a partir de las cuales otros textos diferentes pueden ser inventados prologándose el relato hasta el infinito. Novela pues, esencialmente visual, de construcción aleatoria, donde el sueño del deseo y la razón del monstruo, el pozo removido y la anclada persistencia, surgen frente a la mirada activa que supone, por desconocer, el cerrado y mental universo de la quinta del sordo.” A. Saura en Antonio Saura, Cirici Pellicer 1980, p. 178.
As Saura described, these series displayed an intimate theater in which Saura introspected on his own works and on his position towards the legacy of Goya as an emblem of the fractured and interrupted Spanish modern tradition.246

In *Miroir du Souvenir* (1972), Saura monstrified Goya’s famous painting of a Madrid’s courtesan *La Maja Vestida* (1805), by drawing disproportionate breasts and child-like marks over a paper copy reproduction of Goya’s painting (Fig. 2.28). Saura’s manipulation of Goya’s iconic painting performed an ironic gesture that parodied his own artistic intervention over the female body and over the symbolic status of Goya’s works. As such, Saura’s composition displayed a double monstrous body that is both literal and symbolic. As such, Saura’s gesture in writing over the emblematic body of Goya’s pictorial body embodied a personal remembrance (souvenir) and a kitsch reproduction of Spanish culture (a touristic souvenir), thus offering a subtle commentary on the banalization of Spanish culture in the early 1970s.

In *The Dog of Goya* (1973), Saura rendered grotesque the monstrous physiognomy of Goya’s dog over a printed reproduction of Velázquez’s *Rokeby Venus* (1647-51), (Fig. (Fig. 2.29 & 2.30). Saura’s visual cancellation of Goya’s and Velázquez’s displayed a symbolic *mise-en-scene* of a visual repression of Spanish artistic history. In doing so, Saura symbolically cancelled and over-inscribes the works of two masters of Spanish painting, Velázquez and Goya. As such, this work epitomized Saura’s artistic career by becoming both a commentary on the discontinuous body of the Spanish pictorial tradition and also as a poetic rendering of a personal primal scene

246 Describing *La Quinta del Sordo* (1972) series as painting over painting Saura argued: “Modificaciones, transformaciones, superposiciones, pinturas sobre pinturas… En realidad no se trata solamente de la adición fantasmagórica de nuevos elementos sobre una base preexistente, sino del empleo de esta imagen como fuente de sugerencia, como un excitante provocador de un trastrueque conceptual, y también, como una base de imagen color ya realizada que condiciona el resultado. Rabia infantil, impulso de metamorfosis, actitud reformista, deseo de violentar la belleza establecida mediante la pluma o el pincel iconoclasta. El divertimento acabó por alcanzar el poder de las inéditas apariciones.” A. Saura quoted by Begoña García, en Saura, Ciro ed. 2006, p. 37.
of painting. Saura’s monstrifications and over-inscriptions over paper reproduction of Velázquez and Goya’s works symbolically presented Spanish modern painting as a discontinuous and intermittent narrative offering a fragmented body of Oedipal confrontation and absolutist political oppression.

Saura’s allegorical gesture over the symbolic body of the works of the Spanish masters of painting revealed allegorically the fractured narrative of Spanish modern art. Lonely and in poverty and escaping from the reactionary and of the political despotism of Fernando VII, Goya died in exile in Bourdeaux in 1828, As Goya did, Picasso also died exiled in France in April 3, 1973. Paradoxically enough, despite being forerunners and masters of Spanish modern tradition both Goya and Picasso were rejected by the authoritarian politicians of their own national government by reactionary political absolutism. Responding allegorically to this fractured narrative of Spanish pictorial tradition, Saura’s artistic re-interpretations and symbolic visual cancellations of Velázquez’s and Goya’s enacted an allegorical commentary on Saura’s career-long artistic strategy as well as symptomatic instances of the fragmentary nature of the modern Spanish legacy.

Saura’s inscription of his manual gesture over the symbolic body of the Spanish pictorial ancestry (Velázquez-Goya) functioned as a mise-en-scene of his Oedipal scene confronting the ancestors of the past and the dramatic history of Spanish modern art. Saura’s gesture in writing over paper reproductions of Goya’s Black Painting series revealed his frustrated attempt at establishing a visual legacy with both Goya and Velázquez —what Didi-Huberman described as a “cultural psychomachia”. As Didi-Huberman argued psychomachia described, “the task of any human culture is in fact, to confront (Auseinandersetzung) the decisive crisis that positions man

247 “el único ejemplo en la historia del arte de una pintura hecha para sí mismo y no para los demás. Goya con crudeza, muestra su propio dilema de pintor: cómo pintar par sí mismo aquello que no puede pintarse para los demás” A. Saura, “Goya o la Contradicción”, Fíjeza, op. cit. p. 249
in front of his own monsters. Borrowing Didi-Huberman’s notion, of confronting the intimate and cultural monsters, Saura’s double act both honoring and undermining his artistic ancestry can be seen as an intimate response to the interrupted legacy and disjointed narrative of Spanish modernity.

André Malraux imagined, the postmodern museum as a potentially infinite limitless archive of photographic copies in a museum without walls. Like Malraux’s, infinite imaginary museum of reproductions of masterworks Saura’s systematic revision of the Spanish pictorial tradition offered an intimate museum of Spanish modern art history as a monstrous archive. In writing over and deforming emblematic works of the masters of Spanish pictorial tradition Saura’s compositions displayed an intimate theater of monstrous ancestry at once questioning of his artistic practice of rendering emblematic monstrous bodies while also disclosing his failure in dialoguing with his artistic ancestry. Hence, Saura’s La Quinta del Sordo operated as a personal and public museum of a Spanish modernity always-already inevitably in ruins.


In Postcards series, Saura experimented with printed images and with kitsch and touristic imagery of 1960s Spain. Saura’s Postcard series enhanced Saura’s the mediated strategy of his artistic practice while enacting a critical commentary on the Spanish modern culture as a touristic attraction. In Postcard (1975), Saura juxtaposed Spanish national artistic treasures such as Velázquez’s paintings, next to images of monkeys (Fig. 2.31). Saura’s dissonant juxtaposition of disparate visual archives creates a self-ironic composition while allegorizes the dramatic distance between the presumable glory of the past and the desolated cultural present. Commenting on the Postcard series Saura wrote:

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Postcards is a series of works made out of commercial postcards with the same format. The mysterious association of different visual phenomena, the formal analogies, the gradual metamorphoses and the moral parables force an immediate visual reading that relates to the visual narratives in which the form-less and the explicit mix and get confused— even to the author of the works. At some instances, this serial sequence of contrasting images follows associative processes of the sewing machine or the umbrella.249

In Postcard (1977) Saura created a visual dialogue with the masters of the Spanish tradition while displaying with a critical commentary on Francoist touristic imagery (Fig. 2.32). In it Saura explored the deliberate nostalgic character of postcards as visual reminders of remote scenes of modernity by juxtaposing images of the Spanish national tradition next to touristic images of Spain as an exotic destination —such as bull-fighting, paella or San Fermin. Franco Regime’s carefully designed strategy in showing Spanish historical backwardness as exotic was famously branded under the propagandistic motto, “Spain is Different”. Overall, Postcards series offered Saura a nostalgic yet critical visual space for cultural commentary.

In Postcard (1977) Saura undermined the perniciousness of Francoist touristic policies by creating a visual pastiche in which he mingled Velázquez’s painting with a photograph of a Valencian paella and female erotic bodies (Fig. 2.33). In locating in the same level the Velázquez’s painting is reduced and equated to a form of popular folklore as a paella or bull fighting. Also, Saura’s disparate juxtaposition of cultural productions signaled the temporal and spatial gap between the glorious of the past and the condition of the present that the Franco Regime was attempting to occupy. As such, Saura’s Postcards allegorized the social and political life under Franco as a folkloric pastiche.

249 “Trabajos realizados a partir de tarjetas postales comerciales de formato estandarizado. La misteriosa asociación de diversos resultados crea fenómenos de analogía y metamorfosis, incluso concluyentes esbozos de parábolas morales, que obligan a un tipo de lectura inmediata relacionado con formas narrativas puramente visuals donde lo amorfo y lo explicito se mezclan y confunden. Este encadenamiento de imágenes contrapuestas que aclaran situaciones o crean climas turbadores —muchas veces inesperados e incluso para el propio autor— obedece a procesos asociativos que no andan demasiado alejados del famoso y celebrado casamiento de la máquina de coser y el paraguas.” A. Saura, in Antonio Saura, Cirici Pellicer, op. cit. p. 187.
Since the major development of modern cities at the end of the nineteenth century as modern urban metropolis, and concurrent with the rapidly growing of industrial revolution, postcards have embodied ephemeral residues of modern culture that on the other hand, have also stereotyped visions of a particular city or singular aspects of a particular culture —functioning as collectable artifacts of artistic, cultural and historical nostalgia. As Naomi Schor argues, from its origin, postcards create metonymic displacements of the individual and the public and they have functioned as a popular archive of public memorabilia.\(^{250}\) As Schor reasons postcards provide a visual and textual device that is a form both private and public memory. As she wrote:

> postcards are organized in series and their very seriality negates their individual mnemonic properties; what matters in the case of my postcard collection is not the contiguity between an individual card and the environment from which it was detached; rather, it is the contiguity I restore between a single card and its immediate predecessor and follower in a series I am attempting to reconstitute, or the contiguity I create between cards linked by some common theme. The metonymy of origin is displaced here by a secondary metonymy, the artificial metonymy of collection.\(^{251}\)

In parodying and ridiculing Francoist display of Spanish culture as mere folklore, Saura’s *Postcard* series provided an intimate archive of cultural emblems that are reproduced and manipulated as kitsch imagery for touristic consumption and as visual commentaries on the folklorization of Spanish cultural identity.

Saura’s critical commentary on the folklorization of Spanish cultural condition and his nostalgic gaze towards the symbolic authority of Spanish modern legacy were also present in *Poste Centrale* series (1977) —in which Saura created a series of mail-art like composition sent to Spanish artistic referents a symbolic artistic ancestors including Velázquez, Rembrandt and Goya. Saura’s envelope-artforms functioned as a form of memory of his allegorical and melancholic mediated relationship with the “five favourite ancestors”. As Saura argued, “*Poste

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\(^{251}\) Naomi Schor, *Postcards*, p. 6
*Centrale* displays a message for five favorite and permanent ancestors. It was my attempt to render, by the same background and an imposed limitation of a regular envelope, an approximation to color by means of a global and confusing memory.\(^{252}\)

In combining a humorous yet sarcastic gesture, *Poste Centrale* demonstrated Saura’s satiric and melancholic gesture of attempting to communicate with the artistic ancestry. As such while simultaneously showing the dramatic cultural distance with Spanish modern tradition.

As explored in this chapter all through the 1960s and 1970s, Saura’s graphic series revealed his disruptive nostalgia and disjointed melancholia at visually restating his historical and artistic distance with the Spanish pictorial tradition. In 1978 and concurrent with Spanish transition from dictatorship to constitutional democracy, Saura returned to the practice of easel painting.

**2.8. Saura and the Post-Franco Political Transition**

As this chapter examined, Saura’s recurrent use of visual techniques such as collage, cutouts, montage and over-inscriptions in his works on paper during the mid 1960s and 1970s, offered him a new set of formal languages while providing a stock of vernacular imagery that opened contested spaces for exploring his private and public anxieties. As I showed, Saura’s formal manipulations and visual transformations of bodies in his graphic series expanded his visual grammar of monstrifications while resignifying new visual and social spaces of his artistic strategy. As such, these graphic series thus performed a dialectical action simultaneously revisiting Saura’s own personal visual vocabulary and acting as a social and political

\(^{252}\) “Mensaje para cinco ancestros favoritos y permanentes. Intento de reflejar, mediante el color de fondo escogido, y en la limitación impuesta por la necesaria relación con papeles de sobre corrientemente empleados, una aproximación al color dominante de una obra a través de la global y confusa memoria.” A. Saura in *Antonio Saura*, Cirici Pellicer, p. 217 Republished in *Notebook*, (1992) op. cit. p. 116.
commentary. Responding to this generational artistic shift towards social realism and new media, Saura’s works of the mid 1960s and 1970s operated as an iconographic archive of Saura’s monstrous bodies as humorous and grotesque, as well as personal allegories of sequestration and constant manipulation of the Spanish cultural tradition during dictatorship.

By 1975, dictator Franco was seriously ill and was connected to a medical machine for several days. The image of dictator Franco’s last hours convalescent in bed as a bionic and technologically-dying body incarnated a captivating metaphor that dramatically reflected the Spanish political situation as a monstrous-zombic-body kept artificially alive for more than forty years. The dying body of the dictator plugged into a modern machine was a suitable allegory of the cultural, political and social situation of the country. As Alberto Medina-Dominguez has argued, the political body of the dying Franco offered two unexpected political metaphors of the Franco Regime as a monstrous body: the cyborg and the religious relic. As Medina-Dominguez describes, out of these two options, the Francoist government chose the first one. On November 20, 1975, after being kept artificially alive for several days as a bionic and cyborg creature, dictator Francisco Franco died at the age of 83, and with him it died the autarchic regime that governed Spain from his military insurrection on July 18, 1936.

For Spanish artists, Franco’s death inevitably imposed a historical revision of the narrative of Spanish modern art in the last forty years. This historical lapse of cultural normality for almost four decades demanded a set of historiographic concerns about how to define the role of modern Spanish art under Francoism, and in particular, the urge to confront, the complex issue of how that history would be eventually told. This ethical riddle called into questions the methodologies and strategies of how to construct an honest and political coherent narrative for the generations to come. In 1976, just a few months after Franco’s death, Saura participated in

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the organizing committee for the Spanish Pavilion at the Venice Biennial in 1976. The show was titled *Spain: Artistic avant-garde and Social Reality: 1936-1976* and it was the first post-Franco international exhibition of Spanish art.

This show assumed the herculean task of critically reviewing the last forty years of art under Franco from a theoretical and materialist perspective thus paralleling the artistic practices (Spanish avant-garde art) with the historical evolution of Francoism (Spanish modernity). Unsurprisingly, the show was very controversial due to its historical pretenses at reviewing forty years of political authoritarism. Indeed, the Spanish Pavilion was called the “Red Biennial”.


Although for the visitors the Pavilion was not especially polemical, the controversy regarding the Biennial in Spain made evident that the critical and artistic revision about Francoism was not going to be an easy enterprise. For many scholars Franco Regime was still to vivid and present to obtain a critical historical distance from which properly analyze it. For others, the Regime had lasted too long in order to have a clear understanding of it.

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255 As Tomás Llorens wrote, the show was inevitably political, “À une époque où le régime franquiste fusillait encore ses opposants les plus éminents, user de terme “révolution” pour le réduire immédiatement à une “révolution” seraient la même chose, à cette conscience critique face à l’avant-garde, qui nous semblait être le principal trait définissant la gauche artistique espagnole au moment de la fin du franquisme, était précisément l’histoire que nous proposions de raconter à la Biennale de Venise de 1976.” Tomás Llorens, Art et politique dans les dernières années du franquisme, un aperçu sommaire, en Face a l’histoire; Pompidou, p. 379
Despite the first efforts by all ideological forces and civic society for reconciliation and to start anew, (which included the legalization of the communist party in 1977 and the political amnesty of political convicts), little by little it became more evident that the main political actors of the dictatorship were still willing to play a fundamental role in the new democratic political scene.\footnote{Aleixandre Ciri Pellicer in Estética del Franquismo quoted in Calvo Serraller in Medio Siglo de Arte de Vanguardia, op. cit., p. 946.} Paul Preston summarizes this historical moment as a fragile “social pact of forgetfulness”. As he described surprisingly enough, after the death of the dictator they were no Francoists in Spain as if everyone had been a democratic person all her life. As Preston wrote,

Spaniards co-operated in what came to be known as the pacto del olvido (the pact of forgetfulness). In order to ensure a bloodless transition to democracy, the victims of the repression renounced their desires for revenge, demanded no settling of accounts. There were no purges of the executioners, the torturers, the jailers, the informers or of those close to Franco who had enriched themselves during the years of the dictatorship. By the same token, large numbers of Franco’s more moderate and far-sighted supporters forgot their own pasts, some collaborating sincerely in building the democratic consensus, others merely fabricating new autobiographies as demócratas de toda la vida (life long democrats).\footnote{Paul Preston, Franco, A Biography, p. 782.}

Jaime Chávarri’s documentary film about the decay of the Panero family (a Francoist family of poets and writers), The Disenchantment (El Desencanto, (1976)), verbalized the historical feeling of mid 1970s Spain that immediately follow the euphoric moment of the death of the dictator. Raymond Carr defines this generational emotional response of “disenchantment” as: “the overestimation of possibilities and subsequent disillusionment” that followed Spanish democratic hopes in 1977.”\footnote{Raymond Carr, The Democratic Transition and a New International Role, in Spain in the 1980s, ed by Robert P. Clark and H. Hatzel, Willson Center, 1987 p. 12.}

In 1978 and concurrent with the Spanish first democratic government since 1936, Saura returned to the practice of easel painting with Phillip II —in which Saura distorted and monstrified the image-portrait of the emblematic Spanish baroque monarch (discussed in chapter 3). As I discuss in chapter 3, Saura’s paintings of the late 1970s and mid 1980s deployed the
latent presence of Spanish absolutist history and the instrumentalization of the Spanish tradition under the social democracy.

Chapter Abstract

In 1978, the year Spain transitioned from Francoism towards Constitutional democracy, Saura returned to the practice of easel painting. This chapter examines Saura’s pictorial reinterpretation Goya and Picasso in two thematic series: *Dora Maar Revisited* series (1983), (in which Saura reflected on Picasso’s portraits of Dora Maar), and *Imaginary Portrait of Goya and The Dog of Goya* series (1957-1992), (in which Saura systematically distorted Goya’s *Half Submerged Dog* (1820-1822)). As this chapter posits, Saura’s *monstrifications* of the works of Goya and Picasso during the 1980s and 1990s displayed a melancholic revision of the “body of the Spanish modern tradition” while introspectively considering his own artistic practice. In so doing, his works operate both as an assault on and appraisal of his pictorial modern ancestry while commenting on the ideological appropriation of the Spanish modern narrative by the social democratic government.

3.1. Saura’s Return to Painting

In 1978, three years after Franco’s death and amid the Spanish political transition from dictatorship towards constitutional monarchy (1975-1982), Antonio Saura returned to the practice of easel painting with *Philip II* (1978) In this painting Saura depicted the bust of Philip II of Habsburg (r. 1556—1598), in a monochromatic grey and black composition that resembles a smiling skull —thus transforming the image of the Spanish monarch into a grotesque and monstrous body (Fig.3.1). Saura’s dense grey brushstrokes on the contours of the figure echoed the formal language and aural effect of El Greco’s *Nobleman with the man on his chest* (1507), (Fig. 3.2). Also, the grey monochromatic background conjured the solemnity of Velázquez’s *Portrait of Juan de Pareja* (1650), (Fig. 3.3). Saura’s *Philip II* (1978) resumed his thematic series of monstrous monarchs, *Imaginary Portraits of Philip II* (1967), in which he

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259 For a contextualization of Saura’s return to painting after a decade hiatus see Antoni Urrutia, *Antonio Saura, Diez Años sin Pintar sobre Tela*, 1979, 5 (40) 30-31.
distorted the portrait of the symbolic Spanish baroque Emperor while creating a formal dialogue between Spanish baroque painting and the pictorial vocabulary of the 1950s (as discussed in chapter 1). In an interview with Julián Ríos, Saura explained his return to painting after a decade-long hiatus through the recovery of his previous pictorial iconography as a personal safety net. As he explained, “in the first years after I came back to the practice of easel painting, I had to employ those same images that I had already painted because I needed a familiar visual supply in order to retrieve the mechanisms that I needed to paint anew.”

Saura’s pictorial transformation of the Spanish baroque monarch into a monstrous body conversed with the legacy of the Spanish baroque pictorial tradition (El Greco, Velázquez), while also signaling the dark aspects of the Spanish Golden Age that the symbolic image of Phillip II incarnated. This historical period included, the Spanish Inquisition, the expulsion of Jews and Arabs, the “Spanish Fury” against Protestantism, and the colonization of the Americas. In conjuring Phillip II’s reign—a quite complex historical and political period—as a monstrous past, Saura’s Phillip II revisited his artistic corpus of the mid 1960s, while at the same time providing a subtle commentary on the spectral aspects of Franco’s claim of legacy of Spanish political absolutism. In monstrifying the portrait of Phillip II, Saura’s monstrous and grotesque monarch undermined the legacy of Spanish absolutism—at once criticizing both

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260 “En los años primeros de vuelta a la pintura tuve que emplear las mismas imágenes porque necesitaba una apoyatura de algo familiar para recobrar los mecanismos necesarios para pintar” A. Saura, Las Tentaciones de Antonio Saura, op. cit., p. 194

261 As Lisa Rosenthal wrote, Phillip II was the most powerful ruler of his time: “Raised in Spain, the devoutly Catholic Philip II continued, like his father, to rule from Madrid. But unlike Charles V, who had allowed a good measure of political autonomy in his Netherlandish holdings, Philip II aimed to assert a tighter control over these territories in which he perceived the dual threats of growing political discontent with Habsburg rule, and spread of Calvinism. Philip’s increasingly repressive regime included commanding control of the Netherland’s States General, the locally constituted body that traditionally had overseen political and legislative structures of the region. At the same time he pursued a harsh policy of persecution of Calvinist sympathizers, which relied upon banishment, arrest, and execution of those deemed heretics. Violent reactions to Spanish rule and brutal retaliations by the Spanish army continued for decades: in 1566 a wave of anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish iconoclasm swept through Flanders, and Antwerp was ferociously sacked by mutineering troops in the infamous “Spanish Fury” of 1576.” Lisa Rosenthal, Gender, Politics and Allegory in the Art of Rubens, Cambridge, 2005, p. 4.
The rhetoric of obsessive re-encarnations (Phillip II-Franco, Guzman el Burno-Moscardó) was directed towards the establishment of an anti-evolutive utopia in which the national essence was continuously self-actualized as synchronic co-habitation of the present with the past. The space of Spanish history becomes hence the “single” social space.  

As Medina concludes, during the years of political transition from Franco’s Regime to constitutional democracy, Spain confronted its own lack of historical and political introspection and consequently, the country suspended any objective confrontation with the most pressing historical specters that had grounded Spanish cultural identity for over four decades.

As discussed in chapter one, Saura’s distortion of the body of the Spanish baroque monarch paralleled Walter Benjamin’s description of the allegorical nature of the baroque prince as both tyrant and martyr. According to Benjamin, the baroque sovereign incarnated the emblematic body of absolutist power and also its victim. As he wrote, “The sublime status of the Emperor on the one hand, and the infamous futility of his conduct on the other, create a fundamental uncertainty as to whether this is a drama of tyranny or a history of martyrdom.”

In the Spanish baroque drama, Benjamin reasoned, the monarch becomes the sacralization of human authority and the humanization of divine sovereignty. Borrowing Benjamin’s interpretation of the double nature of the Spanish baroque monarch as both tyrant and martyr of totalitarian power, I interpret Saura’s Philip II as embodying a deformed emblem of the

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263 Benjamin’s equation of Baroque with Spanish baroque is consistent all throughout his analysis. Walter Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, op. cit., p. 73.
disjointed body of Spanish artistic tradition and a personal commentary of the dramatic history of Spanish modern political absolutism.264

Similar to Benjamin’s interpretation of the dual condition of the early modern monarch as both tyrant and martyr, Ernst Kantorowicz interpreted the double nature of the sovereign as the union of the historical and the symbolic body of power —hence revealing the monarch both as mortal and mystical body. In the royal Christology, Kantarowicz described, the sovereign conjuncted two bodies: the body natural as the historical person, and the body politic of the sovereign. As Kantarowicz wrote this dual nature established the monarch as a “superbody”;

This migration of the “Soul” that is, of the immortal part of kingship, from one incarnation to another as expressed by the concept of the king’s demise is certainly one of the essentials of the whole theory of the King’s Two Bodies. It has preserved its validity for practically all the time to come. Interesting, however, is the fact that this “incarnation” of the body politic in a king of flesh not only does away with the human imperfections of the body natural, but conveys “immortality” to the individual king as King, that is, with regard to his superbody. 265

Echoing Benjamin’s and Kantarowicz’s interpretation of the early modern monarch as both a historical and mystical body, Saura’s monstrous portrait of Phillip II in 1978 functioned allegorically. It critically reassessed the symbolic authority of the Spanish pictorial and military tradition of the baroque as monstrous, while it enacted a critical commentary on the legacy of Spanish Black Legend under Spain’s new democratic regime.

Teresa Vilarós has described that the spiritual rigidity of Spanish Catholic Imperialism has been carried in Spanish historical consciousness from the baroque till the death of the dictator in 1975. As she writes, “any Spanish cultural or political system will have to confront, one way or

264 As Hopper argued, by the time of Franco’s military uprising they had been 64 military coups perpetuating the to the democratic institutions in recent Spain. John Hopper, The New Spaniards, p. 189.
another, with the vertical, monolithic and spiritually rigid structure of Spanish Catholic Imperialism.”

Thus, in this intricate moral and political context of post-Franco Spain, Saura’s portrait of Phillip II operated as an allegorical emblem of Spanish autarchy. On the one hand it pointed to the complex status of Spanish early-modern history as emblematic yet terrifying national myth. On the other, it addressed the problematic legacy of Spanish baroque as phantasy of a Catholic Imperial destiny.

Emerging at the crux of Spanish political transition (1975-1982) towards constitutional democracy, Saura’s portrait of Philip II as a monstrous body operated as a visual marker of his recurrent pictorial emblem of his artistic career while acting as an indirect commentary on the specter of Spanish political totalitarism that was menacing to appear in the Spanish early modern democracy. As such, Saura’s monstrous monarch functioned as personal allegory of the disjointed body of Spanish artistic tradition and of the pervasive presence of Spanish reactionary absolutism.

In 1979, Saura painted Torquemada (1979), in which he distorted the bust of Dominican friar Tomás de Torquemada (1420-1490), (the first Grand Inquisitor of Catholic Spain) in a black and white composition. In this painting, Saura depicted Torquemada’s head as a giant countenance occupying the center of the composition. Saura’s dense brushstrokes manipulated and distorted Torquemada’s facial features—hence rendering it as a grotesque and monstrous physiognomy. In Saura’s portrait, Torquemada’s face is portrayed as a tragic figure with no

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physical depth. Actually it looks like an infantile depiction of a ghost (Fig. 3.3). Like in Phillip II (1978), in Torquemada Saura transformed the body of the Spanish significant historical figure into a monstrous and humorous body. Saura’s pictorial turmoil over the convulsed face and the austerity of the color palette conveyed a monstrous depiction of the sinister and symbolic historical early-modern Spanish political figure. As such, Saura’s distortion of Torquemada’s physiognomy resembled a pictorial parody, at once mocking the cruelty of Spanish Catholic church while acting as a symbolic reminder of the endemic persistence of Spanish Imperial legacy during Francoism. As Spanish writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán argued, National Catholicism was still held sacrosant in post-Franco’s society— what he called the historical period of “de-Francoization” of contemporary Spain.267

Operating as symbolic visual remnants of Spanish political absolutism and Catholic Inquisition, Saura’s monstrifications of Phillip II and Torquemada revived the dark specters of Spanish Black Legend while confronting the unstable and fragile ideological status of Spanish new constitutional democratic regime during the late 1970s. In doing so, Saura’s monstrous portraits critically reassessed the pressing influence of the Spanish pictorial tradition in his works while also enacting an oblique commentary on Spanish political situation at the threshold of democracy. As Resina’s has argued, in the amnesic social and political context of the early years of Spanish democracy, the significant remnants of Spanish political absolutism “will continue to importunate the remorseful memory of the living, asking for the arrears of an ever-outstanding debt.” As he adds, “In post-Franco Spain historical memory has been not so much diffuse or inaccessible as cumbersome and inconvenient, for it threatens which infertility on

267 “La herencia política de Franco sigue teniendo una guardia impresionante y han bastado esas leves críticas postmortem para que los capitanes de la guardia del generalísimo ya hayan increpado al gobierno por su tolerancia frente a la desfranquización de España.” Vázquez Montalbán, Los Demonios personales de Franco, op. cit., p. 9
elderly boy that wills itself youthful and, like old ladies, dare not tells its age.” 268 In this convoluted political circumstance, Saura’s monstrous portraits participated in what Joan Roman Resina has called the false “cultural refinement” of the Spanish political transition.

Saura’s monstrifications of the portrait of the monarch continued during the 1980s. In *Phillip II* (1984), Saura displayed the bust of the Spanish baroque monarch in profile in an ochre monochromatic background with no spatial depth. Saura’s vivid brushstrokes and drippings of paint mixed colors and distorted the features of the monarch’s face hence transforming the image of the king into a monstrous image (Fig. 3.4). In *Imaginary Portrait of Philip* (1989) Saura undermined the gravity and solemnity of the Spanish Emperor by transforming him into a monstrous and grotesque gorilla like creature (Fig. 3.5). Saura’s black and white color palette echoed his portraits of Phillip II (1978) and Torquemada (1979) of the late 1970s while also evoking the nostalgia and gravity of black and white photographs. Saura’s derisive gesture of transforming the baroque sovereign into a monstrous creature revealed his long–standing gesture of revisiting the Spanish pictorial tradition (hence acting as a gallery of monstrous physiognomies) while it also commented on the inconvenient memory of Spanish history.269

Embodying both artistic reverence and pictorial assault, Saura’s portraits of Spanish historical figures of the early 1980s at once revered and yet undermined the ideologically charged symbols of Spanish early-modern history. Borrowing Karl Marx’s diagnosis of the reenactment of history as mere farce,270 Saura’s monstirfications of Spanish historical emblems

268 “In post-Franco Spain historical memory has been not so much diffuse or inaccessible as cumbersome and inconvenient, for it threatens which infertility on elderly boy that wills itself youthful and, like old ladies, dare not tells its age.” Joan Roman Resina, *Disremembering the dictatorship: The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy*, op. cit., p. 3 and 15.


270 See Karl Marx, *18 Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. As Hal Foster has argued, this duplicity of repetition is coessential of postmodernity: “Debased repetition: the ghost is awakened as a caricature.” Hal Foster, “What is new about the neo-avantgarde?” *October*, vol. 70, Fall 1994, pp.5-32, see especially footnote p. 21.
revealed Spanish nostalgic narcissism at reviving a universal Catholic nation (attempted first by Phillip II and then by Franco), while also commenting on the recurrent ideological appropriation of the pictorial tradition. As Saura explained, his portraits Phillip II in the early 1980s incarnated his obsessive fascination with the Spanish conflictive past (Black Legend) while also manifesting a visual introspection on his personal ghosts. As he wrote, “for any painter his past is an endless source of artistic genres because all the aesthetic forms reveal him something; by interpreting the past, the painter distorts and transforms it through his own graphology in which he includes his own personal ghosts.” As he argued, his monstrous portraits of Phillip II embodied spectral presences of the fractured national artistic and historic legacy while also criticizing the weight of the tradition over the recently inaugurated democratic present.

During the political and ideological recasting and cultural re-signification of post-Franco Spain into a modern democratic European country (1975-1992), Saura’s monstrous bodies confronted the burden of the drama of absolutism in recent Spanish history while pointing towards the acritical embracement of Spanish postmodern identity. As Jo Labanyi argues, Spanish democracy was haunted with the always-deferred problem of coming in terms with the past. As she writes: “In a country that has emerged from forty years of cultural repression, the task of making reparation to the ghosts of the past—that is, to those relegated to the status of living dead, denied voice and memory—is considerable.”

Labanyi’s description of the symptomatic revival of historical ghosts in democratic Spain as an introspective and melancholic gesture paralleled what Teresa Vilarós defined as the “vampiric” nature of the body of the Spanish political transition. As Vilarós argues, the Spanish

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272 A. Saura, “Retratos Imaginarios” Notebook, op. cit.
273 See Jo Labanyi, *Disremembering the dictatorship. The Politics of Memory in the Spanish Transition to Democracy*, op. cit., p. 80.
rapid and peaceful transition from Franco’s dictatorship towards constitutional democracy revealed both a collective repression towards Spanish recent history, and a cultural inflection over the symbolic *body of the nation*. In those years, she described, Spain repressed its own history in order to survive the disenchantment with its political present. As he wrote:

> The repressed returns not only because it has never actually left, but because it offers a new space for reflection [...] From the expulsion to the aspiration, from the vomit to ingestion, the Spanish political transition invades the Spanish body, our body as a cancerous tumor, as an ancestral snake or an elder vampire which in its eternal return of the same, regurgitates and sucks, sucks and regurgitates. 274

Echoing the cannibalistic condition of Vilarós repressed and *regurgitated bodies* I interpret Saura’s distortions of emblematic historical figures as responding to the essential difficulty of democratic Spain in addressing its immediate past. In monstrifying emblematic works from El Greco, Velázquez, Picasso, and Goya during the 1980s, Saura’s monstrous bodies revealed the phantasmagoric presences of the autarchic past that were not yet completely buried while enacting a mournful introspection of his own pictorial grammar after a decade-long break.

Saura’s allegorical and melancholic gaze towards Spanish national history, and towards his pictorial tradition anticipated his later diagnosis of the banalization and ideological commercialization of Spanish modern art during the social democratic period (1982—1992) as a self-congratulatory institutional entertainment (discussed in chapter 4). As Jo Labanyi has pointed out, Spanish long time-desired conquest of democracy was historically concurrent with the pick of postmodernity. As she argued “The fact that Spain returned to democracy at the height of the postmodern vogue for ‘virtual reality’ should not necessarily be bemoaned as having prevented an engagement with the past.” 275

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275 See Jo Labanyi, *Dismembering the Dictatorship*, op. cit. p. 80. As Gerard de Cortanze has pointed out, this phantasmagoric aspect in Saura’s practice is not only visible in the represented subject but also in the act of painting itself, “Le fantasme n’est pas seulement présent dans le visage ou l’autoportrait, les nus, les dames, les monstres
Spanish cultural and political recasting into a modern democratic and European identity took place mainly during two symbolic years of contemporary Spain: 1981 (with the military coup of February 23rd and the arrival of Picasso’s *Guernica* to Madrid), and 1992 (with the commemoration of the five Hundredth Anniversary of the “discovery of America,” —which included the Seville’s World Fair, Barcelona’s Summer Olympic games, and Madrid as European Capital Culture). Responding to and participating in these political, cultural, and artistic state-sponsored celebrations of Spanish culture, Saura’s monstrifications of the masters of Spanish pictorial school created an ambiguous commentary of Spanish new cultural identity. As this chapter examines, Saura’s monstrifications of Goya and Picasso during the mid 1980s and early 1990s questioned the social-democratic state-cultural agenda as a euphoric celebrating Spanish European identity while also presenting the artistic and cultural legacy of Spanish modernity as a fragmentary, discontinuous, ruinous, and melancholic body.

### 3.2. Undoing Goya and Picasso

In 1979, Saura painted *Imaginary Portrait of Goya* in which he rendered monstrous the physiognomy of Goya’s *Half-Submerged Dog* (1820). Saura’s quick and light brushstrokes over the contours of the figure provided an auratic quality to the figure and recalled the sobriety and gravity of El Greco’s portraits (Fig.3.7). The monochromatic background conjured the sobriety of the color composition and the figure suspended in a visual space with no illusion of depth invoked both El Greco’s and Velázquez’s baroque portraiture. Far from the aggressive

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276 As Medina-Domínguez argues: “Desde el poder se lleva a cabo una compleja operación retórica. Al tiempo que se le ofrece al público la imagen del gesto emancipador (alcance de un estadio de responsabilidad sin tutela) dentro de la tradición moderna sobre la que se había construido el imaginario político del postfranquismo desde la oposición, se introduce a la nación, de modo soslayado, en los hábitos de la inminente “sociedad del espectáculo”, en la retórica y las reglas de juego de la postmodernidad” Alberto Medina-Domínguez, *Exorcismos*, op. cit., p. 62.
brushstrokes of the early 1960s —as in Imaginary Portrait of Goya (1960) in which Saura experimented with dripping paint and agitated techniques applicating painting to the canvas (Fig. 3.8, 3.09 & 3.10). In Imaginary Portrait of Goya (1979) Saura rendered Goya’s dog as a calmed and contained monstrous creature. The dense brushstrokes and the sobriety of color presented the dog as both a fragile and a grotesque body. Saura’s visual displacement of the dog’s head over a black rectangle evoked the image of a puppet master. As Calvo Serraller has argued, Saura’s dog suggests the folkloric image of a toreador behind a burladero (bullfighter covert).277 Also, Saura’s four-eyed dog evoked a symbolic Janus figure looking simultaneously to the past and to the future —which, as Calvo-Serraller has observed, enacts the constant tension between tradition and innovation as an anti-avant-garde movement at the core of Spanish modern period.278

During the early 1980s, and concurrent with his pictorial deformations of the dog of Goya, and his monstrous portraits of Phillip II, Saura painted a series of females on armchairs that echoed and actualized his pictorial series Female on Chairs of the mid 1960s while also quoting Picasso’s pictorial iconography in Seated Women series. In Innana on her Armchair (1985), Saura rendered the female body both as a grotesque body and as a violent surface. Saura’s brushstrokes expanded over the canvas as a tensional gesture and the geometric volumes of the chair (Fig. 3.11). Saura’s painting resumed his thematic pictorial series of seated women of the late 1960s as in Geraldine on her Armchair (1968), thus creating a pictorial conversation with his previous works and with the iconography of Picasso’s series of seated women of the 1940s. (Fig. 3.12) Similarly, in Silesa on Her Armchair (1967) (Fig. 3.13), Saura painted a distorted female body over the squared countour of a chair in a monochromatic black background. Saura’s

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278 Francisco Calvo Serraller, Vanguardia y Tradición artística, op. cit., p. 33.
brushstroke is fast and firm hence contrasting the active action of the brush against the relaxed position of the seated body. Saura’s sober color palette (white, brown and grey) and the monochromatic background resonated with El Greco’s *Fray Hortensio* (1609) (Fig. 3.14). Like El Greco’s portrait of the seated body, Saura placed the body on the volumetric constraints of the chair. Saura’s pictorial tension between excessive presence of the body and the visual geometry of the chair also echoed Picasso’s distortion of the seated female body in Seated Women series, as in *Dora Maar* (1938), (Fig. 3.15).

As Elisabeth Cowling has argued, Picasso’s *Seated Women* series stand as *ciphers* of the past of time while also they reveal the melancholic disposition of the artist. As she writes:

> like the hunched, seated angel in Dürer’s famous allegorical engraving from 1514, this woman is in a melancholy, not merely thoughtful state of mind. And because there is no promise whatever of future activity of present energy, one tends to conclude that her reflections are turning to the past, that *memories* of some kind have made her oblivious to her surroundings. ²⁷⁹

Moreover, she adds, Picasso’s seated women created a continuum with the ancient images of the past being both modern and iconic. As she explains:

> These muffled echoes of works of art dating from several hundred years BC to the relatively recent past make the image of the woman seated on the old-fashioned chair seem to pull slowly backwards in time from a vaguely defined modernity towards a vaguely defined antiquity, without ever becoming fixed at any particular moment in history. In alliance with the head-in-hand, reflecting-remembering pose, the temporal vagueness focuses attention on the inexorable passage of time, on the ceaseless transfer of present into past tense, and the generalized references to classicism functions as deciphers both for the past as such and for the continuum of cultural history. ²⁸⁰

In returning to his previous series of *Females on Armchairs* of the mid 1960s, Saura’s monstrous seated women of the mid 1980s enacted an introspective gesture towards his own artistic practice while also commenting on Picasso’s timeless figures.

Manifested recurrently in his works throughout the 1980s, Saura’s monstrification of the works of Goya and Picasso functioned for Saura as Oedipal borders not to be trespassed. As he wrote, Goya’s and Picasso’s works incarnated a “the zone of danger between the affirmation and the destruction of forms.”281

Robert Rosenblum has also emphasized Saura’s complex distortion of Picasso and Goya as a pictorial and cultural introspection. As he noted, Saura’s systematic reworking of Goya’s dog and Picasso’s female portraiture in the 1980s establishes an intricate network of visual references that reevaluates the Spanish modern canon while assessing Saura’s pictorial grammar in a very specific historical circumstance. As he wrote:

The witches, terrors and brutalities that erupt in Saura’s canvases extend and revive venerable traditions of Spanish art and culture, best known to us in the works of Goya and Picasso. If in their origins, these images may have mirrored the war-torn, repressive decades of the Franco regime, they also carry us forward into the unshackled, rejuvenated Spain of the 1970s and 1980s, when artists, from a liberated historical distance, could explore their own national past for audiences on both sides of the Atlantic.282

Borrowing Rosenblum’s diagnosis on the political and cultural aspects of Saura’s work of the 1980s, Saura’s monstrifications of Picasso and Goya functioned as an allegorical introspection of his artistic practice and a melancholic gaze on the mediated and fractured condition of Goya’s and Picasso’s legacies.

As Freud described in *Mourning and Melancholia*, unlike mourning, in which the loss of the loved-object is healed through grief, the melancholic subject reveals a narcissistic and self-critical attitude towards the loss that is eventually self-destructive. In melancholia, Freud reasoned, “The ego wants to incorporate this object into itself, and in accordance with the oral or

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281 Saura, Interview with Jose Luis Jover, in *Escritura como Pintura*, p. 182.
For Freud, the melancholic subject behaves with hostility towards itself and narcissistically punishes the ego for the loss. As he wrote:

> The analysis of melancholia shows that the ego can kill itself only if, owing to the return of the object cathexis it can treat itself as an object: to direct itself the hostility which relates to an object and which represents the ego’s original reaction to objects in the external world. 284

As Freud described, the melancholic subject dismissed the external world and replaces the desire for the lost object with a sadistic narcissism. Melancholia, Freud wrote, “behaves as an open wound.” 285

Discussing Freud’s analysis of melancholia as sadistic processes of the subject’s difficult struggle in achieving a satisfactory self-identification, Julia Kristeva interpreted melancholia as a form of cannibalistic imagination that ultimately devours the self. As she argued:

> The melancholy cannibalistic imagination is repudiation of the loss’s reality and of death as well. It manifests the anguish of losing the other through the survival of self, surely a deserted self but not separated from what still and ever nourishes it and becomes transformed into the self—which also resuscitates—through a devouring. 286

Borrowing both Freud’s and Kristeva’s understanding of melancholic processes as sadistic, narcissistic, and ultimately cannibalistic, I interpret Saura’s recurrent monstrifications of Picasso and Goya for over four decades as incarnating a melancholic and allegorical gesture. As discussed below, they performed a critical introspection of Saura's own artistic while displaying a melancholic commentary on the pictorial body of the Spanish modern artistic tradition at the end of the twentieth century as a disrupted, fragmentary, and discontinuous body.

284 Sigmund Freud, Mourning and Melancholia, op. cit.
285 Freud, Mourning and Melancholia op. cit p. 252.
286 Julia Kristeva, Black Sun, Depression and Melancholia, New York, Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 12 and 100 and ss.
Saura and Goya

The influence of Goya’s *Black Painting* series is conspicuous throughout Saura’s works. As Saura described, Goya’s late works inaugurated the introspective gaze of modern artists. As Saura described, Goya’s *Black Paintings series* embodied:

the only example in modern art history of an artwork done for the painter himself and not for the viewer. In this series Goya rendered his dilemma as a painter; that is, he faces the question of how to paint for oneself that which cannot be shown to the others.\textsuperscript{287}

This dilemma of the modern painter that Saura described as the foundational condition of Goya’s work can be seen throughout Saura’s pictorial series.

As discussed in chapter one, Saura’s *Multitudes* series evoked the indistinctiveness of the modern collective body in Goya’s *Romería de San Isidro* and *Akelarre from the Black Painting Series* (1820-1823). Saura’s *Multitudes* depicted an accumulation of heads with no bodies—hence losing any individuality. Saura’s claustrophobic composition depicted the modern body as a collection of masks and as an anonymous mass. Echoing Goya’s depiction of the modern mass as a monstrous group portrait, Saura’s *Multitudes* series rendered the chaotic and hence visually threatening accumulation of the modern mass (discussed in chapter 1).

As also discussed in chapter one, Saura’s echoed of Goya’s *Saturn Devouring his Son* (1820) in *Hiroshima mon Amour* (1963), *Brunhilde* (1963) and *Crucifixion* (1963). As in Goya’s composition, Saura’s in both rendered a vertical deformed body in a threatening monochromatic black background. Saura’s figures are covered in red echoing the presence of blood while mimicking Goya’s depiction of the blood of the infant — thus creating a dramatic and tragic composition. As André Malraux described, Goya’s mesmerizing fresco was indeed a black humour composition. As he described, Goya’s *Saturn* “It appears — and it is strange indeed-

\textsuperscript{287} “Es, quizá, el único ejemplo en la historia del arte de una pintura hecha para sí mismo y no para los demás. Goya, con crudeza, muestra su propio dilema de pintor: cómo pintar para sí mismo aquello que no puede pintar para los demás.” A. Saura, “Goya o la Contradicción”, Fijez, op. cit., p. 249.
that he discovered irony at the same time as specters, and so as to make fun of them rather than of his contemporaries. But every satirical drawing assumes what it satirizes, and thereby suggest it." 288 For Saura instead, Goya’s intense and monstrous depiction of the Titan’s cruel infanticide embodied a portrait of melancholic fatalism. As he wrote, “the most melancholic images of the series, also the most fascinating ones, are Saturn devouring his son (emblem of self-destruction and the furious melancholia), and the dog —perhaps the image of a fatalist melancholia.” 289

As described in chapter two, Saura’s photographic montages The Dog of Goya (1972—1974), evoked the poetic iconicity of Goya’s dog as a semantic structure for exploring metaphors of the cycle of birth and death. In Miroir du Souvenir (1972) Saura monstrified a photograph reproduction of Goya’s Maja Vestida (1808) by superimposing a grotesque body over it hence creating a self-pardoying composition. Saura’s irreverent and melancholic gesture over Goya’s work is also visible in the Dog of Goya (1973), in which Saura inscribed a grotesque drawing of Goya’s dog over a paper copy reproduction of Velázquez’s Rokeby Venus (1651) — hence creating a dialogue with the cultural status of Goya’s work while inscribing his body on the body of the Spanish pictorial tradition. In La Poste Centrale series (1977), Saura elaborated a crafted envelope addressed to Goya. This symbolic gesture operated as a visual quotation of mail art practices while also functioning as a subtle mockery of Saura’s unattainable task in conversing with the works of Goya. All throughout these series, Goya’s work functioned for Saura at once as a source of constant artistic scrutiny and as an exercise of self-critical and bitter humor bordering on visual obscenity, and a symbolic profanation of artistic ancestors. 290

In 1996, two years before his death, Saura curated the exhibition, After Goya, a Subjective gaze (Después de Goya, la Mirada Subjetiva) celebrating Goya’s 250th birthday. In the

288 See André Malraux, Saturn, An essay on Goya, Phaidon, 1957, p. 28
290 See Antonio Saura, Fijeza, op. cit., p. 293.
catalogue essay, Saura evaluated and assessed the influence of Goya’s painting for modern and contemporary artists. In the catalogue for the exhibition Saura included a personal iconography of reminders of Goya’s dog —thus showing Saura’s career long interest in Goya’s oeuvre. For Saura Goya’s late work inaugurated the artist’s introspective attitude of the artist towards the allegorical emblems of his artistic heritage. 291

Saura and Picasso

Along with Goya, Picasso is certainly one of the central figures of Spanish modern art. The influence of Picasso’s work in Saura is conspicuous in every aspect of Saura’s artistic practice. As Saura argued, Picasso’s painting incarnates the essential condition of the modern image as a monstrous sexual and aesthetical gesture. As he explained:

> It has to be acknowledged that more than a visual solution or a mere transposition of artistic energy, in Picasso’s painting we are witness of an act of love of painting, a sexual realization through and with painting. In it the obscene and the monstrous conflate in an organic miracle; into an intense beauty that belongs to the realm of the plastic thought but it also belongs to the realm of the phantasm. 292

Indeed, Picasso’s works haunted Saura’s artistic practice. As discussed in chapter 1, Picasso’s Boislegoup Crucifixions series (1930-1932) remains at the center of Saura’s black-and-white Crucifixions of 1959 and 1960. As discussed in chapter two, Saura’s Lies and Dreams of Franco (1962), conjured Picasso’s political and criticism of Franco as grotesque in Dreams and Lies of Franco (1937). Saura’s dialogue with Picasso’s work is paradigmatic in Saura’s series on Dora Maar —which Saura described as “probably the most extreme example of passionate distortion in the history of painting.” 293

In 1964, Saura painted two canvases with identical titles, Dora Maar Revisited, in which he reinterpreted and monstrified Picasso’s iconic portraiture of Dora Maar from the mid 1930s.

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291 See Saura, Después de Goya. La Mirada Subjetiva, Exhibition Catalogue.
292 A. Saura in Visor, op. cit., p. 106.
293 Saura, “La belleza obscena”, Fijeza, op. cit. p. 217
by rendering it as a monstrous body. Saura’s *Dora Maar Revisited* (1964) recalled the intense flatness and aggressive brushstroke of French *Informel* pictorial vocabulary while also echoing the dramatic gestural painting of Abstract Expressionism (Fg. 3.18). Shown at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York in September 1964, Saura’s *Dora Maar* paintings mimicked Picasso’s dramatic distortion of the female physiognomy while also functioning as a conscious reflection on Picasso’s portraiture of Dora Maar. In 1983, Saura revisited Picasso’s *Dora Maar* portraiture *Dora Maar Revisited* (1983). Saura painted again Picasso’s *Dora Maar* in 1987 and in 1992.

Saura’s recurrent monstrifications of Picasso’s portraits of Dora Maar provided a melancholic revision of his own artistic practice while offering an inquiry on the legacy with Picasso’s art in the 1980s. As described below, this revival of Picasso as an emblem of Spanish democracy was manifested in 1981 during the democratic-institutional celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of Picasso’s birth, which culminated with the arrival of Picasso’s *Guernica* to Madrid in 1981.

**Saura’s undoing of Picasso and Goya**

In *The Dog of Goya* (1983), Saura displayed the solitary head of Goya’s emblematic dog over a thin red line. Saura’s two-colored background composition echoed Goya’s iconic composition in an undecisive pictorial space (Fig. 3.19). Also, the isolated head of the dog with no body brings to mind Picasso’s monstrous beheaded animal bodies as in *Flayed Head of a Sheep* (1939), and *Head* (1939), (Fig. 3.20 & 3.21). In these paintings, Picasso resonated with the baroque iconography of the human skull as an emblem of *vanitas* and *tempus fugit*, while echoing Goya’s *Mutton Head* (1808-1812), which Goya painted during the Napoleonic invasion of Spain (Fig. 3.22). Picasso’s indirect quotation of Goya offers for Saura a melancholic gesture
and a reinterpretation of the influence of baroque painting in modern Spanish art. As Saura described:

Goya audaciously portrayed the beauty of the waste, of that which is commonly considered repulsive and turned it into a pictorial theme. The bloody head of the lamb still conserves its terrible eye. It is probably one of the most violent paintings of Spanish history of painting. Within this spirit it might be situated Picasso’s death natures. They are the heirs of Goya’s head and of the iconography of Saint John beheaded and the human skull in the Vanitas’ paintings that were so prevalent on the Spanish baroque. \(^{294}\)

Saura’s career-long strategy at monstrifying Goya’s and Picasso’s painting as Spanish modern ancestors echoed Harold Bloom’s notion of *knosis*. As Bloom reasoned in *The Anxiety of Influence*, the productive “emptying” or “ebbing” of the masterworks of the cultural tradition enacts an introspective gesture that nonetheless produces new artistic approaches. As he wrote, *knosis* entails:

> a revisionary act that creates a liberating discontinuity making possible a kind of creation that a simple repetition of the precursor’s afflatus or godhood could not allow. “Undoing” the precursor’s strength in oneself serves also to “isolate” the self from the precursor’s stance, and saves the latecomer-poet from becoming taboo in and to himself. \(^{295}\)

Borrowing Bloom’s notion of knosis as a productive *undoing* of the cultural predecessors, as a means of creating new works of art, Saura’s works of the 1980s undid his own artistic ancestry and revealed his anxiety towards the symbolic authority of Spanish pictorial legacy. Saura’s monstrifications of Goya and Picasso performed an ambivalent gesture that simultaneously paid homage and reevaluated the cultural status of the Spanish tradition as politically obsolete under the new democratic and European present.

\(^{294}\) “Goya con audacia descubre la belleza sorprendente del despojo, de un tema considerado habitualmente como repugnante —la sanguinolenta cabeza conserva todavía un terrible ojo—, realizando sin duda alguna uno de los cuadros más violentos de la pintura española. Es dentro de este espíritu donde deben situarse ciertas naturalezas muertas de Picasso, deudoras como el cráneo de Goya tanto del tema de la belleza de la cabeza cortada de san Juan, tan prodigada en la pintura y la escultura española del barroco, como de la vasta iconografía de las Vanitas que incluyen el cráneo humano.” Saura, “Picasso y el Toro” in *Visor*, op. cit., p. 143.

Saura’s symptomatic urgency in confronting the Spanish cultural present with emblematic images of the past conjured Walter Benjamin’s the dialectical image as a dialectical struggle. As Benjamin explained;

For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably [...] The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition way from a conformism that is about to overpower it [...] In the dialectical image the past of a given epoch is always ‘the past of always’. But it presents as such only in the eyes of a particular epoch—the one in which humanity, rubbing its eyes, recognizes precisely this dream image for what it is.296

As discussed below, Saura’s dialectical undoings of Goya and Picasso during the 1980s functioned both as a melancholic self-questioning of his own artistic practice, and as a commentary on the broken narrative Spanish pictorial tradition—hence creating a reflective, mediated cultural commentary on the meaning and significance of Spanish cultural modernity in the 1980s.

3.3. Saura and the “Party of Painting” in the 1980s

In 1985, Saura painted Imaginary Portrait of Goya (1985), in which he rendered Goya’s dog as a convoluted and monstrous head. Saura displaced the dog at the bottom of the composition and divided the background in a bright color contrast (Fig. 3.23). The two-colored background echoed both pictorial vocabularies, the ocher colored backgrounds of Velázquez’s portraiture and the black of Goya’s Black Painting series. In this painting Saura echoed both Goya’s iconic dog as well as Picasso’s series of animal heads—hence creating a series of pictorial quotations while rendering the dog of Goya as a monstrous body. This painting reinstated the persistence of Goya’s iconography in Saura’s artistic practice while pointing to the lack of cohesive continuity in the narrative of Spanish modern art.

Saura’s return to the works of the pictorial tradition in the early 1980s also responded to what Spanish curator Antonio Bonet called the Spanish “party of painting” (pintar era una fiesta)—a series of exhibitions (such as “1980” and “Madrid D.F.”) celebrating the works of a new generation of young Spanish painters including Miquel Barceló, Fernández Sevilla, Pérez Villalta and Sicila.297 For Bonet, Spanish “new painting” was truly international precisely because it had finally abandoned the provincial narcissism of Spanish dramatic history.298 Following Bonet’s enthusiasm with Spanish new painting Margit Rowel curated the show New Images from Spain at the Guggenheim museum in New York in which she included paintings by Barceló, Perez Villarta and Sicila. Rowell’s show attempted to repeat Sweeney’s successful strategy in exhibiting Spanish *Informalismo* in 1960 (as discussed in chapter 1).

These shows of Spanish art were concurrent with what Yves Alain Bois defined as the international “return to painting”. As Bois argued in *Painting the Task of Mourning*, Yves-Alain Bois, the massive return to the practice of easel painting during the 1980s enacted a mournful gesture through which artists performed a “rejoice at the killing of the dead.”299 As Bois described, painting had never been gone, but in the artistic context of the early 1980s, artists returned to painting as a securing artistic position in order to conform to the exigencies of the art market. As Bois concluded, this symptomatic return to paint operated “both as a response to the feeling of the end and a working through the end.”300

298 “ahora que afortunadamente no está de moda el arte político, es urgente replantear la política del arte; ahora que la política no se hace en tela, es urgente replantear la política que se hace en la entretela. Juan Antonio Bonet in exhibition catalogue of “1980”, quoted by Jorge Luis Marzo, ¿Puedo Hablarle con Libertad Excelencia?, op. cit., p. 174.
300 Yves-Alain Bois, , op. cit., p. 242.
Bois’ critical evaluation of this symptomatic return to painting responded to Barbara Rose’s 1979 MoMA exhibition, “American Painting: the 1980s: a critical interpretation”, in which Rose presented the most recent American figurative painters as the aesthetic paradigm of the postmodern period. Rose’s show was exhibited in Barcelona and Madrid in 1982.

Hence under this international theoretical debate on the politics of painting in the early 1980s and concurrent with Bonet’s and Rowell’s shows on Spanish new painting of the early 1980s as authentically international, Spanish Spanish socialist government sponsored a series of international events promoting Spanish contemporary art as a means of political legitimation. In 1982, the first edition of Spanish Contemporary Art Fair (ARCO) was inaugurated in Madrid aiming to consolidate Spanish contemporary art and as means to establish as strong national cultural industry.

Jorge Luis Marzo has interpreted this celebratory celebration of Spanish contemporary art and the de-politization of Spanish painting during the early 1980s as rather problematic. As he argues, Bonet’s de-historization of Spanish painting was problematic precisely because of its complacency with the amnesic state cultural policies and its systematic refusal to come with terms with the recent political and cultural past. As Marzo appraised, these euphoric shows celebrating Spanish painting of the 1980s functioned as a “tabula rasa” that was cynically amnesiac and supportive of the political status quo.\(^\text{301}\)

Like Marzo, Jazmin Breirak has also argued that the art market success and the public institutional support of Spanish painters of the early 1980s revealed Spanish-political institutions urgency in re-establishing a national artistic identity. As she described, this cultural and ideological anxiety in re-politicizing Spanish contemporary painting as a-political demonstrated

\(^{301}\) “Se optó por una total amnesia social y política como perfecta tabula rasa para que lo que se pusiera sobre ella pareciera lo más nuevo del mundo. Y la carne a cortar no era otra que la que llevaba treinta años esperando en un rancio congelador.” See Jorge Luis Marzo, ¿Puedo Hablarle con Libertad Excelencia? Op. cit. p. 193
the ideological urgency in neglecting the most recent legacy of the Spanish conceptual art and institutional art practices in the 1970s. As both Marzo and Breirak conclude, the self-congratulatory celebration of painting was obliterating the critical potential of institutional and conceptualist practices and instead, perpetuating the amnesic condition of the political transition. As Marzo writes, by the early 1980s, “Spain had self-stolen the idea of modernity”.

Unlike Bois’s diagnosis on the task of mourning of painting, and also distant from Bonet’s celebratory “painting party” of Spanish painters of the early 1980s, Saura’s monstrifications of Goya and Picasso offered instead a melancholic allegory of the fragmented and discontinuous body of Spanish modernity.

Julia Kristeva defined allegory as a sorrowful gesture that counteracts the congenital enthusiasm of Western imagination. As she argued:

> Beyond its concrete moorings, however, this rhetorical figure [allegory] discovers what Western imagination basically owes to loss (to mourning) and its reversal into a threatened, fragile, spoiled enthusiasm. Whether it reappears as such or vanishes from the imagination, allegory is inscribed in the very logic of the imagination, which its didactic over-simplicity has the privilege of revealing ponderously.

Following Kristeva’s description of Western imagination as allegorical and melancholic, Saura’s monstrous renderings of Picasso’s _Dora Maar_ and Goya’s dogs in thematic series during the 1980s assaulted yet observed the patriarchal figures of modern Spanish painting. Moreover, Saura’s monstrous “undoings” of Picasso and Goya displayed a melancholic gesture towards his artistic practice and towards the cultural status of the Spanish pictorial tradition while deploying

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302 See Jazmin Breirak, _Arte y Transición_, Madrid, Brumaria p. 150 and ss.
304 Julia Kristeva _Black Sun_ op. cit., p. 108.
an allegorical commentary on the democratic refashioning of modern art. This dual gesture was especially significant in the emblematic political moment of 1981 Spain.

3.4. 1981, The Return of Picasso and Saura’s Against the Guernica

1981 was a crucial year in the realignment of forces between art and politics in democratic Spain; first with the military coup of 23 February and second, with the arrival of Picasso’s Guernica in Madrid. These two events reshaped and defined Spanish democracy.

In 1981, the moderate center-right Democratic Christians party (U.C.D.) — the first Spanish democratically elected government in more than forty years — celebrated the centennial anniversary of Picasso’s birth by sponsoring a series of nation-wide museum retrospectives, scholar colloquia, and university seminars honoring Picasso’s contribution to national culture. Born in Málaga in 25 October 1881, Picasso lived in France most of his life. Like Goya before him, Picasso died in exile in France—in Mougins in April 8, 1973.

The Franco regime never praised Picasso. Picasso’s political commitment to the República was anathema for the Regime. Although the Museum Picasso had opened in Barcelona in 1963 with a personal loan from Picasso (which included Las Meninas series) and the bequest of Picassos’ friend and personal assistant, Joan Sabatés, it received almost no official support and scarcely any press attention. In 1981, eight years after his death, Spanish democratic government commemorated Picasso as the great master and paternal figure of Spanish modern art with a series of institutional events as a means to come in terms with the past. For many, Picasso became a political symbol for the demands of an artistic and moral restitution. However, in 1981 Francoist’s nostalgics and the military forces jeopardized this democratic civic spirit of political reconciliation by all sectors of Spanish society.

305 For a fuller discussion see Maria Dolores Jiménez Blanco, Arte y Estado en España, Madrid, Alianza, 1990.
On the morning of February 23, 1981, Colonel Antonio Tejero, as commander in chief of the Guardia Civil (a National security corps with military structure), entered the National Assembly (Congreso de los Diputados) with a gun in hand, shooting into the air (Fig. 3.23) while army tanks patrolled the streets of the city of Valencia. Although the 23-F military coup ultimately failed, it nonetheless reawakened the darkest nightmares of Franco’s military insurrection of July 18, 1936 and hence it revived the tragic fate of Spanish absolutism. The dramatic image of the army tanks patrolling the streets inevitably brought to mind the traumatic events of Spanish most recent history: the bloody fratricide of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and forty years of authoritarian dictatorship (1939—1975).\(^{306}\) Tejero’s military coup made evident the difficult collective task of Spanish democracy in living with an uncomfortable national Black Legend that, like a monstrous skeleton hidden in the closet, it was constantly menacing to reappear.\(^{307}\)

On September 10, 1981, only six months after the failed military coup, Picasso’s *Guernica* arrived for the very first time in Spain from MoMA, where it had been in personal loan by the artist since 1957. For the main Spanish political actors of the time as a collective civic property and as a national cultural symbol, the homecoming of Picasso’s masterpiece symbolized the historical opportunity of healing once and for all Spanish social and political wounds of a traumatic past. As many scholars have argued, in this political climate of post-military coup, Picasso’s *Guernica* incarnated literally, the visual guarantor of Spanish political consensus. As


\(^{307}\) As Juan Pablo Fusi and Jordi Palafox have argued: “Parecía, por tanto, que la historia se repetía, que el Ejército, amparándose en la larga tradición de intervencionismo militar del país, volvía a apelar a la teoría que lo concebía como la salvaguardia de la unidad nacional y actuaba, una vez más, como instrumento de cambio político y, en este caso (como en 1936), de una nueva contrarrevolución española.” Jordi Palafox y Juan Pablo Fusi, *España 1808-1996, El Desafío de la Modernidad*, Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1997, p. 381.
Herschel B. Chipp has observed: “the return of Guernica to Picasso’s native soil and the acceptance of it by the Spanish people was a testimony of national reconciliation”.308

Conservative Spanish newspaper ABC reported the Guernica’s return as “The Arrival of the Last Exiled” (“El Regreso del Último Exiliado”). Echoing Alain Resnais’s 1962 film title, leftist newspaper El País titled the Guernica’s return as “The War is Over” (“La Guerra ha Terminado”), thus celebrating the historical restitution of the values of Spanish democracy that were dramatically usurped by Franco.309 As the eulogic media reports attested, Guernica’s arrival embodied the symbolic restitution of Spanish modern art while acting as a social and political guarantor of Spanish democratic consensus.

As Catalan senator Jordi Solé Tura described, Spanish political consensus defined the Spanish peaceful transition from a forty years fascist dictatorship into a social democracy. As he recalled in his discussion over Spanish democratic constitution of 1978:

the need to look for the greatest support possible in face of the resistance they were certainly going to find made the party leaders finally pass over the initial, more restrictive plans; and consensus emerged as the preferred method. This meant that the drafting of the constitution had to be a job for all the political parties committed to the constitution, regardless of their size or background, so that all shared responsibility for the constitution, and the only resulting dividing line would be that which separated enemies of the democracy and those in favor of it.310

In the same spirit of Turá’s defense of social and political consensus as a tool to consolidate Spanish democratic present, Social Democratic Spanish Prime minister Felipe González (in power from 1982 to 1996), explained this social and political consensus as the condition of possibility for a truly democratic Spanish state. In a speech addressed to an international

audience in New York in 1985, he claimed for a tabula rasa with Spanish recent history as a means to build a genuine democratic future. As he argued:

New generations who had not directly experienced the horrors of the Civil War, among whom I am one, were then able to put a stop to the dialectics of victors and vanquished. Many children of the former joined forces with those of the latter in search of new horizons of freedom and respect, such as are known in other Western countries. These new generations were the first to demolish the walls of incomprehension between Spaniards, which the dictatorship had left standing as a mechanism of social control. This change of attitudes created the necessary conditions to latter enable a political and institutional transformation to take place. 311

In this climate of institutional celebration of Spanish cultural modernity and democratic society, the arrival of Picasso’s Guernica was ideologically significant since Spanish political parties presented it as a symbol of political cohesion and cultural restitution. For them, the painting showed Spanish social and political reconciliation internationally while at the same time it symbolically healed the wounds of the traumas of Spanish most recent history.

Rejecting this official narrative, Guillem Martínez has coined the term *Culture of the Transition* describing the ideological hegemony of consensus as a sacrosanct value in Spanish democratic culture during the past thirty years.312 The price of social consensus, Martínez describes, was paradoxically the negation of critical thinking in favor of social cohesion, thus transforming Spanish recent history into a problematic blind spot.313

As I examine below, ambiguously situated between the reinforcement of the Spanish pictorial tradition and questioning the emblematic status of the of Spanish modern painting, Saura’s repetitive *monstrification* of Goya and Picasso during the early 1980s at once revived and undermined the body of Spanish modern art as discontinous and therefore rendering visible the problem of the historically broken narrative of Spanish modern tradition.

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Picasso’s *Guernica* in 1981 Spain

Without a doubt, Picasso’s *Guernica* embodies the cornerstone of Spanish contemporary art. Picasso painted the *Guernica* after being commissioned by the Spanish Republica to create a work denouncing the struggle of Spanish Republica against fascism for the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Fair. The Republican government aimed at raising international resources and diplomatic sympathy against Franco’s military coup by displaying works from Miró and Calder. Picasso finally accepted the state commission and started making sketches for a mural painting.\(^{314}\)

As Herschel Browning Chipp described, by spring 1936 Picasso had began a few sketches for a mural painting with some allegorical content. As Chipp documented, Picasso started *Guernica* after seeing the news press release of photographs of the aftermath of the massive air bombing of civilians over the Basque city of Gernika by the Nazi Condor Legion on April 26, 1936.\(^{315}\) As Dora Maar’s sequence of photographs in Picasso’s studio testified, Picasso painted the *Guernica* in five weeks in May 1936. The painting was originally displayed at the inauguration of the Paris fair in July 1937.

Despite its controversial first reception —which disappointed those expecting a dogmatic painting denouncing the horrors of Franco’s military insurrection, the *Guernica* rapidly became an icon of the Spanish Civil War and, soon after, an international symbol of resistance against Fascism.\(^{316}\) Across the years, the significance of Picasso’s painting expanded. From its original critical denouncement of the horror of the air bombing of the Basque city of Gernika by Nazi troops, it soon became a symbol of the Spanish fight against fascism. After Nazi occupation of

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Paris in 1942 during World War II, the *Guernica* run the risk of being destroyed and thus it travelled first to England, and then across the United States. In the course of this long transnational itinerary the painting gradually became an emblem of despair against absolute power, thus presaging the horrors that came afterwards from World War II and the Cold War. Shown in permanent exhibition at MoMA since 1957, the painting became a worldwide icon for anti-war movements and stood as an emblem for the Vietnam war protests during the mid 1960s and early 1970s. During the second half of the twentieth century *Guernica* became unquestionably, Picasso’s best-known painting as well as a universal icon against the horror of war. Yet, after decades of Francoist political censorship and repression, in 1981 Spain Picasso’s painting had become a cultural treasure and a national artistic and political emblem.317

Interestingly enough, Spanish legal division between early-modern art —currently exhibited at the Prado Museum— and contemporary art —currently hosted at the Reina Sofía Museum— is defined by Picasso’s date of birth in 1881. Therefore, 1981 symbolized not only the arrival of the emblem of anti-Franco’s resistance and the physical reassurance of Spanish modern democracy after the failed military coup, it also celebrated the first centennial of Spanish modern art.

Forty-five years after the fratricidal massacre of the Civil War, the Spanish democratic political forces instrumentalized the arrival of the *Guernica* in Spain as a healing cultural, social and political emblem. In this particular context of self-imposed social and political consensus, Picasso’s painting operated as a cultural totem with which symbolically recompose the broken narrative of Spanish cultural and political modernity. Such was its apotropaic power, that the *Guernica* was first shown in Spain behind bulletproof glass and under the constant vigilance of

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two armed *Guardia Civiles* (Fig. 3.24). The image of two armed *Guardias Civiles*—the same military force that six months earlier had military occupied the national congress in order to reestablish a military regime—protecting the emblem anti-fascism illustrated the schizophrenia of Spanish political transition.

Guillem Martínez has humorously described this delirious historical moment as *Pop-Francoism*. As he writes:

>Franquismo Pop is a funny and very hard thing to explain to a Swedish person. a) It consists of a country in which the Philadelphia Sound coexisted with the happy songs of Spanish Biking Tour (La Vuelta Ciclista), the cartoons of Vickie the Viking and ups, the death penalty; but also with the extremist political engagement and with the amnesic pact signed by both left and right political forces of the political transition. It is b) a culture in which the negation of historical reality coexist with the real experience of international pop culture... However we should not lie to ourselves; the great issue of Spanish contemporary culture is why Spanish contemporary culture decided not to call into question the Spanish Civil War and the political Transition. In other words, the main issue is why Spanish contemporary culture decided not to interrogate Spanish culture.

As Martínez’s comment sarcastically denotes, in the post-Franco democratic Spain of 1981, Spanish modern art was instrumentalized as a propitious cultural and political tool to come to terms with the traumatic past and to establish a historical and collective restitution of Spanish national memory. At its very core, Picasso’s *Guernica* incarnated the condition of possibility for political *tabula rasa* and national reconciliation. As 1981’s Spanish minister of culture claimed at the first display of the painting at el Casón del Buen Retiro: “Nobody should interpret the work as a flag for any sector — let us look at Guernica as a pure and simple rejection of brutal force.”

Thus, in the fragile social and political Spanish context of post-*coup d’État* 1981, the display of Picasso’s *Guernica* testified the historical restoration of Spanish modern cultural identity, while being presented Spanish civic society long-term collective effort of transforming

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320 Quoted in Chipp, Picasso’s Guernica, op. cit.
Spain into a modern European democratic nation. In response to this ideological instrumentalization of Picasso’s painting and criticizing the political urgency for democratic cultural and political normalization—on December 1981, Saura wrote a sarcastic manifesto Against the Guernica—in which ironically accused the Guernica of being a a-political and therefore subjected to political instrumentalization.

Saura’s Against the Guernica

Despite Saura’s reflective examination of and career-long dialogue with Picasso’s works, Saura did not monstrified the Guernica. In the aftermath of the Guernica’s arrival to Spain, Saura wrote a controversial manifesto sarcastically criticizing the political confiscation of Picasso’s painting by Spanish democracy. Saura’s Against the Guernica is an eighty-pages derisive manifesto in which Saura sarcastically blamed Picasso’s Guernica for not providing a site for political resistance. As Saura wrote, “I hate the Guernica, counselor of democracies.”

Saura’s manifesto offered a controversial commentary on the Spanish political and cultural context post-Guernica—thus unveiling the danger of ideologically appropriating Picasso and therefore of instrumentalizing the Guernica as a political myth. Ironic and in some instances self-deprecatory, Saura’s provocative manifesto criticized the political instrumentalization of the Guernica while at the same time positioning himself in the legacy of the modern Spanish canon. As he wrote, “I despise both Antonios of Spanish art, Tàpies and Saura, men of consumptive origins, travel mates, bastard sons of Picasso and clowns in search of fame.”

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322 As Julián Ríos points out in Against the Guernica Saura adopted Jonathan Swift’s satirical attitude in A Modest Proposal. See Julián Ríos, Las Tentaciones de Antonio Saura, op. cit..
324 “Desprecio a los dos Antonios del arte español, Tàpies y Saura, tísicos de origen, compañeros de viaje, hijos bastardos de Picasso y pintamonas en ejercicio de fama” (Against the Guernica, p. 66).
Antonio López-Quiñones has pointed out Saura’s *Against the Guernica* transposed Saura’s exegesis of Picasso’s painting to the Spanish cultural and political situation of the early 1980s while at the same time it strategically situated Saura as symbolic heir Picasso’s artistic lineage.325

By the early 1980s, Saura was a consolidated painter and a prominent public figure in Spain. In 1982, he was awarded the *Golden Medal of Arts*, —the highest artistic national honour. However, despite his preeminent position as an intellectual artist and as a cultural critic, Saura’s polemic manifesto was not very well received. Indeed, Spanish art critics and intellectuals attacked Saura’s sarcasm and intellectual derisiveness as politically misleading and historically inappropriate. In an interview with Julian Ríos, Saura explained that the criticism towards his sarcastic manifesto proved that “either there is no sense of humor in Spain, or there is no cultural past or, probably, both at the same time.”326 Beyond the exchange of sterile accusations between a few angry critics and annoyed intellectuals, Saura’s manifesto highlighted Spanish political anxiety in moving beyond the haunting presence of the past. As Saura’s manifesto was making evident social democracy’s political urgency in appropriating Spanish contemporary art did not greatly differ in manner from the Francoist diplomatic use of *Informalismo* during the late 1950s (discussed in chapter 1).327 All in all, Saura’s *Against Guernica* expanded Saura’s melancholic criticism against the instrumentalization and banalization of Spanish culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s.328

In 1984 Spanish writer Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio described what he considered an excessive involvement of the government in contemporary art production. He described the inevitable

327 See Marzo, *La Memoria Administrada* and *¿Puedo Hablarle con libertad excelencia?*
degenerative consequences of that support as an act of political *actomanía*. For him, Spanish modern culture had been instrumentalized as a tool for government propaganda and ultimately, contemporary culture was equated to a social party. Sánchez Ferlosio’s harsh criticism of the institutional policies of the “party of culture” anticipated in eight years the State self-congratulatory celebration of Spanish postmodern culture in 1992 as an empty folkloric ceremony.

In 1983, one year after publishing his sarcastic manifesto *Against Guernica*, Saura participated in the exhibition, *Bonjour Monsieur Picasso* at the Picasso museum in Antibes. Curated by Danièle Giraduy, the show displayed a series of contemporary interpretations of Picasso’s works commemorating the tenth anniversary of Picasso’s death. For this exhibition, Saura presented, *Aprés Dora Maar*, a series of paintings based on Picasso’s *Femme au chapeau Blue* (1939)(Fig. 3.25) in which Saura dialogued simultaneously with his own body of works, (by reinterpreting his paintings of *Dora Maar* in 1964), and with Picasso’s portraits of weeping women from the 1930s. This twofold pictorial conversation reinstated Saura’s career-long introspective gesture towards his own artistic language at the very significant moment in which Spain was refashioning its democratic identity. As I argue, Saura’s *Dora Maar* series (1983) embodied both an act of pictorial examination of his artistic legacy, and also a cannibalistic palimpsest of his career-long strategy at monstrifying emblems of the modern Spanish.

### 3.5. Saura after Picasso: *Dora Maar Revisited* Series

As above mentioned, in 1983, the Picasso Museum at Antibes invited a group of 13 artists, including Alechensky, Erro, Arman, Adami, Gutusso, and Saura among others, to participate in the exhibition, *Bonjour Monsieur Picasso*. For this exhibition, Saura presented, *Dora Maar Revisited*, a series of thirteen canvases in which he revisited and distorted Picasso’s *Woman in

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Blue Hat (Dora) (1939), (Fig. 3.25). Saura had been present in French exhibitions regularly since 1960, and was honored in France with prestigious awards. In 1981, Saura had been honored as Chevalier de Arts et des Lettres, and, in 1989 he was awarded, Officier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Letters, the highest French distinction in visual arts. Saura’s canvases of Dora Maar in 1983 revealed his profound knowledge of Picasso’s painting and the syncretist dimension of his artistic practice.

In Dora Maar 20.5.1983 (1983) Saura transformed Picasso’s Dora Maar into a baroque royal portrait, thus conflating the iconography of Picasso’s Weeping Women series of the late 1930s and the pictorial idiom of El Greco’s baroque portraiture (Fig. 3.26). As Saura explained it was his excitement and “complacency of contemplating Dora Maar transformed into Philip II, or vice versa, disguised with antipodal clothes.” The black hat delimits the tensional force on the face, echoing the use of hats in his Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II series (discussed in chapter 1). As Alexandre Cirici Pellicer reminded us, the black hat functioned as a visual barrier of the pictorial turmoil while also operating as a visual symbol of the Spanish Black Legend. As such, Saura’s dialogue with both the modern and the baroque tradition resonated with Picasso’s manipulation of El Greco’s portraiture in Portrait of Juan Sabartés (1939) while echoing Saura’s monstrous portrait of Imaginary Portrait of Phillip II.

In Dora Maar (1983) Saura transformed the face of Dora Maar into a monstrous portrait, revealing her portrait as a pure pictorial turmoil. Humorously, Saura located the form of a cigarette on the eye, hence mocking the gravity of the portrait as well as his artistic gesture (Fig. 3.28). Saura’s brushtrokes create a convoluted face that falls into itself in a centripetal force that

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330 “complacencia al contemplar Dora Maar travestida de Felipe II, o viceversa, disimulada con hábitos de las antípodas” Saura, “La Imagen Pintada”, in Escritura Como Pintura, Barcelona, Galaxia Gutenberg, Círculo de Lectores, 2000, p. 96.
emphasized visually and semantically his pictorial introspection. In *Dora Maar, Après Dora Maar*, 20.9.1983 (1983) Saura explored this visual exercise of pictorial commentary and visual juxtaposition of pictorial grammars. Saura’s palette is reduced to a dramatic black-and-white composition, with the addition of only a few tones of beige (Fig. 3.29). The austere contrast between black, beige and white recalls the pictorial vocabulary of Velázquez’s Portrait of Juan de Pareja, while conjuring the dramatic quality of Picasso’s Guernica— the latter of which Saura had seen recently in Madrid after his arrival in Spain in 1981. The blank space on the neck is covered by splattered paint resonating at once with the technical virtuosity of abstract expressionism and his previous works such as *Geraldine son sans Fauetl*. In so doing, Saura’s *Dora Maar* revealed Saura’s pictorial archaeology as a constant deformation of artistic ancestries. As Saura wrote:

*Dora Maar Revisited*, reviewed through a ceremony in which a borrow schema gets transformed into a pure structure which is subjected to the inexorable laws of plastic phenomenology. Bones or pretext. Growth and fossilization of an instant, but also the subtle amputation of a small portion of a mystery. In short, to achieve an image through the reflex of a reflex. 332

In *Dora Maar 23.5.83* (1983) Saura dialogued at once with Picasso and with the previous Dora Maars of the series thus becoming a meta-referential painting (Fig. 3.30). Rather than a stable image, Saura’s monstrous portrait of Dora Maar embodied visual matrix for potentially infinite distortions. As he wrote, Picasso’s portraits of Dora Maar embodied an act of love for painting through a monstrous obscene and phantasmagoric exercise of deforming beauty:

I want to assert that more than a mere substitution or a transposition of energy, [in Picasso’s painting] we can see an act of love with painting, a sexual encounter by means of painting. The obscene and the monstrous conflate into a magic organism. They become another kind of beauty:

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332 “*Dora Maar Revisitada, revisada a través de una ceremonia en la cual un esquema prestado acaba por transformarse en pura estructura ya sometida a las leyes implacables de la fenomenología plástica. Osamenta o pretexto. Crecimiento y fosilización del instante, pero también ligera amputación de una parcela de misterio. Lograr, en suma, una imagen a través del reflejo de un reflejo.*” Antonio Saura, “*La imagen Pintada*”, en Saura, 15 Retatros Imaginarios, 1983, published in Escritura como Pintura, p. 81
an intense beauty that belongs to the realm of the plastic thought but it belongs also to the realm of the phantasmagoric.\textsuperscript{333}

As Saura argued, Picasso’s \textit{Dora Maar} represented the paroxysm of Picasso’s monstrous portraiture and it functioned for him as a matrix-image for consecutive and future deformations, symbolizing at the same time a mother, a Gorgone, a prostitute, and a Lolita.\textsuperscript{334}

Saura’s pictorial \textit{monstrification} of Dora Maar manifested his career-long artistic conversation with Picasso while revealing the profound introspective quality of his artistic production.\textsuperscript{335} Saura’s artistic attitude is then cyclical and repetitive. By perverting and vampirizing the pictorial languages of his artistic ancestry during the early 1980s, Saura’s monstrous renderings of Dora Maar, created a melancholic body of works by revaling the uncertainties of the political present as a continual recasting of the past.

In 1964, Saura painted two canvases with the identical title, Dora Maar in which Saura dialogued with Picasso and with the visual language of French Informel.\textsuperscript{336} For more than twenty years, Picasso’s iconic image of Dora Maar functioned for Saura a visual palimpsest of his pictorial strategies.\textsuperscript{337} Additionally, Saura’s systematic \textit{monstrification} of Picasso’s Dora Maar offered a particular instance of his profound interpretation of Picasso’s painting as an allegorical platform for his own artistic practice.

Saura’s \textit{Dora Maar series} demonstrated Saura’s ironic gestures addressed both to his own works and to Picasso’s artistic body of deformed female portraits. In this series, Saura emulated  

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\textsuperscript{333} “En todo caso cabe afirmar que más que a una solución de sustitución o transposición de energía, asistimos a un acto de amor con la pintura, a una realización sexual a través y dentro de ella. Lo obsceno y lo monstruoso se conjugan en un milagro orgánico, en otra belleza llamada intensidad que perteneciendo al dominio del pensamiento plástico, pertenece también al de la fantasmagoria.”A. Saura, “Picasso en tres Dimensiones”, \textit{Visor, Sobre Artistas}, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{334} See Antonio Saura, “Picasso en tres dimensiones” op. cit., p. 109.
\textsuperscript{335} Saura’s Dora Maar Revisited series where exhibited at the Stadler Gallery in Paris from June 2-July 9, 1983 with a text by Pierre Daix. See Pierre Daix, \textit{Dora Maar D’Aprés Dora Maar, Portraits Raisonnés avec Chapeau, Antonio Saura}, Galerie Stadler, Paris, June 2-9 July 1983.
\textsuperscript{337} For the palimpsest in Saura see Didier Simier, Lelong Gallery, Paris, 2010.
\end{flushright}
Picasso’s portraits of the 1940s while showing the frustration of such emulation hence turning Picasso’s portraits into an Oedipal task that quest also Saura’s gesture as a painter. Saura’s strategy, at once ironic and self-introspective, paralleled Paul de Man description of allegory as an exercise in irony. As de Man argued irony reveals the temporal distance and as such it becomes a meta-referential commentary. As he wrote:

> The act of irony, as we now understand it, reveals the existence of a temporality that is definitely not organic, in that it relates to its source only in terms of distance and difference and allows for no end, for no totality. Irony divides the flow of temporal experience into a past that is pure mystification and a future that remains harassed forever by a relapse within the inauthentic.  

Continually signaling the artistic difference and historical lapse between his works and those of Picasso, Saura’s monstrifications embodied dramatic yet humorous distortions of the artistic heritage as monstrous. Hence offering a melancholic assault against the authority of the pictorial tradition. As Gerard de Cortanze wrote:

> Saura resumed Dora Maar where Picasso had left her: as an intimate presence of a mental image; as a compound of traces and multiple viewpoints. It needs to be stated that when Dora Maar saw her portraits in Picasso’s studio she acknowledged that a “terrible form isolated between the eyes resembled her own front […]” [Saura’s Dora Maar] (Dora Maar 20.5.89) reconstructs body and soul. She is an obscene queen, a lovable monster, a nameless desire. Everything has its transformative plenitude; its abruptly fossilized delicacy. And yet that which prevails in the memory of a painting is what is submerged beyond “the confusion of the explosive attributes”. The painting reveals the architecture of desire and the excessive deformations that transform the faux appearance into a dogma. That is, it reveals the schema of the ancestral form.

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Painted in five weeks from 25 April-25 May 1983, Saura’s *Dora Maar Revisited* series paid homage Picasso’s thematic portraits of *Dora Maar* in his series of weeping women of the 1930s. As Leo Steinberg described, in Picasso’s series of Dora Maar “beauty it is yet to be born”.\(^{340}\) In similar terms, Victoria Combalia argued that “Picasso’s animalistic women, his monster-females, might also reveal male’s ancestral fear toward the female image, who then becomes Medusa and Gorgone; a terrible mother-figure; a unique conflation of beauty and horror.”\(^{341}\) As such, Saura’s *Dora Maar series* reflected Saura’s career-long *Oedipal* and vampirist attitude towards his pictorial ancestry and as a visual confirmation of his constant confrontation with the haunting presence of his artistic ancestry.\(^{342}\) Indeed, Saura’s *Dora Maar* portraits mimicked the brutal intensity of Picasso’s portraiture painting and also attempted to imitate the monstrifying aspect of Picasso’s artistic practice. As William Rubin argues, Picasso’s portraiture of Dora Maar casts the very concept of identity into doubt; it is no longer fixed, but mutable, becoming “a set of evolving metamorphoses.”\(^{343}\) Describing Picasso’s portraits of Dora Maar Brigitte Léal writes, are monstrous portraits of a tragic beauty:

> Today, more than ever, the fascination that the image of this admirable, but suffering and alienated face exerts on us incontestably ensues from its coinciding with our modern consciousness of the body in its threefold dimension of precariousness, ambiguity and monstrosity. […] it creates an image of the monstrosity of a tragic beauty: there is no doubt that by signing these portraits, Picasso tolled the final bell for the reign of ideal beauty and opened the way for the aesthetic tyranny of a sort of terrible and tragic beauty, the fruit of our contemporary history.\(^{344}\)

Thus, Saura’s monstrous and tragic portraits of Picasso’s portraits of *Dora Maar* functioned as a second level of distortion; as a deformation of an already deformed body. Saura’s double visual

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\(^{342}\) A. Saura, in an interview with Julián Ríos, in Las Tentaciones de Saura, op. cit. p. 177.


\(^{344}\) Brigitte Léal in “For Charming Dora, Portraits of Dora Maar”, in Picasso and Portraiture: Representation and Transformation, ed. W. Rubin, op. cit. p. 385
quotation embodies a twofold gesture: an act of cruelty over a cruelty—what Pierre Daix has called “an artistic blasphemy.”

If Picasso’s rendering of Henriette Theodora Marković as Dora Maar incarnated a monstrous pictorial transformation, Saura’s deformations of Picasso’s portraits of Dora Maar visualized a monstrous depiction of a second order and thus operated allegorically in the strictest sense: as commentaries on a commentary, speaking through the body of others by rewriting Picasso’s portraiture.

Elisabeth Cowling has described Picasso’s renderings of Dora Maar as metaphorical self-portraits. As she wrote, “far from being the ‘other’, she is the self.” Following Cowling on Picasso, Saura’s monstrous rendering of Picasso’s Dora Maar performed a twofold profanation. It embodied a visual transgression of the pictorial body of Dora Maar while symbolically distorting the body of Picasso’s portraiture. Saura’s series thus engaged in both a pictorial but also metaphorical Oedipal confrontation with the master of Spanish modern painting.

If in the Imaginary Portrait of Brigitte Bardot series Saura had monstrified the desired body of the popular sex-symbol, Dora Maar series Saura offered a meta-artistic reflection about two monstrous renderings: the works of Picasso and his own works. In so doing, Saura’s systematic reworking of Dora Maar in Dora Maar revisited enacted a vehicle for pictorial conversations. In this double tension, Saura’s perversion and monstrification of Picasso’s Dora Maar embodied an allegory of his own artistic practice at monstrifying the body of the Spanish pictorial legacy, while honoring yet undermining his artistic ancestry.
In 1985, Saura painted *Dora Maar 11-8-85* revealing the persistence of Picasso’s cruel portraiture in Saura’s artistic memory and demonstrating its function as a paradigmatic evaluation of his own painting (Fig. 3.31). Saura’s repetitive portraits of Dora Maar display a fragmented and dismembered monstrous body that is disseminated in discontinuous thematic series across three decades. Saura’s portraits of Dora Maar are allegorical; they functioned as repetitive reevaluations of Picasso in the 1980s and as exorcisms of Picasso’s artistic influence.

In 1984, former member of artist collective *Equipo Crónica*, Manolo Valdés, created *Dora Maar*, in which he collapsed Picasso’s Dora Maar portraits and Saura’s reinterpretations into a single iconic image (1984) (Fig. 3.32). Valdés’s combination of the pictorial gestures of Picasso and Saura into a popular image manifested the reification of Picasso’s portraiture of the 1930s while consolidating Saura’s pictorial grammars into the body of the Spanish tradition. By the late 1980s, Saura’s *monstrification* and allegorical *vampirization* of Picasso situated his works as both pictorial commentary on the Spanish pictorial legacy discontinuous desire and failure to enter the pantheon of Spanish modernity.

3.6. 1992, The Dog of Goya and the Spectacle of Spanish culture

In 1981, the year of the arrival of Picasso’s *Guernica* to Madrid, Saura painted *Dog of Goya III* (1981) —in which he monstrified Goya’s iconic *Half-Summerged Dog* (1820-1823) as a vulnerable and fragile creature (Fig. 3.33). In *Dog of Goya III* Saura rendered Goya’s dog in the metamorphic moment in which the dog is vanishing into formlessness and thus threatening to collapse into itself. Saura’s warm beige-toned monochromatic background established a visual


348 See also Xavier Rubert de Ventós *On Modernity* (“De la Modernidad”) (1980), as he argued, “Spanish power was more interested in generating that in controlling reality”

conversation with the color palette of Velázquez’s baroque portraiture in *Pablo de Valladolid* (1636) while paralleling the phantasmagoric representation of a monstrous bodiless head in Turner’s *Sunrise with Sea-Monster* (1845). Saura’s visual citation of divergent pictorial codes conflated two antithetical pictorial languages while re-enacting an introspective commentary that devoured the previous dogs of his career-long series (Fig. 3.34 & 3.35).

Saura had constantly reinterpreted the dog of Goya since 1957. For almost four decades, Saura’s systematic quotation, appropriation, and repetitive distortion of Goya’s emblematic dog incarnated a career long signature icon, and eventually became a personal emblem of his artistic practice. In the post-Franco Spain of the early 1980s, Saura’s systematic appropriation and *monstrification* of Goya’s dogs dialogued with both Goya’s *Black Painting Series* while introspectively evaluating his own pictorial strategy in deforming his artistic tradition.

**The dog of Goya an open metaphor of a shifting political subject**

The image of Goya’s dog is ubiquitous at every stage of Saura’s artistic production for more than forty years. Moreover, it became Saura’s signature icon as well as an emblem of his allegorical artistic practice.

As Saura described, he had been fascinated with the Goya’s dog since early on of his artistic career:

> Since I was a child, I have been fascinated with this extreme image that always reminded me of the ugly duck. As in the children tale, the dog manifests the experience of surprise in facing the world for the very first time. This fascinating presence of the dog has reappeared in several canvases and graphic works of mine in which the ideas of “emergence”, “birth”, “appearance” remained connected with the experience of the pictorial void.

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350 Looking at Velázquez’s Portrait of Pablo de Valladolid Manet argued “the background disappears; it is only air that surrounds the good man, all dressed and alive” Manet in Jonathan Brown, *Picasso and the Spanish Tradition*, p. 13.

351 “Desde niño me he sentido fascinado por esta imagen extremosa que ha permanecido siempre asociada al recuerdo del patito feo del cuento infantil y a su manifestación de asombro al surgir del redil y contemplar la vastedad del mundo. Esta presencia y su recuerdo bien presente ha dado origen a diversas pinturas en tela y en papel en donde la las ideas de ‘surgimiento’, ‘nacimiento’ y ‘aparición’ permanecen necesariamente asociadas a la
Saura began his thematic series on Goya’s dogs during the late 1950s with *Imaginary Portrait of Goya* (1957) in which he created and ink on paper composition depicting an abstracted head of a grotesque drawing of a dog’s head (Fig. 3.36). From 1957 onwards, Goya’s dog is persistent in Saura’s works. For almost forty years, Saura used the dog as both dramatic and emblematic imaginary portrait of Goya and a sarcastic, and occasionally ironic, self-critical gesture towards his own work. Scholars such as Dore Ashton, Valeriano Bozal, Calvo-Serraller and Guy Scarpetta interpreted Saura’s dogs as metaphorical self-portraits. Their interpretations paralleled Saura’s own interpretations of the dog. As Saura described:

Nothing as absurd as this painting, seducer of writers, it represents the painting as an affirmation for the paradigm of the human condition. [It embodies] a last appearance; a last disappearance. A farewell to painting through and a message inside it: “I am not just a dog. I am also a portrait of my own author and those who contemplate me.”

For Saura, Goya’s dog embodied the condition of the modern subject while at the same time incarnating a captivating metaphor of the painter in the act of painting. As Saura argued, Goya’s dog embodied at once a metaphorical self-portrait of Goya, a symbol of the painter’s melancholia and solitude, a symbolic representation of the pictorial void (“el vacío plástico”), and a metaphorical portrait of our modern condition. As he questioned:

What if the dog, besides being the guardian of the world of the dead and the image of the nocturne terror, is also the prophetic symbol of time? A creature in the desolated dessert of the world; the Renaissance allegory of the ascension of the spirit; the emblem of fidelity and melancholy? What if the dog also embodied the plastic symbiosis of a human portrait, a metaphoric reflection of our modern condition? And why not, what if it would be the metaphoric portrait of Goya himself transformed into a dog?

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352 “Nada tan absurdo como este cuadro, seductor de escritores, que no representa más que la pintura para afirmar el paradigma de la condición humana con su ejemplo. Una última aparición, una desaparición apenas insinuada. Un adiós a la pintura a través de una gran pintura y un mensaje dentro de ella: “No soy solamente un perro, sino también su propio autor y todos cuantos me contemplan, pues soy ante todo pintura ya que sin ella no existiría” A. Saura, “El Perro de Goya”, *Fijeza*, op. cit. p. 308.

353 “¿Y si el perro, además de ser cancerbero del reino de los muertos, imagen del terror nocturno, símbolo profético del tiempo, criatura en el gran desierto del mundo, alegoría renacentista de la ascensión del espíritu, emblema de la fidelidad y de la melancolía, fuese también, en plástica simbiosis un retrato, una metáfora de un retrato humano, una reflexión sobre nuestra propia condición, y por qué no, un autoretrato del propio Goya transformado en perro? ¿Y si
Following Saura’s interpretation of Goya’s dog as a metaphorical self-portrait, Calvo-Serraller has also interpreted it as the metaphor for what lies beyond our gaze as viewers. As he wrote, “Imperfect, particular, broken and obviously perturbing, Goya’s dog looks with anxious stupefaction what is happening in the world whereas us as viewers, with our bodies buried in the sand cannot see.” 354

Like Calvo-Serraller, Valeriano Bozal has also described Goya’s dog as Saura’s personal monster. For Bozal Saura’s dog conflated the grotesque aspects of the visual sarcasm and the portrait of the modern subject. As he described, “The dog is Saura’s monster. It combines a pathetic image and a ferocious and grotesque sarcasm. It embodies the absolute negativity of the monster; the more intolerable of them: the one that defines the subject itself.” 355

Departing from this interpretation of Saura’s dogs as self-portraits, I posit instead that Saura’s monstrous renderings of Goya’s dogs in discontinuous thematic series operated allegorically. Indeed, they incarnated Saura’s self-introspective gaze while revealing an archaeology of Saura’s artistic practice. Rather than coming back to the artist body (Goya-Saura), Saura’s dogs enacted a set of allegories of a Spanish political subject scrutinizing its constantly shifting historical present under pressing political times.

In 1957, Saura’s distortion of Goya’s dog symbolized Saura’s artistic anxieties and personal uncertainties living under the cultural isolated and politically repressed postwar Spain. In the early 1960s, Saura’s monstrous and ferocious dogs of Goya were in overt conversation with the formal aggressiveness and gestural attitude of American action painting. In the U.S., Saura’s ferocious dogs were seen as a metaphor for the cruelty of Francoist social and political

oppression. In 1964 Saura’s *Grand Imaginary Portrait of Goya* (1964) won the first the Carnegie Prize in Pittsburg—which consolidated his prominent position as a leading figure in Spanish postwar art (Fig. 3.37).

In *Imaginary Portrait of Goya* (1977) Saura substituted the visual disposition of the dog’s head with an image of a dinosaur. Saura’s sarcastic and self-parodying gesture revealed the “buried” condition of the Spanish social subject emerging from forty years of an anachronistic (and Jurassic) authoritarian regime (Fig. 3.38). As I discussed above in this chapter, in *The Dog of Goya* (1979) Saura’s dog gazed simultaneously towards the past and towards the future, hence allegorizing the uncertainties and fears of Spanish new democratic subject between two political regimes (Fig. 3.7).

In *The Dog of Goya* (1985), Saura displaced the dog to the upper-right corner of a monochromatic black canvas. Saura’s painting displaced a visual and semantic displacement. Saura’s visual displacement suggests a semantic transposition. (Fig. 3.39) As such, it portrayed a sarcastic and dramatic gesture that visualizes Saura’s own mockery as an artist and of his artistic practice.

In May 1992, Saura showed a selection of his dogs of Goya the Sala del Arenal at the Regional Pavilion of Aragon at the International Exhibition of Seville next to a selection of Goya’s works. Concurrent with the spectacularization of Spanish culture during the national euphoric celebration of 1992, Saura’s dogs as a melancholic commentary on Goya’s art and as reflections on his own practice.

In 1996, two years before his death, Saura painted *The Dog of Goya* (1996) in which Saura displaced the dog to the left side of the composition. The dramatic presence of black in the composition suspends the monstrous dog in a non-space. This gesture can be interpreted as a
symbolic final curtain on the theater of the interrupted sequence of the modern Spanish tradition and the melancholic impossibility to continue it. (Fig. 3.40)

As this historical sequence suggested, by the mid 1990s, Goya’s dogs were already emblems of Saura’s artistic practice, functioning at once as compositional strategy, personal metaphor, and iconographic signature through which Saura merged with and distanced himself from Goya and thus embodying a melancholic allegory.

3.7. Goya’s Dog and the Spanish Democratic Identity

In *Half-Submerged Dog* (1820) Goya portrayed an enigmatic dog’s head suspended in-between two visual planes that are delimited by two earth-toned colors suggesting both appearance and disappearance from the viewer’s gaze (Fig. 3.41). Regardless of Goya’s original intention, Goya’s enigmatic depiction of the bodiless dog has become a visual icon that has puzzled viewers, artists, and critics ever since. For Yves Bonnefoy, Goya’s dog embodied an intellectual image that gives food to thought (donne à penser). For Saura, instead, it is the most compelling image of modernity: “To me, the dog of Goya is the most beautiful painting in the world.”

Painted around 1820, *Half-Submerged Dog* belonged to one of Goya’s walls decorations for the second floor of the *La Quinta del Sordo* (The House of the Deaf)— an isolated house at the outskirts of Madrid, where he retired from Fernando VII’s absolutist monarchy in 1818. The fresco was originally located between *Asmodeus* and *The Witchy Brew* at the corner of the living room on the second floor. Seen from left to right, the dog closes the cycle as a final image of the

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358 Saura, “El Prado Imaginario”, Crónicas, 211.
series.359 Best known as Black Painting series, Goya’s dramatic and enigmatic paintings have become certainly one of the most eccentric and powerful representations in modern art.360

Goya painted the Black Painting Series at the age of 75, in complete isolation from the court in Madrid and suffering from mental despair and physical pain. Goya remained isolated in the intimacy of La Quinta del Sordo where he lived surrounded by the Black Paintings till his self-exile to France in 1824. Goya died in exile in Bordeaux in 1828 rejected by the political absolutism and counter modern politics of their own national government.361

Building on Goya’s personal and historical circumstances of misfortune and poverty, scholars have discussed the modernity of Goya’s Black Painting Series by describing the supremacy of subjective expression over figurative representation. As modern writers described, Goya’s Black Painting series opened a new groundbreaking field for the visual exploration of modern representation. Baudelaire and Gautier commented Goya’s Black Series by describing the ambiguity and force of these works as a humorous commentary on our modernity.362 For André Malraux, Goya’s works stand as forerunners of our modernity. For him, rather than an artistic ancestor he is our contemporary.363 For Tzetzan Todorov Goya’s Black Paintings embody an intimate exorcism, a work of self-healing.364

359 See Priscilla E. Muller, Goya’s Black Paintings, Truth and Reason in Light and Liberty, New York, Hispanic Society of America, 1984, p. 131-140.
360 The bibliography here is extensive, Priscilla Muller, Yves Bonnefoy Malraux just to name a few. Priscilla Muller, Black Paintings, Truth and Reason in Light and Liberty, New York, Hispanic Society of America, 1984, André Malraux Saturn, Robert Hughes, Goya, Litch, Goya, Yves Bonnefoy, Les Peintures Negres.
361 As Jonathan Brown writes, Goya was concerned with the Inquisition after selling his printings of Los Caprichos, “Fearful of reprisal by the Inquisition, Goya quickly withdrew the prints from sale and thereafter took his new style underground, confining its use to sketchbooks while continuing to produce society portraits and other commissioned works.” Jonathan Brown, Picasso and the Spanish Tradition, p. 22.
363 See André Malraux, Saturn, An Essay, London Phaidon, 1957op. cit..
364 See Todorov, op. cit. 228.
For Todorov, Goya’s *Black Paintings* embodied intellectual propositions at the same status of his contemporaries Goethe and Dostoievski. As he argued, Goya’s visual articulations call upon us as open questions that continually destabilize modern certainties. As Todorov wrote:

Goya is not only one of the first painters of his time he is also one of the most profound thinkers of his time. He is not less contemporary than Goethe or Dostoievsky will be fifty years later […] My interest in Goya is not only from his singular position in the history of art or in his relevant place in modern culture, rather, Goya participates on the same necessity of those of his contemporaries. His works contained a lesson of wisdom that still interrogate us.365

Just like Todorov’s interpretation of Goya’s paintings as intellectual compositions, Saura interpreted Goya’s dog as conceptual propositions in which Goya deployed the modern gaze and the solidity of modern existence.366

As Victoria Combalía points out, Saura’s exhibition of the Dog of Goya’s series at the World Exhibition of 1992 in Sevilla paralleled the international display of Goya’s *Black Paintings* at the Paris World Fair of 1878 — hence realigning Saura’s introspective gesture with the legacy of Goya as a paternal figure of modern art, resituating Saura in that same narrative of Spanish art.367

Rather than metaphorical self-portraits of the artist as previous scholars have contended, Saura’s consistent monstrifications of Goya’s dog, displayed a consistent allegory of the modern Spanish subject under shifting political regimes while disclosing a melancholic commentary on the fragmentary and disrupted condition of Spanish modernity. Moreover, it functioned as an emblem of Saura’s allegorical and melancholic practice.

365 “Goya n’est pas seulement l’un des premiers peintres de son temps, il en est aussi l’un des penseurs les plus profonds, pas moins que son contemporain Goethe, par exemple, ou qu’un Dostoievski, cinquante ans plus tard… Ainsi, mon intérêt pour Goya n’est pas lié à la seule histoire de l’art ou des la culture, il participe d’un besoin de mieux comprendre mon temps et mes contemporains. Son oeuvre contient une leçon de sagesse qui s’adresse à nous aujourd’hui.” Tzvetan Todorov, *Goya à l’Ombre des Lumieres*, Flammarion, Paris: 2011, p. 9 and p. 248.
367 “A este hecho particular (Goya padre de Saura) hay que sumar la circunstancia de la celebración de la Exposición Universal de Sevilla, en la que Goya es el personaje que sirve de eje temático para los contenidos del Pabellón de Aragon, recobrando así, y en esta ocasión a través de su tierra natal, el protagonismo que ya tuvieron las pinturas negras en la Feria Universal de París de 1878, que estuvieron presentes en el Pabellón Español” Victoria Combalía, “El Perro de Goya”, *Antonio Saura, Decenario*, op. cit. p. 14.
Saura’s and Goya’s Melancholia

Analyzing Dürer’s Melancholia I, Erwin Panofsky argued that the dog embodied the Saturnean disposition of the modern artist as an introspective gaze. As Panofsky argued:

[The Dog] it opposes a life in the service of God to what maybe called a life in competition with God— the peaceful bliss of divine wisdom to the tragic unrest of human creation […] Thus Dürer Melancholia belongs in fact to those who ‘cannot extend their thought beyond the limits of space’. Hers is the inertia of a being which renounces what it could reach because it cannot reach for what it belongs.368

Following Panofsky’s analysis on the dog as a visual emblem of melancholia, Walter Benjamin described the introvert gaze of the dog as a melancholic allegory. As he reasoned:

in the proximity of Albert Dürer’s figure, Melencolia, the utensils of active life are lying around unused on the floor, as objects of contemplation. This engraving anticipates the baroque in many respects. In it the knowledge of the introvert and the investigations of the scholar have merged as intimately as in the men of the baroque […] The vain activity of the intriguer was regarded as the undignified antithesis of passionate contemplation, to which alone was attributed the power to release those high places from the satanic ensnarement of history, in which the baroque recognized only the political aspect. And yet: introversion also led only too easily into the abyss. This is illustrated by the theory of the melancholic disposition.369

For Benjamin, Panofsky’s interpretation of the dog as a melancholic detachment from the world corresponded to the allegorical mode of the artist as a collector of broken fragments, struggling in vain to put together the pieces back into an organic whole.370

Following both Panofsky’s and Benjamin’s interpretations of the dog as an emblem of melancholia, Saura’s monstrous dogs conversed visually with Goya’s dog while also antagonizing with his own previous pictorial series. In this continual and repetitive artistic quotation, Saura’s dogs embodied an introspective gaze looked inside towards Saura’s painting, (thus symbolizing a figural primal scene of the act of painting) while also deploying a nostalgic gaze towards the fragmented and discontinuous nature of Spanish modern tradition (as an always-

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369 See W. Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, op. cit. p. 142.
370 See W. Benjamin The Origin of German Tragic Drama, op. cit. p. 152.
already vanishing body). In so doing, Saura’s continual devouring of Goya’s dog created a set of melancholic introjections in which the aggressive and monstrous transformation of Goya revived the symbolic body of Spanish artistic legacy while confronting the void of the Spanish cultural present.

**Saura’s postmodernity and melancholic allegories**

In his analysis of postmodernism as “the cultural logic of late capitalism,” Fredric Jameson has described postmodern artistic representation as a fragmentary, discontinuous, and broken narrative.\(^{371}\) Paralleling Jameson’s diagnosis of postmodernity as an incomplete and fractured narrative, several art historians described the systematic confiscation of significant images of modern art by contemporary artists as a postmodernist strategy. As these scholars argued the artistic practices of appropriation, montage, and over inscription of some contemporary artists enacted a systematic revision of the modernist epistemology by questioning the modern categories of the work of art as original, authentic, and unique.

Borrowing Walter Benjamin’s analysis of allegory as fragmentary compositional procedure American critics Clive Owens and Benjamin Buchloh described the artistic practices of contemporary artists such as Marcel Broodthaers, Sherry Levine, Dara Birbaum, and Cindy Sherman as symptomatic of the allegorical nature of postmodernism.\(^{372}\)

As Owens described, “In allegorical structure, one text is read through another, however fragmentary, intermittent, or chaotic their relationship may be; the paradigm for the allegorical work is thus the palimpsest.”\(^{373}\) Benjamin Buchloh also discussed this postmodern artistic

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\(^{373}\) Owens, ibid. op. cit. p. 69.
practice as a renewal of the process of late capitalism. “Allegory’s most essential feature, he argued, is that it rescues from oblivion that which threatens to disappear, thus revealing the nostalgic condition of postmodern artworks in late capitalism.”

Responding to this theoretical debate on the allegorical nature of postmodern of the early 1980s art Spanish critic Jose Luis Brea described Spanish conceptual artworks of the 1970s as a “baroquisation of representation”. For Brea, this allegorical impulse in the Spanish artistic context of the late 1980s constructed a concave mirror-effect that ultimately transformed the exhibition space into a baroquisation of the space of representation, hence offering a self-introspective artistic space. As he argued, in Spanish works of the 1980s:

The Space of representation becomes a self-producing machine: it interiorises —or rather it spreads out until it occupies —all exteriority, distributing it in series which it covers in a systematic whole […] The illusion of discontinuity fades away and with it the lukewarm vertigo it was nourishing. Enthusiasm, the correlative affection towards the supposed postmodern metastasis of the space of representation, congeals and crystallizes over the tedious untimeliness of its reiteration.

As Brea concluded, in Spanish postmodern art the baroquisation of Spanish contemporary art was essentially allegorical. As he wrote:

Bearing all this in mind, there is a type of allegorical strategies that are revealed to us as particularly significant and, to put it one way, central in the baroque, complex economies of the representation concerning us. These are the ones in which a reflexive, self-referential loop is accomplished, which puts the allegorical procedure in the place of the enunciation of something else which concerns the space of representation, experiments orientated to the suspension —or at least, to putting in brackets— of the enunciative literality.

Different from the revision of Saura’s monstrous bodies of the early 1980s presented an allegorical and melancholic evaluation of Spanish modernity. Indeed, Saura’s melancholic

374 See Benjamin Buchloh, “Allegorical Procedures”, op.cit.
375 See Brea, Jose Luis Brea, Before and After Enthusiasm, 72-1989, SUD, La Hague, 1989.
376 See Brea, op. cit. p. 15.
377 See Jose Luis Brea, Beyond Enthusiasm, op. cit., p. 28.
evaluation of Goya and Picasso devoured and cannibalized the symbolic body of Spanish pictorial masters hence allegorizing the interrupted nature of Spanish modern narrative.

In the often too rigid cartography of postmodern appropriations of modernity by contemporary artists, Saura’s monstrifications of emblematic works of Picasso and Goya in the 1980s participated with his own voice in the ongoing discussion of the paradigm of postmodern allegory. Saura’s systematic appropriation and sadistic devouring of Goya’s dog operated as a melancholic allegory, one that critically and systematically reflected on the discontinuous, fragmented, and ruinous nature of the cultural emblems of Spanish modernity in the mid 1980s and early 1990s.378

1992: A melancholic counter-celebration of Spanish European postmodernity

In 1992, Spanish government commemorated the Fifth Hundredth anniversary of Spanish “discovery” of America, by celebrating Barcelona’s Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona, Seville’s World Fair Exhibition, and Madrid as European capital of culture —what Kim Bradley described as Spanish “triple Stravaganza”.379 Newsweek magazine titled its summer cover “1992: the year of Spain.”380 Eduardo Subirats has interpreted this symbolic moment of 1992 Spain as a Gesamtkunstwerk, thus criticizing the cultural celebration of Spanish postmodernity as a cultural simulacrum. As he argued:

Its foundations have been the carnivalization of democracy, the aesthetization of politics as show business for the media, the configuration of Cultural State as fiction, the domestication of the artistic and intellectual avant-gardes, and their volatization as politically manipulated performance. But all that was achieved under the postmodern banner of cultural pastiche and recycling was intellectual apathy, the abandonment of any renovation projects, and the generalized disarticulation

379 Kim Bradley, op. cit.
of social subjects and discourses: Spain’s postmodern modernization intellectually crystallized as an aesthetic of the desertion and absolution of criticism. In the context of the self-complacent international events of 1992, Saura’s monstrifications of Goya’s dog operated as counter-signs of the euphoric moment of Spanish postmodernity by challenging the present with the images of the past. More than a celebration of Goya and Picasso as an international markeatable Spanish brand for touristic revenue at the end of the twentieth century, Saura’s monstrous dogs incarnated a set of melancholic and broken allegories that disjointed the celebratory moment of Spanish postmodernism. Moreover, in the euphoric re-framing of Spanish post-modern cultural identity of the early 1990s, Saura’s “cannibalistic dogs” provided an allegorical mise-en-scene of a sorrowful gesture. They embodied a pictorial lament of Spanish cultural past and offer a platform for memorabilia of and grief for the fragmented body of Spanish modernity— that was interrupted first by the absolutism of Fernando VII, which forced Goya’s isolation and exile, the Spanish Civil War, and forty years of dictatorship.

Reappearing recurrently in Saura’s works for forty years in paintings and works on paper in discontinuous thematic series Goya’s dog operated for Saura as an exploration of the self, a questioning on the symbolic legacy of the Spanish tradition, and as a visual archeology of his artistic practice. More than a mere metaphorical self-portraits as previous approaches have argued, Saura’s dogs functioned allegorically. They disclosed Saura’s consistent strategy in attempting and yet failing to establish an impossible relationship with the Spanish legacy.

Against the hegemonic view of the euphoric celebration of Spanish culture during the 1980s and early 1990s, Saura’s monstrous dogs displayed a consistent melancholic and allegorical gesture that further revealed the fragmented, discontinuous and disjointed body of

modern Spanish art. As Julia Kristeva wrote regarding the melancholic body, “Better fragmented, torn, cut up, swallowed, digested… than lost.”

3.8. Goya, Picasso, Saura and the Ruins of Spanish Modernity

In 1892, when he was only eleven years old, Picasso drew a head of a dog next to a crucifixion (1892). As in Goya’s dog, the young Picasso rendered an isolated head of a dog looking inwards. Like in Saura’s compositions years later, Picasso’s dog and crucifixion embodied allegorical and melancholic bodies (Fig. 3.45).

As I explored in this chapter, Saura’s, Goya’s and Picasso’s dogs embodied a personal emblem of the introspective gaze of the artist while operating as a broken allegory. They refrained from the world in order to look more profoundly into it.

Exactly one century after Picasso’s drawing of the dog, Saura exhibited his dogs next to Goya’s works at Seville World Fair (Expo’92, 1992). Suspended in their pictorial and semantic ambiguity, Saura’s monstrous dogs stand as remnants of the Spanish artistic traditions. Operating as guardians of the pictorial past, they incarnated allegorical specters of the past looking towards the past and questioning the cultural present.

During the euphoric moment of spectacular celebration of Spanish international postmodernism of the early 1990s, Saura’s retrieval of Picasso and Goya enacted a melancholic gaze towards the fractured and discontinuous narrative of a Spanish modern tradition. Both Goya and Picasso, died in exile, repressed by the absolute power of their own country. From Goya onwards, Spanish art has been a fractured and interrupted narrative by political absolutism (Fernando VII, Francoist dictatorship). Modern Spanish art has been an exiled narrative; made out of gaps and violent political interruptions.

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382 See Julia Kristeva, Black Sun, op. cit., p. 12.
383 As Jonathan Brown points out Picasso probably visited El Prado with his father in 1901. He might have seen Goya’s dog in reproductions. My contention in bringing this potential analogy is merely speculative.
In reclaiming and yet monstrifying Goya’s and Picasso’s works, Saura’s monstrifications of Picasso and Goya displayed a series of monstrous bodies embodying allegorical gestures that situated Saura’s works as the historical culminations of a self-appointed tradition that his works both undid and consecrated. During the Spanish postmodern context of 1992, Saura’s act of parricide and cannibalism over the emblematic body of Goya and Picasso performed an aesthetic undoing that consecrates him in the Spanish modern artistic canon while revealing the melancholic, fragmented and ruinous condition of Spanish artistic modern legacy.
Chapter 4: Saura and the Spanish Literary Body

Chapter Abstract

This chapter explores Antonio Saura’s illustrations of significant texts of the Spanish literary corpus as well as his role as a public intellectual. Starting in 1962 till 1992 Saura illustrated a selection of historical Spanish literary texts including Francisco de Quevedo’s *Dreams* (1962 and 1971), Camilo Jose Cela’s *La Familia de Pascual Duarte* (1985), Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1987), Ramón Gómez de la Serna’s *Nueva Flor de Greguerías*, (1988), Baltasar Gracián’s *El Criticón* (1991), and San Juan de la Cruz’s *Poemas* (1991). As this chapter argues, Saura’s illustrations of significant texts from the Spanish literary tradition revealed the literary aspects of Saura's artistic practice while enhancing his public dimension as an intellectual artist. Under the self-congratulatory celebration of Spanish postmodernity as a normalized European democracy during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Saura’s illustrations of selected texts of the Spanish literary melancholic body questioned Spanish euphoric liberation from its dramatic and tragic history.

4.1. A Visual Reading of the Spanish Literary Body

In 1987, Antonio Saura created 125 Indian ink drawings in which he illustrated his personal reading of Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote de la Mancha* commemorating Barcelona’s publishing house Círculo de Lectores/Galaxia Guttenberg’s twenty-fifth anniversary. Edited by Cervantes scholar Martin de Riquer, Saura’s illustrated version of *Don Quixote* was awarded the silver medal at the Most Beautiful Illustrated Books Exhibition (*Scönste Bücher aus Aller Welt*) in Leipzig in 1988.

Saura’s set of black and white ink drawings revealed Saura’s personal interpretation of Cervantes’s novel while it expanded his career-long iconography of the monstrous body in his thematic pictorial series and his graphic works (as discussed in previous chapters). In *Quixote and Sancho* (1987) Saura deformed Cervantes’s characters. Saura’s deployment of Cervantes’s
characters as iconic silhouettes resembled written signs on the white page. Saura’s thin traces of black lines in the deserted Arcadian landscape of La Mancha, transformed the anti-heroes of Spanish Golden Age literature into monstrous and grotesque bodies in an infinite blank space (Fig. 4.1). As Roger Bartra describes, Don Quixote, who Cervantes described as the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance, is a melancholic character since he “is immersed in a new intellectual texture that indicates the positive although risk-laden nature of the black humour.” Indeed, Bartra argues, Don Quixote embodies a “mimetic and ingenious melancholy” that helps him to see “that there is a malignant enchanter that turns the world upside down.”

Saura’s illustration of Quixote and Sancho as grotesque bodies expanded his career-long strategy of monstrifying bodies of the Spanish early-modern tradition while at the same time dialoguing with the legacy of visual illustrations of the Spanish modern legacy—in particular Dalí’s Don Quixote (1945) and Picasso’s La Celestina (1962).

Saura’s illustrations of Cervantes’s literary masterpiece operated on a dual level. On the one hand, they perpetuated Saura’s monstrifications of significant bodies from the Spanish tradition as an introspective gesture that defined his artistic practice for over four decades. On the other, it experimented with the symbolic body of Spanish literary tradition. As Saura reasoned, his book illustrations established a symbiotic visual and semantic relationship in which the graphic activity becomes a singular space for a personal and aesthetic inquiry. As he explained:

To create a beautiful book—or rather, to begin the initial cruelty of the process of writing a novel with the proper density—is transcended by a second density, that of the act of painting it. Such could be my ideal project: to illustrate a literary work without putting at risk the liberty of the written signs. On the contrary; [I want] to do it in a way in which the illustration stimulate the creation of new images. One can only illustrate those literary works with which one has

384 For Roger Bratra Don Quijote, as the Knight of the Sad Countenance, incarnates a melancholic emblem. See Roger Bratra, “Melancholy and Christianity: On Don Quixote’s Sadness” in Melancholy and Culture, Essays on the Diseases of the Soul in Golden Age Spain, University of Whales Press, 2008. P. 176-182.

established an affective encounter; maybe a symbiotic one. In my own case, I can only engage in a graphic activity with those books, which, after the moment in which I discovered them have become a faithful object of affection and definite admiration.  

Saura’s consistent strategy monstrifications as looking to Spanish reality through deforming lenses resonated with Ramón del Valle-Inclán’s strategy of “esperpento” as a deforming yet reflective compositional procedure as a means to criticize Spanish socio-political circumstance. Valle-Inclán’s strategy of deformation and critical commentary can be seen in staged plays *Luces de Bohemia* (1920), *Los Cuernos of Don Friolera* (1921) and *Martes de Carnaval* (1922). As Rodolfo Cardona and Anthony N. Zahareas have described, Valle-Inclán’s *esperpentos* performed a deforming strategy in which he rendered grotesque and deformed situations — hence ridiculing characters while unveiling the crudity of reality and ultimately the human condition. As they wrote, it provokes a “parodic redefinition of the tragic sense of life and a new and grotesque strategy that reshapes traditional tragedy”. As they reasoned, Valle-Inclán’s *esperpentos* operated as a “concave mirror” that deformed our perception of reality and therefore it distances the experience of the spectator who is taken into a reflective experience.

Similar to Valle-Inclán’s esperpentos, Saura’s illustrations offered an allegorical yet melancholic criticism of end of the century Spain and its inability to overcome its monstrous past and its backward cultural circumstance. Following a long tradition of deforming the experience of reality: from Quixote’s literary delirium, Goya’s *Caprichos*, to Valle-Inclán’s *esperpentos*,

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386 “Hacer ante todo un libro bello donde el pretexto de crueldad, viniendo de su propria densidad, traspase los signos del relato con otra densidad propia de la pintura. Ésta sería, al menos en mi caso, la situación ideal para ilustrar una obra literaria sin que ello suponga una limitación a la libertad gráfica, sino más bien excitante apertura abridora de imágenes. Solamente pueden ser ilustradas aquellas obras literarias con las cuales se ha establecido un lazo afectivo o simbiótico; solamente, al menos en mi caso, pueden ser acompañados gráficamente aquellos libros que tras el sobrecogedor o placentero descubrimiento, se han convertido en objeto de afeción, en permanente vínculo de admiración y permanencia.” Antonio Saura, Saura, “La Familia de Pascual Duarte”, in *Notebook, Memoria del Tiempo*, 1992 op. cit.


388 Rodolfo Cardona and Anthony N. Zahareas, op. cit. p. 30
Saura’s illustrations offered a particular genealogy of the deformation of Spanish modern culture as part of a literary tradition.389

Saura’s engagement with books had manifested very early on his artistic career. As he confessed in an interview to French critic Guy Scarpetta, he had been intrigued by the relationship between text and images since his early childhood, “I have been obsessed by images since I was a child. During the Spanish Civil War (I was six or seven years old) my father gave me a book full of pictures, photographs and newspapers articles. I remember quite well an image of the air bombing of Barcelona’s harbor.” As Saura described, those captivating images eventually became visual categories of his own work, “All my life I have made books a source for my art. I created a fantastic iconography for almost forty years. I am aware that those images that I categorized as structures also designate the main forms of my own painting.”390 As discussed in the introduction and in chapter 2, Saura’s mediated encounter with images began during his time of physical constraints and in isolation in bed.

As Saura recalled in an interview with Julián Ríos, those years of painful recovery while lying in bed were nonetheless significant and prolific experiences for his artistic exploration and, as he remarked, they enacted an intellectual awakening:

Actually, I began to paint and to write back then, in the loneliness of my illness; in that forced isolation, in that anxious introspection of my domestic convalescence. Those were moments of significant discoveries. I discovered sexuality and many other complex issues. There were not many things available for me to be informed with in Spain during that period. Books and

389 Bartra has also argued about the long-lasting presence of melancholia in Spanish culture: “El immenso sol negro de la melancolía española de esa época dejó caer sus rayos sobre toda nuestra cultura occidental con tal fuerza que su alargada sombra llega hasta nuestros días.” Roger Bartra, Cultura y Melancolía, Las Enfermedades del Alma en la España del Siglo de Oro, Barcelona, Anagrama, p. 14.
390 “J’ai toujours été obsédé par les images. Mon père, pendant la guerre civile espagnole (j’avais six ou sept ans) faisait un livre, sur lequel il collait des photos, des extraits de journaux, je me souviens d’une image du bombardement du port de Barcelone… J’ai sans doute été très marqué par ce livre, qui s’est perdu. Toute ma vie, j’ai fait des livres de coupures de presse, j’ai une iconographie fantastique, des images que je découpe depuis trente ou quarante ans. Et je me suis rendu compte que ces images, que j’ai classes par “structures”, correspondent tout à fait avec les formes principales de ma propre peinture.” Guy Scarpetta, Les Paradoxes d’Antonio Saura, op. cit. p. 40.
magazines were hard to come by. It was really hard to be aware of what was happening out there.391

All throughout his life, Saura collected books, exhibition catalogues, comic strips, and cultural magazines with which he constructed a literary archive of cultural references. Saura also published numerous articles commenting on his own works, on the works of other artists, as well as his critical reflections on modern art and contemporary culture. A collection of Saura’s essays have been edited and published by publisher house Círculo de Lectores in five separate volumes, *Fijeza* (1999), *Crónicas (Artículos)* (2000), *Visor (Sobre Artistas) (1958-1998)* (2001), and *Escrirura Como Pintura, (Sobre La Experiencia Pictórica) (1950-1994)* (2004).

In 1988 Saura illustrated Kafka’s *Metamorphoses* and *Journal of Kafka*, as well as George Orwell’s *1984*. Saura’s illustrations of renowned texts of European modern literature proved the intricate relationship with visual art and literary texts as an essential aspect of his artistic practice. However, as this chapter examines this meta-reflective relationship with literature was most significant in his illustrations of selected texts of the Spanish literary tradition— in particular, Quevedo’s *Dreams* (1963 and 1971) Gómez de la Serna’s *Greguerías*, Cela’s *The Pascual Duarte Family* (1986) Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1987), Gracián’s *Master Critic* (1991), San Juan de la Cruz’s *Poems* (1991).392 Saura’s selection of literary national references pointed to a particular literary corpus. As Saura described, he was captivated by each of one their symbolic contents:

391 “Empecé a pintar y a escribir realmente entonces, en esa soledad provocadora por la enfermedad, en este aislamiento obligado, en esta especie de interiorización tremendamente angustiosa, porque precisamente fueron momentos de descubrimiento de muchas cosas: de la sexualidad, de cosas muy complejas. Entonces, en aquella época habia muy pocos elementos en España para poder informarse, realmente, a través de libros y publicaciones; apenas había un material informativo que podía nutrir, que podía mantenerte en comunicación con cuanto pasaba fuera.” See Antonio Saura in *Las Tentaciones de Antonio Saura* op. cit., p. 25.

Certain literary works, not desired and yet unobtainable such as Quevedo’s *Dreams* and *Discourses* and Camilo José Cela’s *The Pascual Duarte Family*, do not impose a specific iconography. Instead, they induce an open interpretative approach. From deep love and recently acquired freedom, they can be included in the wide spectrum of the personal obsessions. Such stylistic freedom provokes me a certain amount of images that resemble particular schemas that I used in the past while providing new images that came from the specific literary reading.393

These texts offer significant instances of Spanish convulsive cultural and political circumstances (in particular the Spanish Baroque as a Catholic Empire, the playfulness of the avant-garde before the Civil War, and the dramatic cruelty of Francoist post war). As he confessed in an interview to Jose Luis Jover, the illustration of Spanish texts as part of a shared and yet distant legacy seduced him in that they equated the painter (him) with the idea of a writer in his own labyrinth:

> The painter has to first read carefully the literary text and participate in it, in order to reach a proper point of encounter. He has to find a shelter of his experience and the clue of the writer’s labyrinth. Writing behaves like a painting that is facing a wall. Beyond that darkness it finds its own certainty and a sense of correspondence with itself; even if in such painful impasse the mind cannot go back to the point of departure. Sooner or later an unprecedented creature fills up the blank and a series of images organizes time rhythmically and finally the text reveals its on capture.394

Saura’s description of his conscious analogy between painting and writing is significant in that it intensified the self-aware intellectual dimension of his work as an allegorical strategy. As this chapter examines, part intellectual challenge, part visual experiment, Saura’s illustrations

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393 “Ciertas obras literarias, deseadas e inalcanzables — los Sueños y Discursos de Quevedo, por ejemplo, y recientemente la Familia de Pascual Duarte de Camilo José Cela— ya no precisaran del sometimiento estricto a la iconografía que les pertence, sino que permitieran, en compentrado amor y adquirida libertad, dar paso a la libre aproximación y a su inclusion en el amplificado espectro de las obsesiones. Tal libertad permite el empleo de imágenes emparentadas con algunos esquemas utilizados con anterioridad, tanto como la aparición de otras, inéditas, originadas por la evidencia literaria.” Saura, “Crimen y Capricho” in Escritura como Pintura, op. cit. p. 117.

394 As Saura argues: “… el pintor lo primero que debe hacer es leer bien el texto, e impregnarse del mismo, para hallar propio lugar de encuentro, refugio de su experiencia y clave del laberinto del escritor. Sucede que la escritura se comporta de forma semejante al cuadro vuelto contra el muro, al descubrir inopinadamente, tras la oscuridad, su certeza, e incluso una sorprendente revelación o correspondencia, aunque a veces, en penosa parada, el vacío de la mente impide tomar la página para poblar el lugar predestinado. Tarde o temprano, aquel lugar vacío de la trama es lleno con insólita criatura, y el despliegue de imágenes que se organiza ritmicamente en el tiempo del texto queda así iluminado mediante atrabiliar, escondida o forzada captura.” A. Saura, “Crimen y Capricho” in Escritura como Pintura, op. cit. p. 114.
monstrified expanded his career-long strategy in deforming the body while at the same time, reaffirming Saura’s position as a cultural figure of the late 1980s and mid 1990s Spain.

As discussed below Saura’s illustrations of Spanish literary works were concurrent with his essays and articles of the 1980s—which enhanced the image of Saura as an intellectual artist. In his articles, Saura commented on his own works, on the works of other artists, as well as on his reflections on the political instrumentalization of modern art and contemporary culture. As he explained, “The painter has not to be an intellectual necessarily, however, I cannot think of a good painter without intellectual curiosity.”

Spanish-language writers including Julio Cortázar, Rafael Alberti, Juan Goytisolo, José Lezama-Lima, Pere Gimferrer, Andrés Sánchez Robayna, Severo Sarduy, and Camilo José Cela, as well as literary critics such as Saúl Yurkievich, Marcelin Pleynet, and Gérard de Cortanze noted the intellectual and literary dimension of Saura’s works. As Cortázar reasoned, Saura’s work created a contingent universe of cultural references creating a self-referential ouvre—what he defined as Saura’s “Sauromachia”. As he wrote:

If only I could just write as he draws, engraves or paints: the penetrating feeling of a simultaneous and multiple trace; of a territory where it would be impossible to separate the circle of the city and its fall; the fulgurate convergence towards a theme and its appearance on the whiteness of a previous second, of that nothingness that existed before. Sauromachia without parts or trumpets, instantaneous mastery to which the bull and the matador are irremissibly bonded in a convulsive merging.

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396 “Claro que si se pudiera escribir como aquí se dibuja, se graba o se pinta: penetrante sensación de un trazo simultáneo y múltiple a la vez, de un territorio donde sería imposible separar el cerco de la ciudad y su caída, la convergencia fulgurante hacia el tema y su aparición en la blancura de un segundo antes, de una nada antes. Sauromachia sin tercios ni toques de clarín, faena instantánea a la que se arrojan toro y torero en una sola, convulsiva fusión.” Julio Cortázar en Diez Palotes Diez, en Territorios, México, Siglo XXI, 1978, (75-86) p. 75.
Cortazar’s reflection on Saura’s work as a self-contained territory was included in *Antonio Saura, Figure and Background (Antonio Saura, Figura y Fondo)* (1987)—a collection of essays on Saura by writers, intellectuals and fellow contemporary artists such as Antoni Tàpies, Eduardo Chillida, Luis Gordillo, Lucebert, and Pierre Alechinsky along with a series of original drawings by Saura. This book celebrated Saura’s cultural status as a consecrated contemporary artist, and also, it confirmed Saura as a prominent intellectual figure during the late 1980s.  

In 1988, the University Menéndez Pelayo in Santander (Spain) published *The Illustrated Painter (El Pintor Ilustrado)*. Edited by literature scholar and Spanish Royal Language Academy member, Francisco Rico, this book compiled a series of original drawings by Saura that were juxtaposed to original poems by Spanish poets Jaime Gil de Biedma, Rafael Alberti and Jose Ángel Valente describing Saura’s artistic practice. Both books reflecting on the literary dimension of Saura’s artistic practice emphasized the intimate relationship between visual arts and literature in Saura’s work and increased Saura’s artistic relevance as an intellectual painter and as a cultural figure. Saura’s position as an intellectual artist was paradigmatic in his sarcastic manifesto *Against Guernica* in 1983, —which Saura sarcastically accused Picasso’s as a-political Guernica (discussed in chapter 3). In 1994 Saura created *Nulla Die Sine Linea* (1994) in which he composed 218 drawings and paintings on paper illustrating daily news events from newspapers cutouts on a daily basis for almost a year —hence functioning as Saura’s visual commentary on daily day events.

During the euphoric celebration of Spanish modern culture as branding device of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Saura’s illustrations of the Spanish literary body offered an allegorical 

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399 See *Antonio Saura, Nulla Die Sine Linea*. 


and melancholic commentary on the discontinuous and fractured nature of Spanish modern narrative. As this chapter posits, Saura’s illustrations of Spanish literary texts participated in and commented upon the contemporary recasting of the discontinuous condition of Spanish modern legacy during the cultural, political and artistic refashioning of Spanish social democracy and its cultural and institutional policies in the late 1980s and early 1990s.400

**Reading in Bed: A Body in Pain and the mediated encounter with literature**

Saura encountered art and literature in the intimacy of his bedroom and under the cultural isolation of Franco’s postwar Spain. At the age of twelve he was diagnosed with bone tuberculosis and from 1943 to 1947 he was forced into a five-year convalescence in which he remained lying immobilized in bed. As he recalled, those were painful but nonetheless, informative years for the young Saura:

> I was sick for several years, from 1943 to 1947. Five years. I was immobilized from the hip to my chest. It was during those years in which I continued painting and writing, (as I had done since I was a child) it was my way to participate in real life in a much more conscious manner.401

During this time of physical constriction and cultural isolation he read profusely. Those first readings in bed left a huge imprint of the painful experience of his illness while also acting as visual reminders of the cultural and moral desolation of the most severe years of the Spanish postwar period. As Saura explained:

> The story of my time reading those happy books intertwines in my memory with some unforgettable moments of the past. Each book was in this sense fundamental. Each one of them became a marker of my life. My individual story could be reconstructed with particular vivacity through the pages of those books; it was my desired search; my joyful possession; my delirious enjoyment. In some cases, their own corporality still appears in my mind by telekinesis. They were my first emotional captures and they return to me as ambiguous and yet bright delightful remnants of yhe past. Ultimately, they have become embodiments of an ineffable aura; a sign of


401  “Yo estuve enfermo durante varios años, del 43 al 47. Cinco años, sí. Escayolado desde la cintura hasta el pecho, inmovilizado, y fue justamente en esos años cuando comencé, no a pintar y escribir, porque eso lo hacía desde niño, sino a practicar unas formas de intervención sobre la realidad mucho más consciente.” A. Saura, Las Tentaciones de Antonio Saura, p .25
their power to encompass all that period of my memory and bring me back to the state of ingravity and make me feel again my open adolescent anguish.  

For a young adolescent under Franco, teenager literature, magazines, and comic books also provided imaginary and evasive spaces that mitigated the tedious condition of daily day painful experiences of 1940s Spain.

During those early years of his convalescence in bed Saura also read vernacular household magazines, which provided visual forms and images of the exterior world along with countless pictures of female bodies. As he recalled, through the pages of those women magazines, he also discovered the forms of the female body as well as his own sexuality.  

In ladies’s magazine Lecturas Saura found a weekly section, “Sentimental Journey through European Art Museums” (“Viaje sentimental a través de los museos de Europa”) which offered a visual survey of European art galleries such as Moscow’s Hermitage, Madrid’s Prado, Venice’s Academy of Art, and Paris’s Louvre. These modest reproductions of female bodies and low quality reproductions of European artworks became for the young Saura the possibility of constructing an imaginary museum through which escape from physical, social and moral daily constrictions. Indeed, the profusion of the images, the traces on the pages, and the marks on the paper soon became for him signs of self-expression and, also, opportunities to explore the
untested experiences of a body in movement. They also revealed Saura’s mediated condition of his artistic practice as self-reflective and his public image as an intellectual artist.404

4.2. Saura as a Public Intellectual

Saura’s relationship with literature was consistent all along his artistic career. In 1948 Saura’s held first art show at a bookstore, Libros in Zaragoza. In 1951 and in 1952 he presented a selection of drawings and small paintings at the Library Buchholz in Madrid establishing a continuous relationship of his work as a visual and cultural practice.

Saura’s first shows on libraries were synchronic with his publications on art and art criticism. In 1950, he wrote, “The Vegetal World in Modern Painting” (El Mundo Vegetal en la Pintura Moderna) in which he celebrated the virtues of abstract art as exploratory space for self-expression. In 1951, wrote his first manifesto “Programio” in which he committed to Surrealism. In 1953 he wrote, “Letter to an Spectator” (Carta a un espectador), in which he praised visual abstraction as visual tool for personal and social agitation. In 1953 Saura curated the exhibition on Fantastic Art (Arte Fantástico) — a show of Spanish late Surrealism — at the bookstore Clan in Madrid.

In 1953 Saura moved to Paris for two years. In Paris he met Benjamin Péret and André Breton—the latter of whom would later describe Saura as “the painter of the presages.” In Paris, Saura read texts on literature and art criticism that were unavailable in Spain. He kept these copies on his private library throughout his life. As discussed in chapter 1, Saura read Bataille while in Paris in 1953-1955. In Art and Evil (El Arte y el Mal) Saura quoted Bataille’s La littérature et le mal celebrating his fascination with the intense force of a monstrous beauty. While in Paris, Saura met French art critic Michel Tapié who introduced him to the pictorial processes and the violent surfaces of French Informel and the gestural expressivity of American

404 Las Tentaciones de Antonio Saura, op. cit.
Expressionism. Months before his return to Spain in October 1955, Saura wrote to Francoist curator Jose Luis Fernández del Amo under the pseudonym Manuel Del Toro, discussing his fascination with Tapié’s *Arte Autre* and celebrating Del Amo’s display of Spanish modern art at the Sao Paolo Biennial of 1954. In 1956 Saura showed his new works in Madrid with his renewed calligraphic style and his experimental materials.

As discussed in chapter 1, concurrent with his refashioning of his artistic practice during the late 1950s, Saura’s became one of the leading artists and critical voices of artist’s group *El Paso*. During the 1950s he wrote manifestos and curated shows on Spanish Informalismo in which he aimed for a homologation of his work with the pictorial languages of the international avant-garde. As discussed in chapter 1, Saura’s active participation as a painter and as an intellectual in the late 1950s, granted him a leading position as a domestic and international representant of Spanish postwar painting.

During the 1980s Saura resumed his practice as a culture critic by publishing a series of articles on Spanish art, modern literature and new museums of contemporary. In these articles Saura discussed on the cultural significance of Spanish painters including Velázquez, Picasso, Goya, Dalí and Miró as well as on the works of modern artists such as Pollock, and de Kooning, as well as on the work of some of his contemporaries —such as Pierre Alichensky, Pierre Soulages, Asger Jorn, Frank Auerbach, Lucebert, Errò and Wilfredo Lam.  

Saura also wrote extensively on literature. In “*Poetry and Painting of Rafael Alberti*” (1986) he analyzed the affinities between poetry and visual arts on the works of Spanish Republican and Communist poet from the 1927’s Spanish poetic generation. In 1988 Saura wrote “The Styx Lagoon” (“La Laguna Estigia”) which operated as a prologue to Spanish writer and politician Jorge Semprún’s novel *The White Mountain, (La Montaña Blanca)*. Semprún (1923–

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405 See *Visor, Sobre Artistas*, Galaxia Guttenberg/Círculo de Lectores, Barcelona, 2001
2011) was a concentration camp survivor. During Francoist dictatorship Semprún lived in exile in Paris as one of the intellectual critics of Franco’s Regime. After Franco’s death he served as a Minister of Culture of the PSOE government from 1988 to 1991. As discussed in chapter 2, Semprún and Saura had collaborated in 1964 in *History of Spain* —a set of grotesque and monstrous portraits of Spanish early modern emblematic figures that were politically appropriated by the Francoist regime.

Saura’s articles of the late 1980s were also very critical of the instrumentalization and cultural practices of the socialist government (PSOE) that he categorized as a branding opportunity for diplomatic recognition and ideological legitimation. In *Paris Will Be a Party* (Paris será una fiesta) (1987) Saura criticized Spanish a-critical display of contemporary art through international exhibitions.

During the 1990s Saura curated several shows on Spanish modern art. In *The Dog of Goya* (*El Perro de Goya*) (1992), and *After Goya: A Subjective Gaze* (*Después de Goya: Una Mirada Subjetiva*) (1996) Saura exhibited his series of works based on the dog of Goya as an iconographic conversation with Goya’s work while publishing a series on essays on the relevance of Goya for contemporary artists. Saura also participated in scholar and university conferences discussing the presence of the monstrous in Velázquez, Goya’s and Picasso’s artistic practice hence manifesting his active role in the refashioning of Spanish debate on modern culture.

In 1992, concurrent with the celebration of 1992 Spain (discussed in chapter 3) publishing house *Círculo de Lectores* organized an exhibition of Saura’s illustrations of books at the Círculo de Bellas Artes in Madrid. Mikel Hainze published *Antonio Saura and the books of his life*, included a collection of Saura’s illustrations of Cervantes, Quevedo, San Juan de la Cruz,
Cela, and Gómez de la Serna.\textsuperscript{406} Also in 1992, Saura published, \textit{Notebook (Memories of time)} (\textit{Notebook (memoria del Tiempo)}), a collection of Saura’s essays on his artworks.

Saura’s articles on art, literature and culture inserted Saura’s voice as a cultural figure in the ongoing discussion about Spanish lack of modern tradition during the cultural refashioning of Spanish social democracy.\textsuperscript{407} As this chapter examines, Saura’s critical texts on modern art and on the cultural policies of Spanish social democracy during the 1980s foregrounded his role as a public intellectual.

\textbf{The PSOE’s postmodern experiment and the international branding of Spanish contemporary culture (1982-1992)}

During the early 1980s, the recently elected social democratic government of the PSOE (in power from 1982 till 1996) was eager to display Spanish new democratic regime internationally as a modern European democracy. As scholars have pointed out, PSOE’s strategy served as a cultural and commercial opportunity —what Kim Bradley has described as “the great socialist experiment.”\textsuperscript{408} As Jazmin Breirak has argued, during the early 1980s the PSOE’s politics instrumentalized Spanish contemporary art as a means to legitimate its political agenda and as a branding opportunity. As she describes, “what was successful on art markets coincided with the modernizing project of socialist politicians. In a way both constituted a sort of “branding image”; perhaps the first one of a democratic government in Spain.”\textsuperscript{409}

Days before the democratic elections of October 1982, on September 29, PSOE’s presidential candidate Felipe González, held a public conference “For the Cultural Change” (Por el Cambio a cultural) addressed to a select number of Spanish artists and intellectuals disclosing

\textsuperscript{406} Antonio Saura Los Libros de Su Vida with a prologue by Hans Mankiel, Círculo de Lectores, Barcelona, 1991.
\textsuperscript{408} See Kim Bradley, “The Great Socialist Experiment”, \textit{Art in America}, vol. 84, February 1996, pp. 72-77.
\textsuperscript{409} Jazmin Breirak in \textit{Arte y Transición}, Brumaria, 2012, p. 271
socialist’s “new cultural message.” As Spanish journalist Fernando Jáuregui described, González demanded from intellectuals and artists a public commitment to his political party’s policies in exchange of cultural support and economic funds for culture in the national budget. González won the 1982 democratic elections with a supermajority in both Congress and the Senate—hence becoming the first left wing political party in office since 1936. Concurrent with this political euphoria for the democratic change of Spanish society after decades of fascist dictatorship, in June 1982 Spain hosted the Soccer World Cup. Beyond the cultural fervor of Spaniards for soccer, the 1982 Spain’s World Cup became the first international-scale event after Franco’s dictatorship. Despite Spanish national team poor performance, Spain’s 1982 World Cup functioned as an international testimony of Spanish social and political normalized situation as a modern democratic country. Joan Miró was commissioned by the state to design the main poster for the world-televised event—hence reinforcing the explicit connection between Spanish popular art and soccer while also exploiting Miró’s international prestige. This political use of Spanish modern art in the early 1980s was signfinificant in order to create a clear distance from the dark past of the still vivid memories of the Franco’s Regime. Just months after the World Cup, in October 1982, recently elected Spanish ministry of culture, and future commander-in-chief of NATO, Javier Solana, inaugurated ARCO, Spanish first Contemporary Art Fair, in Madrid. ARCO was conceived as a means to integrate Spanish art galleries into the international art market as a means to promote Spanish contemporary art as a cultural industry. As the official presentation note explained:

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411 See Mar Villaspesa, Sindrome de mayoria absoluta, Arena Internacional de Arte 1, 1989.
412 See Medio Siglo de Arte, Calvo Serraller, op. cit., p. 1163.
The Spanish current political, social and cultural context demands a radical shift in order to reposition Spain into the international community. ARCO’82 has been born with such a goal. ARCO’ 82 is the first International Contemporary Art Fair in Spain. Its aim is to situate Spain as a preeminent platform for the encounter between artists and collectors but more importantly it aspires to become a permanent meeting point for European, Latin American and North American art from which it could be shown to the rest of the world the Spanish contemporary art.414

As the official note proved, government’s promotion of Spanish international events as political opportunities was also successfully instrumental in promoting Spanish contemporary art as an essential aspect of “Spanish cultural industry.”415 As Kim Bradley has argued, these commercially oriented exhibitions functioned as political-self-celebratory events.416

As discussed in chapter 3, in 1984 Spanish writer Rafael Sánchez-Ferlosio had denounced this political instrumentalization of Spanish art by the government as a problematic act of self-promotion (what he called an act of actomanía).417 Like Ferlosio, Saura also criticized the political instrumenetalization of modern art. In 1985 Saura wrote The Fair of the Capriciousness (La Feria de las Veleidades) in which he manifested his condemnatory review of ARCO while criticizing the trivialization of Spanish contemporary art as a commodity.418 For Saura, Spanish government’s involvement in these self-congratulatory celebrations of Spanish contemporary art ultimately constructed prestigious venues for political self-promotion.

In 1984, the National Congress-sponsored the exhibition Spanish Art in the National Assembly (Arte Español en el Congreso). This artshow presented a collection of modern and contemporary Spanish artists, some of which had been exiled and left outside of the official narrative of Spanish modern art for over forty years. This show was making self-evident the

414 ARCO’82 Official note, quoted in Calvo Serraller, Medio Siglo op. cit. p. 1140.
explicit connection between Spanish modern art and its deliberate political intention. As scholar and curator of the exhibition, Francisco Calvo-Serraller pointed out this show provided the opportunity for the socialist government to show the works of Spanish modern artists who had been obliterated during the dictatorship and as a means to reestablished a “good relations” status of the government with modern artists. Calvo-Serraller’s description on the cultural role of the government as a responsible keeper of the modern tradition revealed once again the Socialist Party’s (PSOE) urgency toward reestablishing the historical, cultural and political disjuncture of Spanish cultural legacy. The shows also provided the image of the new democratic state as Spain’s first cultural and artistic patron and hence reinforced the paternalistic attitude of the Spanish government towards art production. As Alberto Medina Dominguez has argued this paternalistic approach to culture actually did not differ much from Francoist cultural goals. In fact, he argued, Spanish social democracy ideologically appropriated Spanish contemporary art as means for political legitimation, transforming Spanish tradition as Spanish culture.

Indeed, this series of state-promoted events of Spanish contemporary art were historically coincidental with democratic Spain ingress in the European Union and consequently concurrent with its full participation into the global art-market. In 1985, the Spanish government designed and sponsored Europalia 85 Spain in Brussels commemorating Spanish European condition and

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419 See Calvo Serraller, Medio Siglo de Arte de Vanguardia, op. cit. p. 1245.
420 “Exiliados la mayor parte de sus mejores creadores y hostiles al franquismo la práctica todalidad del resto, era evidente que lo primero que debía realizarse desde el nuevo Estado democrático no podía ser más que la búsqueda del restablecimiento de unas relaciones rotas. Actuando así, es Estado no sólo cambiaba su odiosa faz de perseguidor y trataba de reparar los daños infringidos, sino que asumía el papel de proporcionar una información sistemáticamente secuestrada a la mayoría de los ciudadanos. Por razones políticas obvias los españoles habían sido con frecuencia marginados de los circuitos culturales internacionales más interesantes, lo cual supuso, en el terreno de las artes, que los museos y las salas oficiales españoles no sólo prescindieron de las obras representativas del mejor arte de nuestro siglo, sino que también lo hicieron incluso se trataba de importantes figuras nacidas en el país.” Calvo Serraller, Medio Siglo de Arte de Vanguardia, op. cit. p. 101.
421 “Desde el poder se lleva a cabo una compleja operación retórica. Al tiempo que se le ofrece al público la imagen del gesto emancipador (alance de un estadio de responsabilidad sin tutela) dentro de la tradición moderna sobre la que se había construido el imaginario político del postfranquismo desde la oposición, se introduce la nación, de modo soslayado, en los hábitos de la inminente “sociedad del espectáculo”, en la retórica y las regla sde juego de la postmodernidad.” Alberto Medina-Dominguez, Exorcismos de la memoria, op. cit. p. 62.
presenting Spanish culture to the rest of European countries. The show included a series of six Spanish art exhibitions showing different aspects of Spanish cultural identity, from gastronomy to cultural traditions of local regions. These state-promoted shows operated as a protocol-presentation before the official ingress EU as a means to “accomplish the greater diffusion of Spanish culture in Europe ‘as a point of departure of a political Europe.’” Saura rejected the artistic and political premises of this show as a simplistic banalization of Spanish culture and as a presentation of Spanish art as mere folklore.

In Don Quijote and The Bravantia Giant (Don Quijote y la Giganta Bravantia), (1985) Saura criticized this exhibition as a self-promotional and chauvinistic display of Spanish ignorance that was ultimately displaying a stereotyped image of the radical diversity of Spanish culture. As he argued, the show served as a platform for mere “political prestige” which reduced Spanish culture to a superficial compacted entity of history, cultural mythology and ultimately as a form of folklore. Saura criticism was also addressed to national display of Spain’s cultural policies, in particular during 1986.

If, as discussed in chapter 1, 1957 had been a significant year in the re-alignment of art and politics under Francoism (with the arrival to power of the Opus Dei’s technocratic government

422 “En líneas generales, Europalia 85 ayudará a nuestros vecinos europeos a conocer mejor el pasado y el presente de un país que, a partir del 1 de Enero de 1986, será formalmente miembro de pleno derecho de las instituciones políticas, jurídicas y económicas encargadas de proyectar hacia el futuro un legado común de cultura y civilización al que España ha contribuido decisivamente. Por tanto, el festival que hoy se inaugura en Bruselas merece el apoyo de quienes realmente están implicados en la difusión de la cultura española.” Editorial note “Legado común and Civilization” Madrid, 24 September 1985 quoted in Calvo Serraller, Medio Siglo de Arte de Vanguardia, op. cit.p. 1358.
423 See Antonio Saura, “Don Quijote y la Giganta Bravantia (Sobre Europalia 85)”, A. Saura, El Mon, 186, 15 November 1985, reprinted in A. Saura, Crónicas, p. 122–133.
424 “Tal confusión entre historia, mitología y folklore, se conjuga mal con una encomiable intención desmitificadora de la imagen tópica de un país que se integra definitivamente en Europa, y menos todavía cuando se formula a través de ciertos actos populares de indudable gratuidad. La culminación de los mismo, junto a la quema de una enorme falla valenciana, será un concilio ecuménico de gigantes y cabezudos de ambos países, reunidos para celebrar el acoplamiento contra natura del gigante Don Quijote y de la giganta belga Bravantia, acto grotesco cuyo ridiculo gesto, pretendidamente simbólico y europeísta, merece, a pesar de su insignificancia, nuestra sorpresa y repobración.” A. Saura, “Don Quijote y la giganta Bravantia (Sobre Europalia 85)” in El Mon 186, November 15, 1985, reprinted Crónicas, p. 133.
and the founding year of *El Paso*), 1986 witnessed the recasting of the cultural politics of the Social democratic government as a normalized European democracy. In May 1986 the Reina Sofía Museum opened in Madrid as the first national collection of contemporary art under democracy. In December 1986 Spain joined NATO after a controversial democratic referendum. Artists and intellectuals like Saura, aligned with the majority opinion of the civic and rejected the idea of becoming a military ally of the United States. In 1986 Saura created a poster against Spanish involvement in the military treaty (Fig. 4.2). Also, in fall 1986, Saura published “Present and Future of the Reina Sofia Art Center,” celebrating the inauguration of the new museum of contemporary art while warning against the chauvinistic approach and the shortness of the museum collection. Spanish state-sponsored and politically oriented cultural events lead eventually to the massive celebration of Spanish postmodern democratic status in the emblematic year of 1992.

As discussed in chapter 3, in 1992, Spanish government commemorated the Five hundredth anniversary of Columbus first trip to America in 1492 with Seville’s World Fair (EXPO’92). That same summer, Spain celebrated the Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona, and Madrid as European Capital of Culture. Kim Bradley has called this multiple celebration of international events as the “triple stravaganza of 1992-Spain”. As Kim Bradley has pointed out, although 1992 epitomized the idea of Spain as a postmodern country, 1992-Spain was nonetheless a ruinous national event:

> Madrid’s European Cultural Capital celebration was an embarrassing flop, badly organized and pulled together at the last moment. At Seville’s World Fair, art projects that challenged the Socialists’ carefully groomed image of modernity were summarily canceled.

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meanwhile, had used the announcement that it would be hosting the Olympics to generate funds for two new museums, the National Museum of Catalan Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art, which it expected to have finished in time for the ’92 crowds. Political infighting and bureaucratic difficulties, however, put that goal out of reach.428

As Bradley suggests, after the collective affective celebration of 1992, Spain was left with no political collective goal and instead it suffered a strong sense of political individuality and individual consumerism. As a corollary of the complex year of 1992, Picasso’s Guernica was controversially transferred from El Casón del Buen Retiro to the Reina Sofía Museum—thus betraying Picasso’s will to remain next to Goya’s Shootings of the Third of May. Despite William Rubin’s criticism, the Reina Sofia museum benefited immensely from the massive of tourism of the Guernica.429

Similar to Bradley’s denouncement of Spanish postmodern-artistic events of 1992, in “The dress of the Emperor” (“El vestido del Emperador”) Alberto López Cuenca has described the decadence and gradual deterioration of Spanish artistic premises that transitioned from the genuine civic enthusiasm after the death of the dictator in the mid 1970s, to the gradual transformation of Spanish political subject into a consumer of culture of the early 1990s.430 Cristina Moreiras has also pointed out that post-1992 Spain signaled a moment of trivialization of the Spanish culture in which the melancholic collective subject was left out of any political project. As she describes, from the enthusiastic utopia of an alienated subject of the 1980s, during the early 1990s Spanish political subject was actually part of dystopian spectacle.431 As she wrote:

If 1992 began with joy, it ended in disenchantment and loss. This time the loss was the feeling of a very absence of a nation wide collective project and the rupture between State and Culture. [In 1992] Future had finally arrived to Spain and the promises of the 1980s were actually never fullfilled.432

Following Moreiras’s analysis of Spanish postmodernity as a consumer-oriented spectacle and as a branding and marketing political strategy, it seems clear that the 1992 cultural-celebrations did not fulfilled its promises of modernizing Spain and instead, it had elongated the structures of the capitalistic global market.433

Indeed, after the huge touristic success of Spain-1992, Spanish regional and local institutions (Autonomías) focused on promoting a system of regional cultural and iconic art institutions in order to re-define their regional cultural heritage and politica identity— hence embracing contemporary culture as an opportunity for touristic capital. As Xon de Ros described, these new centers of contemporary culture were transformed into symbolic infrastructures for capitalistic revenue. As he reasoned, these museums became “Cultural icons are central to the definition of national heritage. They are instrumental in projecting the nation’s image into a discursive space and are therefore the object of governmental attention and the subject of cultural policy.”434

This sense of political urgency at building symbolic national-spaces for contemporary culture revealed the symptomatic jouissance of social democratic institutions at inaugurating significant spaces for contemporary art and culture in which the “art” was the infrastructure itself

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432 “Si 1992 comienza su andadura con la alegría, terminará con el desencanto y el enfriamiento, otra vez, a la pérdida de un objeto. Pero esta vez, la pérdida será la ausencia de un proyecto colectivo y la ruptura entre el Estado y la cultura (esta última representada desde sus instituciones tanto como desde sus productores). El futuro ha llegado a España y la promesa de los años ochenta no se han materializado como se apuntaba.” Cristina Moreiras, op. cit. p. 188.
433 See Santos Juliá, Jose Luis García Delgado, Juan Carlos Jiménez and Juan Pablo Fussi, in La Cultura del Siglo XX, Madrid, Marcial Pons, Historia 2003, specially p. 598 and ss.
and the “culture” was the act of inauguration. This museum fever continued during the late 1980s and increased during the early 1990s.

In 1986 the Reina Sofia museum (MNCARS) was inaugurated in Madrid as the national museum of contemporary art. In 1989, the Valencian Institute of Modern Art (IVAM) was inaugurated in Valencia with the permanent bequest of cubist sculptor Julio González. In 1992 the Thyssen Museum opened in Madrid with the Thyssen collection of modern art. On November 1995, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) opened in Barcelona, and in 1997 Guggenheim Bilbao was inaugurated in the Basque Country as part of the international franchise of contemporary museums. Frank Gehry’s spectacular and sculptural building enhanced its condition as an artistic and a touristic museum of contemporary art functioning as a source for cultural revenue and as a signifier of contemporary postmodern added-value. The museum had a tremendous impact on Bilbao. Indeed, Kim Bradley described Guggenheim’s Bilbao as “the deal of the century”. As Xon de Ros has argued, the Guggenheim Bilbao operated as a political signifier:

   The Guggenheim is equally symbolic of a new turning point in the history of the region after the final industrial debacle of the 1980s. In modeling itself on the idea of the expo, and thereby turning high art into popular culture, it has become a cultural icon which not only embodies the rhetoric of progress, but, in an illustration of Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’, serves also as a powerful instrument in government programs of social performance.

This regional-nationalistic promotion of museums of art functioning as touristic icons created a set of symbolic monuments for the new Spanish postmodern patrimony that functioned indeed as touristic attractions. On the one hand, these monuments reaffirmed Spanish new social

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436 Kim Bradley, “The deal of the century” op. cit.
democratic identity internationally. On the other, they operated as literal and allegorical walls that resisted and yet prevented the contemplation of the fractured condition of recent Spanish history. Nonetheless, under this politically infused postmodern reinvention of Spanish cultural identity, public institutions and politicians conceived contemporary Spanish culture as a creation from the top to the bottom in which the contemporary magnificent infrastructures would eventually provide the content needed and consequently, its meaning.

Saura objected this cultural state policy of building new museums and centers of contemporary art describing them as expensive frames of art rather than in the content of the art. As he wrote in *The Museum of the End of the Century* (1995), this implosion of state-founded centers for contemporary art run the risk of switching the signified by the signfier:

> in Spain we are witnessing a striking phenomenon: the construction of new museums without collections; the paradoxical condition of museums as signifiers without signified. Overall, it is a caricature of a fake rivalry, a misunderstanding of prestige without cultural reasons. This is Spanish contribution to the art of the absurd: the expensive museum that shows our cultural void.

As Saura added, this proliferation of new cultural spaces for contemporary art was a pathetic caricature, a cultural shipwreck of Spanish culture. Saura criticized the void of Spanish specific cultural politics as mere spectacle for political self-promotion:

> In attendance of the great sweep of history when every day it seems more urgent the need of history and every day we are still so close to being “genuinely modern”—and therefore we still belonging to this century and not to the previous one—the ghost of the museum appears as a catalyzer of different intensities. Maybe it functions as means to exorcise or rather compensate the monstrous of our modern reason; maybe it is still an incentive to aspire for freedom and creativity. Maybe the modern museum functions as an open book that can still reflect the positive spirit of our age and reject that which is mere spectacle and fashion. […] This is certainly the

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440 “asistimos en nuestro país a un fenómeno inédito y verdaderamente sorprendente: a la construcción de nuevos museos sin colección previa, a la paradójica construcción del continente sin haberse preocupado de formar con anterioridad un contenido que lo justifique; en resumen, a la caricatura de la rivalidad comunitaria, al malentendido del prestigio sin razones verdaderamente culturales. He aquí, sin duda alguna, el mejor aporte del arte español al universo del arte absurdo—y quizá, incluso, al del arte conceptual—: el costoso museo para no mostrar, en la espera, más que un gran vacío cultural.” Saura, *El Museo Fin de Siglo*, en Fíjeza, p. 356.
great offering of Spanish art to the world of contemporary art (and maybe even to conceptual art): a very expensive museum to show nothing while we wait for the immense cultural void.  

Saura’s criticism against the instrumentalization of Spanish contemporary art by the state was also symptomatic of his long-felt anxiety about the increasing trivialization of contemporary art as a mere brand for touristic consumption. In an interview with José Luis Jover, Saura criticized the state promotion of contemporary art as mere cultural entertaining, affirming that:

Contemporary art in Spain has become mere entertainment, and the managers promote their fun-company by creating a passive audience that is continually seduced by immediate satisfaction while following the fashion character of the sudden flash […] This new art market is breaking apart by being taken over by investors and being sustained only as an investment —like the real estate market. Contemporary museums do not buy painting or sculpture; and the few museums that exist are suffering a series management and economic crisis.

Yet, despite being against this state boom on contemporary centers of art, major Spanish museums held monographic retrospectives on Saura’s works throughout the 1980s (Fundació Miró, (1980), IVAM (1989), Reina Sofia (1989)) which further consolidated Saura’s position as a canonical figure of Spanish modern art.

In 1990, American critic Richard Shore described Saura’s works as a fossilized formula arguing that his paintings were “clichés of spagnolisme” and ultimately as a “repetitive ritual.” Shore’s impatience with Saura’s “threadbare facility” was symptomatic of some art

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441 “En la espera del inexorable gran barrido de la historia, cuando se hace cada día más apremiante la escritura de la misma, cuando faltan pocos años para continuar siendo “verdaderamente modernos” y pertenecer todavía a este siglo y no al pasado, aparece el fantasma del museo quizá como catalizador de intensidades, quizá para exorcizar o compensar los monstruos producidos por la razón de nuestra época, quizá para continuar sirviendo de incentivo para la libertad y la creatividad, quizá como un libro abierto capaz de reflejar el espíritu positivo de una época en menosprecio de aquello que solamente es espectáculo y moda.” Saura, El Museo Fin de Siglo, en Fijeza, p. 356.

442 “El arte se ha convertido entretenimiento, y los gestores fomentan su empresa de diversion, creándose un público pasivo, atento a la seducción inmediata, encendiéndose temporalmente por el personaje de moda o el repentino alumbramiento… Un incipiente mercado de arte se desmoraña al ser ocupado fundamentalmente por los especuladores y sustentarse, como en el negocio inmobiliario, en la pura inversion. Los museos no compran pintura escultura, y los pocos que existen atraviesan problemas económicos y de gestión considerables…” Antonio Saura, “Entrevista con Jose Luis Jover”, en Escritura como Pintura, op. cit. pp. 167-183.

critics’s response towards the Informalist generation in the 1990s. For these critics, these artists, and Saura as a preeminent one of them, had exhausted narratives of Spanish modern art as a dramatic, isolated, and exotic tradition at least since the mid 1950s and lacked any new visual interaction. As I posit throughout this pages, it is precisely this gesture of continual self-introspection, which operated for Saura as an allegorical and melancholic gesture towards his own artistic production.

On his essay “The Melancholic Intellectual” (El Intelectual Melancólico), Jordi Gracia has described the symptoms of the Spanish contemporary melancholic intellectual. For Gracia, the Spanish modern intellectual systematically looks into the national past as the central problem to be solved as a means to create a fictional narrative in order to justify and excuse, the lack of significance of his/her artistic role as cultural critic. Gracia’s diagnosis on the introspective nature of the modern intellectual in Spain can be also addressed to Saura’s generation of artist who those as Saura opened Spanish art and were successful during the 1960s and in which the new demand for new art was left out of the major trend of the contemporary. And yet, more than a nostalgic gaze towards a mystified past, Saura’s books illustrations embody a melancholic gesture that revelas his “graphic thought.”

In his illustrations of emblematic texts of the Spanish literary tradition of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Saura deployed a melancholic and allegorical gesture evaluating his own artistic practice and the cultural validity of the Spanish literary body during the refashioning of Spanish cultural identity.

444 Jose Luis Brea, El Punto Ciego, El Arte Español en los Años 90.
445 See Jordi Gracia, El Intelectual Melancólico, Barcelona, Anagrama, 2006.
4.3. Saura and the Spanish Literary Body: His Book Illustrations

As above mentioned, Saura’s illustrations of significant texts of the Spanish literary canon during the late 1980s and early 1990s were concurrent with the political recasting of Spanish modern art by the PSOE government while at the same time, they were symptomatic of his intellectual activity as a cultural figure. Indeed, in this context of state-promoted international branding of Spanish contemporary art, Saura’s printmakings and illustrations of historically significant texts of the Spanish literary canon operated as symbolic platforms for exploring Saura’s graphology — what Dore Ashton has called Saura’s “plastic thought.” As she wrote:

it is almost impossible not to make literature when one discusses plastic thought […] (Saura is an intelligent painter) That is, a painter whose plastic intelligence has wrought a vision through the means a painter commands: canvas, brush, matter, and all the images he has ever paused to see (as his surprisingly candid published anthologies of images reveal: new photos, magazine illustrations, old master paintings, scientific drawings, and paintings by contemporaries—no iconographer will ever be able to distort his sources.)

Following Ashton’s description of Saura’s graphology as “plastic thought”, Saura’s illustration of literary texts revealed Saura’s structuring visual principle and the literary force of his artworks. As discussed below, Saura’s illustrations defined his visual and literary artistic practice.

French philosopher Louis Marin has explained the double bind at the core of the literary illustration as embodying the doubling process of writing and reading. As he argues, what is really relevant in an illustration is how an image becomes a narrative:

…asking how, beyond simple questions of iconography, a narrative becomes an image, what requirement specific to the pictorial medium and to visual substance, to visual modes of perception and contemplation of the work, the painter had to fulfill in order “visually” to tell the story that constituted the subject of the work; it meant inquiring into the constraints imposed on the painter, constraints stemming from the most general categorizations of space and time and of their representation, operative at the precise time and place in history and culture, a series of laws

and norms governing the painter’s creative inventiveness, as well as the beholder’s contemplation of the work.447

Following Marin’s analysis of the possibility of a visual reading, Saura’s book illustrations provided singular platforms displaying his career-long gesture of monstrifications of previous artistic corpuses and also sites for exploring the disjointed condition of Spanish modernity.

4.3.1. Los Sueños of Francisco Quevedo (1963-1972)

Saura was fascinated with the Spanish baroque gaze. As he wrote in “The baroque image” (“La Imagen Barroca”) (1984) the baroque gaze, what he defined as the “cruel gaze” (la mirada cruel) is exemplified for Saura in Quevedo’s Dreams.448 Saura illustrated Quevedo’s Dreams in 1963 and in 1972. As James O. Crosby has argued, Quevedo’s Dreams are emblematic works of Spanish baroque. As Crosby reasons, they operate as allegories of the falsness and decrepitude of Spanish Imperial deliriums.449 For him, Quevedo’s Dreams are modern texts. As he argues, Quevedo’s modernity lies precisely in his semantic ambiguity of horror and fascination with which he experimented with death as dreams thus creating a text that is both tragic and ironic. As Crosby argued, Quevedo’s Dreams situates the narrator in the position of the modern subject, in which narrator-reader and spectator conflates in a single entity—which ultimately antecedes the experience of the modern subject. 450

448 Saura, See Antonio Saura. “La imagen barroca” (1984), in Fijeza, op. cit. and in Los Sueños de Quevedo, Notebook, op. cit. p. 131
Etreros Mena also argues, “Quevedo constructs a sui generis work that can be considered the paradigm of modernity by all means. Quevedo’s modernity becomes actualized even today.”

In 1963 Saura illustrated Traüme, the German edition of Quevedo’s Dreams and Discourses (Los Sueños) in Cologne (Germany). In these drawings Saura rendered Quevedo’s allegorical descriptions of dream-scenes in a set of black and white compositions of accumulated faces and monstrous bodies. Saura’s bodiless heads compressed in a sofocating visual space resonate with monstrous accumulated bodies of his Multitudes (discussed in chapter 1).

In Traüme 1, (1962) Saura illustrated a scene of Quevedo’s Dreams, in which he accumulated a series of monstrous and skull-like faces in a constrained rectangular space. Saura’s ambivalent masks-heads are both threatening and phantasmagoric hence suggesting both a comic and a tragic depiction. Saura’s accumulation of bodies without bodies recalls Goya’s Romería de San Isidro from the Black Painting series as well as his own artistic production. (Fig. 4.3)

In Träume 3 (1962) and in Traüme 4 (1962) Saura’s illustrations enhanced the allegorical and oniric-like atmosphere that Quevedo’s text while enacting an intimate dialogue between his artworks. Formally, Saura’s claustrophobic compositions challenged the accumulation of grotesque and monstrous collective bodies (equating baroque’s horror vacui) as an accumulation of bodies as both threatening and comical. (Fig. 4.4 & 4.5.)

Roger Bartra interprets the frequent presence of black humor in Spanish baroque literarture as an indirect melancholic gesture for social and political change. Like Bartra,

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451 “Quevedo construye una obra sui generis que debe considerarse modelo de modernidad en todos los aspectos, modernidad que queda actualizada hasta el día de hoy, dados los aciertos de su elaboración” See, Los Sueños de Francisco de Quevedo, Mercedes Etreros Mena, Madrid, ed. Libertarias, 1998 p. 41.
scholars have celebrated Quevedo’s bitter satire, pointing to the wrongs and the defects of his
historical present as a sign of Quevedo’s literary modernity in his black humor.As in Bartra’s
description, in Saura’s illustrations of Quevedo’s Dreams the bodies are both grotesque and
monstrous both phantasmagoric and comic grotesque bodies are both phantasmagoric.
In 1971, Saura created Three Visons of Quevedo, a set of illustrations for the French
edition of Quevedo’s Dreams for Yves Riviére editorial house. Published in 1972, the book
included Saura’s 42 black-and-white lithographs. Saura’s illustrations replicated some of the
visual motifs he had explored throughout his career in pictorial series and graphic works such as
the distortion of the female body, the woman in an armchair, and the crucifixion (discussed in
chapter 1). As Saura argued in those illustrations, “I tried to create a truly illustrated book. I
conversed with Yves Rivière and together designed a series of big compositions that would
occupy the blank spaces hence creating a intimate correspondance between the text and the
visual images.” For Saura both texts (his illustrations and Yves-Riviére edited version of
Quevedo’s text) should be read as part of the same reading process, “The images go hand by
hand with the reading as certain children books do.”453
In La Curiosité M’obligea de me fourier dans la presse (1971) Saura depicted an
accumulation of monstrous bodies in a claustrophobic environment. The composition echoed the
accumulation of bodiless figures in Traüme (1963) — hence expanding yet repeating the selfreflective dimension of his visual repertoire. Saura’s illustration occupies the blank on the page
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“Y fue el largo Siglo de Oro Español uno de los processos culturales que más contribuyó a consolidar en
Occidente el humor negro como una de las fuerzas motrices de la sociedad y de la política.” Roger Bartra,
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“Se trataba de hacer un verdadero libro ilustrado, y de acuerdo con Yves Rivière, su editor, planteamos la obra de
forma que las imágenes, realizadas en grandes piedras, quedaran incluidas en espacios precisos decididos de
antemano, permaneciendo de esta forma íntimamente ligadas al texto a fin de que nunca pudieran ser desgajadas del
conjunto. Las imágenes acompañan la lectura, al modo de algunos libros infantiles y de ciertas obras lejanas en el
tiempo, proponiéndome ilustrar realmente un texto fascinante y no vagabundear en la carambola de la
aproximación.” A. Saura, “Lo Sueños de Quevedo”, Notebook, op. cit., p. 132

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and stand as a visual presence of the page. The grotesque figures equate the menacing presence of the monstrous presences of Goya’s *Black Paintings series* with Saura’s own pictorial series of *Multitudes*, thus creating a continuous iconography across media.

In *Il N’y a rien de tout cela qui soit ce qui soit ce qu’il paraît* (1971), Saura rendered a procession of figures invading the top of the page. Saura’s grotesque figures paralleled a religious procession hence equating the process of reading to a religious ritual (Fig.4.6). Rather than functioning simply an illustration of the text, Saura’s drawing interprets the text and participates in the reading as an active reader.

In *Certes, c’est un chef-d’œuvre de la Nature* (1971) Saura depicted a nude female body over a horizontal space. Saura’s drawing occupies the upper part of the page while the text is displayed in a two-column division, thus creating a blank space between the text and the image. Saura’s visual motif of a reclining naked woman recalled Goya’s *La Maja Desnuda* (1800 ca.) —hence anticipating in one year Saura’s grotesque rendering of Goya’s painting in *Miror de Souvenir* (1972) (Fig. 4.7), (discussed in chapter 2).

As Foucault pointed out, on an illustrated book the image articulates the process of meaning doubling the process of reading between the image and the text. As he wrote:

> On the page of an illustrated book, we seldom pay attention to the small space above the words and below the drawings, forever serving them as a common frontier. It is there, on these few millimeters of white, the calm sand of the page, that are established all the relations of designation, nomination, description, and classification. ⁴⁵⁴

Saura’s deployment of black-and-white monstrous bodies showed the persistence of his visual iconography as a self-contained gallery of self-referential motifs. This recurrence of the same visual motifs emphasized Saura’s monstrous bodies but also the allegorical dimension of

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⁴⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *This is not a Pipe*, p. 28
his artistic practice as a systematic revision of the Spanish cultural legacy in particular with significant figures of the Spanish baroque.

Saura’s repetitive illustrations of Quevedo’s grave and yet satirical style allegorized the solemn drama of the Spanish Baroque and at the same time they enacted a comic and humoristic undermining of its symbolic body. In doing so, Saura’s illustrations of Quevedo deployed a mise-en-scene of Saura’s personal mental theater. As Dore Ashton described, Saura’s rendering of Quevedo as a “falling off into a void—what Picasso would have called the “black mirror.” From the beginning, Saura expressed, consciously or not, an Old Spanish preoccupation: Quevedo’s “the waters of the abyss.”

Indeed, Saura’s illustrations of Quevedo, as an emblematic writer of Spanish baroque, also enacted a direct dialogue with Picasso’s illustration of the significant figures of Spanish literary canon such as Gongora and Fernando de Rojas. In 1948, Picasso had illustrated an edition of twenty poems by Spanish baroque poet Luis de Góngora. In this work, Picasso explored the intersection of language and image as a form of graphic poetry. Picasso included a portrait of Góngora in which Picasso echoed Velazquez’s portrait of Góngora in 1646. In so doing, Picasso’s illustrations of Góngora’s poems conversed at once with the force of Góngora’s poems and also with the visual language of Cervantes’s baroque portraiture.

In 1962, one year before Saura’s illustration of German edition of Quevedo’s Dreams, Picasso illustrated Fernando de Roja’s La Celestina (1501). Roja’s early-modern Spanish stage play tells the tragic-comic story of a failed love story between two lovers (Calixto and Melibea), and the elderly woman that made profit of their engagement (Celestina). For many scholars, Roja’s La Celestina is a literary exeption on European literature of the 1500s. As they argue,

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Roja’s text epitomizes the modern novel as (as a story of intricate and contradictory characters) and moreover it is one of the first instances of a new literary genre (the tragedy-comedy). As Roger Bartra describes, Roja’s *La Celestina* is a melancholic text. As he argues, *La Celestina* is, “an extraordinary text, at whose base we can hardly fail to discern melancholy as the cause of morbid eroticism of the lovers. In the *Celestina*, Bartra continues, fleshly and worldly love is condemned with a kind of good-humored passion that leads us to suspect that the apparent condemnation merely serves to veil a surreptitious admiration for the lovers who sacrifice their lives for the sake of love.”

As Picasso’s drawings of *La Celestina* documented, Rojas’s text offered Picasso the opportunity to combine the nudity of the female body that he had previously addressed in his drawings and sketches of turn-of-the-century Paris nightlife with the folkloric iconography of the Spanish Baroque Drama (Comedia de Capa y Espada). In illustrating emblematic works of the Spanish literary tradition, Picasso’s illustrations border both the grotesque and the dramatic while reinterpreting the Spanish literary tradition during the mid 1960s.

In summer 1962, Saura visited Picasso in his studio at Mougins. As can be seen in the photograph, both artists are seated on a table while having a chat (Fig. 4.8). By the window, on the back, can be seen one of Picasso’s lithographies of *La Celestina* (1962) that he later echoed in his illustrations of Quevedo.

In quoting previous artistic and literary referents, Saura’s illustrations of Quevedo’s *Dreams* (both in 1963 and 1972) dialogued with Picasso’s illustration of Spanish baroque literature (Gongora and Fernando de Rojas) while at the same time offering a different platform from which evaluate his artistic practice (his pictorial series of *Multitudes*) —thus providing a particular comment on the political appropriation of the baroque by Francoism.

456 Roger Bartra, op. cit, p. 168
As such, Saura’s illustrations of Quevedo revealed the haunting preeminence of Spanish baroque in Spanish collective imaginary and also they embodied the legacy of the modern tradition. Saura’s and Picasso’s interpretations of Spanish early-modern tradition and of Spanish baroque in the mid 1960s was not incidental. Indeed, they operated in the particular circumstance of Francoist appropriation of Spanish baroque as a national Golden Age. As Jorge Luis Marzo described, for Francoist cultural figure Eugenio D’Ors, Spanish baroque embodied the Spanish classicism and therefore, as he argues, for the Franco’s regime, Spanish Baroque became a matter of national identity.457 In substituting the present with the cultural prestige of the Spanish baroque, Marzo described, Francoist dictatorship replaced its political present with the myth of the glorious national past. As Marzo argues, “This is what the myth of the baroque entails. It substitutes reality by fiction; it constructs a narrative that invites to forget and creates a calculated distance by means of literature and images. This founding dissociation secures the success of the baroque as an ideological narration.”458

Ultimately, then, Saura’s grotesquization and monstrification of Quevedo’s text commented on this continual revival of the baroque precisely through revealing its monstrous and melancholic aspect. This demanding and pressing situation of the Spanish Francoism during Franco’s postwar is also significant in his illustration of Camilo José Cela’s *Pascual Duarte’s Family* in which he illustrated one of the most significant texts of postwar Spanish literature.

4.3.2. Saura’s Illustration of Postwar Spain: *The Family of Pascual Duarte* (1986)

In 1986, Saura created a series of 41 drawings (19 drawings in Indian ink and 22 mixed media works in color) illustrating Camilo José Cela’s novel *La Familia de Pascual Duarte*.

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457 See Marzo, *La Memoria Administrada*, op. cit.
458 “El mito barroco consiste en esto. En suplantar una realidad por una ficción, en construir una narración que invite al olvido y crear la distancia mediante la literatura y las imágenes. Esa disociación vertebradora, en el tiempo, del éxito del barroco como narración ideológica.” Marzo, op. cit. 331.
Originally published in 1942, it is one of Cela’s most significant novels and certainly one of the preeminent texts of postwar Spain. Cela’s novel tells the story of Pascual Duarte, a peasant that is awaiting his execution in a prison cell. In the isolation of his cell he repeatedly remembers in anguish and pain, the horrible matricide on his family. As Manuel Vázquez Montalbán argued, Celá’s dry language and crude realism verbalized the desperate and cruel living circumstances of life in postwar Spain. As he wrote, “Pascual Duarte was the representation of Spanish tremendism; it revealed the burden of Cela’s effective exaggeration and truculence. However, it did not assert the organic harmony of the imperial world of the apologetic official novels of the Francoist regime.”459 Thus, in dialoguing allegorically with the postwar literary tradition, Saura’s illustrations of Cela’s novel as monstrous scenes it embodied a twofold gesture looking at once to the Spanish modern tradition and also on the memories of his painful adolescence (as discussed in the introduction).

In Saura’s first illustration of the text Saura portrayed an anthropomorphic creature holding a knife (Fig. 4.09). Saura’s black strokes constructed a visually ambivalent figure that dwells between a physical presence and its shadow. Indeed this undecisive situation Saura’s furious traces and vertical silhouette it symbolizes the terrifying and dramatic language of the story.

Saura depicted the crucial scene of the matricide (Fig. 4.10). In this image Duarte is holding the knife in the middle of the room. Saura’s scene is both phantasmagoric and distressing. The elongated forms and the shadow convey a phantasmagoric composition. The figure is enclosed on a cubic form. This physical constriction in a squared space resonates with

459 “Pascual Duarte era la representación del tremendismo español, con toda la carga de exageración y de truculencia efectista del joven Cela, pero evidentemente ni ratificaba aquel mundo armónico y lleno de marchas imperiales, de apologia de la estética del imperio que presentaban los novelistas oficiales. Vázquez Montalbán, La literatura en la construcción de la ciudad democrática. Mondadori, Barcelona, 2001, p. 73
Bacon’s visual motif of enclosing bodies in cubes —hence creating a dialogue with both the Spanish literary tradition and with the visual languages of modern painting. Bacon, who lived in Spain and had reinterpreted Velázquez’s painting in the mid 1950s in his study series of Velázquez’s portrait of the Pope Innocent X, Study after Velázquez’s Portrait of Innocent X (1953) died in Madrid in 1992. Honoring Bacon’s work on April 1992 Saura wrote “Francis Bacon and The Obscene Beauty” in which he praised the contradictions and force of Bacon’s painting as obscene and cruel beauty.\footnote{Saura, “Francis Bacon y la Belleza Obscena”, in Visor, Sobre Artistas, op. Cit. pp. 167-180.}

In the last illustration of the book Saura rendered a formless anthropomorphic body in a coffin. Saura’s illustration recalled a deposition of the crux hence echoing Saura’s tortured bodies of Christ in his Crucifixions pictorial series of the mid 1960s. As such, Saura’s illustration resonated with his previous visual antecedents of distorted and monstrous bodies while offering an allegorical reading of Cela’s novel and a melancholic gesture towards his own previous works. As such, Saura’s works paralleled Cela’s narrative.

Cela was very pleased with Saura’s works. He described Saura’s illustration of his own novel as a perfect interpretation. As he wrote: “If I would have been a painter, and I would have enough years, less years than Saura has now, I would probably have painted like he does. No one except him would have been able to interpret my work.”\footnote{“Si yo hubiera sido pintor, y hubiera tenido los años, bastantes años que le llevo a Saura, probablemente hubiera intentado pintar como él. Quiero decir que nadie hubiera podido interpretar mejor que él un texto mío” Camilo José Cela, Antonio Saura El Pintor Ilustrado, Universidad Menéndez Pelayo, 1981.} Cela and Saura had collaborated in the late 1959. In 1959, Cela dedicated a single monographic volume of his journal, Papers de Son Armadans to the artistic group El Paso —which reinforced the image of Saura as an intellectual artist in the late 1950s (discussed in chapter 1). Also in 1959 Saura created
Pintiquinestras, as “loving giants” a series of grotesque drawings by Saura prologued and titled by Cela and an inside joke on Cervantes’ Don Quixote.

Saura’s illustrated volume of Cela’s novel was finally published in 1989 and it included a text by Saura, “Crime and whim”, (“Crimen y capricho. Una reflexión sobre la ilustración y la literatura”) —in which he discussed on the status and symbolism of Cela’s narrative.[^462] This same year Cela was awarded the Literature Nobel Prize. Rather than recognition to Cela’s literary status, scholars interpreted Cela’s Nobel Prize in cultural terms. For them, Cela’s award was in fact a symbolic recognition of a whole generation of writers of the 1950s who had written under the difficult constraints of the dictatorship (a generation of Spanish writers which included Carmen Laforet, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, Miguel Delibes, Juan Goytisolo and Carmen Martín Gayte). As discussed above, Saura’s illustrations of Cela’s novel resonated with the gravity and solemnity of Cela’s writing while dwelling in the limits of the monstrous and the phantasmagoric, but also, it symbolically recuperates visually the legacy of the post-war literary corpus.

4.3.3. Don Quixote de la Mancha, Miguel de Cervantes (1987)

In 1987 publishing house Círculo de Lectores commissioned Saura to illustrate Miguel de Cervantes’s emblematic novel Don Quixote de la Mancha in order to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of their editorial debut. Cervantes’ Don Quixote (1605-1615) is probably most famous work written in Spanish and certainly one of the founding texts of modern literature. Saura’s illustration of the baroque masterpiece also meant for Saura the opportunity to

participate in the legacy of modern artists such as Dali and Daumier who had already illustrated

*Don Quixote.*

Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* tells the story of an old man (Alonso Quijano) who spent his life reading books and who in his elderly years decided to take action in the world by defeating the malic forces and injustices that he encounters in his journey. However, after spending his life reading medieval chivalric texts, Quijano is unable to differentiate reality from imagination and therefore he is not capable to delimit the constraints of real life and fiction. Consequently Quijano, as *Don Quixote*, continuously fails to defeat the monstrous and evil forces that he both imagines and combats and that nonetheless prevent him from succeeding. As Mario Vargas Llosa has noted, *Don Quixote* is animated by a delirious desire; he wants to resuscitate a time that it actually never took place and as such he is both nostalgic and visionary. As he described, *Don Quixote* is a melancholic character; he rejects the external world in order to transform his own reality and therefore transforming fiction into history. As Roger Bartra argues, the image of a delirious elderly man whose ideals are tragically transferred into reality (hence becoming the *Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance*) embodies a very powerful metaphor of the melancholia of Spanish culture and also a grotesque and anachronic figure that is “immersed in a new intellectual texture that vindicates the positive although risk-laden nature of the black humor”.

Hence, Saura’s illustrations of *Don Quixote* operated as a visual and literary instance in which to explore his own *graphia*, his personal trace, and the semantic aspects of his allegorical artistic practice. As Anton Patiño points out, Saura’s *Quijote* becomes an emotional sismographer and

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463 See *La Proliferación de los Espejos: Don Quijote y Antonio Saura*, Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez.
464 Mario Vargas Llosa, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, Real Academia Española Madrid, 2004
465 For Roger Bartra Melancholy and Culture, op. cit. p. 176
an *ergography* that equates the delirium of Quijote confounding reality and fiction with the psychological contradictions of the modern artist.\footnote{See Antón Patino, *El Quijote de Antonio Saura*. op. cit.}

In Saura depicted *Don Quixote* as a geometric figure opening his arms into the air (Fig. 4.11). Saura’s composition recalled Dalí’s *Quixote* as well as his career-long iconography of cruciform bodies as in *Grey no. 7* (1959) (discussed in chapter 1). In doing so, Saura’s illustration revisited his artistic practice while reinterpreting the Spanish modern tradition of illustrating the Quixote (as in Doré and Dalí). As Saura argued, his illustrations of *Don Quixote* established a dual dialogue.\footnote{Antonio Saura, *Saura por sí mismo*, p. 301.}

In *Portrait of Alonso Quijano* Saura depicted the head of Quijote inside of a cubical structure (Fig. 4.12). Framed inside a cube, Saura’s portrait of Alonso Quijano reproduced a symbolic scene of writing in which the image on the paper becomes three-dimensional. Saura’s drawing becomes both an image on a page and an imaginary theater; it is an image within an image. Saura’s cubic structure conjured Bacon’s paintings of bodies within cubes. In *Don Quixote* Saura enclosed the literary character and the viewer in an imaginary theater, thus mirroring the process of the quest of reading the novel itself.

Saura’s illustrations of *Don Quixote* established a singular dialogue with a self-appointed artistic ancestry (Bacon, Dalí and Picasso) as masters of modern art. Saura’s recurrent gesture in dialoguing with the modern tradition can be also seen in “Oh, you, whoever you might be” (1987) in which Saura depicted *Don Quixote* opening his arms in front of a grey wall. Saura’s use of grey and black emphasized the pathetic dramatism of the character (as living an imaginary fantasy in which the consequences of his acts are, however, real) —hence rendering Quixote’s
delusion through the solitude of the figure opening his arms, an act both of defiance and of surrender (Fig. 4.13). Saura’s opened arms figure simultaneously recalled Dalí’s iconic depiction of Don Quixote opening the arms into the void and also Goya’s Fusilado figure at the center of Shootings of the 3rd of May (1814).

Saura’s recurrent dialogue with both literature and with the Spanish pictorial tradition as a consistent strategy is visible also in Oh Dulcinea, (1987) Saura’s rendering of the female body in a horizontal plane mimicked Goya’s “La Maja desnuda” — as Saura had done in “Mirror du Souvenir” in 1972 (discussed in chapter 2). As such, Saura’s illustrations of Don Quixote created a self-contained universe of self-referential images that functioned as a visual palimpsest of his artistic practice (Fig. 4.14).

4.3.4. Ismos and Nueva Flor de Greguerias, Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1989)

In 1989, Saura created Nueva Flor de Greguerías, a set of eighty-seven small drawings illustrating his personal selection of Ramón Gómez de la Serna’s brief poems (Greguerías). As Saura argued, illustrating Gómez de la Serna’s book became a memory exercise; it recalled his painful experience in bed while at the same time it evoked for him the captivating moment of his early discovery of avant-garde art of the 1930s. As he explained:

Those small vignettes accompanying my own selection of greguerías echoed the little drawings that I made as teenager on my first edition of the book. My selection of poems came out as a result of my pacient reading of de la Serna’s text in different editions in which I saw best rendered his talent, his modernity and his syncopal sense of humour.469

In this book, Saura also included, “Imaginary Letter” (“Carta Imaginaria”) (1988).

Written as an intimate letter addressed to Gómez de la Serna, Saura’s text celebrated Gómez de

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469 As Saura argues: “Las viñetas que acompañan esta selección de greguerías, relacionadas en vecindad con alguna muy precisa de ellas, pretenden seguir con la pauta marcada por el propio escritor cuando en alguna edición Antigua acompañó estas pequeñas joyas literarias con sus propios dibujos. La selección fue el resultado de una paciente lectura en la que confronté múltiples ediciones, escogiendo aquellas que me parecieron representar mejor el ingenio, la modernidad, el humor sincopado y el vuelco de la percepción que representan.” A. Saura, Notebook, 1992, p. 146.
la Serna’s artistic practice and his hundreth anniversary, while also inviting Gómez Serna to Gómez de la Serna’s career-retrospective at the Reina Sofía in 1989.

As Saura, recounted, in reading of Ramón Gómez de la Serna’s texts he evoked his adolescent memories as a teenager recovering in bed and also, the vivid memory of his intimate discovery of the avant-garde during his particular domestic enclosure (discussed in the introduction). Moreover, Saura’s illustration of Gómez de la Serna’s poems, expanded the allegorical dimension of his artistic practice while deploying an introspective and melancholic gesture.

In the first image of the book, Saura depicted the monstrous image-portrait of Ramón Gómez de la Serna enclosed in a grey box (1987) Saura’s composition recalled the visual and semantic compositional strategies of appropriation of Asger Jorn works (Fig. 4.15). In doing so, Saura’s portrait of Gómez de la Serna enacted a visual dialogue with his previous works while revealing his dimension as thoughtful reader of the Spanish modern literary tradition.

As Saura often described, Gómez de la Serna’s books played an essential role in introducing of the European avant-garde into Spain during the early 1930s. In 1931, Gómez de la Serna published *Ismos*, in which he offered his personal account of the preeminent artistic movements of the early 20th century (“las nuevas formas del arte y la literatura”). In *Ismos*, Gómez de la Serna paralleled literature and visual arts as equally significant and reciprocally reinforcing each other across significant aesthetic movements of the European avant-garde. For Gómez de la Serna, these crucial movements were Dadaism, Cubism, and Surrealism, along with another set of aesthetics movements that he invented such as Apolineirism, Picassism,  

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Jazzbandsism.\textsuperscript{471} By the early 1930s, Gómez de la Serna was already known for his humorous compositions of short-prose poems (\textit{Greguerías}). These small poems operated both as a form of sarcasm and as a humor writing.

As Saura recalled, he first read Ramón Gómez de la Serna in 1947 when his mother gave him \textit{Ismos} as a Christmas present.\textsuperscript{472} For the young Saura, Gómez de la Serna’s description of the intricate relationship between text and image in modern art was fascinating: “[Ismos] was a continuous, limitless and unfinished book. It is very persistent book that still projects into my current present.” \textsuperscript{473} Saura returned to Ramón Gómez de la Serna’s artistic practice in the early 1980s. In 1983 Saura wrote an essay on Gómez de la Serna in Revue Parlée en Paris at the Centre Pompidou emphasizing his early fascination with Gómez de la Serna’s text as a founding instance of his childhood. As Saura wrote:

Ramón Gómez de la Serna’s \textit{Ismos} produced a huge impression on me. No other book has been so prominent in my memory. I remember it with a great degree of admiration and acknowledgment. It had a very powerful revelatory capacity. I warmly recall it very close to my first personal discoveries. It was a multiplier of affections and feelings. It was my way to be constantly in alert for the present and to question history. No other book has been so intimately related to hope for my country. No other book has ever rendered my solitary adolescence. It was a neverending book that was constantly open to the present. I remember the chaotic arrangement of isms and images, of poems and fascinating sentences as a “profound breath.” The cold and charged air penetrated in me. It is absurd to describe it once more. It is enough to confront the ghost of its name for my memory to recall its names and its vivid sensations that bring me back to the lonely cell. What can be expected from an object that is motionless and dumb? What can be expected from an object that has neither odor nor flesh and yet it had the capacity to show me the carnival of forms from the immense whiteness of its pages.\textsuperscript{474}

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\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{471} “Voy a hacer lo más prohibido por ciertos absolutistas teóricos, que es mezclar el nuevo arte y la literatura; pero del conjunto de esta herejía brotará una idea general de cómo es más verdad de lo que parece esta influencia recíproca… De la mescolanza de unos con otros y sus doctrinas brotará la palingenesia del arte nuevo, el horóscopo para entenderlo; entendiendo por arte nuevo esa mezcla de literatura, pintura y demás músicas.” Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Prólogo, \textit{Ismos}, Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1931, p. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{472} Las Tentaciones de Antonio Saura, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{473} “Aquel libro continuo, inacabable, nunca terminado, un libro perpetuo que se propaga todavía en el presente.” Saura, “Ismos” in \textit{Escritura como pintura}, p.103.
\textsuperscript{474} “Ismos, de Ramón Gómez de la Serna, ejerció la impresion más poderosa sentida frente a un libro. Ningún otro será recordado con tanta admiración y reconocimiento, tal fue su capacidad de revelación y su cálida vinculación a los primeros descubrimientos, tan grande sus responsabilidades en la pauta de la curiosidad, tan intenso su poder abridor, multiplicador de zonas afectivas, tan fértil su provocadora confusion, iluminadora. Abierta polifocalidad, eco prolongado, euforia desprendida. Alerta frente al presente, duda frente a la historia: ningún otro libro estará tan relacionado con la esperanza en el castigado país, ninguno podrá reflejar tan intensamente la soledad adolescente, el
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First published in 1931, Ramón Gómez de la Serna’s *Ismos* described and analyzed the different –*isms* of the most significant art movements of the beginning of the century. Gómez de la Serna conceived of humor as one of the trends of contemporary art. He defined humor as an attitude to life rather than a style per se. In describing *Humorismo* as an —*ism* in its own, Gómez de la Serna was defining it as an artistic style in itself. In doing so, he used humor as one of the most powerful forces of the avant-garde art to demystify the false pretense of prestige of academic art while introducing modern art in a less heavy way to Spain.

This combination of *humorism* and *monstruosism* is prevalent all across Saura’s artistic career. As Saura’s artistic career showed, Gómez de la Serna’s *Humorism* and *Monstruosism* became for Saura a visual and rhetorical strategy through which he reevaluated and questioned his artistic heritage by systematically deploying distorted, monstrous bodies that at once revered and undermined the emblematic bodies of the Spanish pictorial traditions.

**4.3.5. The Master Critic, Gracián (1991)**

In 1991, Saura illustrated Baltasar Gracián’s *El Criticón (The Master Critic)*, with a series of 36 illustrations in mixed technique. Written in 1651–1653 Gracián’s *El Criticón* is certainly one of the emblematic texts of Spanish baroque literary body. Like Calderón de la Barca’s dramas, Gracián’s allegorical text described the cultural moment Spanish Baroque as the great theater of the world. As Saura wrote, Gracián’s text embodied the allegorical nature of Spanish baroque as meta-referential and allegorical self-contained universe:

dolor del instante y el ansia de conocimiento y liberación. Aquel libro era un libro continuo, inacabable, nunca terminado, un libro perpetuo que se prepara todavía en el presente. El desfile caótico de ismos e imágenes, de poemas y frases vertiginosas, será recordado para siempre como “una profunda respiración.” Aquel aire fresco y empozonado penetró muy adentro en privilegiado receptáculo. Inútil describirlo nuevamente y contemplar sus poblados desiertos de papel brillante: a pesar del tiempo transcurrido basta la convicción del fantasma para que a su nombre regresen fuertes y aturdidoras sensaciones, trasladándose repentinamente al lejano cubículo ¿Qué más puede pedirse de un objeto mudo e inmóvil, que no posee olor ni carnación, pero que fue capaz de mostrarnos a través de su manchada blancura la vastedad del carnaval de las formas?” A. Saura, *Los Ismos de Ramón Gómez de la Serna, y un apéndice circense*, op. cit. 2001.
Great theater of the world and the world as theater. It is a mental universe; an invented scenario of atemporal time; a dialogue without end; a dialogue with oneself, characters that are paradigms, a continuous river, artifice, elongated allegory, philosophical journey. It is horror more than beauty.475

In *El Criticón* Gracián portrayed two main characters, Andrenio and Critilo. Each of them incarnated one side of the human psyche (Andrenio, the impulsive side) and the prudent side (Critilo, the prudent side). Gracián’s dialogue between the two sides of the human mind displays an allegory of the human condition. As scholars have argued, like Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* and Quevedo’s *Dreams*, Gracián’s *El Criticón* incarnates both a melancholic and allegorical representation of Spanish culture. As Roger Bartra observes, “Gracián’s critical heroes move through life in a permanent act of migration, from one difficult choice to another in search of salvation, like Don Quixote behind his chimeras.”476

In consonance with Bartra’s interpretation of *El Criticón* as a melancholic and humorous text, Aurora Egido describes Gracián’s text as a self-reflective text which establishes a dialogue with Cervantes’s novel. As she writes:

> Following Cervantes and yet with different media and different goals, Gracián lowers the epic poem and the sublimity of tragedy to the humble terrain of the daily day existence that is represented by Comedy which was “mirror of life, reflection of customs and image of truth.”477

In this sense, she points out Saura’s illustration of El Criticón emphasizes its dimension as an intellectual painter:

> As a talented reader of El Criticón, Antonio Saura was very aware of the sharpness of this gesture and this can be seen by tracing the figures beyond the black and whites that define his personal


476 Roger Bartra, op. cit. p. 191.

477 “Al igual que hiciera Cervantes, pero con distintos métodos y fines, Gracián rebaja la altura de la epopeya y la sublimidad de lo trágico al terreno humilde del diario vivir, propio de la comedia que era espejo de la vida, reflejo de las costumbres e imagen de la verdad.” Aurora Egido, in Antonio Saura *El Criticón*.
typography. Gracián’s words and Saura’s illustrations are therefore merged in a common fight against oblivion.⁴⁷⁸

Saura’s illustration of El Criticón visualized particular moments of Gracián’s text that Saura has highlighted. In Noble Head, (Cabeza Noble I, 9) (1991, Fig.4.16) Saura illustrated one of Gracián’s most quoted passages: “The head—Andrenio said—I call it—I am not sure if I am lying to myself—castle of my soul, court of its powers.”⁴⁷⁹ Saura’s skull stands thus as one of the most significant emblems of the baroque; it is the image of the vanitas as a visual reminder of the fugacity of time and the inexorable presence of death in every moment. Indeed, Saura’s distorted head-skull is both joyful and monstrous. The menacing presence of the black-and-white forms equated Saura’s monstrous monarchs of the mid 1960s in Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II as phantasmagoric figures of Spanish history (discussed in chapter 1) while also echoing the pictorial vocabulary of his monstrous portraits of Phillip II and Torquemada in the late 1970s (discussed in chapter 3). As such, Saura’s illustrations functioned as an indirect commentary the recurrent legacy of Spanish political absolutist history.

In this dual reading (both allegorical and melancholic) Saura’s skull functions both to illustrate Gracián’s text and to recall the visual matrix of a head suspended in the air — as in Saura’s career-long monstrous renderings of the dog of Goya (discussed in chapter 3). Hence, Saura’s illustration of Gracián’s text became an ephemeral space but also a site of aspiration towards an eventual redemption by history. As such, in Saura’s illustration of El Criticón, the monstrosity of the past that is still mourned — and this could be operative even today — and the

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⁴⁷⁸ “Buen lector de El Criticón, Antonio Saura, supo, sin duda, de la agudeza de acción, trazando, más allá de los blancos y negros que conforman su tipografía, los de las figuras que lo componen. Las palabras de Gracián y los dibujos de Saura se unieron así, al cabo de los siglos, en una lucha común contra el olvido.” Aurora Egido, op. cit. p. 23.

⁴⁷⁹ “La cabeza –dijo Andreino– llamo yo, no sé si me engaño, alcazar del alma, corte de sus ponencias.” (I, 9) Baltasar Gracián, El Critiión,
perpetual mourning of the past in which any future is therefore possible. As he argued, “As it happened to me when illustrating Quevedo’s *Dreams*, I could illustrate Gracián’s text all my life. I am fascinated with its underlaying conceptualist and baroque sense of humor. Also, with its esceptic, acute, caustic and tenebrist genious.”

Patricia W. Manning has also described the allegorical nature of Quevedo’s and Gracián’s works. As she points out, for both Spanish baroque writers, allegory became a valid strategy to overpass the trial and censorship of the Spanish baroque Inquisition. As she writes:

As we have seen in the case of Francisco de Quevedo, some elite authors who went against prevailing cultural values in more readily transparent formats experienced difficulties either with Inquisitorial or state authorities. Works that were more difficult to comprehend provide more possibilities for concealment, and successful dissemination of one’s ideas. Because its complicated structure and allegorical plot, Gracián’s three-part novel *El Criticón* (The Master Critic) (1651, 1653, and 1657) provides an ideal space to conceal criticism of the reigning cultural norms. The novel’s level of complexity makes the reader complicit in the author’s critical project and therefore less likely to denounce the text to the Inquisition.

As Manning notes, the allegorical structure of Quevedo’s and Gracián’s fragmented and discontinous texts gains the favor of the reader in creating a captivating allegory but more importantly, in this allegory they overcame the surveillance and threatening censorship of the terrifying Spanish Catholic Inquisition court —thus functioning ultimately as melancholic texts of cultural resistance against institutional power.

Saura’s illustrations of Gracián’s *El Criticón*, established an artistic dialogue with his modern predecessors illustrating Spanish canonical texts (Picasso and Dalí) while at the same time inserting his works as a painter and as an intellectual in the symbolic lineage of Aragones ascendancy—Gracián-Goya-himself—hence creating a discontinous artistic genealogy. Saura’s

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480 “Como me ha sucedido frente a Los Sueños de Quevedo, podría seguir ilustrando esta obra de Baltasar Gracián toda la vida. Su humor subyacente, conceptual y barroco, su ingenio esceptico, agudo, sombrío y caustico.” A. Saura, *Notebook*, 1992, op. cit. p. 155

profound dialogue with the Spanish baroque as a melancholic and allegorical gesture can also be seen in his illustrations of the poetry of baroque mystic poet San Juan de la Cruz.

4.3.6. San Juan de la Cruz and the illustration of Mystic Poems

In 1991 Saura illustrated an edition of San Juan de la Cruz’s poems for publisher Círculo de Lectores illustrating one of de la Cruz’s most celebrated mystical poems, “A dark night of the Soul” (Una noche Oscura del Alma). As Saura explained these illustrations revealed the introspective passion of San Juan de la Cruz’s mystical poems as personal visual revelations. As he described, de la Cruz’s poems religious experience as a love poem. As he wrote in creating a dual reading of his experience as both human love and religious communion, de la Cruz’s mystical poems offered a challenge:

These illustrations were driven by the impossibility to compose a literal image of them— contrary to previous books in which I followed a chronological approach— in this book I was driven by the artistic freedom of the writer’s accurate syntax. Except in a few rare cases, (as in some convent references) these images were suggested by the poem A dark night of the Soul [una noche oscura] which evoked in me a sublime landscape made out of nothing in which the presences emphasize the dominance of a bright blackness.

Saura’s depiction of a grotesque figure inside a cubic-form space holding a cross in his right hand and a small knife in his left showed Saura’s predicament in transferring a visual image into a mystical experience (Fig. 4.17). As above noted, Saura’s portrayal of a open-armed figure is recurrent in his artistic practice. In the next image, Saura created a monstrous creature battling

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482 As Saura writes, “Tal revelación es indisoluble de la belleza del lenguaje empleado, de aquí, quizás, la dificultad de ilustrar las obras de San Juan sin caer en un lírismo fácil o en la beata sumisión, es decir, en dos posibilidades bien alejadas de cuanto para mí supone una verdadera ilustración. “Para venir a lo que no sabes, has de poder ir por donde no sabes”, nos dice San Juan en uno de sus hermosos textos. Esta lúcida y afirmativa duda la hice mía hace ya muchos años, convirtiéndose tanto en ayuda frente a la ceguera con sorpresa la diferencia existente entre el deseo y cuanto surge de las manos.” A. Saura, Obras de San Juan de la Cruz, Notebook, p. 150-151.

483 “Las ilustraciones que acompañan esta compilación de textos fundamentales fueron presididas no solamente por la imposibilidad de ilustrarlos literalmente —al contrario de otras ocasiones, en donde la lectura exigió cronológico desarrollo y paralelo reflejo—, sino también por la libertad otorgada por el escritor mediante su certera frase. Salvo pocas excepciones —algun guiño conventual—, estas imágenes se refieren a una noche oscura, a un supremo paisaje hecho de nada en donde las presencias pretenden acentuar el dominio de una luminosa negrura.” A. Saura, Obras de San Juan de la Cruz, Notebook, 1992, op. cit., p. 151.

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to the surface that seems both resisting and yet screaming in silent to be swallowed by darkness. The head-like shape recalled Saura’s career-long iconographic signature motif of the dog of Goya and the crucifixion (Fig. 4.18)

In quoting his previous works, Saura’s illustration of San Juan’s poems created an aesthetic and semantic cross-references —at once recalling his Crucifixions of the late 1950s, and his illustrations of Don Quixote. Hence in echoing the iconography of his previous illustrations, Saura monstrified de la Cruz’s poems as an allegory of the mystical dimension of the mystic poetry in the equation of human love as a religious experience, while at the same time performing a melancholic revision of his artistic practice. Ultimately, in looking retrospectively, Saura’s visual interpretation of de la Cruz’s mystic poetry performs a narcissistic and cannibalistic self-introspection and thus operating as an allegory of his career practice.

4.4. 1996, The Return to the Conservative Politics

In deforming emblematic texts of the Spanish literary canon, Saura’s illustrations functioned as a concave mirror that allegorically deformed the Spanish literary body. As such, Saura’s illustrations paralleled Valle-Inclán’s allegorical gesture of “esperpento” as a grotesquization of Spanish literary corpus. Saura’s illustrations enhanced his introspective artistic gesture at once evaluating his previous works while also highlighting the demforming strategies of his artistic ancestors. Under the self-congratulatory celebration of Spanish postmodernity as a normalized European democracy, Saura’s illustrations questioned Spanish euphoric liberation from its dramatic and tragic history.

As Saura’s articles and museums retrospective reflected by the early 1990s, Saura was a consolidated public figure in Spanish and European art. In 1993 Saura received the Joan Miró Medal from UNESCO in Paris. In 1995, he was awarded the Grand Prix des Arts de la Ville de
Paris and also the *Freedom Prize* in Sarajevo. During the early to mid 1990s Saura continued his career-long pictorial thematic series (mainly *Crucifixions, Imaginary Portraits of Phillip II, Imaginary Portraits of Goya* and *The Dog of Goya*) hence expanding his intimate museum of monstrified artistic references.

As I explored, Saura’s illustrations and pictorial series of the mid 1990s were concurrent with culture as consumerism. Nonetheless, this sense of commercialization and merchantilization of contemporary art was dramatically reinforced by the reactionary politics of the conservative party (Popular Party) in the mid 1990s in which Spanish modern culture faced yet another political recasting.

In the democratic elections of March 1996 conservative Political Party (PP) arrived to power and imposed his traditional view of Spanish art, and thus for contemporary culture. Its strategy operated in two levels. On the one hand, the right-wing government continued with the state-promotion of contemporary culture as a branding strategy. On the other, the conservative government recuperated the anachronistic and national dimension of the Spanish tradition —thus imposing a regressive cultural and political period that resonated too much with certain aspects of Franco’s understanding of Spanish culture by self-appointing the role of a paternalistic understanding of contemporary culture.

As Manuel Vázquez Montalbán noted Political Party’s ideological appropriation of Spanish early-modern tradition as the symbolic body of the Spanish political unity echoed Francoist famous motto: “from Empire to God and from God to the Empire.” As Montalbán argued, mid 1990s Spain manifested the unfulfilled promises of the socialist party in actually

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485 Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, *La Aznaridad, por el Imperio hacia Dios o por Dios hacia el Imperio*, Barcelona, Mondadori, 1998.
modernizing the profound clichés of Spanish modern tradition while also suffering the reactionary politics of the new conservative party. As he reasoned:

Whether through oversight or design, the Socialists have failed to free Spain’s cultural institutions from political manipulation. Similarly, the bureaucratic constraints that are so often used as excuses for the ministry’s sluggish performance are as firmly entrenched as ever, even though the Socialists have shown themselves able, as with the Guernica transfer, to dissolve those constraints in an instant when it suits them….In the meantime, a golden opportunity has been lost to bring to the nation’s art institutions a professionalism worthy of the international status to which Spain aspires. Lost also, and irreplaceably, is the chance to nurture and prolong the exciting outburst of artistic activity that marked post-Franco Spain.486

In the midst of this political turn toward conservative politics and its reactionary understanding of culture, Saura returned one more time to his career-long signature icon the Dog of Goya (discussed in chapter 3). In February 1996, two years before his death, Saura painted the Dog of Goya. In it, Saura monstregied Goya’s dog over a dramatic and intense black canvas while situating it on an extreme of the canvas (Fig. 4. 19). Saura’s displaced dog incarnated as an iteration of his career-long iconographic while also functioning as a symbolic farewell of his artistic practice. Indeed, Saura’s repetitive motif of the monstrous dog of Goya embodied a melancholic emblem of his artistic legacy as a continual self-reflective gesture. As such, it showed Saura’s melancholic diagnosis of contemporary Spanish culture as a body that is discontinuous and fragmented but also exploited and instrumentalized by demagogic and political interests has been active ever since.

This melancholic status of Spanish contemporary culture is also persistent nowadays. In the summer of 2012, director of Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, Manuel Borja-Villel, wrote an article titled Melancholia in which he offered his pessimistic diagnosis of the current situation of Spanish contemporary culture, which he defined as a “melancholic era”. Borrowing Lars Von Trier’s metaphor in his film “Melancholia” in which a giant moon approaches the earth without

486 Kim Bradley, “The Great Socialist Experiment” Art in America, p. 77
any hope for humanity. For Borja-Villel this image functioned as an allegory of our current situation. As Borja-Villel argues, the symptoms of this melancholic understanding of contemporary culture are recognizable worldwide; a demagogic use of culture that understands art as a luxury (and not as a source for democratic education), the mimetism of a depoliticized culture that accepts the status quo in an increasing status of “aesthetic of recession” (and does not operate as a reflexive and critical platform), and the accepted symbolic condition of the culture in a financial directed global market (that considers art as a legitimation process for certain elite-consumerism and therefore inevitably fusing art and commodity). As Borja-Villel argues, rather than perpetuating this current situation by the persistent precarious condition of culture and a melancholic acceptance of the present, contemporary art should keep questioning the formation of political hegemonies and hegemonic discourses, even those that we construct. This continuous effort, he argues, will eventually provide the critical tools needed for an effective inquiry against the constraints of the current political, discursive, artistic, and narrative authority.487

As this chapter examined, Saura’s monstrifications of texts from Cervantes, Quevedo, San Juan, Cela, Gómez de Serna, and Gracián in the late 1980s and early 1990s offered a double challenge. On the one hand they functioned as a case study of Saura’s career-long gesture of monstrification of the Spanish cultural body. On the other, they provided a platform for artistic interrogating and questioning Saura’s cultural heritage and his artistic and intellectual position towards it. Furthermore, Saura’s visual and textual reinterpretations of the Spanish literary body embodied a melancholic gesture by revealing the body of Spanish literary tradition as not lost and yet perpetually mourned. In 1997 Saura was diagnosed with leukemia. He died in his summer studio in Cuenca in September 1998.

Epilogue: Melancholic Allegories of the Modern Spain

By the early 1970s, Saura was already considered a part of the Spanish modern artistic canon. In *El Recinte II* (The Enclosure II) (1972) Valencian art collective Equipo Crónica included Saura’s *Imaginary Portrait of Brigitte Bardot* (1958) as one of the maids of honor in Velázquez’s studio in *Las Meninas* (1656) as the symbolic repository of the Spanish pictorial legacy. Juxtaposed next to iconic works by Picasso, Miró, Dalí and Tàpies, Saura’s monstrous body of Brigitte Bardot at once disrupted and yet consecrated the symbolic pantheon of modern Spanish tradition. (Fig. 5.1).

As this dissertation has shown, the monstrous body played a central role in Saura’s artistic practice acting both as its central visual motif, and as its main framing strategy. As this dissertation examined, Saura’s career-long monstrifications of emblematic artworks of Spanish art history in thematic series for more than four decades deployed a twofold strategy: simultaneously looking outwards to the bodies of significant masters of Spanish pictorial tradition (mainly El Greco, Velázquez, Goya, and Picasso) and also inwards, into his own artistic practice. This strategy opened avenues for allegorical introspections of Saura’s artistic practice and a revision of Spanish legacy as a melancholic body for over forty years. Borrowing Walter Benjamin’s category of baroque allegory as fragmentary and disjointing compositional procedure, this study argued that Saura’s monstrifications of significant works of Spanish art history restated his artistic ancestry while at the same time undoing it. In doing so, Saura’s works continually acknowledged their cultural indebtedness to the pictorial tradition while confronting the discouraging cultural present. Paralleling Saura’s artistic practice this study uncovered the political instrumentalization of the Spanish artistic legacy: Franco’s dictatorship (discussed in chapter 1 and chapter 2)), the unfullfil project of a truly Spanish political transition towards
democracy, the euphoric celebration of culture and social democracy (discussed in chapter 3) and the return of right-wing conservatives (discussed in chapter 4). As I explored, this contradictory gesture of destruction and homage of the national artistic legacy consolidated Saura’s position within the Spanish modern art tradition.

Contrary to the excessive lyricism and psychological interpretations of previous approaches, this dissertation analyzed four different aspects of the monstrous body in Saura: the teratological, the grotesque, the Oedipal, and the deformation of literary texts offering a critical approach and a theoretical analysis of Saura’s practice. This study was divided chronologically. Each chapter examined a different aspect of Saura’s artistic practice—his paintings, his graphic series, and his book illustrations—, while situating his works under the specific historical specificities of the cultural, and political context. In chapter 1, I explored Saura’s rendering of bodies in pain in his pictorial series of the late 1950s and early 1960s. It argued that Saura’s consistent display of the tortured body in his canvases was instrumental in dialoguing with the leading pictorial vocabularies of the 1950s while also functioning as a personal vehicle commenting on the production of art under Franco. Chapter 2 explored Saura’s works on paper. It argued that Saura’s graphic series created visual dialogues with the figurative realism of Pop Art and Nouvelle Figuration while at the same time deploying the humorous, irreverent, and ludic aspects of the monstrous body. By deforming mass media imagey in thematic series Saura’s works revealed his anxiety towards commercial imagery while enacting personal allegories of life in Spain during the 1960s. In chapter 3, I explored Saura’s monstrifications of Goya and Picasso. In 1978 concurrent with Spanish transition towards democracy Saura returned to easel painting. In his series of the 1980s Saura deformed recurrently Goya’s iconic Half-Summerged Dog and Picasso’s portaiture of Dora Maar. In dialoguing with Goya’s and Picasso’s
iconic works as monstrous bodies, Saura’s paintings of the 1980s and early 1990s confronted the recuperation of the Spanish modern legacy under Constitutional democracy. His works were commenting on crucial moments of Spanish democratic identity: arrival of Picasso’s *Guernica* in Spain in 1981 and the euphoric celebration of its re-entry into the European democratic scene in 1992. As I argued, in reinterpreting the works of Goya and Picasso as monstrous bodies, Saura’s paintings confronted the political refashioning of Spanish postmodern political identity as unaffected by the troubling historical past. Chapter 4 examined Saura’s illustration of significant texts of the Spanish literary tradition: Quevedo’s *Dreams*, Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, Ramón Gómez de la Serna’s *Greguerías*, Camilo José Cela’s *The Pascual Duarte Family*, San Juan de la Cruz *Poems* and Baltasar Gracián’s *The Master Critic* positioning Saura as an intellectual artist. As I explored, Saura had been active reader since his early childhood when recovering in bed. In this chapter I argued that Saura’s symbolic deformation of the Spanish literary body revealed the literary dimension of Saura’s artistic practice while also positioning him as a cultural figure and as a public intellectual in the mid 1980s and early 1990s Spain. This chapter also examined how, Saura’s articles purposefully self-appointed him as a cultural critic, while expanding his career-long strategy in reevaluating the precarious status of modern Spanish culture.

Saura’s recurrent strategy of rendering monstrous significant bodies of his artistic ancestry paralleled a long-standing tradition of evaluating Spanish cultural identity through a deforming lens. From Goya’s *Caprichos* to Valle-Inclán’s *esperpentos*, modern Spanish artists have deformed Spanish reality uncovering its dark aspects as a means to and criticize and intervene into the self-complacent national narrative. Functioning as melancholic or allegorical strategies these strategies have deconstructed the political imposition of the Spanish modern
identity. As I explored in the previous pages, Saura’s recurrent gesture of deforming the body revealed both the left’s and the right’s common political interest in reviving Spain’s cultural and historical exceptionality as an organic and whole while avoiding the confrontation with the political present. As such, Saura’s bodies disclosed the political urgency in appropriating the modern tradition.

This critical commentary on the status of Spanish artistic legacy seems pertinent also today. Under the current regressive politics of the conservative party in power, Spanish modern tradition faces yet another ideological refashioning as a means for international political legitimation. Not very different from the Francoist strategy in appropriating the prestige of the Spanish school for diplomatic purposes, current right-wing politicians instrumentalize contemporary culture as a branding opportunity to portray Spain as a cultural touristic destination. The year 2013 saw exhibitions of Velázquez at the Prado and a record-breaking exhibition of Dalí at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid that drew nearly three million people. As I am writing these lines, Spanish government commemorates the fourth hundreth anniversary of El Greco in Toledo with a set of exhibitions, concerts and shows celebrating the work of “the most universal toledan of all times and the truly icon of Toledo.” These state-sponsored events are symptomatic of the ideological recasting of Spanish modern tradition as a cultural industry deprived of any critical evaluation and thus demonstrating the continual interest in narcissistic and nostalgic re-examinations Spanish modern art.

This political attitude in celebrating the rich legacy of Spanish artistic tradition while avoiding any critical confrontation with history is also indicative of the resistance to face the present-day collapse of national political emblems such as the monarchy, the territorial union, and the mono-linguistic territory. Instead of confronting the problematic condition of the present
(the pressing territorial fragmentation and massive social des-affection from a common political project), the Spanish government deviates cultural attention on the glories of Spain’s cultural past as a looking into reality through deformed lens.

As described in chapter 1 and chapter 3, by continually rendering monstrous historical figures of Spanish Black Legend Saura’s imagined portraits of Phillip II and Torquemada in discontinuous thematic and multi-media series disrupted the self-congratulatory state of the present as a ruin of the too-vivid and never-confronted monstrous past. As I examined Saura’s monstrous bodies continually exposed the viewer to the reversal of an ideal construction of a mythical national Golden Age that actually never existed. All along, Saura’s works paralleled the political shifts of recent Spain while at the same time functioning as symptomatic reminders of the fragmented and disjointed nature of Spanish modernity. In the current regressive political present that seems determined to impose a monolithic and hegemonic national cultural identity, Saura’s monarchs still function as constant reminders of the monstrous Spanish modern past while revealing the latent menace of absolutist power’s continual interruptions of and regressions of Spanish modernity.

As I conclude, Saura’s monstrous bodies continue to confront the fragmented and disjointed nature of Spanish artistic legacy while uncovering the political impulses to reconstruct it. As I explored in this dissertation, disseminated in different set of series across decades, Saura’s monstrifications embodied and revealed a series of melancholic allegories of the broken and dismembered condition of Spanish modern Spanish tradition. Saura’s monstrous bodies revealed the fragmentary and dismembered condition of the Spanish modern tradition as an always-already allegorical, melancholic, and ruinous body.
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![Saura, Phenomenon](image)

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![Jackson Pollock, Brown and Silver I](image)
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Fig. 2.12. Saura, *La nouvelle creature détruira la terre*, (Narration), (1964) 13 elements onixed technique and acrylic paint on guache, (70 x 100 cm)

Fig. 2.13, *France Observateur* (1964)
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Fig. 2.15. Saura, Dama (Lady) 1965, collage and ink on paper

Fig. 2.16. Saura, Dama, Lady, (1965) collage and ink in paper
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Fig. 2.20. Saura, Dreams and Lies of Franco (1962)
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Fig. 2.26, Saura, Montage (1972) mixed technique on paper
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Fig. 4.6. Saura, Il N’y A Rien de Tout Cela Qui soit ce Qu’il Paraît (1971) (35 x 56 cm)
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