

THE LIGHT OF THE FRAGMENT

12.12.2020–18.04.2021



RAFAEL TUR COSTA

PRESENTATION

Pilar Costa i Serra

Rafael Tur Costa distinguishes three Ibizas in one: the tourists' Ibiza, the cultural Ibiza, and the traditional one. The artist is proof of the importance of the latter two, which allowed him to develop his passion, marked by an inquisitive nature and self-education, intuitively nurtured with an unprejudiced eagerness to grasp and learn from everything that captured his interest in the process of creating his own language.

As it is with all artists, Tur Costa's work is inseparably linked not only to artistic influences, but also to life experiences. His book *Un al·lot evissenc a la Guerra Civil* [An Ibzan boy during the Civil War] reveals the strong principles that were Rafael's heritage since childhood, as well as his commitment to keeping historic memory alive and the need for delivering justice. A man of integrity, Tur Costa was a great admirer of the artistry of the ceramicist Anneliese Witt, who was his wife. The work of one cannot be understood without that of the other; they shared the cultural and exhibition space at their original house in Jesús, built by another great artist, the architect Erwin Broner.

The traditional Ibiza of which Rafael speaks accommodated and gave its light to the great contemporary painting movement of the nineteen-fifties, which began thanks to foreign artists who came to live and work on the island, attracted by the singularly of its peaceful lifestyle and the accessible costs of the traditional farm houses, the *casas payesas*. The artists began to create new work; the gallerists, to show that work in influential exhibitions around the world; and Tur Costa obtained everything that the classical academic education of the School of Arts and Crafts could not give him: an open and stimulating environment and a clear vision of his path, not that of figurative painting but

Rafael Tur Costa, *Untitled*, 2010.
Collage and mixed media on canvas, 120 × 120 cm.
Estudi Tur Costa Collection

that of abstraction, which had fascinated him in his relationship with the Berlin group, the members of Grupo Ibiza 59, and the art dealer Carl van der Voort.

Rafael began painting in dark tones; he then allowed colour to come into his canvases as part of his path to purifying his painting marked by the simplification of lines, collage and, above all, the colour white. That white defines an extensive body of work, transmitting the light of Ibiza, the light that enamours everyone who comes to the island. Tur Costa has had the luck of living with that light, in his own words, he carries it inside him in his soul; he has seen it for almost a century on the whitewashed walls of Ibiza's geometric houses, in the reflection created by the action of the sun on these houses.

Like his collages, Tur Costa is doubtlessly an artist of many layers. This year, he received the Gold Medal of the Autonomous Community, and the Conselleria de Presidència, Cultura i Igualtat del Govern de les Illes Balears [Office of the Presidency, Culture and Equality of the Government of the Balearic Islands] considers it indispensable to honour his work presenting the retrospective exhibition at Es Baluard Museu.

A journey through this artist's work will help us to delve deeper into a creative process that, as it happens with poetry, requires predisposition and sensibility. Tur Costa possesses both those qualities; the first abstract artist educated in the Balearic Islands, his life and work is testimony to all the possible Ibizas, he deserves every acknowledgement.

RAFAEL TUR COSTA. THE LIGHT OF THE FRAGMENT

Imma Prieto

There is an incomprehensible logic to the emergence of memories; minute sparks that compose the landscapes and experiences of a life. It is thus that, with no apparent order, we draw a line that reconstructs all that has in some way made us into what we are. The exhibition project "Rafael Tur Costa. The Light of the Fragment" sets out in search of this route; a path revealing the moments that aid understanding.

It is for this reason that the project comprises, on the one hand, a set of materials shown in the exhibition rooms of the museum and, on the other, a publication containing a series of texts of two natures: the writings of people who have had different relationships with the artist, and the memoir written by the artist in 2005, in which he speaks in the first person of the barbarity of the Spanish Civil War and Franco's regime.

The exhibition presents for the first time a selection of works from the nineteen-fifties to our days; of a retrospective nature, it is complemented with personal documents, sketches and correspondence, among other materials. The project not only recomposes the artist's body of work, it leads us to that private space in which every detail correlates with a life experience. It is in this invisible dialogue that new meanings appear and shed light on the manner in which Tur Costa's artistic practice is to be understood. A new consideration of the different periods that characterize his work calls for drawing a parallel between the manner in which we might write about his work and that in which history is written, a history in which every detail is vital.

Es Baluard Museu continues its work of studying and enhancing appreciation of artists who are key figures in the

historiography of the Balearic Islands as well as the international one. This project fulfils one of our most essential objectives: to redefine and reinscribe the work of artists who have not had the acknowledgement they merit. Rafael Tur Costa is one of those artists whose work is woven into a common universe, a story that is part of everyone's history.

The title of the project also has much to do with that objective and aspiration. "The Light of the Fragment" is a metaphor for the process the artist has carried out in his work. We witness how throughout the years, he was able to strip his works on canvas or on paper of everything superfluous, leaving only the essential. A material and conceptual simplification that burrows into the composition with grooves and fissures. Tur Costa creates new spaces on the space of the canvas. Fragments that, wrapped in the white that recalls his native Ibiza, embrace the cracks that bring us light. That process, as we cannot but appreciate, corresponds to a single desire: that of elucidating meanings. The works, in which white gradually occupies the compositional surface, create a perfect outline of a never-ending investigation. If in the artist's early works, colour and a certain abstraction convey the expressive gesture, little by little, it is geometry that comes to mark the spaces and structures.

Pausing to consider the artist's different periods brings the realization that, unconsciously, the artist had engaged in a work process that corresponds with the manner in which memories make sense of a life.

We would dare say that there exists an almost exact methodological parallelism between his plastic work and the way memory functions. Glimmers and fragments that illuminate the void of existence, bringing us closer to a story. There is nothing casual about how every memory wins its battle over oblivion by creating hollows; each new crack is a hollow replete with instants and meanings. To contemplate Tur Costa's canvases is to witness an act of bravery with respect to memory. To acknowledge the immensity of a life

with only what we remember; can anything be more disorienting than the realization of how little we recognize of what we have lived?

At the same time, Tur Costa's work contains constants that might allow us to decode the link between his painting aesthetic and his biographical writing. The idea of how the disappearances and murders committed by Franco's troops have been engraved on the white walls of Ibizaan houses, and how the white surfaces mark that silence that awaits the fragment of memory. The light of the island is thus reclaimed as a medium of struggle and resistance. With each composition, Tur Costa responds to the void of his memory, the memory of all of us. Thus, "The Light of the Fragment" is a gesture that speaks to us through individual and collective history.

A TIMELINE, A LIFE LINE

Pilar Rubí

A timeline would allow to see the development of Tur Costa's work in a single segment; from the late nineteen-fifties to his latest and recent work in 2016, the artist has tended towards the almost absolute simplification of his formal language. The retrospective exhibition at Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani in Palma is an anthology that reviews an entire lifetime devoted to art. Although the artist has exhibited at art centres and galleries in recent years, his work has not been revisited with such an intention since almost twenty-three years ago, in 1997, when there was a large exhibition at the Casal Solleríc, in Palma. That work is never figurative, Tur Costa never abandons that precept; his practice ranges from lyrical to geometric abstraction, colour gradually diminishes tending to white, the stroke turns into a line, overlaying gives way to the outline, writing to construction.

Although Tur Costa develops his own vocabulary and personal voice in painting, he navigates the premises of informalism. He connected with the investigations of the other European figures of *art informel*; initially, with Wols' diluted and coloured tachisme which, in the seventies, Tur Costa concentrated into gesture, sign and colour. He also connected with Tàpies' matter painting and graphic elements. In the following decade, he introduced the counterpoint of silver, which Anna-Eva Bergman had employed to give rhythm to her synthesis of nature. Also at that time, the painter began a process in which form and space predominated over the tendency towards signs and chromatism. Tur Costa joined with small strips the fabric that Burri had stitched together. The superposition of layers in a collage of papers and fabrics seems to press the colour and bury it under the white forever, constructing a space that delimits the pictorial surface. The artist painstakingly works every fragment, every area of the painting. He seeks out contrasts

and imbrications, textural qualities; at times, breakages, cuts and incisions in the white. White is the thick, rough wall of Ibiza rural architecture which, despite its cracks, hides all and preserves all. In an inverse process, almost a décollage, Tur Costa lets us look through what might be half-open windows to glimpse the colour between these cracks, to discover what is behind the achromatism of the white-wash. White is also the reflection of light on the cubes, the modules, that make up the traditional houses of the island, which attracted the attention of the modern movement, first Hausmann and then Sert, artists who visited Ibiza. Others, such as Broner, would come to stay. The light and the white distil in Rafael Tur Costa a sort of Mediterranean informalism which, like an invisible thread, connects all the paintings that make up his body of work.

The light of Ibiza ultimately turns into the essence of his work. Those who have been on the island have felt traversed by it. The artist speaks of that light in this way: "The most important thing for me is the light of Ibiza; it is the sort of light that you don't find in most places. I carry it in my soul. This light moves me. If you look at my painting, it might be said that it is a poetic that is rooted in the light of the island. The reflection of the white walls of the *casas payesas*¹ illuminated with this magnificent light, and so many things associated with the luminosity of white".

A pioneer on the paths of abstraction, essential and minimal, the artist synthesizes all that Ibiza is and represents: one layer over another, and yet another, overcome by the white light that bathes everything, tinges everything, that is all-powerful. It is an overwriting that, as though in a contemporary palimpsest, passes through the same familiar places time and again but that, each time, finds a new meaning with which to open up to the world.

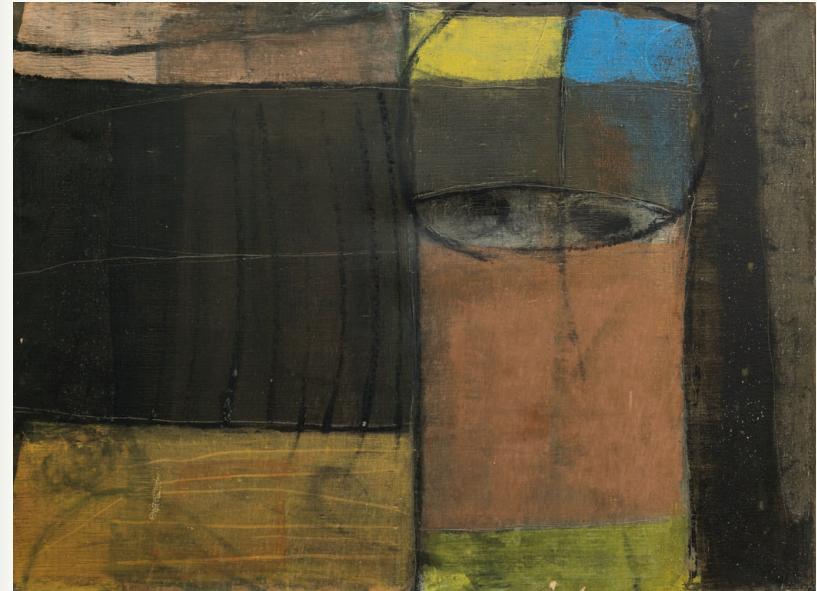
1. Translator's Note: *casas payesas* are the traditional farmhouses of the island.

A poem² that Vicente Valero dedicated to Tur Costa in 1992, kept by the artist, typewritten and signed, suggests a disjunction to do with his work, and finds a constant: “What do we see here more: that which can be seen or that which cannot be seen?”. What do we see more, the exterior or the interior of the painting? Is the wall more evident than the window it contains? The curtain, rather than the interior it shrouds? The skin, rather than the wound? The present, rather than the past? The artist holds the key to deciphering this, but so does each and every one of us, the spectators of an open work that Tur Costa invites us to complete. Its echo can be heard beyond the context of the Balearic Islands; in fact, one of the artist’s paintings is part of an initiative begun around 1975 by the Museo Internacional de la Resistencia Salvador Allende, associated with the Museo de la Solidaridad, in Chile. The project was initiated personally by President Allende to show support to the Popular Unity government; the major artists of the contemporary art scene of the time wished to support it by donating work. The military coup closed the museum, and the collection was not salvaged until 1990. This year, 2020, the MSSA was present at the 11th Berlin Biennale focusing on the issue of gender, asserting itself as a revolutionary and still very relevant project bringing together art and politics.

The line of time is infinite, it comprehends and integrates sequences between events, ordering them chronologically. The line of life is parallel to it, it accumulates, superimposes, it makes everything that happens to us simultaneous, without an established order. That is the line that runs through and binds together Tur Costa’s biography and his work, the line drawn by life itself.

2. Valero, Vicente. *Teoría solar*. Madrid: Visor, 1992.

(painting) // What can be seen: off-white, the white of island textures, rough white and geometric white. White, open-chested on an October afternoon. White on white: music. More white. // What cannot be seen: the hands of the night (terribly old). The sea in equilibrium: red, black, green. The last paths sprinkled by light and the smell of discarded roots. // ¿What do we see here more: that which can be seen or that which cannot be seen?



Rafael Tur Costa, *Untitled*, 1959.
Mixed media on canvas, 54×73.3 cm.
Museu d’Art Contemporani d’Eivissa Collection



Rafael Tur Costa, *Untitled*, 1961.
Watercolour on paper, 40×33 cm.
Estudi Tur Costa Collection

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Rafael Tur Costa, *Untitled*, 1972.
Collage and mixed media on canvas, 200×150 cm.
Estudi Tur Costa Collection

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Rafael Tur Costa, *Untitled*, 1975.
Collage and mixed media on canvas, 80×80 cm.
Es Baluard Museu d'Art Contemporani de Palma,
Serra Collection long-term loan

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Rafael Tur Costa, *Untitled*, 2002.
Collage and mixed media on canvas, 80×65 cm.
Estudi Tur Costa Collection

15



Rafael Tur Costa, *Untitled*, 2009.
Collage and mixed media on canvas, 120×120 cm.
Estudi Tur Costa Collection

A LACERATION, LITTLE-SPECTACULAR YET PROFOUND

Yves Michaud

I am not one for making art into an ethical affair. The display of ethics is most frequently a hypocritical screen with “business as usual” behind it, when it isn’t the refuge of well-meaning conformism.

And yet, I would like to begin with a few words about Rafael Tur Costa’s integrity, given that it has had a direct effect on his painting, even while his painting, paradoxically, carries no lesson or message.

Tur Costa spent a large part of his life running a fabric store in Ibiza. Painting came before work, after work, also during the times of little activity on an island whose livelihood has always depended above all on summer tourism. He did not paint as an amateur, “in his spare time”, but had thus placed himself in a situation in which he had the opportunity of escaping both the need to produce for the market and the often trivial and demoralizing complications of the “artworld”.

That is the reason why he has not received the recognition he deserved outside his island; fortunately, although it is not something the artist has sought, that recognition is beginning to grow.

The benefit, on the other hand, is that in the course of over sixty—almost seventy—years of activity, he has been able to create a body of work that is ample without excess, possesses integrity and coherence, without the inevitable compromises made in an effort to promote it, to seduce the market, to feed it, to respond to its ups and downs. Tur Costa has painted the paintings that he honestly, in his soul and conscience, had to paint.

Frequenting the smaller, local artistic milieu consisting of friends or artists who came seasonally did not

make him enter into “the logic of vanity fair” of which Sir Ernst Gombrich speaks, where artists challenge each other, even if in a friendly manner. There is nothing competitive or excessive about Tur Costa! Just the logic of work. That is why I speak of integrity.

I now come to his work, and will concentrate on the aspects I find the most striking.

I will briefly recount the artist’s beginnings.

Becoming a contemporary artist was not a likely path to take on an island that began to open up internationally only thirty years ago.

Tur Costa was born in 1927. He was a child during the Civil War, and he has spoken of the deep wounds of that period in a detached yet poignant account published in 2007—*Un al·lot eivissenc a la Guerra Civil* [An Ibiza boy during the Civil War].

The post-war years were terrible. They lasted until the end of the 1950s. The Civil War brought grief, trauma, hatred among neighbours and even within families, withdrawal, and extreme economic hardship, exacerbated by the communications blockade during World War II, which impeded the emigration of the poorest. For over ten years, Ibiza was a closed island where one died of hunger in an enchanting setting. In his account, Tur Costa speaks of the two companions of his teenage years: hunger and cold.

It is only at the end of that long confinement that marks his entire adolescence that Tur Costa discovered what is known as contemporary art, meeting artists who came from the peninsula or from European countries attracted by the landscape, the sun... and the inexpensive life.

In the mid-fifties, Tur Costa met the woman who would become his wife in 1960: Anneliese Witt, who came on a post-graduate study trip with fellow students from the Berlin School of Fine Arts and one of their professors,

Curt Lahs. In those years, Tur Costa befriended a group of artists, German for the most part, and became a part of Grupo Ibiza 59 along with Erwin Broner, Hans Laabs, Katja Meirowsky, Bob Munford, Egon Neubauer, Antonio Ruiz, Bertil Sjöberg and Heinz Trökes.

The paradox of the period was that, for the very reason of its isolation and abandonment, Ibiza fell a bit outside the norm of the Franco dictatorship, also owing to the patronage of the jet-set of the Franco regime (the Bordiu-Franco family) and the international jet-set that began to frequent it, just as the princes of the Persian Gulf State do today, to taste the elsewhere forbidden pleasures...

In his beginnings in the 1960s, Tur Costa was a competent and elegant artist, who quickly adopted the abstract approaches of the time, with clear influences of Kandinsky and, even more so, Klee; but it is in the early 1970s that he comes into his own and shows his full originality.

That originality requires a “hollow” or negative approach, based on what sets Tur Costa apart from comparable works of the same period.

His painting, abstract, most often white with a few spots of colour contributed by collage, is indeed unique.

The first singular feature, worth noting given the geographic location and what it would suggest, is that Tur Costa has always been impervious to the clichés of Catalan painting: no tar, no sands, no large expressionist signs, no applied objects, no earthy colours, no writing, no graffiti. None of the Catalan paraphernalia so well employed and popularized by Tàpies and turned into a cliché in the hands of his followers. Tur Costa’s works, always flat, even while they almost always include glued elements, have nothing of matter painting. They are, above all, white and luminous, free of signs and symbolic significance.

In that sense, while not figurative, they have to do with the walls of Ibiza houses, be they the modest country houses or those of the city: those whitewashed walls,

rough and uneven, that trap the light, that are of a radiant and blinding white at mid-day and suddenly turn grey when the sun no longer shines on them, or if one turns the corner of the building. It is true that Ibiza is not Catalan, and even its language is not pure Catalan. On the other hand, it has been confirmed that the early perceptive experiences in childhood have a marked influence on how artists choose their colours; those of the popular “architecture without an architect” have clearly conformed Tur Costa’s modes of perception.

Second observation: the modern art that Tur Costa discovered with the German artists, often themselves equipped with a solid baggage of an art education received at art schools, took him closer to Kandinsky and, above all, to Paul Klee—especially to his drawings from the end of the 1960s—than to geometry, and even less so to kinetic art that was so influential in the 1950s and 1960s.

Tur Costa’s abstraction was never geometric. The compositions of his paintings are rigorous and spare; over the years, the artist moved towards greater simplicity. Above all, his geometric lines are tremulous, charged with emotion, timid with a timidity that I would dare call amicable, because it rejects everything that might be peremptory. The cut-outs that appear on the fabrics and “create form” are often collages made with cardboard or paper pulp, placed with precision and confidence, but without calculation. The artist shows no hesitation, yet he does not impose a calculated order.

Thus, despite the few effects, in his case, one cannot speak of minimalism. There is no explicit theoretical intention of meaning nothing and having the object close in on itself. True minimalism has something puritan about it. None of that in Tur Costa: his simplicity is not a puritanism. On the other hand, if there were a relation to point out, it would be to another false minimalist, Robert Ryman, whose white canvases—seen in reality, and not

in the form of perfectly flat images on the Internet or in a catalogue—are tremulous and timid.

This now positively leads me to state my admiration for this attentive, meditative, subtle painting, each time more refined and simplified, which gradually took on large, yet never excessive dimensions, and which calls for an equally attentive and careful gaze.

Over the years, this painting has gradually become less formal, in the sense of being a simple question of abstract forms. Especially after the 2000s, Tur Costa’s canvases show something other than a pictorial form arrived at with an elegant collage of elements. The works possess a marked emotional intensity; almost all contain something like a crack, a difficult to name presence, discreet, yet strongly felt.

I said difficult to name. The word wound is not a good fit: it is too medical and too carnal. The word gap, dear to many of the philosophers of the 1970s and 1980s, is also too bombastic and even coarse. To speak of a crack is too abstract. One must try to say it in a different manner. The canvas or the drawing show a laceration, little-spectacular yet profound, insistent and constant. Tur Costa accomplishes the effect by gluing onto the fabric, itself already full of initial, discreet marks, sheets of cardboard or very thin plywood; in their junctures, they allow to glimpse a bit of colour, which might be yellow, black, red, depending on the work. A different world emerges and peaks out through that laceration, rendered by a sort of material slit in the painting. Perhaps it is grief, perhaps the sun, it might be blood; in any case, not at all calm and merely pictorial.

In the account in which Tur Costa describes his childhood during the Civil War, mentioned earlier, he speaks of the tragic murder of his father and his grandfather. The grandfather was killed for his involvement with the labour movement and the left. The father, a municipal civil servant,

was killed at almost the same time by falangist mafiosos whose corrupt deals he had not accepted. The violent death of close family members burst into the child's life forever.

Even so, Tur Costa's force resides in never yielding to the merely autobiographical, in checking any subjective outpouring and sublimating, bringing all that emotion that never goes away to painterly expression.

Tur Costa finds a balance between form and subjective experience that is at once fragile, detached and intense.

His painting has the coherence of masterful work.

SONG AT EVENING

Elena Ruiz

"The white remembrance of childhood floats here, and this sun, it must do the old bones good".

Native land, Marià Villangómez

In order to understand what made Rafael Tur Costa (*Santa Eulària del Riu, Ibiza, 1927*) so determined in his vocation of painting and his commitment to certain vanguard positions, it is essential to consider the artist's environment at the start of his career, in the middle of the last century. Perhaps today, in the dim light of this crepuscular time, we might come to a deeper understanding of his work; painting that sounds like an evening song, full of a creative melancholy that does not subside. A line from Marià Villangómez' poem "Song at evening" says: "We need to wish for the impossible // and let not desire die".

If there was anything that has predominated in Tur Costa's attitude since his beginnings, it is his lack of dogmatism, as well as an enormous curiosity and capacity to assimilate. This attitude allowed him to develop a personal style sustained, on the one hand, by his inner voice and, on the other, by subscribing to certain artistic currents.

One has the impression that in his youth, Tur Costa did not want to miss a thing of what might stimulate him artistically, be it on the national or international level. That is why when we look at his lasting body of work —and his active life has lasted long— we find an enormous faceted crystal where we see the moments and periods of intense creative vitality, reflections of the prevalent influences, echoes, reverberations, changes of style and, most importantly, what the artist has done with it all.

On the other hand, a permeable and intuitive sensibility to everything poetic contained in the close surroundings

lead the artist to extract, distil and synthesize the essences of the island's landscape, its vernacular architecture, its sea and its light.

In this light, his initial passage through the Ibiza School of Arts and Crafts is of little importance compared to the weight of the other, not academic experiences of his life. If an autodidact is a person that constructs himself outside the framework of a formally regulated education, then Tur Costa is an autodidact.

The artist's meeting the group of students from the Berlin School of Fine Arts (Hochschule für bildende Künste), accompanied by their professor Curt Lahs, who visited Ibiza in 1955, is always mentioned. In my opinion, its importance does not lie only in the fact that among the students, Tur Costa met Anneliese Witt, the young woman who would become his wife and the mother of his children; the meeting was an epiphany for the artist. We might say that chance would have it that it was the year the artist met his destiny.

Anneliese Witt, an art educator and ceramist, became his loyal companion, living in Ibiza until her death on May 15 of 2018. It is worthwhile to consider her own cultural baggage, especially as it doubtlessly had a great influence on Tur Costa's early work. Anneliese Witt's art education as a student at HFBK, shaped by professor Curt Lahs (who had the "misfortune" of being classified as a "degenerate artist" by the Nazis in 1933 and by the communist regime of the GDR in 1949), is shaped by the influence of the late flourishing of expressionism, also defended by the painter Karl Hofer, director of the school starting in 1945.

Hofer was able to attract two artists who came from the defunct Weimar Republic and were clearly exponents of that vanguard: Max Pechstein and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff.

But in addition, a bitter and emotional polemic between the proponents of realism and those of abstraction marked the art life of the school to such a degree that

Hofer resigned from his post in 1955, dying soon after. If I mention this fact pointedly, it is because it turned into a "battle" that should never have been. A direct consequence was that radical and belligerent positions were adopted on both sides, the confrontation in the artworld lasting too long, well into the twentieth if not the twenty-first century.

Those who saw abstraction as solely and exclusively synonymous with the avant-garde did not realize to what extent they were draining its transcendent nature of content, distorting it and turning it into pure formality. On the other hand, by not acknowledging the need to free painting of all matters that were not its basic elements, as Kandinsky had so well explained in his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* published in 1912, the "deniers" of the spirit that inspired abstraction turned into rigid defenders of the supremacy of realism, which ended up assimilating everything that was dated, conservative or official, and also attacked from outside positions for that very reason. This led many young students to take the matter to the ideological and political terrain. Hofer was succeeded in the post of director of the school by the architect Karl Otto, a follower of the Bauhaus principles, which guaranteed that a different movement contributed to the students' education.

It is not unlikely that Anneliese, who had personally lived through all this, transmitted it in some manner to Rafael; on the other hand, Tur Costa in those years was already in touch with the active artistic life of the island, led by the programmatic functioning of the Grupo Ibiza 59, with the very prolific Erwin Broner, working in lyrical abstraction, at its front.

What other reason would there be for Tur Costa taking his first steps towards total abstraction, with no reminiscences of the figurative tradition, which was a discipline clearly included at the Ibiza School of Arts and Crafts, and cultivated by quite a few painters who enjoyed a considerable social weight on the island at the time.

Only an enthusiastic attitude like that of Tur Costa, who declared himself an admirer of, for example, Miró and Paul Klee, might explain that the artist adopted as style references those also defended by Anneliese, also coinciding with the active position of the members of the Grupo Ibiza 59. I believe that Anneliese Witt took on the work of transmitting the baggage of her artistic education naturally, and that Tur Costa assimilated it on as his own.

All the members of Grupo Ibiza 59 were virtually of the same generation as Tur Costa; with the exception of Broner, they were born in the first two decades of the twentieth century. All had arrived on the island from elsewhere and had turned it into their “homeland”, bringing the international vanguard movements with them. Their ideas about art made clear the pre-eminence of abstraction, although their liberal attitude did not exclude other forms of expression, provided that they were “modern”, including figuration.

They believed in the need to overcome out-of-date, official and academic positions, and admired the languages of renewal; for example, surrealism, the dadá movement and neo-plasticism. They recognized the enormous value of Walter Gropius and rationalism, and had faith in the regenerating role of artists within the social structure. As a result, they would set up the gallery El Corsario and initiate an entire programme of exhibitions of their own work and that of invited artists, attracting the interest of the public, intellectuals and critics within and outside the limits of the island.

Grupo Ibiza 59 attempted to take on an enormous responsibility: that of reconciling an island immersed in its traditional culture with an imported artistic vanguard. In my view, it was a way of inserting value, humanism and civilization into a post-war environment, in a specific place that was poetically seen as a paradise. The dose of utopia of such a venture was evident. The fact is that when

Tur Costa holds his first exhibitions in the beginning of the sixties and makes his appearance as an artist in the local public life, he makes it clear that the cause defended by Grupo Ibiza 59 is also his own.

A painting of Tur Costa's from 1959 belonging to the MACE collection shows his plastic programme of the time, and that it is in tune with the work of several artists of the group. It is untitled, which shows the extent to which the artist wants to disassociate from any visual or object-oriented reference and, instead, grant the greatest semantic autonomy to colour and form. The work is not as spontaneous as it might seem, but rather, possesses something of a calculated rhythm of composition, as though wishing to ponder on the basis of its structural and chromatic harmony slowly, reflexively, perhaps resulting from insecurity or a lack of absolute conviction. It might be said that the work is a statement of intentions, but it has not yet reached maturity, and not even the colour, very dark, is a sign of identity.

At the start of the sixties, Tur Costa leaves what that type of work behind him and sets out on a clear route, opting for the gestural language, dynamizing drawing, discovering the value of white, and luminous and vibrant colours. He makes works that opens up, highly celebratory, rhythmical and high-spirited. Calligraphies appear spontaneously: curved lines, waves, sinuous and impulsive arabesques and embracing concatenations of elementary forms. Tur Costa becomes recognizable. He acquires his voice. And exhibiting at the Ibizan galleries Ivan Spence and Carl van der Voort—beacons of modernity—becomes habitual.

Tur Costa's launch and growing reputation outside the island is evident. In 1965, for instance, he exhibits at the Juana Mordó gallery in Madrid and the René Metras gallery in Barcelona, attracting the attention of the leading Spanish critics. We have only to look at the anthology of texts published in the catalogue of the artist's exhibition at the MACE

[Museu d'Art Contemporani d'Eivissa], at Casal Solleríc, and at Sa Nostra in 1997, authored by Cirici Pellicer, Maria Lluïsa Borràs, Corredor-Matheos, Antoni Marí, Fernández Molina, Moreno Galván and Daniel Giralt-Miracle.

They are predominantly texts from the seventies, a decade of splendour and confidence, which Tur Costa begins with a stylistic voyage that drifts away from lyrical abstraction to culminate in a revolution in favour of expressive reductionism and geometry. The artist's becoming aware of the possibilities of altering the surface, making it pulsate with reliefs and protuberances, the colour silver, the torn papers, adhered in layers and as a collage, all give way to a rationalization of plastic means, and the decision to hide and minimize the chromatic areas. The white survives, but now understood as matter, abandoning the curved lines in favour of the straight; secant and tangent lines—a compositional reference to rational constructivism—imply a cooling-off of emotions with respect to the warm and sensual works of the sixties.

This change or evolution of style is very visible in his drawings (a selection of drawings was exhibited at the MACE in 2013). Those from the sixties have a formal kinship with automatism and psychic improvisation with surrealist roots, and with the calligraphic and hallucinatory compositions of Wols (as it was pointed out by Cirici Pellicer in 1973). In contrast, those from the seventies possess a calculated control of the lines, order and space. It is as though Tur Costa had wanted to systematize, applying the principles of minimalism or the neo-reductionism of Supports/Surfaces.

In the works of the eighties and henceforth, the fully mature Tur Costa synthesizes and consolidates the conquests of the earlier decades renouncing nothing, composing with all the elements within his reach, and allowing the contradictory features to fuse in harmony. He discovers the factor of shadow, risking the plane with pronounced reliefs, a little in the manner of Lucio Fontana, ripping

surfaces, overlapping papers on the surface and creating layers of levels. All his elements of style are put in play, renewed or revisited: the malleable textures of the days gone by, the cracks, the tears, the spilled paint, the overlaps, the breakages and the calligraphy. Tur Costa reaches far in his experimentation, feeling that he must safeguard the autonomy of his art, or the need to get to the essential by eliminating the superfluous. He knows one cannot renounce loyalty to oneself.

In January 2019, I interviewed Tur Costa on the occasion of the posthumous tribute to Anneliese Witt's and exhibition of her ceramics work curated by the poet Eva Tur. Among the things said, I was not surprised to hear this: "all artists have influences, but one must come to make work that is one's own [...] Anneliese's idea of art and mine are not the same. We have always created in accord with our sensibilities [...] She made ceramics for herself [...] She wanted to be herself. As I wanted to be myself in my painting".



Rafael Tur Costa, drawing notebook, 1969.
Pen and mixed media on paper, 24.5×34 cm.
Estudi Tur Costa Collection

The Light of the Fragment

Rafael Tur Costa

From 12th December 2020
to 18th April 2021

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