



Hiroshima, Mon Amour

Antonio Saura

Not on display

Title/Description: Hiroshima, Mon Amour

Artist/Maker: Antonio Saura

Born: 1963

Object Type: Painting

Materials: Canvas, Oil paint

Measurements: h. 1334 x w. 1651 mm

Accession Number: 23

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: France

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Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Born in Huesca, Spain, Saura was self-taught as an artist. Between 1953 and 1955 he lived in Paris, where, influenced by late Surrealistic ideas, he developed automatist techniques. However, he quickly became disenchanted by the lack of control inherent in automatism, and, returning to Madrid, reduced his means and imagery to black and white and the human figure respectively.

Hiroshima, Mon Amour (no. 179 - the title is taken from a 1959 film directed by Alain Resnais) is a bitter comment on man's abuse of his own intelligence. A wreck of a figure stands in the middle of a void, but whether the figure is to be pitied for its suffering, or congratulated on its survival, is by no means clear. In an annotated catalogue of prints of the same title produced in 1959 and 1961, Saura reiterated Goya's dictum, 'The sleep of reason produces monsters' (Stadler, 1965).

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

Antonio Saura was a Spanish painter, sculptor, printmaker and writer. Largely self-taught, he was initially associated with the Surrealist movement after spending time in Paris in the 1950s. His work swiftly progressed towards a gestural and expressive style, reducing his colour palette almost entirely to black and white and focussing his subject on the human figure. Along with other prominent Spanish artists, Saura was one of the co-founders of the group *El Paso* (1957-1960) meaning "step forward." This was a short-lived movement which aimed to revitalise Spanish painting following the stagnation of the post-Civil War period.

Saura's work often depicts disfigured and contorted human forms, rendered with expressive and energetic brushstrokes against flat backgrounds. *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* epitomises the transformation of these forms which, although still recognisable, are subjected to an intense process of decomposition. The themes of death and decay recur in many of his paintings, drawing inspiration from Christian religious imagery to express the helplessness of mankind in a brutal world.

This painting presents a variation on the crucifixion theme, which permeated Saura's work from the 1960s. The title of the painting derives from a novel by Marguerite Duras and the 1959 film by Alain Resnais, which alluded to the devastating consequences of the atomic bombing of Japan in 1945. Deemed controversial, the work was prohibited from public view in New York in the early 1960s.

Hiroshima, Mon Amour was acquired in June 1966 from the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York.

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Calvin Winner, Head of Collections, Sainsbury Centre

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1966. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
