

JOSEP AMAT



EL PASSEIG DE SANT FELIU DE GUÍXOLS, 1988 (65 x 50)

FOR AMAT, SKILL AND ABILITY WERE TOOLS WITH WHICH HE ACHIEVED A NATURAL, PURE STYLE OF PAINTING, WITH WHICH HE PAINTED PICTURES THAT HELP US COMPREHEND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD AROUND HIM.

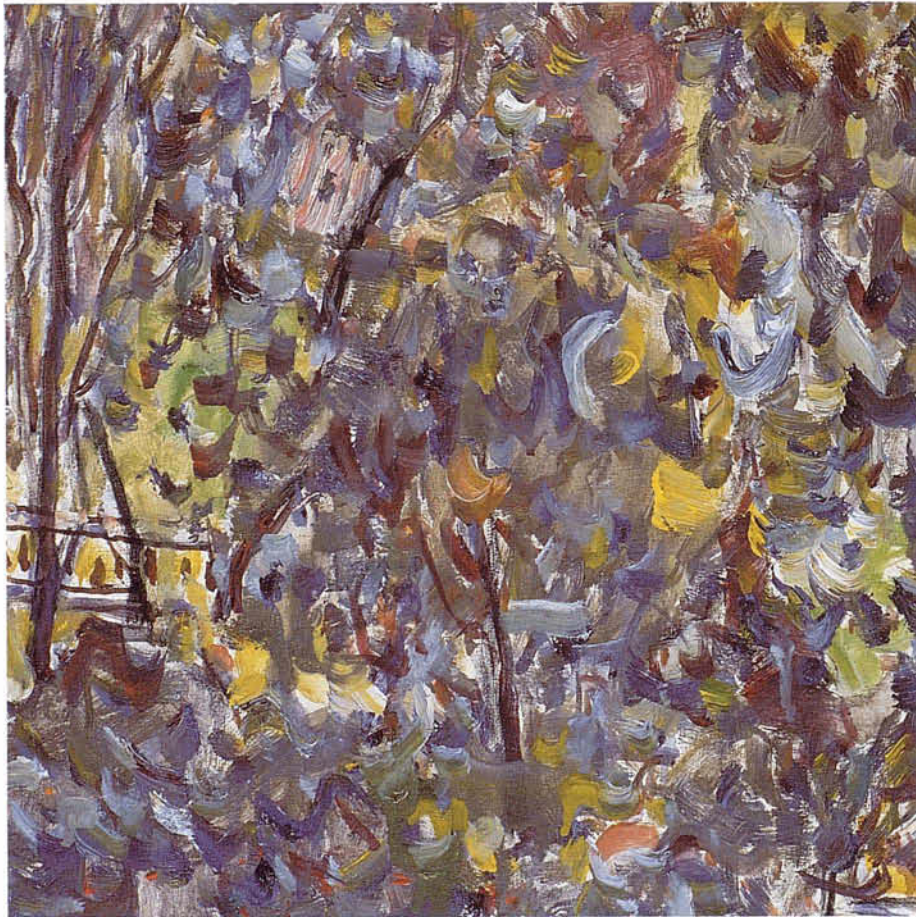


LA RAMBLA (DETAIL), 1965 (65 x 50)

FRANCESC FONTBONA ART CRITIC



VISTA GENERAL DE BARCELONA, 1964 (81 x 60)



VISTA GENERAL DE BARCELONA (DETAIL)



INTERIOR (38 x 46)



BANDERA, 1985 (24 x 38)

When I sat down to write this article, I could not imagine that what started out as praise for a living painter would end up being his epitaph, but the fact is that Josep Amat, who along with Camps-Ribera, Ramon de Capmany, Calsina and a handful more was one of the few living patriarchs of contemporary Catalan painting, died in Barcelona during the third week of January of 1991.

Amat was no longer young – he was almost as old as the century – and recently his health had been through difficult moments, both physical and moral. Nevertheless, it was not long ago that the artist was still painting, and some of these latest productions contained the essence of the wisdom of a life devoted

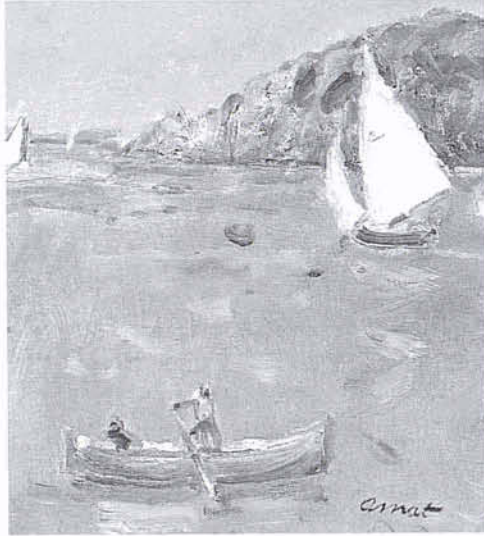
entirely to art: they were highly refined syntheses in which with a minimum of brushstrokes he converted his inevitable physical limitations into extraordinary plastic results with that great simplicity with which only the great artists can create, free of all accessories.

Amat was a painter who was loyal to a classic genre, the landscape, which had taken on new life and meaning with the triumph of Realism in the nineteenth century, and even more so with Impressionism, when to paint a picture out of doors was to stand up for freedom in the face of the conventionalism of narrative painting. It therefore comes as no surprise that, on being elected to membership of the Reial Acadèmia de Belles Arts de Sant Jordi, he should

have chosen the “History of Landscape” as the subject of his inaugural speech, delivered in 1981.

Those first modern landscapists, in whose footsteps Amat was content to follow all his life, and who were so different from those who had painted landscapes with the same artificiality with which they might construct a scene from mythology, created the figure of the painter who took the energy he needed to paint with from the earth – or from the paved city streets, since Amat, like Rusiñol before him, preferred a landscape modified by the hand of man – and painted what he saw before him, even if it contained nothing anecdotic or picturesque.

Amat belonged to this class of painter. With a style of his own, he was a fol-



PESCADOR, 1970 (23 x 25)



LE CONSOLAT, PARIS, 1949 (65 x 50)

lower of the kind of painting that needs a reference to a specific, tangible landscape rather than creating from dreams, from pure concept, and which in fact has its origins in French Impressionism.

Amat was an independent member of the generation of painters of 1917, the generation that reacted against the idealism of the *noucentistes*, although the person he came closest to was Joaquim Mir, the leading name in post-modernist landscape painting.

Barcelona, Paris and the Costa Brava—especially Sant Feliu de Guíxols—were easily the subjects that Amat preferred to paint. It was he who made the marquees and the tents of travelling circuses an artistic theme of the first order. His views of the Seine, the most fre-

quently painted river in the world, have nothing to envy the works of its more illustrious portrayals. The best examples of his work in Barcelona are those of the portside districts and those of the Putxet, in what used to be the town of Sant Gervasi de Cassoles, where the artist lived. In this sense, Amat, apart from being a great painter, also provides us with a unique testimony of an extraordinarily evocative district, the Putxet, largely spoilt today by recent building work. Many of those little nineteenth century villas, so characteristic of the district, with their neo-classical air, now only survive in his paintings. In this way, Josep Amat fulfils the old maxim that says that the most important art can arise from the most specific localism.

From all this, we can infer that Amat was one of those painters who valued technique, but, unlike what so often happens with painters of this sort, in Amat what is colloquially referred to as the *cui-na* "kitchen art" has always been balanced by plastic sensitivity. For him, skill and ability were no more than tools he used in moderation, without showing off ertheless possessed, to achieve natural, pure paintings, paintings that help us comprehend the world around him, the life of his country, thereby achieving what is possibly one of art's great virtues, that of being able to transmit across time the special vibration of an age which may never be so clear to those who have not lived it through words, except perhaps for poetry. ■