

# Carles Delclaux

## A continuation of the Catalan Tapestry School

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<sup>1</sup> *Revista de la Escola de Decoració*, Barcelona, Year I, First quarter, March MCMXIV, pp. 34-35. <https://bit.ly/2w5rMp0>. Tomás Aymat (Tarragona 1891 -Barcelona 1944).

2014 was the hundredth anniversary of the first piece Tarragona-born Tomás Aymat ever wove.<sup>1</sup> This was the first step in what, many years later, would come to be known as the Catalan Tapestry School. A century is a good round number that invites us to look back and take stock. But no dip into the history of the School would be complete without looking at Carles Delclaux, the last of its artistic directors. 2014 was also the forty-seventh anniversary of this prolific creator's start as a weaver.

Delclaux was born in Sant Cugat del Vallés (Barcelona) in 1951. When he was still very young, he became interested in painting and began studying under Joan Tortosa. At sixteen, he started working at Alfombras y Tapices Aymat, a company that had been located in the town since the 1920s. From then on, weaving was his life: Delclaux lived his weaving and wove his life. Its close ties with his life mean his work can be read like a biography, because the artist, sometimes boldly and others discouraged, often with humour and at times sarcastically, poured himself into his work. Researching it, therefore, is like writing a chronicle of his life. An artistic life that can also be interpreted musically, as Delclaux never ceased to compose, in his own way, a concert that goes back and forth over a few sonorous themes: the self, women and nature.

### Opening

In 1968, when he joined the staff at Aymat, the company was living a sweet moment: it had gained international renown and moved comfortably in the circles of a new style, similar to the trends of the New Tapestry movement. Delclaux fit in here like a spindle whorl on a spindle. He took on board the new formulas used in the workshop quickly, the volumes, the unorthodox stitches, the new materials, the move away from figurative art, etc. And he quickly started to take part in the weaving of works designed by Josep Grau Garriga, who was the artistic director of the tapestry department from 1957. But these high points aren't often perceived by those living them as what they are: the beginning of the end. Just a few months later, Grau began distancing himself from the factory in pursuit of personal success. Josep Royo, who took

over for him, would leave Aymat as well, in 1970, to seek his artistic fortune in Tarragona, working with Miró and Maeght.

Delclaux took over management of the workshop then, aged just nineteen, full of self-confidence, which would always be one of his most characteristic traits. This security gave him the courage he needed to start working on a personal line that, without going against everything he had learnt in the workshop, pushed him imperceptibly towards the path of tradition. Returning to their craft, for good professionals, is more than a desire; it is a need. Early on, Delclaux felt the expressive limits of the New Tapestry's gestural textiles, proved its effect to be greater than its eloquence, and chose not to be bound by such narrow constraints. This early intuition of reality led him to become interested in the trade. He registered at the Massana School, where he took classes on restoring tapestry and learnt classical techniques. For years, he combined this schoolwork with his full-time job. This shows another of his characteristics: hard-working.

Daring and tenacious; unorthodox and traditional. Opposing elements blended into an emulsion that would always define his work. It is no surprise, then, that these early years gave rise to, almost simultaneously, a piece like his *Tapis-Is* (a three-dimensional textile piece in line with the flashier Polish or Yugoslavian productions) and *La llegada de la esperanza*, in which he returned to flat stitching and figurative representation. And he would never leave this fusion/contrasting line of work, although, naturally, some elements stood out above the others, depending on the piece.

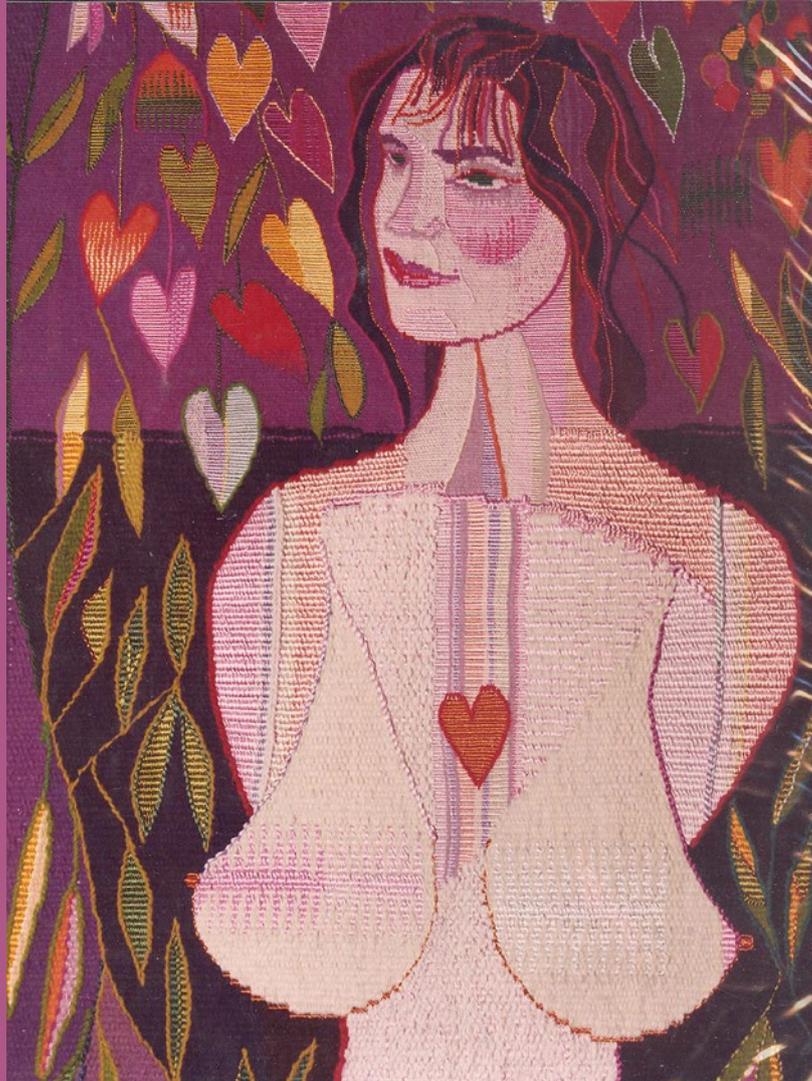
In 1974, he had to do military service, which took him away from his position at Aymat and he never returned. The company fell into an inexorable decline that would end with its closing in 1980. Why is Delclaux, then, considered the heir of the Catalan Tapestry School? Let's have a look.

### **Gestation of an artistic figure**

His time in the military on Menorca didn't keep him away from his vocation, as he juggled his obligations as a soldier with his devotion to weaving in his free time. It was a time of personal growth, in which he decided to begin an independent life.

On his return to Catalonia, he moved into Can Monmany in Valdoreix, a town on the outskirts of Barcelona, where he helped organise the small workshop of Mercè Diogène and Cecile Dedieu. But he still did not abandon his own work, which he continued on a loom in his home.

His work continued oscillating between tradition and the heterodoxy that he didn't seem completely satisfied with, because to express himself he needed



*L'Empordanet*. (detail from portrait of Teresa). Size: 340 x 700 cm. 1980. Carles Delclaux Archive. Photos: Carles Cabanas.

material means he didn't have. His good relationship with his former boss, businessman Miguel Samaranch, encouraged him to ask the man for those means. Delclaux returned to Aymat and found it completely changed. In just a short time, it became clear the factory was in crisis: rug production, which was what sustained the factory financially, couldn't compete with products from Asia that were invading the market, and the tapestry department was languishing without its former members. Samaranch offered his former artistic director the chance to move to Girona, with support from the city council, giving him some of the looms and tools from the workshop. Without a moment of doubt, with his characteristic decisiveness, he left Can Monmany and set up a shop in Girona, opening up a workshop on Carrer Força, very close to the cathedral, almost immediately.

His personal and artistic life were beginning to mature. He became a popular figure in the city, students came from various locations and he began to get commissions from decorators, hotels, banks and private homes. His tapestries were filled with flowers, butterflies and birds, not only an ode to nature but also a metaphor for the plenitude he felt. **Women**, as the focal point of life, also had a central role in his tapestries from this period, and to highlight their beauty, Delclaux employed a balanced, intelligent use of a highly varied selection of textile resources. His best piece from that time, perhaps of his whole career, is *L'Empordanet*, a huge tapestry that summed up the highest achievements of his inspiration and his trade.

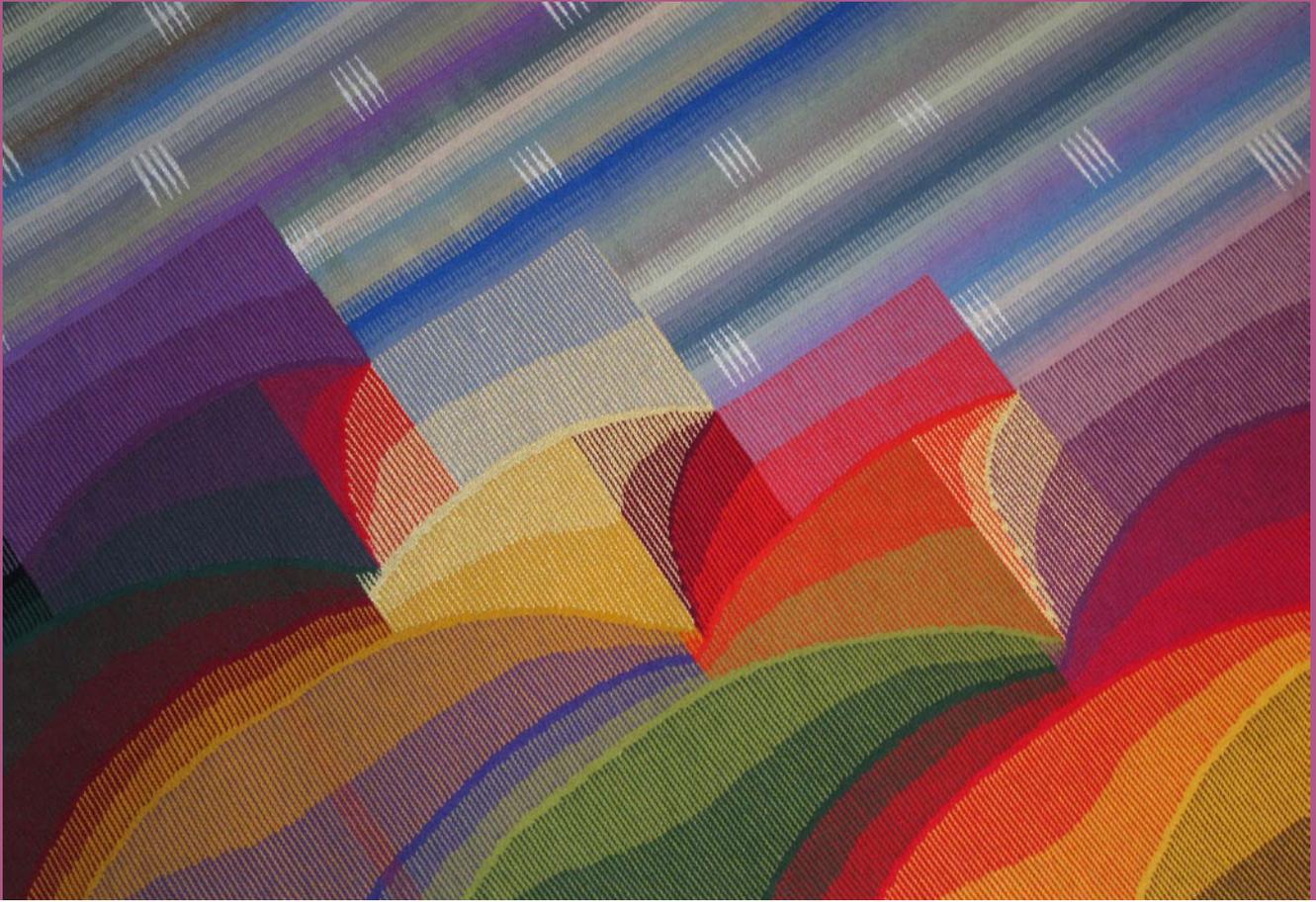
La Mercè Cultural Centre.  
Girona. Loom room.  
Photos: Laura de la Calle Vian.



In 1984, the small workshop on Carrer Força moved into the new cultural centre the city council had opened at the former convent of La Mercè. Here, the municipal authorities set up the rest of the looms from the factory in Sant Cugat, after reaching an agreement with Samaranch to purchase them. Carles Delclaux led this workshop for twenty-five years, following the same rules that had applied at Aymat, using the same tools and seeking the same goal of creating an artistic industry with its own character for Catalonia. This pursuit of goals, continuity of methods and tools, and use of the brand *Escola catalana de tapís* (Catalan Tapestry School), which Samaranch used to identify his production from the 1960s, allow us to say, without qualms, that Delclaux was the most resolute director of that School.

### **Maturity**

It is clear that, over a long career, any artist's work changes. This is even more true of the work of an artist like Delclaux, who so faithfully conveyed his own experiences. After the hopes and dreams of his youth, which are celebrated enthusiastically in the tapestries of that period, maturity brought a certain disenchantment. His work continued to focus on the same topics, but his perspective and technical means to convey them were transformed. His language became simpler, bordering on abstraction, although his discourse is

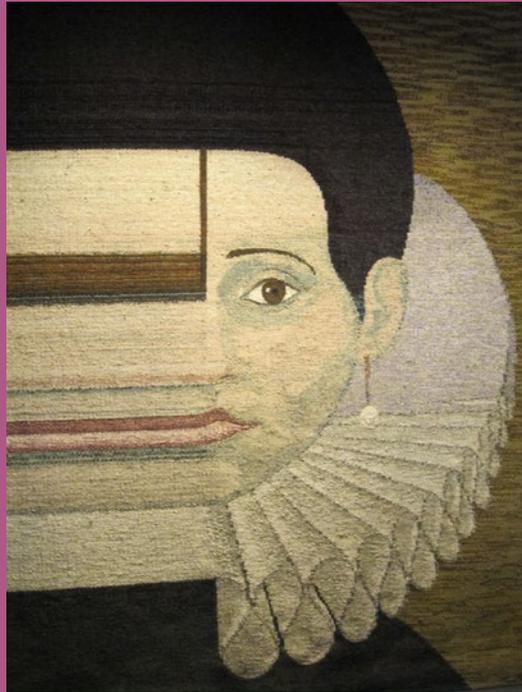


*Corintio*. Size: 204 x 300 cm. 2008.  
Photos: Laura de la Calle Vian.

clear: from praising women he moved to reproach, from tribute to spite, from trust to scepticism. Nature no longer has the same vitality it did before, the exuberant flowers are gone, the butterflies are just an outline, and everything takes on the sharp edges of irony. The final tapestries show a Delclaux who was both hurt and caustic, but would never let himself be taken down. Perhaps to fill the hole left, both in his soul and his workday, by that quasi-pantheistic harmony conveyed in his tapestries, his work turned to a more elemental focus: the resources of the trade. This brought forth a series of textiles that reinterpret old paragons of women's fashion, but with a masculine power that makes them very attractive pieces.

The long and intense professional life of this artist isn't only reflected in his own creations. He spent a significant part of his time translating the works of others. This shows Delclaux's skill, who like any good actor adapted to the artistic peculiarities of a wide range of men: Tharrats, Subirachs, Beulas, Millares, Llosas and many others. This flexibility is indisputable proof of his skill.

This brief portrayal of Carles Delclaux wouldn't be complete without a look at his teaching, which he did without pause from the very beginning: first at the Aymat workshop, then at the gypsy craftsmanship school Campo de la Bota, later at Can Monmany and, finally, in Girona at his workshop on Carrer Força and at the La Mercè cultural centre. Numerous students of his have set up small workshops all over Catalonia, putting down roots for this art form that had no tradition in Catalonia.



► *La princesa de Éboli*. (detail)  
Size: 179 x 338 cm.  
1988. Cardboard by  
Josep Maria Subirachs.  
Photos: Laura de la Calle Vian.

► *San Félix y la catedral*.  
Size: 160 x 262 cm. 2004.  
Cardboard by Pere Llosas.  
Photos: Laura de la Calle Vian.



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pp. 212-214 and 357-364).

## To be continued

The abundant work of this creator, with more than four-hundred tapestries woven personally or under his tutelage and still counting, deserves a monograph studying his life and work in depth.<sup>2</sup> I have spent the last few years working on this, doing field work that was not only very absorbing and enriching but also very pleasant. I hope this monograph will soon be available in bookshops, entitled *DELCLAUX. LA VIDA EN UN HILO*, a summary of the meaning of his work, which is also his life. ●