

TONI CATANY

A HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY



BACK
AND FORTH

THE ORIGINS

“Childhood is the royal road by which we know a country best. Ultimately, there is no country but childhood’s.”

Roland Barthes

Toni Catany was a self-taught photographer. His fascination with family albums and the portraits of Tomàs Monserrat led him to become interested in photography, and he learned his first notions thanks to a correspondence course he took while in high school. In 1960 he moved to Barcelona to become a chemical expert. The death of his father in 1963 freed him from the obligation of his studies and he followed his true passion. At a time when there were no photography schools, his learning process was based, on the one hand, on the knowledge of the great masters of the history of photography through books, first, and the collection of selected pieces, later. On the other hand, he focused on the practice and experimentation with different techniques, ancient and modern, with an insatiable curiosity that accompanied him throughout his life, going from analog photography to digital photography, through the calotype, the polaroid transfer, the selenium toning and hand-colored or enriched with gold leaf photos.

Still life no. 70, 1984 © FTC



PHOTOGRAPHIES

PORTRAITS

“In the portrait, the model, being who he is, must look like someone else. The person looking at it must let himself be fascinated by a face and see it according to his own imagination. The face of a cobbler can look like that of a king, and also the other way around. A good portrait can lie in particular while still telling the truth in general.”

Toni Catany

Fotografies [Photographies] is the title of the book that Catany dedicated almost exclusively to portraiture in 1996. Taking photographs is often synonymous with taking portraits. Catany’s first iconic photograph is a portrait: the *Nin d’Eivissa* [Ibiza’s boy] of 1967. So were most of his commissions when he was taking his first steps in the profession of photographer, especially of writers and musicians at the height of the artistic movement of the *Nova Cançó*. However, it was not until the discovery of the polaroid transfer process and the chromatic treatment it allows that Catany decided to take face-to-face portraits, starting in 1994.

The portraits of other authors admired by Catany occupy a preeminent place in his collection, which includes works by André Kertész, Humberto Rivas, Marc Trivier, Robert Doisneau, Ouka Leele or Jan Saudek.

Alexis, Cuba, 1996. Polaroid transfer © FTC



PROFANE
ALTARS

STILL LIFES

“You invent an image, a composition, to express a feeling, a sensation, with objects and through objects. You photograph it and the composition disappears with the *decomposition* of the objects. Only the recorded image remains to awaken, to others, other feelings, other sensations.”

Toni Catany

Among all the genres cultivated by Catany, still life is undoubtedly the one most associated with his name, the alpha and omega of his work. The floral compositions in color, made mainly in the eighties, made him known on the international scene and in his latest series, *Altars Profans* [Profane Altars], the technical mastery of the digital process leads to a work of a refinement as subtle as it is sublime. For Catany, still life is, more than an aesthetic choice, a vehicle to express feelings, sensations or moods.

Catany approached still life in the seventies, when he realized that the long exposures required by the calotype technique called for still subjects. From the calotype he moved on to black and white still lifes with a modern medium format camera and from there to his still lifes in color. It was, in the photographer’s own words, “like opening a large window through which light enters a dark space.”

Still life no. 186, 1991 © FTC

TONI CATANY (Llucmajor, 1942 – Barcelona, 2013)

A few years before his death, Catany began to work on a dream: to make Llucmajor, his hometown, a centre of reference in the world of photography. That dream came true with the opening of this Centre in March 2023, and with the arrival in Llucmajor in 2024 of his archive: the positives and negatives, the glass plates by Tomàs Monserrat, the early photography collection and the works by modern and contemporary photographers such as Kertész, Man Ray, García Rodero, Cartier-Bresson, Graciela Iturbide, Paul Strand, Michael Kenna, Joan Fontcuberta, Marc Trivier, Masao Yamamoto, Pentti Sammallahti, Humberto Rivas and Carla van de Puttelaar, of some of whom the Fundació Toni Catany has organised exhibitions.

From this archive, we have put together the anthological exhibition that we now present of Catany's work and his vision of photography, in which his images are accompanied by pieces from his collection that complement and enlighten it.

Catany's work focuses on four major themes, not only in the history of photography but also in the history of art: still life, nude, portrait and landscape. These four themes are developed in six sections: Back and Forth [The Origins], Photographs [Portraits], Profane Altars [Still Lives], My Mediterranean [The Journey], Obscure Memory [Archaeologies] and Dreaming of Gods [The Nudes].

A HOUSE FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

The Toni Catany International Centre of Photography, designed by architect Josep Lluís Mateo and located in the space formerly occupied by the houses of Toni Catany and Tomàs Monserrat, aims to become an active organisation with local and global projection for the promotion of photographic culture and for the knowledge, preservation and dissemination of the work of Toni Catany through exhibitions and a programme of cultural and educational activities.

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FUNDACIÓ TONI CATANY



Conselleria de Turisme,
Cultura i Esports
Direcció General de Cultura



Consell de Mallorca



Ajuntament
de Llucmajor



MY
MEDITERRANEAN

THE
JOURNEY

“There are few who practice something that I consider fundamental in a trip. A certain state of mind to know and understand the country visited. The people, the culture. Travel is a means to acquire knowledge.”

Toni Catany

In 1991 an exhibition was presented at Casal Sollerich that brought together a selection of photographs that Catany had been taking in his travels around the Mediterranean, from his first trips to the Pityuses and to Egypt and Israel with Baltasar Porcel in the late sixties to Turkey in 1990, through Morocco, Tunisia, the Costa Brava, his native Mallorca and Venice. For Catany, these trips were a return to childhood; his Proust madeleine was a peach eaten in Morocco and in our sea he found a memory of his native island: a fabric, some pine trees, the smell of jasmine.

Having traveled the Mediterranean from coast to coast, the photographer did not hesitate to broaden his horizons: he was fascinated by the people and landscapes of the Cuban and Venezuelan Caribbean, and India with its sensory explosion. He returned assiduously to these three countries, but he also obtained images of great beauty in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, Mexico and Easter Island. Among these images taken during his travels, landscapes dominate, but we also find the photographs he carried inside: still lifes on a simple table or a cloth on the floor; fortuitous portraits for which he always found the most wonderful models and the ideal background to portray them.

Madona, Llucmajor, 1974 © FTC



OBSCURE
MEMORY

ARCHEOLOGIES

“The passage of time is an obsession for me. I could have thought of the general landscape, the people; I could have portrayed different ethnic groups... but I thought of the ruins as our historical roots, the only thing that remains of our past. There are also the books left, but what we really see are the ruins.”

Toni Catany

Since the end of the 17th century many young European aristocrats used to go on a training trip around the Old Continent. The Grand Tour usually passed through Paris and continued through northern Italy, ending in Rome if the budget allowed it. With the discovery of Pompeii and Herculaneum, a visit to the ruins became a must, and the death of Lord Byron made Greece the desired final destination.

Catany also made his Grand Tour. From his travels in the Mediterranean and his fascination for the classical world, he wanted to take a series of photographs of the vestiges that dotted the lands of the *Mare Nostrum*, from Morocco to Turkey, through Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Lebanon, Italy, Greece and Jordan. For the first time, he undertook his travels with a specific photographic objective, and using only Polaroid polapan films (instant black and white slides) that were usually used for light tests in the studio. The combination of the imperfections of the film with the textures obtained with the developing by means of selenium toned calotypes is characteristic of this series. The search for memory and archaeology later extended to other countries where he traveled: Angkor Bat in Cambodia, the Persian ruins in Iran, the Mayan remains in Mexico.

The runner of Herculaneum, Archaeological Museum of Naples, 1993 © FTC



DREAMING
OF GODS

NUDES

“The other day, rereading Blai Bonet’s *El jove*, I came up with a possible title for my nude collection: “Dreaming of Gods”. The poem “Tres” says: “While I dream you are god”. This title explains very well what I have been doing so far: mythologizing the body. I have photographed beautiful bodies to look at and admire, but not to touch.”

Toni Catany

At the end of the 1980s, after more than a decade making the still life series, Catany grew tired, and the confluence of two chance events provided him with a new subject. An unsuccessful commission on the human body and the photographs he took of Iago Pericot's show “Mozartnu” led him to make the nude the focus of his photographic interest in a project that would result in the book *Somniar déus* [Dreaming of Gods], published in 1993.

Inspired by classical statuary and driven by the desire to divinize the human body, he abandoned the immobility of still lifes for the bodies of dancers in movement, focusing his interest not on the texture of the skin like other photographers of the time who were dedicated to that theme, but on the shape of the body, the volumes, the dynamism.

However, Catany explored nude photography before and after *Somniar déus*. The naked body is already the protagonist of numerous calotypes that the artist produced between 1976 and 1986, and this subject also appears in his later works, from his exquisite polaroid transfers to the latest works of digital production.

Dreaming of Gods no. 84, 1988 © FTC