

## Biography Antonio Saura

### 1930–1950

**1930:** Antonio Saura was born September 22 in Huesca (Spain) as firstborn of four siblings. His mother Fermina was a pianist as a young woman, his father Antonio a lawyer. **1936:** During the Spanish Civil War the family lived in Madrid, Valencia, and Barcelona in the remaining strongholds of the Republican Government's retreat. Saura described himself as a „very aware and lonely child, rather weak physically and badly behaved.“ When very young he loved to read above all else, especially books on biology and astronomy. He had the desire to change everything that seemed imperfect in his eyes. Very early memories he could „never forget“ included visiting a Huescan cinema and seeing Man Ray's short film *The Starfish* followed by *King Kong* while „shooting could be heard outside.“ **1938:** While holding his father's hand in Barcelona during a bombing attack he witnessed how a man whose head was torn off by shrapnel still managed to walk a few steps before going down. **1939:** After the end of the War he spent a year in Huesca. Saura was convinced that „he flew down the steps at his grandmother's house.“ **1940:** The family moved to Madrid. He was fascinated by the prints of Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*, a Spanish edition of Geffroy's *Les Musées d'Europe*, and a painting of Beatrice Cenci's execution on the breaking wheel. He was intrigued by the ocean. He read Jules Verne, Emilio Salgari, and the journal *Chicos*. **Fall 1943:** Antonio Saura contracted tuberculosis. **1944:** He had to undergo several operations and was confined to bed for the greater part of the subsequent five years, isolated from the outside world. His ailment was very painful. He had his mother's constant support. He left school and devoted himself to reading and writing. On the radio he discovered Stravinsky, jazz and flamenco music. In an edition of the Nazi journal *Signal* he stumbled across so-called „degenerate art.“ **1945:** Press photographs of concentration camps and the aftermath of the atom bomb in Hiroshima filled him with „horror.“ **November 1946:** Greatly admired a gift from his mother, the catalogue of Ramón Gómez de la Serna's oeuvre with the title *Ismos*, in which he was confronted with reproductions of surrealist painting for the first time. He discovered the artists Pablo Picasso, Hans Arp, Salvador Dalí, Yves Tanguy, and Paul Klee. He read books on biology and astronomy. Began to doubt religion, grew obsessive and suffered from depression, had thoughts of suicide. Subsequent to a dream, or rather a hallucination, he executed his first painting and wrote his first poem. **1947:** In the Prado he came across and was fascinated by Francisco de Goya, El Greco, Francisco de Zurbarán, and Pedro Berruguete. He read works by John of the Cross, Comte de Lautréamont, Arthur Rimbaud, André Breton, and Paul Eluard. He was captivated by Julián Carrillo's microtonal music and Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*. Saura painted pictures with the ocean in the background and created poems through automatic writing. **May 1948:** In Madrid Saura visited for the first time an exhibition on modern painting (*Arte Contemporanea Italiana*). **Between 1947 and 1950:** He created experimental works on paper and wooden panels: the series *Constellations*, *Still-lives*, and *Rayograms*. **1949:** Saura executed 40 paintings depicting objects suspended in deserted landscape scenes. In them he strived to illustrate „real landscapes of the unconscious.“ **1950:** Organized by Federico Torralba, the first exhibition of his work was held at Libros Bookshop in Saragossa. He wrote a letter to André Breton but received no reply.

### 1951–1956

**1951:** First exhibition at Buchholz Bookshop and Gallery in Madrid of his technically highly precise oneiric surrealist works. Saura worked passionately on his art but was on the fringe of desperation: „My tragedy lies in my technique. My slow method of working was not compatible with my thirst of revolution, my ambition, and my character. My slow and meticulous technique frightened me (...).“

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At the same time he painted a series of abstract *Landscapes* and published a text he wrote titled *Programio*, a vivid and poetic litany. **1952:** Second exhibition at Buchholz Gallery. **Fall:** First trip to Paris accompanied by José Ayllón. During 15 days Saura visited museums, galleries, and bookshops. **1953:** Participated in Eugenio d'Ors' *Salón de los Once*. In Madrid Saura organized the exhibition *Tendencias* and *Arte Fantástico*. The „irreversible, adventurous, enthralled, and fatal“ experience of his second trip to Paris. He arrived without knowing either a single person or French and carrying two canvases. He stayed at the Casa de España. **In spring** he made the acquaintance of Gunhild Madeleine Augot in the Cité Universitaire district. He met André Breton. **1954:** Saura settled in Paris. He became acquainted with Benjamin Péret, Simon Hantaï, Wifredo Lam, and Max Ernst. He participated in the activities of the surrealists. Paintings on canvas and paper: *Phenomena* and *Grattages*. They are the first pictures whose structure he based on the female body. Married Madeleine on September 18 in Madrid. **February 1955** in Paris: Saura and Simon Hantaï broke from the surrealist group. Saura painted the *Dynamic Grattages* in La Fouche in „a sleazy room“ without light, living with Madeleine together in extreme poverty. Made the acquaintance of Marcel Duchamp, Asger Jorn, and Michel Tapié. Read the latter's work *Un art autre*. Saura returned totally destitute to Spain and destroyed many of his pictures. **In summer:** In Cuenca Saura painted the *Spanish Landscapes* and his first expressionist works „as if driven by a fever (...) in total freedom.“ **1956:** Lived in Madrid in his parents' house. Shocked by the death of a student in a demonstration that was crushed by the Franquist police. Exhibition of his entire oeuvre and the first of his exclusively black-and-white paintings at the Biblioteca Nacional de España (text by Eric Boman). Began his *Women* series and painted his first *Self-portraits* in the Parisian studio of the sculptor James-Jacques Brown.

### 1957–1968

**1957:** First group exhibition at Stadler Gallery in Paris (catalogue with an introduction by Michel Tapié). In Madrid Saura founded the group *El Paso*, which he led until it broke up in 1960. Publication of writings and manifestos. He executed his first *Crucifixions* as well as several satirical series on paper (*Sauromachia*, *Spanish Show*, *Saturn's Monastery*, *The Whore Book*, *Series of Women in Technicolor*, first *Montages* and *Repetitions*). **July 26:** His first daughter Marina was born. **1958:** Saura painted the first *Imaginary Portraits*, among others the series *Brigitte Bardot*. Participated in the Pittsburgh Bicentennial International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture, Carnegie Institute; in the Festival of Osaka; in the 29<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennial; and the Four Spanish Painters exhibition at the Sala Negra in Madrid. First lithographs in the studio of Dimitri Papageorgiou in Madrid. **1959:** Executed several series of large-format paintings. *Shrouds*, *Portraits*, *Nudes*, *Nude Landscapes*, *Priests*, and *Crowds*. A series of 15 lithographs with the title *Pintiquiniestras*. Published the essay *Espacio y gesto* (space and gesture). First solo exhibition in Paris (Stadler Gallery, introduction by Michel Tapié), an exhibition in Munich (Van de Loo Gallery together with Tapié), participated in Documenta 2 in Kassel. Was strongly politically engaged, which he continued until the overthrow of the Franco regime. Traveled to Milan and Torino. In Barcelona he made the acquaintance of Joan Miró. In the studio of Ruth Franken in Paris he painted his *Crucifixion* triptych. **November 20:** His daughter Ana was born. **February 1960:** Worked in Paris. Saura gave up working exclusively in black-and-white. Began the series *Imaginary Portraits*, *Vertical Women*, and *Profiles and Hats*. Works on paper: *Accumulations*, *Narratives*, and *Repetitions*. In Madrid he moved into a new flat together with Madeleine, Marina, and Ana. He kept the old apartment as an independent studio. **In summer:** Produced several sculptures in Cuenca. Won the Guggenheim Award (New York). Traveled to London, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Amsterdam. **1961:** First exhibition at Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York. **1962:** First etchings and silk-screen prints.

Executed the series of satirical drawings and paintings on paper with the title *Lies and Dream*. Published a work on *Crucifixions* with an essay by Enrico Crispolti under the patronage of Odyssia Gallery in Rome. Visited Colmar to see Matthias Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece*. Trips to Venice, Zurich, Torino, London. **August 27:** His daughter Elena was born. **1963:** Retrospective of his work at the Stedelijk Museum, Eindhoven, at Rotterdamsche Kunstring, as well as at the museums in Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. Saura realized the sets for Federico García Lorca's *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* directed by Juan Antonio Bardem. Traveled to Calanda together with Luis Buñuel. **In winter 1964:** Worked in Madrid. Eddy de Wilde organized a retrospective of Saura's paintings on paper and his prints at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden; and the Göteborg Konsthall. Second exhibition at Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York. Made the acquaintance of Mark Rothko, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Alfonso Ossorio, and Lee Krasner. Visited the Museum of Primitive Art and the retrospective of Mark Rothko's work. For the World Exhibition in New York Saura created 14 paintings on glass for the Jordanian Pavilion. Additionally he executed a series of colored lithographs with the title *The History of Spain*. Participated at Documenta 3 in Kassel. Saura was awarded the Carnegie Prize together with Eduardo Chillida and Pierre Soulages. Traveled to Berlin (visited the museum center in Dahlem and the Pergamon Museum), Munich, Zurich, and Basle. **In summer:** Produced his first designs for carpets. **1965:** Saura destroyed some 100 of his pictures in Cuenca in a radical condemnation thereof. Later he would repeatedly destroy work. **February 1966:** First trip to Cuba in conjunction with a retrospective of his works on paper at the Casa de las Américas in Havana. Worked for three months in an unassuming studio apartment in Paris. **June:** Exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London on invitation of Roland Penrose. Began the series of pictures *Women in an Armchair* as well as a new series of *Imaginary Portraits*. Was awarded with the grand prize at the Bianco e nero print biennial in Lugano. **In fall:** Returned to Paris to work. **March 1967:** Paris his permanent residence. During the summer Saura worked in Cuenca. He painted the first *Imaginary Portraits of Goya* and *Goya's Dogs*. Stadler Gallery exhibited his *Women in an Armchair* and *Imaginary Portraits*. Again he destroyed around 100 paintings in Cuenca. **January 2 to March 5 1968:** Second trip to Cuba. Attended the Culture Conference in Havana. Saura met Mercedes Beldarraín. **In May** he experienced the riots in Paris. **In summer** he worked separate from his family residence in his new studio in Cuenca. Saura went through a period of deep personal crisis. **October:** An exhibition of his collages took place in Frankfurt. **November** in Paris. Creative crisis. Saura admitted to Madeleine that he was in a new relationship with Mercedes. Gave up painting on canvas and devoted himself to painting exclusively on paper for ten years.

### 1969–1978

**1969:** First monograph published on Saura with an essay by José Ayllón. **1970:** Separation from Madeleine. Saura spent the greater part of the year in Havana. **1971:** He produced the lithographs and a series of illustrations for Francisco de Quevedo's book *Trois visions* at the Centre genevois de gravure contemporaine. Executed a number of series of silk-screen prints: *The King* (with Lezama Lima), *Rembrandt* (with Bert Schierbeek), and *Goya's Dog* (with Jean-Clarence Lambert). Married Mercedes Beldarraín in Cuba. **1972:** During a retrospective of his work at Juana Mordó Gallery in Madrid a terrorist attack took place by the extreme rightwing group Guerrilleros de Cristo Rey. Executed several large montages such as *Trompe-l'œil*, *Metamorphosis*, and *Puzzle*, as well as several series of *Superimpositions*, among them *The House of the Dove*. **1973:** Exhibition at Colegio de Arquitectos in Santa Cruz in Tenerife with a retrospective of his paintings on paper. Attended the World Freedom Conference in Moscow. **1974:** Retrospective of his works on paper in the Art Center M-11 in Seville. Worked on a new series of the *Large Montages* and continued with the

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*Superimpositions* series. His studio on Rue Nationale since 1966 was demolished. For four years he lived in a very small studio at the Cité des Arts in Paris. **1975:** Retrospective of his works on paper at Maeght Gallery in Barcelona. First trip to and exhibition in Mexico (Juan Martín Gallery). **20. November:** Death of Franco. **1976:** Primarily produced lithographs on zinc at Parisian print workshop Clot, Bramsen & Georges. Created the silk-screen series *MOI*. **1977:** First edition of his writings. Saura created the illustrated book *Cámara ardiente (burning tribunal)*. Expelled from France owing to his support of the Sahawri National Liberation Movement. Due to considerable protest and solidarity, his expulsion was revoked and he was able to return to Paris. Participated at Documenta 4 in Kassel. **1978:** Exhibition of his recent prints at the Fondation nationale des arts graphiques et plastiques in Paris. Again took up working on canvas and produced several books as unique works of art.

#### **1979–1984**

**1979:** The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam put on a retrospective curated by Ad Petersen. The exhibition then traveled to the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, was shown a year later at Casa de Alhajas in Madrid, and finally at the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona. Won the prize of the first Biennial of European Graphic Arts in Heidelberg. **April:** A large part of his archive and his collections were destroyed due to arson. **1980:** Speaker in the public discussion „Pour un portrait de Salvador Dalí“ in the Centre Georges Pompidou. Henceforth Saura participated in numerous seminars, colloquiums, as well as conferences on art and culture each year. **1981:** Retrospective of his works on paper at the Caja de la Inmaculada in Saragossa. Saura was made Chevalier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. Death of his mother. **1982:** The Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Madrid organized a touring exhibition of his graphic works. Publication of his polemical pamphlet *Contra el Guernica*. Awarded the Medalla de Oro de Bellas Artes (fine-arts gold medal) from King Juan Carlos. José María Berzosa made a film about Saura's work for French television: *Antonio Saura: quelques rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire (ou presque)*. **1983:** Saura painted the first *Dora Maar* series, which was shown at Stadler Gallery (essay by Pierre Daix). He designed the sets for the ballet *Carmen* directed by Carlos Saura and Antonio Gades at the Théâtre de Paris as well as for *Peixos Abissals* by Joan Baixas at the Teatre La Claca in Barcelona. Saura took on the presidency of the Artists of the World against Apartheid in Paris. His daughter Elena was killed in a traffic accident in France.

#### **1984–1992**

**1984:** Began his *Autodafé* series: Saura painted on the covers of books after tearing out the pages. **1985:** He realized the sets for *Woyzeck* directed by Eusebio Lázaro in Madrid. His daughter Marina played the part of Maria. He produced the unique artist's book *Die Mauer* with overpaintings addressing the Berlin Wall. The Cabinet des estampes in Geneva put on a retrospective of his graphic work. Mariuccia Galfetti compiled the first catalogue raisonné of his print oeuvre. Saura executed a series of large-format paintings in acrylics and oil. Exhibition at the Abbaye de Sénanque in Gordes. **1986:** The Neue Galerie Sammlung Ludwig, Aachen, organized a retrospective. **1987:** Worked on *Elegía*, a 20 x 10 meter large ceiling painting for the Diputación de Huesca. The preparatory sketches were shown in a traveling exhibition. Illustrations for Cervantes' *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. Publication of the anthology *Figura y Fondo*. **1988:** Saura produced lithographs illustrating Kafka's *Diaries*. Publication of *Elegía*, a monograph on the creation and execution of his ceiling painting. **1989:** The Wiener Secession held a retrospective of his works on paper. An exhibition in anthology form of his works was organized at Harvard University, Cambridge. Curated by Rainer M. Mason, the Musée d'Art et d'histoire, Geneva, put on a themed retrospective of Saura's

large-format paintings at the Musée Rath. Subsequent venues in 1990 were IVAM in Valencia, the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, Lenbachhaus in Munich, and the Réfectoire des Jacobins in Toulouse. After an eye operation Saura again began painting. Death of his father. **1990:** Worked in Barcelona on a series of large-format monotypes. Illustrations for *La muerte y la nada* with an essay by Jacques Chessex. Saura was made Officer of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. Death of his daughter Ana in France. **1991:** Participated in the production of the opera *Carmen* at the Staatstheater Stuttgart with his brother Carlos Saura and Luis García Navarro. Decenario retrospective shown in Saragossa, Teruel, Barcelona, and Murcia. An additional retrospective in the same year was dedicated to his books *Retrato de Antonio Saura* and *Las Tentaciones de Antonio Saura* (essays by Julián Ríos). Drew the illustrations to *Poesía y otros textos* by John of the Cross. **1992:** Designed the exhibition *El perro de Goya* shown at the Salas del Arenal, Seville, and at the Museo de Bellas Artes, Saragossa. Publication of *Note Book* (Memoria del tiempo), a concise bibliography of writings with Saura's notes on his work. **1993:** Responsible for the sets of *El retablo de Maese Pedro* by Manuel de Falla for the Ballett de Saragossa. Publication of *Belvédère Miró*. Saura could not work for several months following a hip operation. **1994:** The Museum of Modern Art, Lugano, organized a retrospective of the paintings Saura executed between 1948 and 1990. Under the curatorship of Emmanuel Guignon, the Museo de Teruel organized an exhibition of Saura's early work (surrealist and oneiric pictures). Produced a series of 218 drawings and paintings on paper titled *Nulla dies sine linea*. **1995:** Illustrated Carlo Collodi's *Adventures of Pinocchio*. For the book Saura was awarded the best-book-of-the-year prize by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture. Saura received the Grand Prix des Arts de la Ville de Paris and was awarded the Prix Liberté in Sarajevo. Together with his brother Carlos he designed the sets and scenery for Bizet's opera *Carmen* at the Festival dei Due Mondi in Spoleto. **1996:** Curator of the exhibition *Después de Goya: una mirada subjetiva* (Palacio de la Lonja and Palacio de Montemuzo, Saragossa). **1997:** Painted a number of large-format panels, exhibition at Daniel Lelong Gallery in Paris (*Crowds and Imaginary Portraits of Goya*), and executed a new series of *Portraits* and *Self-portraits*. **In June** he contracted leukemia. **1998:** Saura died July 22 in Cuenca (Spain).

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