

Pierre Daura's
*Enchanted
Universe*

McKenzie Gallery

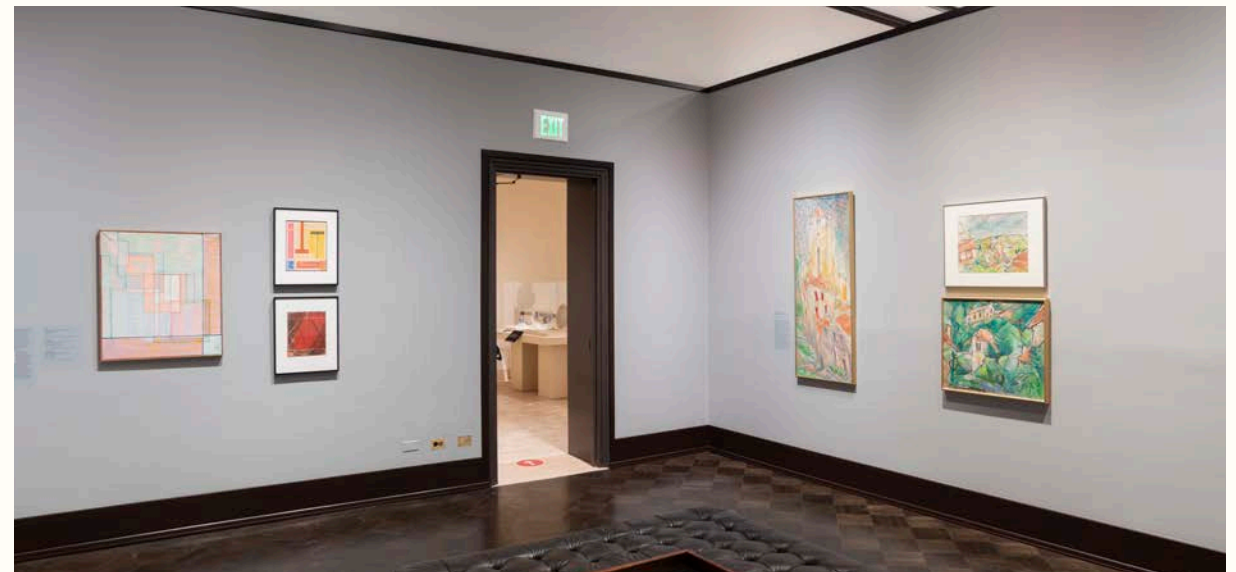
March 20 – August 1, 2021

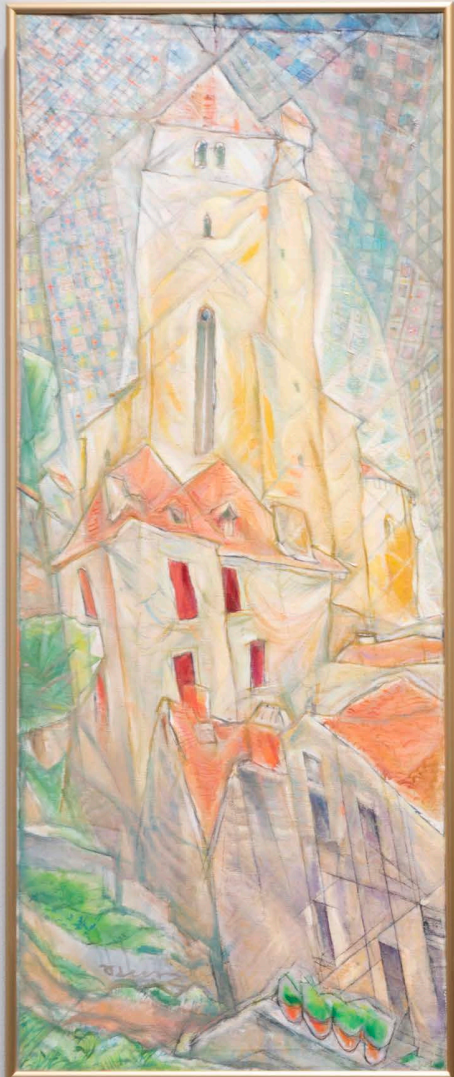


Pierre Daura (1896-1976), born Pedro Juan Daura y García in Minorca, Spain, spent his formative years in Barcelona working by day as an apprentice for a theater set designer while taking night courses at the La Llotja School of Fine Arts. Daura moved to Paris in 1914, where he worked with French Post-Impressionist painter Emile Bernard and became fully integrated into the burgeoning avant-garde. Increasingly attracted to mathematic philosophies and visual abstraction as vehicles for enhanced expressions of the natural world, Daura co-founded the short-lived group Cercle et Carré (Circle and Square) in 1929. The following year, Daura and his wife, American painter Louise Heron Blair (1905-72)—married in 1928—exchanged the chaotic milieu of Paris for the peaceful refuge of the medieval village of Saint-Cirq-Lapopie in Southern France. Daura remained connected with Spain and in 1937 volunteered to fight with the Republicans against Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War. After an exile in Virginia, Louise’s home state, during WWII, he divided time between homes in Virginia and Saint-Cirq for the rest of his life.

In 1950, Surrealist poet and founder André Breton (French, 1896-1966) moved to Saint-Cirq, purchasing a summer home near Daura and initiating a close friendship. In 1953, Breton began laying the groundwork for an art historical opus titled *L'Art Magique*, which positioned art as an ancient conduit for magic and artists as modern magicians. As part of his research, Breton engaged 80 artists and writers (including Daura) in a survey about the connection between art and magic. Though he never associated with the Surrealist movement, Daura's answers reveal an imagination deeply engaged with Breton's thesis. In Daura's words, "The magician tries to enchant the universe. The modern artist reveals the enchanted universe;" and art, as a "magic object," can operate "only by way of revelation and initiation." Drawn from the permanent collections of the JSMA and the Knight Law Center, the works in this exhibition reveal the enchanted refrain that runs through Daura's prolific and diverse output from Virginia and Southern France between the 1930s and the 1970s. Moving nimbly between landscape, portrait, and abstraction, watercolor, oil, and gouache, Daura embodies his ideal of an artist-magician dedicated to initiating viewers to an entrancing veiled world.

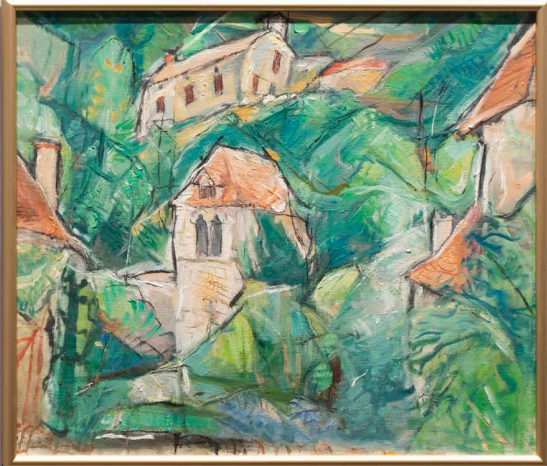
This exhibition was curated by Emily Dara Shinn, Curatorial Extern in European and American Art and is indebted to the generous support of the artist's daughter, Martha Daura, and the dedicated research of Caroline Phillips.

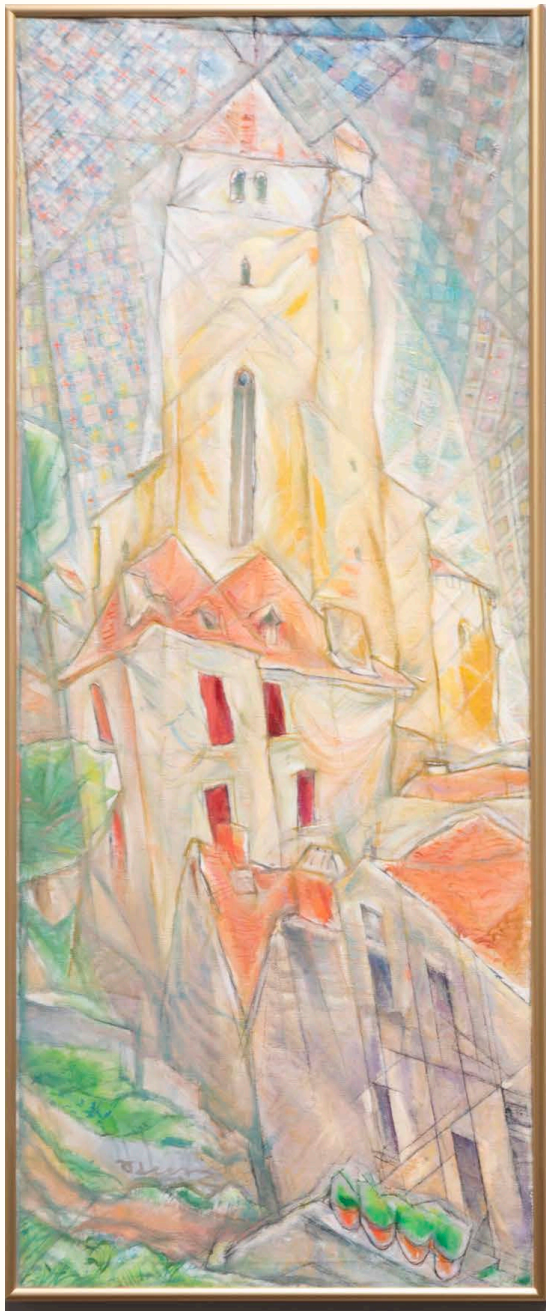




Black, Under the Blue Sky, 1997
Jordan Schnitzer
Oil on canvas
30 x 12 inches

In 1997, Schnitzer painted *Black, Under the Blue Sky* in the basement of his home in Astoria, Oregon. The painting is a study in color and form, with a focus on the textures and shadows of the building's facade. Schnitzer's use of bold, expressive brushstrokes and a rich palette of yellows, oranges, and reds, set against a background of blue and green, creates a sense of depth and complexity. The composition is highly textured and layered, suggesting a complex architectural structure.





Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Church, Checkered Sky (Saint-Cirq-Lapopie), 1972
Oil on canvas

On Loan from the University of Oregon Law School; L2014:11.1

In 1929, Daura and his wife purchased a 13th century residence in the medieval village of Saint-Cirq-Lapopie. After settling in his new homestead in the summer of 1930, Daura began to translate every facet of his surroundings in visual form. The central fortified church, constructed in the early 16th century on a rocky outcrop on the foundations of a Romanesque chapel, took on particular meaning for Daura over the course of the next four decades. In oils and watercolors as well as pen and ink drawings, he sought to capture “the stone, the mortar, the tiles, the stained-glass windows; jewels, gems, scintillant lights...the calm, serene, unchanged church, around which I wanted to weave my home.”

Daura’s musings to Breton that art, as a magic object, “operates in certain conditions, and through revelation and initiation,” receive perhaps their fullest representation in his visual and verbal reflections of the church. In 1955, he wrote:

“The tower and the sky spoke to me in their each one’s tongue; a Rosetta stone that only possessed artists can decipher – such a bountiful tongue! Such rich, vivid language a man can’t keep for himself alone, and was trying, humbly but with all my fury...to translate into forms and colors, what the roofs, what the sky, what the tower were telling me... How we chattered, these old companions and I...after so many years...our passion for each other renewed...we had aged some plenty, but we understood each other so much better now.”

Daura and Breton became close friends after the Surrealist poet began spending summers in Saint-Cirq in 1950. They exchanged letters, poetry, and artwork inspired by one another until Breton's passing in 1966. Daura's participation in Cercle et Carré, which sought a means of expression in resistance to Surrealism, did not appear to sour the fruitful friendship. Their fast affinity and creative camaraderie are particularly evident in Daura's depictions of his neighbor's home. In this view, painted from Daura's living room, the painter delivers a visual accompaniment to the sentiments expressed in an original poem inscribed by Breton in a book gifted to Daura in September 1951:

*"From my window
Each morning
I rejoiced at seeing
The birth of a blue smoke.*

*I would say to myself
There, my friend Pierre Daura is up.*

*This smoke
Veils and unveils
A sensitive and compassionate nature such as I like
And find so few of.*

*May that blue smoke
Rise again each summer."*



Photograph of Breton in front of Daura's studio in St. Cirq, ca. 1960
Pierre Daura Archive, Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Breton House (Saint-Cirq-Lapopie), 1955-70
Oil on canvas

On Loan from the University of Oregon Law School; L2014:11.17



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Daura Studio (Saint-Cirq-Lapopie), 1955-56
Oil on canvas

On Loan from the University of Oregon Law School; L2014:11.2

After leaving the avant-garde clamor of Paris, Daura returned to the expressive landscapes he loved as a young painter in an effort capture the red tile roofs, narrow cobblestone streets, and verdant river scenery of his new home in Southern France. An expanded freedom of line, color, and space permeate these canvases, particularly after WWII, when Daura, grateful to be reunited with the once-fortified village, began reflecting on his new “understanding of the language spoken” by the landscape. The compression of space, attention to color, and shifting geometric planes in these works recall Daura’s continued affinity with Paul Cézanne and embody the advice of Cercle et Carré contemporary, Joaquín Torres-García. In a letter from 1929, Torres-García appealed to Daura to “not be concerned” with the desire to paint naturalistically and simply focus on the ideal to “create with color and geometry something beyond reality...do not seek the artistic meaning in reality but within [yourself].”

Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
The Star Makers, ca. 1955
Oil on canvas

Loan courtesy of Martha Daura; L2021: 7.1

Inspired by Breton's poetry, *The Star Makers* visualizes the themes circulating through his early Surrealist work, which espoused the beauty of the unconscious in dreams, and his mature musings on the ancient connections between magic and art. Partially obscured by a vibrant veil of teal and deep reds, a mysterious figure—a titular Star Maker—gazes at a sphere that appears to contain objects in motion. The orbs seem to swirl, casting light and fluctuating hues as if spellbound by the figure's concentration and the delicate movement of a powerful hand.

In his answers to Breton's survey, Daura expressed his conviction that magic in art need not be restored from a lost existence, but rather has always been present and can always be found. This evocative painting conveys Daura's mind at work during his years of friendship with Breton, a visual reminder to continue searching; the enchanted mechanisms and makers are simply waiting to be revealed.





Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Maison Daura (Saint-Cirq-Lapopie), ca. 1930
Etching with aquatint

Gift of Martha Daura in memory of Chapin D. Clark;
2004:14.34



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Church (Saint-Cirq-Lapopie), ca. 1951
Marker on paper

Gift of Martha Daura in memory of Chapin D. Clark;
2004:14.14



Small informational text block on the left wall, partially obscured.

Small informational text block on the right wall, partially obscured.



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Country Scene (Rockbridge Baths, VA), 1955-70
Watercolor on paper

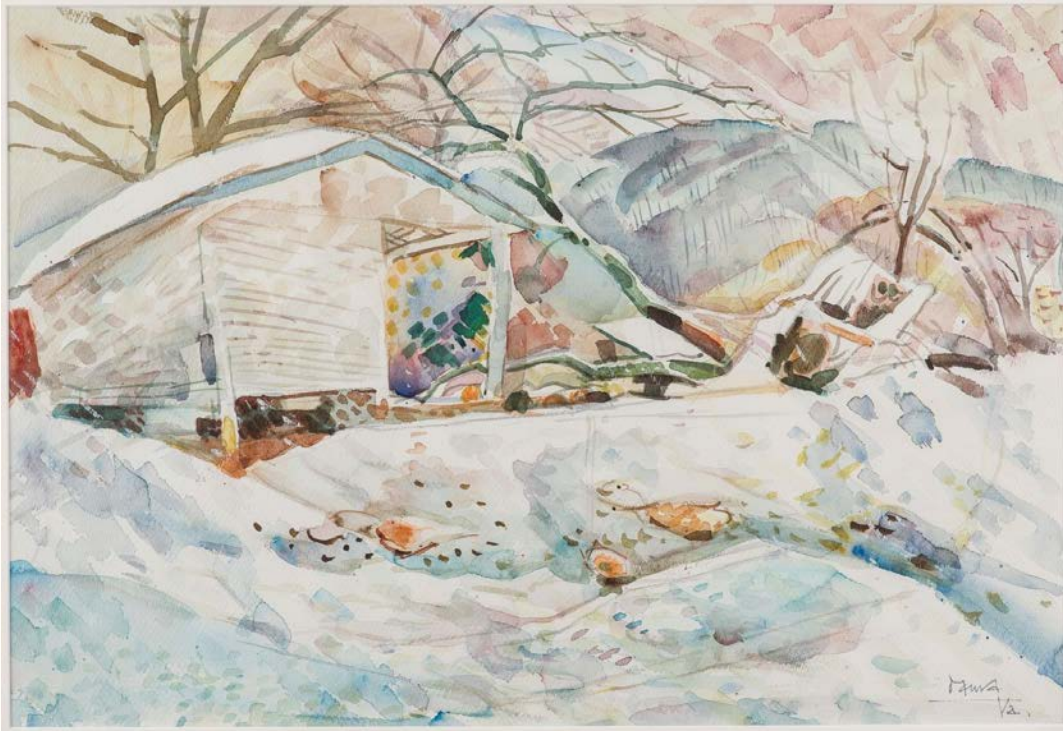
Gift of Martha Daura in memory of Chapin D. Clark; TN00544.48



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Log Cabin in Fall (Rockbridge Baths, VA), 1945-55
Watercolor on paper

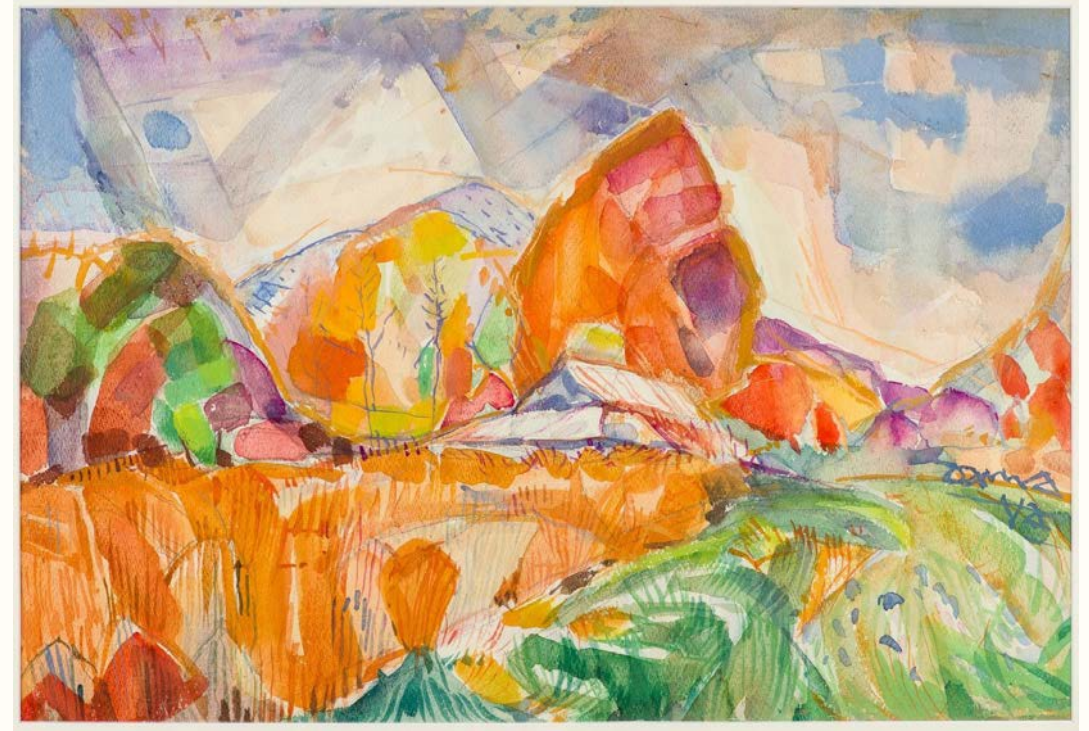
On loan from Knight Law Center; TN00544.95

Daura made his first visit to Virginia to meet Louise's family in 1934. The couple returned with daughter Martha in 1939 while Louise sought medical treatment, and remained when WWII prevented their return to France until 1947. During the unexpected exile, Daura embraced Virginia as an adoptive home and creative haven, becoming an integral member of the faculty at Lynchburg College and Randolph-Macon Woman's College. Having lost his Spanish citizenship after fighting against Franco in the Spanish Civil War, Daura became a naturalized US citizen in 1943. Once allowed to return to Saint-Cirq, he divided time between Virginia and France for the rest of his life.



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Daura Kiln House with Snow (Rockbridge Baths, VA), 1955-70
Watercolor on paper

On loan from Knight Law Center; TN00544.89



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Autumn Scene (Rockbridge Baths, VA), 1955-70
Watercolor on paper

On loan from Knight Law Center; TN00544.98

The shifting planes, kaleidoscopic skies, and expressive use of color in his French landscapes also permeate Daura's Virginian views. As he blurs the line between representation and abstraction, his attention to color, line, and geometry brings to life the vivid hues of autumn trees in transition, a luminous snowfall around his home studio, and the magnetic charm of a quiet countryside in Rockbridge Baths. Daura's chromatic and compositional investigations in Virginia give visual form to his insistence in Breton's survey that "There is no doubt that magic in art responds to a need of the human spirit [and] as long as it continues to be explored, there will be a function for magic."



Informational text panel on the left wall, containing several columns of text and a small graphic element.

Informational text panel on the right wall, containing several columns of text.



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Pieta, 1955-70
 Watercolor on paper

Gift of Martha Daura in memory of Chapin D. Clark;
 2004:14.17

Representations of and allusions to the Holy Family, Pieta, and the Virgin Mary make frequent appearances in print, painting, and sculpture throughout Daura's career, visualized in connection with portraits of couples and family. Daura lost his mother at the age of eight, precipitating an enduring interest in depictions of motherhood, and of mothers and children. Daura reflected that mothers were the "ultimate symbol of creation and existence," that "everything turns to the mother and child." Though he was not devout, Daura's Roman Catholic background shows its influence in such compositions. In this Pieta pair, mother and child follows an art historical cannon of figures rendered in profile and frontal view akin to the Romanesque architecture and sculpture in his birthplace of Catalonia and beloved home in Saint-Cirq. Together, the duo expresses an emotional spectrum present throughout Daura's representations of loved ones, conveying both a celebrated warmth of familial love through abstracted chromatic brilliance, and a spectral mirage of loss preserved and protected in memory.



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
White on Black, ca. 1967
 Gouache on paper board

Gift of Martha Daura in memory of Chapin D. Clark;
 2004:14.19



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Blue on Black, ca. 1967
Gouache on paper

Gift of Martha Daura in memory of Chapin D. Clark; 2004:14.21



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
White on Blue, ca. 1967
Gouache on paper

Gift of Martha Daura in memory of Chapin D. Clark; 2004:14.20

This series of gouaches stands out in Daura's oeuvre in medium and style, but perhaps not theme. As the ghostly swirls of brushwork coalesce into just tangible figures, scenes of mythic, ancient, epic significance seem to materialize, depicting conflict and battle, death and grief, prayer and human connection. Daura's experience in compulsory and voluntary military service in Spain influenced his artistic practice for decades, most notable in a series of drawings, etchings, and paintings in the late 1930s and early 1940s in which he detailed the tragedy, cruelty, and anguish of war. Though without direct reference, this untitled quartet from the 1960s echo these earlier depictions, exploring through nuanced attention to gesture, color, and form those magical forces at the center of one's identity, history, memory, and drive toward expression.



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Blue on Blue, ca. 1967
Gouache on paper

Gift of Martha Daura in memory of Chapin D. Clark; 2004:14.23



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
White on Black, ca. 1967
Gouache on paper

Gift of Martha Daura in memory of Chapin D. Clark; 2004:14.22

“Art has been and always is the means and the purpose of the irresistible urge for self-expression, expression of those values of beliefs latent in man, which establish the link between man and the ever receding over yonder,” Daura reflected in an undated journal. In a 1957 exhibition catalogue, he described such “beliefs” as “magical myths...that have been and are the living forces directing man towards his destiny...Religion, Flag, Love, Happiness, Home.”



Left:

Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Geometric, 1960-65
Oil on canvas

On Loan from the University of Oregon Law School; L2014:11.5

Top Right:

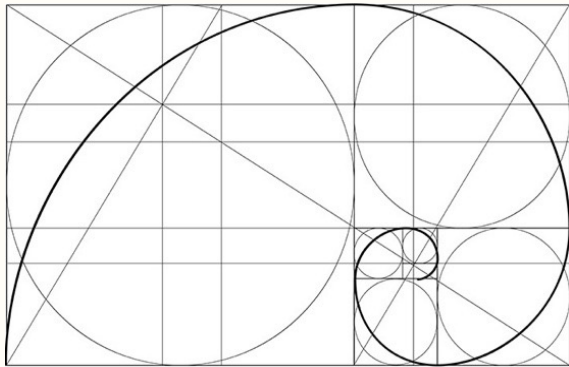
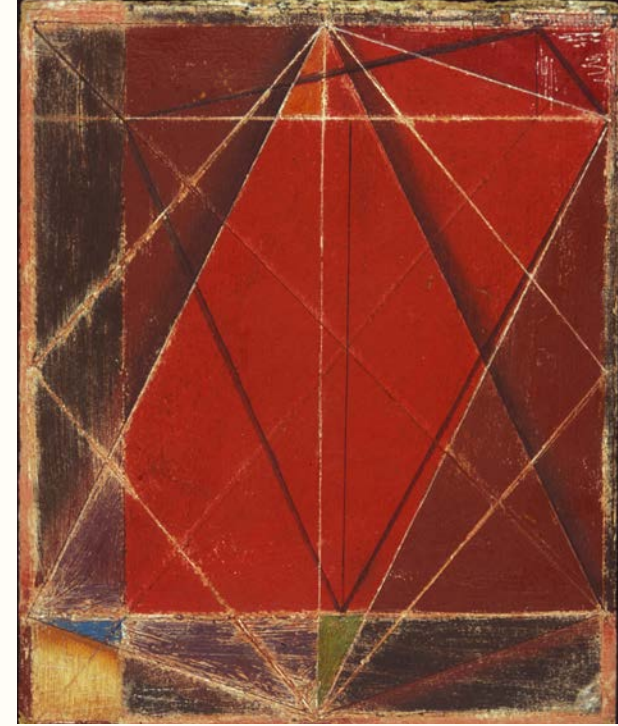
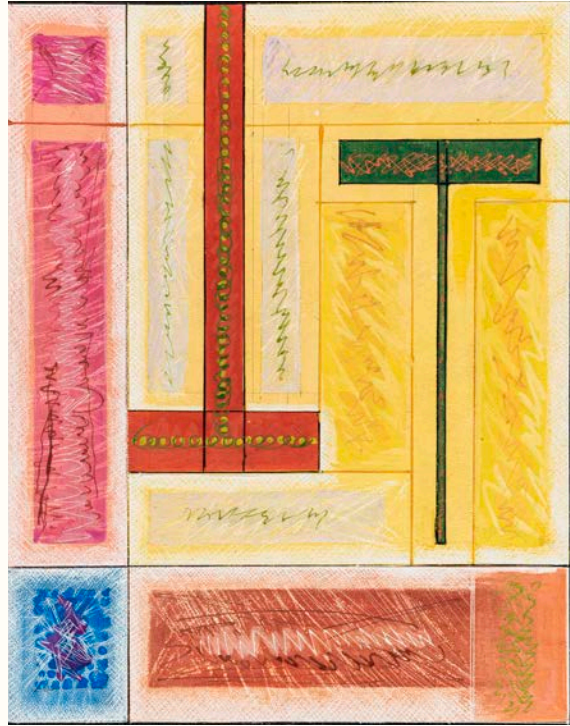
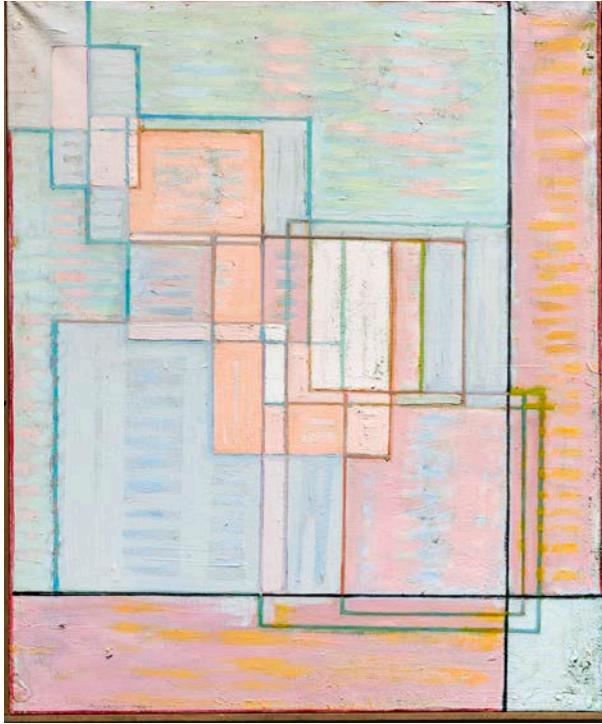
Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Geometric, Green T, 1945-65
Crayon and pastel on paper

On Loan from the University of Oregon Law School; L2014:11.15

Bottom Right:

Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Fifty Fifty, 1945-65
Oil on cardboard

Gift of Martha Daura in memory of Chapin D. Clark; 2004:14.9



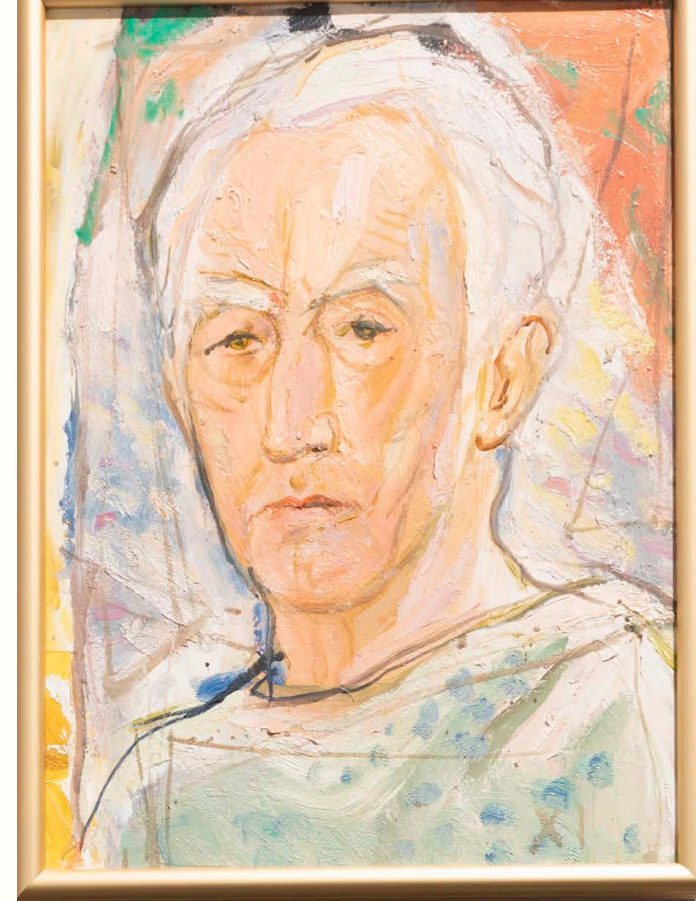
For Daura, abstraction was a vehicle for expressing his sensory and cognitive perceptions of the world. Influenced by fellow artists involved with *Cercle et Carré*, who were concerned with pictorial construction and utilizing abstraction as a meaningful, universal language, Daura turns away from figures and landscape express an attempt to reveal a world beyond reality. His search for this revelation corresponds with his answers to Breton, in which he conveyed a desire to balance an artwork's ability "to provoke magic enchantment" and an artist's need to "appeal to reason, to intellect." As he wrote, "unless there is magic, there must be more logic, directed thought, and acquired knowledge."

This vibrant trio shows Daura's persistent engagement with what he considered the "pure" elements of painting—line, color, and surface—and the mathematical principles of the Golden Section he embraced while associated with *Cercle et Carré*. Also known as the Golden Ratio or Divine Proportion (among other monikers), this symbolic mathematic notation—expressed as $(1 + \text{Square root of } \sqrt{5})/2$ and equaling approximately 1,618—is related to the Fibonacci Sequence and can be traced in the organic patterns of pinecones, seashells, and galaxies. Artists have adapted the visual depiction of the equation for centuries through abstract and representational compositional sequences of rectangles, squares, circles, and triangles.



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Self-Portrait, 1940
Watercolor on paper

On Loan from the University of Oregon Law School;
L2014:11.16



Pierre Daura (Catalan-American, 1896-1976)
Self-Portrait (XI), 1960-69
Oil on canvas

On Loan from the University of Oregon Law School;
L2014:11.4