

ARTUR CATALÀ

ICON, ATMOSPHERE, AND SURFACE
AS SUSTAINED TENSION



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ARTUR CATALÀ: ICON, ATMOSPHERE, AND SURFACE AS SUSTAINED TENSION

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Core Thesis: The recognizable image as a center of gravity

Artur Català's body of work asserts itself through a striking figuration, understood as an iconic presence rather than a narrative. The series installs a recognizable, compact, and frontal form at the center of the field, whose legibility organizes the experience from the very first glance. This figuration is presented neither as an illustration nor as a scene, but as a visual volume capable of sustaining itself against a boiling pictorial environment. The relationship between both realms establishes the decisive feature of the collection: the figurative image consolidates while the surrounding space behaves as a system of forces that traverse, graze, and reconfigure it. Instead of choosing between the pure stability of the icon or the dissolution into gesture, Català allows both conditions to coexist, turning them into a formal structure.

The figuration is constructed through a modeling technique that concentrates density, tonal gradation, and contour control. The environment is articulated through large chromatic trajectories and dispersion registers that introduce speed and vibration. This coexistence produces a dual reading: on one hand, a figure that maintains its coherence; on the other, a field that expands, splashes, condenses, and opens up again. The series thus operates as a visible negotiation between the stable and the turbulent. The stakes are clear: to sustain a recognizable image within a contemporary regime of visual saturation, where the gaze is attracted by impact but remains due to material complexity and the precision with which energy is distributed across the entire surface.

Composition and Hierarchy: Frontality, Anchoring, and Expansion

The compositional organization of the work is built upon a central anchor that fixes the scale and directs the flow of the gaze. Frontality dominates, yet it does not lead to rigidity. On the contrary, the series employs this frontality as a lever to intensify the movement of the environment. The central figurative mass imposes itself through its optical weight, its density of values, and a clarity that concentrates information. From this core, the image opens into successive zones of pressure and release: lighter fields, broad transitions, and impact zones that disperse the focus without losing it.

In relation to the edges, a strategy of expansion is perceived. The dominant directions are not confined to the center: they traverse the plane and activate the boundary of the field as a membrane. The edge ceases to function as a passive frame and becomes a place of continuity; the composition suggests that the chromatic flow and the energy of the gesture proceed beyond the framing. This expansive condition is fundamental to understanding Català's figuration: the center does not close; it sustains. The figure remains recognizable precisely because it is inserted into a field that tensions it, and this tension reinforces its visual authority.

The work also shows an effective management of masses and relative voids. Zones of lower density act as breaths that allow high-load areas to maintain intensity without saturating perception. The series functions as a system of balances: central concentration does not crush the rest, the environment does not dissolve the icon. Hierarchy is maintained with clarity, but the painting avoids any sense of closed stability. Composition, in short, turns figuration into a resistant focus and turns the field into a motor of movement.

Chromatic Regime: Directed Saturation and Temperature in Tension

Color in this series operates as organized energy. The palette moves between two poles: cold-temperature backgrounds—open and modulated—and high-saturation accents that break in like vectors. Cold tones establish an air pocket that amplifies contrast and allows intensities to be read as events. Over this support, Català introduces bands and trajectories of warm or electric color that generate pressure, acceleration, and direction. Chromaticism does not function as ornament, but as the architecture of rhythm: it intensifies certain areas, guides the gaze, creates pauses, and resumes movement.

The central figuration benefits from this chromatic regime: it is distinguished by its tonal control and by a modeling that coherently integrates variations of light and shadow. At the same time, the chromatic accents of the environment act as tensors that test the stability of the center. Color can graze the figure, traverse its proximity, or position itself as a shock field around it. This relationship generates a sense of immediate contemporaneity: the recognizable image coexists with a chromatic environment that evokes speed, excess, and pressure, without losing precision or falling into indiscriminate saturation.

The collection also stands out for its use of strategic coolings. Areas of more muted, grayish, or mineral tones dampen the impact, sustain a visual breath, and allow saturation not to become a single effect. This alternation of intensity and restraint produces a temporality of reading: first the chromatic impact appears, then the complexity of layers and transitions emerges. The painting thus maintains immediate efficacy and sustained density—two qualities that mutually reinforce each other.

Light and Volume: Figuration as Material Presence

Figuration in this collection is defined by the way light organizes volume. Català works with lighting that does not merely describe but builds presence. Tonal gradation, contrast distribution, and selective sharpness produce a sense of relief that positions the center as a consistent visual body. This presence does not depend on anecdote or detailed description, but on an economy of values capable of sustaining the recognizable form at a distance and offering nuances in close proximity.

Light is not uniform: it behaves as a regime of intensities moving across the surface. There are areas where brightness appears as an active layer and others where the paint absorbs light, generating deep mattes. This alternation contributes to a tactile, almost physical reading that reinforces the figurative character of the work. The figure is understood as an entity with optical weight, while the environment behaves as an atmosphere in motion. The series thus articulates a dialogue between presence and environment: volume asserts itself and the field vibrates.

This approach places the collection within a precise historical line. Modern figuration that assumes the autonomy of the painting while maintaining a recognizable image finds here an update based on the contrast between icon and turbulence. The reference does not dissolve into a quote but into a visual consequence: the painting reclaims the power of the figure as a form of condensation, while incorporating an environment of energy and noise characteristic of contemporary sensibility.

Architecture of the Surface: Strata, Rhythms, and Thresholds of Sharpness

The surface in Català's work is organized as a stratified territory where compact densities and atmospheric dispersions coexist. A logic of layers is perceived: zones that act as an open base and others situated in front, with greater load and presence. This stratification builds depth without resorting to traditional perspective; distance appears through superposition, variations in sharpness, and the way brightness and matte alternate. The painting manages legibility thresholds: high-definition areas coexist with smooth transitions, granulation, and chromatic spraying that dilate the space.

The rhythm of the surface is composed of continuity and interruption. Large chromatic trajectories generate sustained movement, while impact registers introduce punctuations that cut, accelerate, or redistribute energy. These punctuations do not act as decorative accidents but as rhythmic structures. The repetition of certain directions and the alternation of spot sizes build a cadence that guides the gaze throughout the field. Central figuration benefits from this system: its stability is reinforced by contrast with the vibration of the environment, and the environment gains meaning through its relationship with the central anchor.

The series also shows an active relationship with the edge. Surface energy approaches the boundary, crosses it visually, and turns it into continuity. The overall sensation is expansive: the image is sustained at the center, but the surface suggests a field larger than what the frame crops. In this architecture, detail never becomes independent of the whole. The surface works as an organism: every density, every transition, every area of brightness contributes to a dynamic unity.

Pertinent Genealogies: Gesture, Color Field, and Figure in the Age of Attention

The collection stands at a historical crossroads where figuration meets gesture and the color field. The first genealogy relates to 20th-century action painting, where impact and dispersion become material writing. Here resonates the idea of a pictorial space activated by splashes and surface rhythms, with an obvious antecedent in Jackson Pollock—not as a formal model, but as an understanding of the painting as a total field of energy. Català integrates this energy into a framework where the figure maintains centrality, and this combination produces a specific tension: the field acts, the figure remains.

The second reference stems from chromatic expansion and painting understood as atmosphere, with echoes of Helen Frankenthaler in the way of building depth through color layers and transitions. In Català, this atmosphere does not replace the recognizable form; it surrounds and intensifies it. Color creates space but does not neutralize figuration. The third reference can be placed in a territory where the figure transforms into a contemporary icon, with a frontal clarity and visual force reminiscent of Francis Bacon's capacity for condensation—understood as a central presence subjected to a field of pictorial pressure. The interpretative consequence is direct: figuration becomes a point of condensation affected by visible forces, without the need to turn painting into a narrative.

These genealogies connect with a clear contemporary axis: the age of attention and the competition between images. The collection assumes impact as a condition of current reading but translates it into demanding pictorial terms. The recognizable image captures, the surface sustains. The painting is not exhausted in a single visual blow; it deploys a materiality that prolongs the experience, regulates reading time, and turns the gaze into a journey.

Visual Problems of the Era: Legibility, Noise, and the Persistence of the Figurative

The series activates a central question: how to maintain a figurative image in an environment of visual noise without giving up material complexity. Català formulates this problem through visible decisions. The legibility of the center is sustained through tonal control, density, and a coherence of volume that allows the form to be recognized without depending on details. Environmental noise manifests as chromatic vibration, granulation, impacts, and multiple directions. The series turns this friction into structure. The figure does not isolate itself; it coexists with the field. The field does not cancel; it tensions.

This way of approaching figuration produces a contemporary reading without the need for external discourses. The painting works with the same mechanisms that organize perception in modern life: focus, interruption, excess, drift. The difference is that here, those mechanisms become controlled plastic decisions. The series proposes a persistence of the figurative based on its capacity for condensation: the figure acts as a core that orders and allows complexity around it. Instead of choosing between image and matter, Català makes them inseparable. Figuration is recognized, but it is recognized in paint—as surface, as layer, as modulated light, as distributed contrast.

The collection also poses a notion of time. There is a fast time, associated with chromatic impact and the frontality of the icon. And there is a slow time, associated with the reading of strata, variations in brightness, and transitions that appear upon closer inspection. This dual temporality responds to a condition of the era: the need to capture attention and the need to sustain it. The series turns this condition into form, without concessions, from the authority of the craft and from a clear vision of painting as an active field.

Epilogue

Artur Català's collection affirms a central figuration of an iconic character and places it within a pictorial field of forces where energy is distributed through chromatic directions and impact rhythms. The composition sustains a frontal anchor that orders reading and, at the same time, opens the space toward the edges, turning the frame into continuity. The chromatic regime alternates incisive saturations with coolings that regulate intensity and ensure breath, while light builds volume and presence through measured gradations and contrasts. Surface architecture organizes depth through strata, variations in sharpness, and the alternation of gloss and matte, making compact density and atmospheric dispersion coexist. In this friction between recognizable image and field vibration, the series formulates a contemporary problem of legibility and persistence: the figure stands firm because the painting turns tension into structure.



Artist Statement

My artistic practice is grounded in the representation of animals at risk of extinction as iconic, fragile, and persistent presences. I am not interested in literal narration, but in constructing an image that condenses the tension between existence and disappearance. Brushstrokes, splashes, and areas of dissolution act as metaphors for an environment that presses upon the figure, positioning the animal as a symbol of resistance.

This visual drive emerges from my background as a photographer, where I work rigorously with light, composition, and visual narrative. As in the work of Sebastião Salgado, my practice seeks to capture dignity and beauty amid the decay of the surrounding environment. I translate this rigor onto the canvas through a hierarchy of detail that guides the viewer's gaze toward the essence of the figure: an iconic form that asserts itself while fragmenting, surrounded by broad brushstrokes and energetic splashes. It is here that I pursue Henri Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment": the exact instant in which matter pulses between existence and oblivion.

My perspective stems from an intense bond with nature since childhood, severed by the memory of a massive forest fire that left an indelible mark of fragility within me. This episode, coupled with personal life experiences that demand extreme patience and delicacy, has shaped my ability to observe everything that struggles to endure. In the silent obstinacy to live that surrounds me, I recognize the same dignity and fury I find in the gaze of the animals I paint. I view each work as a meditation on life and an emotional exploration that establishes me as a chronicler of resilience. My art is an act of power that seeks to connect the viewer with what is essential, vulnerable, and, despite everything, persistent.

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