

2005

# Pierre Daura, Catalan-American Modernist: People, Places, and Things

University of Richmond Museums

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/exhibition-brochures>



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#), and the [Painting Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

University of Richmond Museums. *Pierre Daura, Catalan-American Modernist: People, Places, and Things*, September 28 to December 11, 2005, Joel and Lila Harnett Museum of Art and Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums. Richmond, Virginia: University of Richmond Museums, 2005. Exhibition Brochure.

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the University Museums at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Exhibition Brochures by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu](mailto:scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu).

Bumpo



PIERRE DAURA, CATALÁN-AMERICAN MODERNIST  
*People, Places, and Things*

September 28 to December 11, 2005  
Joel and Lila Harnett Museum of Art and Print Study Center  
University of Richmond Museums

## INTRODUCTION

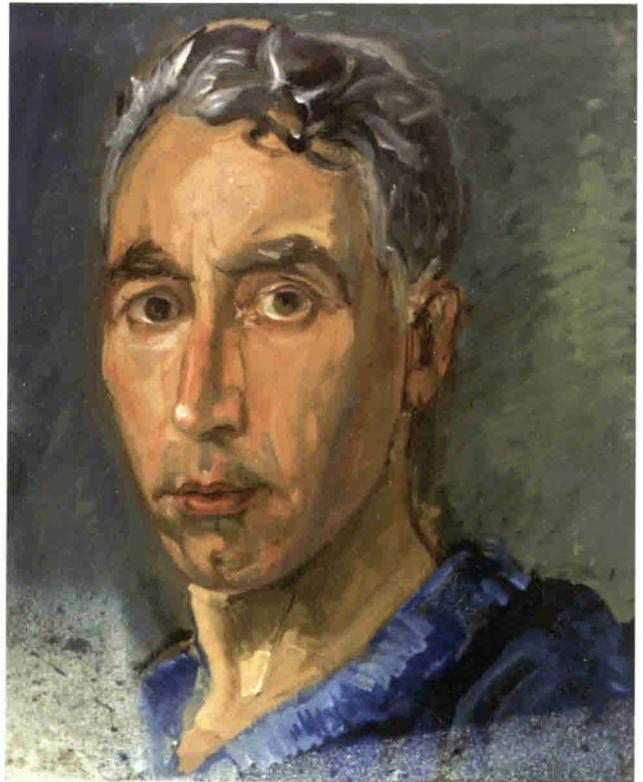
Pierre Daura (American, born Spain, 1896-1976) was a member of a radical generation of artists who shaped the development of European modernism from the 1910s to the 1930s. The richness of his art reflects the diverse experiences of his life — growing up in Catalonia, Spain, maturing as an artist in Paris, moving to the small French village of Saint Cirq-Lapopie, participating in the Spanish Civil War, and finally relocating to Rockbridge Baths, Virginia. After settling in America during World War II, Daura focused his art on the landscape, still life, and the figure. Selected from a major gift to the Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center from the artist's daughter, Martha Randolph Daura, the exhibition of drawings, watercolors, prints, and oil paintings highlights the major themes of Daura's long career as an artist.

Organized by the University of Richmond Museums, the exhibition is presented concurrently in the Joel and Lila Harnett Museum of Art and the Print Study Center. Co-curators are Richard Waller, Executive Director, University Museums, and Bradley Jane Wright, '06, marketing major, University of Richmond, and 2005 Harnett Summer Research Fellow. As part of her fellowship and continuing research this semester, she has written the exhibition's extended labels and the essay in this brochure.

We thank Martha Randolph Daura for her generosity to the University Museums, and we are deeply grateful to her for this gift to our collection. Thomas Mapp has been truly helpful with this project, and we thank him.

With this generous donation, the Harnett Print Study Center is now a prominent repository of works by Pierre Daura, and we look forward to sharing his art with our students, scholars, and visitors. The exhibition is made possible in part with funds from the Louis S. Booth Arts Fund and the support of the Daura Foundation.

Richard Waller  
*Executive Director*  
*University of Richmond Museums*



*Self Portrait*, circa 1939-1945, oil on masonite, 16 1/8 x 13 inches.  
Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond  
Museums, Gift of Martha Randolph Daura, H2003.38.001

*I have painted, I have worked. I have given myself to my art. That is what I wanted since my early, very early age. . . to be an artist, good or bad. . . that is what I am.*

— Pierre Daura

## EDUCATION AND EARLY YEARS

Pierre Daura was born Pere Francisco Daura y Garcia in 1896 in Minorca, Balearic Islands, Spain. Son of a textile merchant and musician, and godson of the esteemed cellist, Pablo Casals, Daura was surrounded by art and music at an early age.

He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Barcelona, Catalonia (a northern region in Spain), where his teachers included Pablo Picasso's father, José Ruiz Blasco. At the age of fourteen, Daura organized his own exhibition and sold his first painting.

In 1914, the artist moved to Paris to pursue his art career. When crossing the border, officials changed his name to Pierre, the French equivalent of Pere or Pedro (Peter). He worked in the studio of artist Émile Bernard, primarily sorting letters between Bernard and Vincent Van Gogh, and he maintained a friendship with Bernard for many years.

Daura returned to Spain briefly for military training before he moved in 1921 to Montmartre, a Parisian district brimming with young artists and writers. He showed his artwork in numerous exhibitions in Barcelona, Amsterdam, and Paris, including the *Salon d'Automne* (1922, 1926) and the

critically acclaimed *Cinq Peintures Refusés par le Jury du Salon* (1928) where five artists exhibited their work that had been refused by the Salon jury.

The artist documented his travels in his art, as seen in the 1929 painting of his family's place of origin, Ascó, Spain, and sketching the coast of France for his 1929 etching of Cargese.

## LIFE IN PARIS: *CERCLE ET CARRÉ*

In 1929, Daura and close friends Joaquín Torres-García, a Uruguayan painter, and Michel Seuphor, a Belgian artist and writer, formed the group *Cercle et Carré* ("Circle and Square"). Daura designed the logo, and members included notable modern artists, such as Jean Arp, Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, and architect Le Corbusier.

Acclaiming the purity of the geometric form, *Cercle et Carré* was formed in opposition to Surrealism, the dominant avant-garde style at the time in Europe. Daura's good friend, poet and critic André Breton, led the Surrealist movement. Although ignored by the press at the time, *Cercle et Carré* is now considered an important part of the development of early twentieth-century art.

His abstract paintings and watercolors reflect the continuing influence of *Cercle et Carré* on his art. *Diamonds and Rectangles* (1951-1965) is part of a series entitled *Fifty/Fifty*, which focused on symmetry and division. Daura continued to experiment with the use of proportion and order in his later still lifes such as the *Fruit* series (1955-1974).

Right: *Martha with Pinwheel*, circa 1935, oil on wood panel, 10 5/8 x 7 1/2 inches. Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Gift of Martha Randolph Daura, H2003.38.019



Far right: *Louise and Martha*, circa 1935, ink on paper, 10 1/2 x 8 1/4 inches. Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Gift of Martha Randolph Daura, H2003.38.123

## MOTHER AND CHILD

In 1927, Daura met Louise Heron Blair of Richmond, Virginia, who was in Paris studying art. Raised by a prominent family on the city's Monument Avenue, Louise continually demonstrated her adventurous spirit, whether declining to make her debut in society or furthering her studies overseas. The couple became close as she helped him learn English and he gave her painting lessons.

They were married in 1928, and their only daughter, Martha, was born two years later. Both wife and daughter became major subjects in Daura's work, as seen in individual

portraits such as the painting *Martha with Pinwheel* (circa 1935) or in figure studies and sketches, in which he frequently used Martha and Louise as models.

The theme of "Mother and Child" is apparent throughout the artist's oeuvre, and it is often interpreted as representing the Virgin Mary and the infant Christ. While he was not a practicing Catholic, he was certainly familiar with stories of the Bible. Daura said in 1962, "Praise and glory to the Mother and the Child. . . and of course, mother and child to me mean mother Louise and daughter Martha. To them both, this symbol of life, of renewal, of eternal continuity."



## SAINT CIRQ-LAPOPIE

In 1929, the Dauras purchased a thirteenth-century Gothic house in Saint Cirq-Lapopie, a medieval town in the Lot valley of southern France. Raised in St. Cirq, Daura's daughter, Martha, once described the town as, "a beautiful, magical village, with steep cobblestone streets, perched on the edge of golden limestone cliffs."

Along with new surroundings, the artist developed a new style incorporating more vibrant color. This transition is evident when comparing the early painting *Red Roofed Houses* (1930-1939) to the later watercolor *Middle Village* (1955-1970).

Their neighbor, Surrealist poet and critic André Breton, wrote the following poem in 1951 about seeing his friend during their summer visits (translated from French):

*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.*



*Bronchales Teruel Fascist Cleare*, from the series, *Civilisation*, circa 1937-1939, engraving and etching on paper, image 7 x 5 inches, sheet 10 x 7 inches. Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Gift of Martha Randolph Daura, H2003.38.225

## SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The Spanish Civil War began in 1936 after a failed attempt to overthrow Spain's leadership. Daura voluntarily joined the Spanish Republican (Loyalist) Army in 1937 to fight the rebellion. Led by General Francisco Franco, the rebel Nationalist Army

was victorious, ending the war in 1939.

At age forty-one, Daura earned the nickname “Abuelo” (grandfather) from fellow soldiers in his unit. As an artillery observer, he was severely wounded in his left arm at Teruel. After being sent home to recover in France, Daura refused to return to Spain, which cost him and Martha their Spanish citizenship.

He created a series of dramatic prints entitled *Civilisation* (1937-1939), which shows the horrors he experienced during the war. Daura had planned to sell the prints to American artist and political activist Rockwell Kent, to raise money for the Spanish Republican cause. However, the war ended before he completed the series.

## A NEW BEGINNING: VIRGINIA

The artist first visited Virginia in 1934 to meet Louise’s family. A second trip was necessary in 1939 when Louise became ill. By the time Louise recovered, World War II had broken out and prevented their return to Europe. The family made a new home in Rockbridge Baths, Virginia, a small town in the Allegheny Mountains in western Virginia.

Fascinated by the beauty and colors of nature, Daura closely studied the Virginia landscape and seasons. His early works, such as *Jump Mountain* (circa 1935) and *Shed in Snow* (circa 1935), show the influence of French artists Émile Bernard and Paul Cézanne. Daura also captured the region’s changing seasons, as seen in *Autumn Scene* (1955-1970) and *Daura House* (1945-1955).

## LATER YEARS

Daura served as Chair of the Art Department at Lynchburg College (1945-1946) and taught art at Randolph-Macon Woman’s College (1946-1953). His approach to teaching was to encourage the individuality of each student through positive reinforcement; one of his students was renowned contemporary artist Cy Twombly, who credits Daura as his first painting teacher.

In addition to his own art, Daura found enjoyment in restoring and identifying modern and old master paintings. Trained in Europe, where he had transferred several Van Gogh paintings from cardboard to canvas while a young apprentice in Paris, he had a long and continuing interest in art restoration. More important, Pierre Daura continued to create artwork until the end of his life in 1976.

Bradley Jane Wright  
*University of Richmond, '06*  
*2005 Harnett Summer Research Fellow*



UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND MUSEUMS  
Richmond, Virginia 23173 804-289-8276  
<http://museums.richmond.edu>

Cover: *Horses and Jump Mountain, Rockbridge Baths, Virginia*, circa 1945-1955, watercolor on paper, 15 1/4 x 22 inches. Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Gift of Martha Randolph Daura, H2003.38.003

All images © Martha Randolph Daura  
Printed © 2005 University of Richmond Museums, Richmond, VA