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Madison, Wisconsin: Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987

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BRADIO

CLAUDIO BRAVO: Painter and Draftsman

GUEST CURATOR

Edward J. Sullivan

ORGANIZED BY

Elvehjem Museum of Art
University of Wisconsin–Madison

Elvehjem Museum of Art
University of Wisconsin–Madison
August 29–October 18, 1987

Meadows Museum
Southern Methodist University
October 29–December 13, 1987

Duke University Museum of Art
Duke University
January 29–March 27, 1988

This exhibition is supported by grants from the Norman Bassett Foundation, Inc.; The Evjue Foundation, Inc.; and the University of Wisconsin–Madison Anonymous Fund and Knapp Bequest Committees.

FOREWORD

Claudio Bravo's work is startlingly beautiful. When I first encountered it in the fall of 1984, I was greatly impressed and delighted by the artist's incredible draftsmanship, his elegant Mediterranean sense of light and color, and the quiet, sophisticated stillness of his compositions. It was surprising, therefore, to discover subsequently that although Claudio Bravo's work is extremely well known in South America, North Africa and Spain, relatively few critics and scholars were familiar with it in the United States. Further research showed that a significant number of Bravo's works were to be found in private and public collections in this country due to the efforts and dedication of a small group of initiates. However, no comprehensive attempt had ever been made to bring the artist's work together and to assess his place in the contemporary art world. It seemed then a perfect opportunity for the Elvehjem and, indeed, the only means to satisfy my own desire to see more of Bravo's work.

The exhibition was brought about by the combined efforts of many people. However, the Elvehjem owes a special debt of gratitude to two individuals. To Professor Edward Sullivan of New York University who kindly agreed to serve as guest curator. It was his expertise and familiarity with the artist's work that produced the selection for the exhibition and the scholarly catalogue essay. To Pierre Levai, Director of the Marlborough Gallery in New York City, who generously shared his enthusiasm for Bravo's work and extended to us the full cooperation of his gallery and its many resources.

The Elvehjem is also especially grateful to the numerous lenders listed elsewhere in this catalogue

who so willingly agreed to part with their works of art for the duration of the tour of this exhibition. Without their support and belief in the importance of this project, the exhibition could not have taken place.

Special thanks must also be extended to the various museum staff members and other University of Wisconsin specialists who worked diligently to bring this project to successful completion. To Lisa Calden, the Museum's Registrar, fell the complex and difficult task of gathering together the sixty-five paintings from diverse sources in the United States and abroad. Earl Madden of University Publications designed the handsome exhibition catalogue and poster, while Loni Hayman and Anne Lambert applied their now legendary editorial skills to the task of molding the catalogue materials into a tasteful and accurate documentation of the exhibition.

Other details which are so essential to the success of any project were carried out by Kathy Parks, Assistant to the Director, Stephen C. McGough, Associate Director, Carlton Overland, Curator of Collections, Sandra Pierick, Account Specialist, and Sherill Addison, Word Processing Operator.

Finally, on behalf of the Elvehjem Museum of Art and all involved with this project, I wish to thank the Norman Bassett Foundation, Inc., The Evjue Foundation, Inc., and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Anonymous Fund and Knapp Bequest Committees, whose very generous support made this exhibition and catalogue a reality.

Russell Panczenko
Director

The Elvehjem gratefully acknowledges the following lenders to the exhibition:

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INTRODUCTION

Claudio Bravo is one of the most significant artists working in a realist mode today. A painter and draftsman with a singularly fertile imagination, Bravo draws upon a myriad of sources in the art of the past and present, combining them in a uniquely personal manner. The mysterious, almost other-worldly quality of his work may, in part, be traced to the environments in which he has lived and worked. A Chilean who has spent the last fifteen years in Morocco, Bravo derives a great deal of stimulus for his paintings, pastels and drawings from the Moroccan landscape and Moroccan people. He is a painter with one eye on the latest developments in western culture and the other penetrating the less scrutable barriers of eastern thought and aesthetics. Bravo's work is fascinating on every level—from the pure physical beauty of his images to the many artistic and literary references directly or indirectly visible in his art.

In deciphering the output of this prolific master, I have been privileged to have had the best possible guide—the artist himself. Claudio Bravo has been consistently generous and gracious. The many weeks

I have spent with him in Morocco, Spain and New York have been both pleasurable and enlightening. I am enormously grateful for his cooperation and kindness. Several of Bravo's close friends (who have now become mine) have been equally cordial to me, especially Rafael Cidoncha and Drs. Melvin Blake and Frank Purnell. The latter two individuals have been especially generous in loaning works from their collection for the present exhibition. I am thankful to all lenders and especially to the Forbes Collection and its curator, Margaret Kelly, for their cooperation, and to Mr. Pierre Levai for his kind help with this project.

I also wish to acknowledge the helpfulness and expertise of the staff of the Elvehjem Museum of Art. Russell Panczenko, Director, Lisa Calden, Registrar and Loni Hayman, Editor, are owed a great debt of thanks.

Edward J. Sullivan
New York
February, 1987

CLAUDIO BRAVO: Perceiving the Seen

The art of Claudio Bravo poses a number of dilemmas, especially for audiences accustomed to regularly taking the pulse of the latest avant-garde. Bravo's luminous still lifes and landscapes are undeniably beautiful. Invariably drawn with perfection and employing a range of colors and tones that make us think we are looking at the objects he creates for the first time, these pictures are almost always crowd pleasers on a purely instinctive level. His popular success, however, has not always been matched by critical acclaim or analytical discussion. Charles Moffett wrote, in 1975, that "the last time that Claudio Bravo had an exhibition in New York, there was virtually no critical response, probably because the pictures at first strike the viewer as little more than highly finished realist images of a purely decorative sort."¹ Although Bravo himself claims that "decorative" is not for him a pejorative term (see the interview with the artist), there appears to be more than a little ironic insouciance in his attitude. He is, I think, thumbing his nose at his orthodox modernist-formalist detractors who (seldom) verbally or (more often) through neglect of his work express their disdain for his particular way of conveying object reality.

Bravo is indeed difficult to characterize. His early work in Madrid earned him the label "society portraitist," placing him in the category of "follower" of the nineteenth-century tradition of Boldini, Sargent and Sorolla. There are, however, many subtleties in these pictures of the 1960s, of which the vast majority has neither been seen outside of Spain, nor widely published. Although I cannot claim to have seen all of Bravo's "Madrid period" portraits, those I have studied are more than flattering images of pretentious people. As we will see further on in this essay, the early portraits were often used to create unexpected, even bizarre, settings for his characters. The more than three hundred portraits also enabled Bravo to study the human form in all its varieties. He has said that he could never deny anyone a portrait—even if the sitter was uninteresting or ugly—for each person he painted taught him something new about the human body or mind.

His work since the late 1960s, including the wrapped canvas paintings, the wrapped packages, and the "supermarket" pictures as well as the studio

views and still lifes, all have often been treated as "Super Realist" works and have been included in exhibitions (such as the *Documenta 5* in Kassel) and in books and articles on the so-called New Realism. Edward Lucie-Smith, one of the critics who has stressed Bravo's affinities with the international contingent of artists such as Richard Estes, John Salt and Audrey Flack in the United States, Fernando De Filippi in Italy and Franz Gertsch in Germany, has described Super Realism as a distinctly American phenomenon imparting a detached, neutral quality to the reality it defines.² Irving Sandler has written of

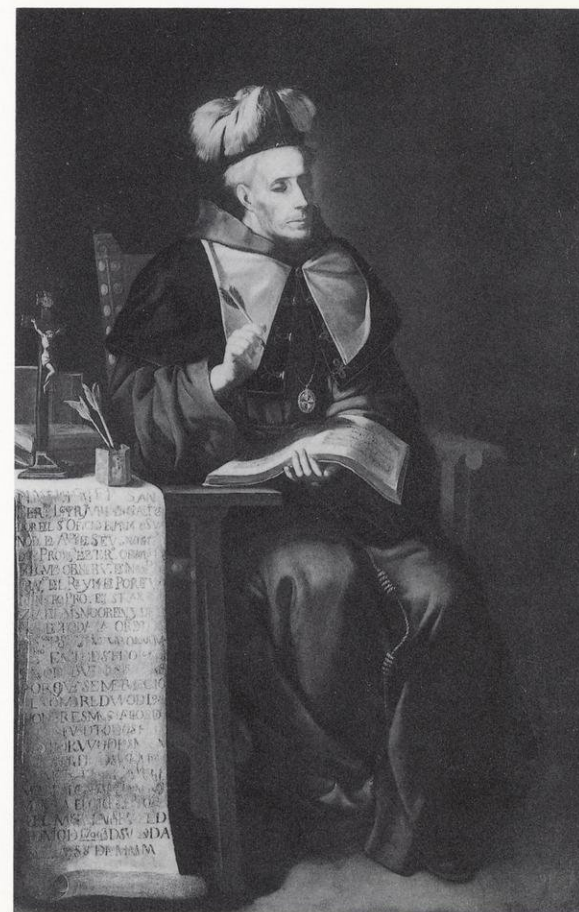


Fig. 1 Attributed to Juan de Valdés Leal, *A Spanish Ecclesiastic*, c. 1660, New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of James W. Fosburgh, B. A. 1933.

*All illustrations to which a "figure number" is assigned do not form part of the exhibition. Works by Claudio Bravo without "figure numbers" are found in the checklist of the exhibition.

the New Realism of the 1960s (especially in New York) as "cool, clean, distanced from the self."³ Bravo's work, however, displays few of these characteristics. There are, in fact, virtually no links between Bravo and the American New Realists of the 1960s and 70s. He paints none of the mundane aspects of urban life that so fascinated the American Photo Realists such as store fronts, cars or shelves of merchandise, and he never works from photographs. Although he has spent long periods of time in New York, he has been little effected by the latest developments in American painting. This is not to say that no American artists have inspired him. In his wrapped package pictures, for example, as well as in his paintings of folded paper, the work of Mark Rothko and the color field painters like Jules Olitski and Ellsworth Kelly did play a certain role. Other critics, like William Dykes, have described Bravo's art as a part of the New Spanish Realist movement that includes Antonio López-García, Isabel Quintanilla, Julio L. Hernández and Daniel Quintero.⁴ While there are indeed more points of contact between Bravo and these painters, there is still much that separates his work from theirs. The pervasive romantic melancholy of the Madrid group, their deserted streets, empty bathrooms or depictions of dead animals on plates are all far from the aesthetic of Bravo in whose paintings a contemplative mood is achieved through concentration on clarity and purity. Sometimes these qualities can be mistaken for preciousness. Bravo has stated that he conceives of himself as an "aesthetic" artist, one who chooses objects, places and people that are pleasing to look at and express his ideals of beauty and universal harmony. His work is saved from gratuitous prettiness, however, by the intensity of the presences he creates.

The objects in Bravo's art appeal to us as extraordinary studies of form and texture, whose significance goes beyond their outward appearance. This meaning is at times difficult to grasp. There is, more often than not, a sense of the bizarre or the surreal in his paintings, pastels and pencil sketches. Indeed, Surrealism, or at least a surrealist-related mode of perception lurks just beneath the surface of many of his images. I do not think that his overtly surreal imaginings, like some of his quasi-religious composi-

tions, such as the 1979–80 *Madonna* which will be discussed below, or the *Temptation of St. Anthony* of 1984, are merely homages to a style long out of date in western Europe and America. Bravo's interest in the surreal is accounted for, at least in part, by his Latin American heritage. Although Bravo believes "the only vestige of a Latin American identity is my Chilean passport,"⁵ he and other Latin American artists seem predisposed to a type of fantastical imagery (visual and literary). Surrealism has survived longer as a viable artistic option in those regions that stretch from Mexico southward than anywhere else. This is not to say that the fantasy elements in Bravo's art have been borrowed from his fellow Latin artists, for indeed there is virtually nothing of a Latin-American "feel" to his art in either subject matter or color. I simply mean to suggest in his work there is

an affinity for the bizarre that may be linked to his native culture. In fact, the specific roots of his Surrealist-related iconography and imagery are exclusively European.

There is another reason for Bravo's "differentness." When asked if he felt himself to be a part of the modern tradition in art he said "Not really. I have my own boat, my own sails, my own wind." This rather poetic answer could be mistaken for arrogance, but I believe that Bravo was simply stating, with characteristic hispanic individualism, that he feels like an outsider.

Born in 1936, in Valparaíso, Chile, Bravo studied art as a teenager for only three years in the atelier of a local academic painter, Miguel Venegas. Interestingly enough, Venegas had also been the teacher of Sebastián Matta Echaurren who, as Matta, would

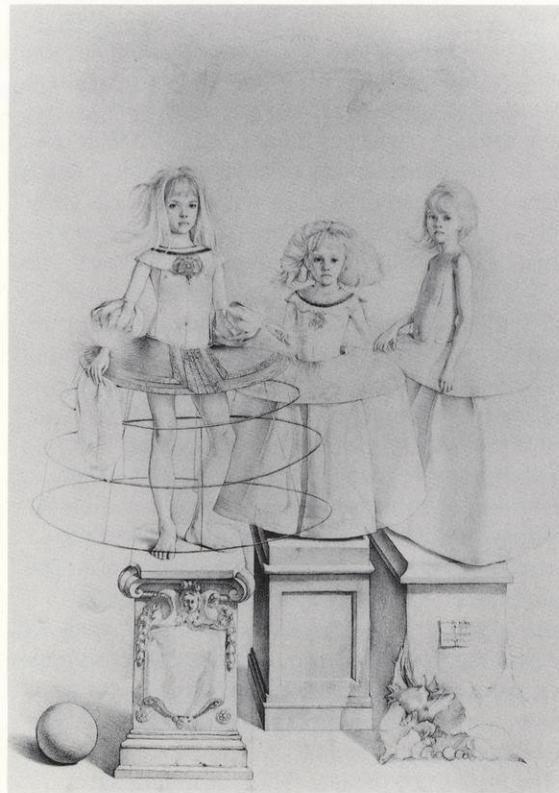


Fig. 2 Claudio Bravo, *Three Young Girls*, 1963, Spain, private collection (photograph courtesy Staempfli Gallery, New York).

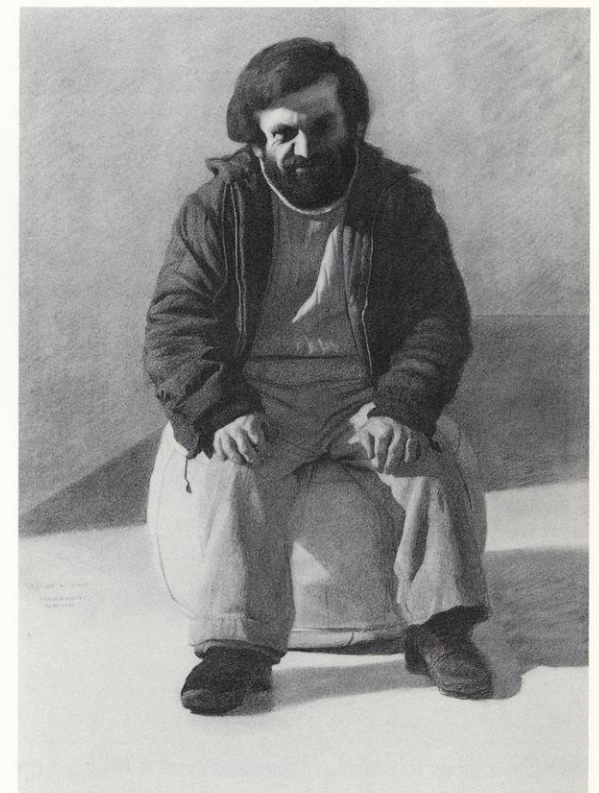


Fig. 3 Claudio Bravo, *The Dwarf*, 1979, New York, Staempfli Gallery (photograph courtesy Staempfli Gallery, New York).

become an important name in Surrealism. Since there were few museums in Chile at that time, almost the only exposure that Bravo had to art, outside his teacher's studio, was by means of reproductions. Through these he developed a taste for Renaissance and Baroque art that he would see in European museums where he would feel totally at ease. From 1961 to 1972, he lived in Madrid. This was during the years of Franco's dictatorship, when, although several significant galleries were operating there, Madrid was hardly in the forefront of the European avant-garde. Spain was still fairly isolated from the rest of Europe in terms of the current events in culture. Bravo's next move was to a place even further from the centers of the art world. In 1972, he went to Morocco where he remains today. In his house in Tangier he lives and works in relative solitude. Though not far from Spain geographically, Tangier belongs to another world. Bravo has almost always lived in places that are far

from the center of the latest events. He observes and understands them but does not feel obliged to conform to any preconceived notion of modernism in its broadest or narrowest definition. His detached critical judgement has allowed him to develop on his own terms, to create a world which is uniquely his.

Bravo's work is full of art historical references. Inspired by Tàpies, Rothko and others in his "package" paintings, he has since borrowed liberally from the artistic traditions of virtually all periods. In fact, it would be easy and even tempting to explain his paintings, especially his figure compositions of the later 1970s and 80s, as variations on or transformations of artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Caravaggio or Velázquez. This would be missing the point, however. Bravo does not engage in the type of "image appropriation" employed by contemporary painters from Sherrie Levine to Mike Bidlo. Nor, for the most part, does he paint "variations" on old master works in the manner of Picasso. Each time he borrows or transforms a figure or even a composition from another artist, he pays tribute to that master and reinforces his own position as heir to a specifically realist Renaissance-Baroque tradition. Bravo feels a particular affinity for the seventeenth century in gen-

eral and for Spanish and Italian masters in particular: "If I had to choose an age into which I'd fit, it would have to be the seventeenth century. During that time artists copied nature in a conceptual way. They transformed the reality of their times as I try to transform the reality of ours." Velázquez, Zurbarán and the painters of Spanish Baroque still life, such as Juan Sánchez Cotán and Juan van der Hamen as well as Caravaggio and some of the Italian still life masters like Evaristo Baschenis have been, since the early 1960s, almost constant points of reference for Bravo. He is in touch with their art through his readings and frequent travels: "Every time I go to Madrid I make a special pilgrimage to the Prado just to look at Velázquez—he's even more interesting now that so much is being done in the museum to clean his paintings." The library in his Tangier house contains a large number of books on the history of art, focusing on the Italian Renaissance and on classical antiquity. As a collector, Bravo has taken a particular interest in the antique past. He owns a number of Roman heads and busts as well as nineteenth-century bronze copies after famous Greek and Roman sculptures, many of which he has incorporated into his paintings, drawings and pastels. Also appearing often in his work are the objects from other cultures that he has collected. During trips to the Orient, Bravo has acquired Chinese and Japanese scroll paintings. From India he has brought lingams. Naturally, Islamic art from Morocco and other North African countries appears in his still lifes from time to time. It must be understood, however, that these eclectic tastes do not lead to an indiscriminate display. Rather, they sometimes add an exotic flavor to a painting or drawing but they never overpower the pervasive sense of balance and harmony that are innate components of Bravo's aesthetic.

At this point it may be useful to examine some of Bravo's works in a chronological and thematic sequence in a search for their sources and meanings. There are very few pictures from the 1950s outside of Chile. Fairly recently, a small group of drawings, dating from 1953, appeared on the New York market. Acquired by the Forbes Collection in New York, they comprise nine ink and pencil studies on paper depicting famous composers and ballet dancers.



Fig. 4 Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of Francisco Lezcano (The Child of Vallecas)*, c. 1644, Madrid, Prado.



Fig. 5 Claudio Bravo, *Toledo*, 1962, Madrid, private collection.

Although these studies do not display any of Bravo's characteristic mystery and suggestiveness, they show his technical proficiency as well as his fascination with historical traditions. Perhaps the most arresting of them is the *Head of Beethoven*, in which a haunting and disturbed personality is adumbrated.

Once Bravo arrived in Spain his art matured rapidly. As is often true in the case of artists who paint many portraits, as Bravo did during his years in Madrid, there are some likenesses in which the viewer infers a strong relationship between painter and sitter that goes beyond the strictly professional. Some of the most attractive portraits are of close friends and fellow artists. The red chalk and pencil portrait of Fernando Zóbel (1924–84) is a case in point. It is signed and dated 1963.⁶ An important figure in the abstract movement in Spain in the 1960s and 70s, Zóbel was born in Manila and educated in the United States. He was known for his paintings of projectile-like black objects surrounded by a feathery aura and set against stark white backgrounds. He was also an important art collector and a promotor of

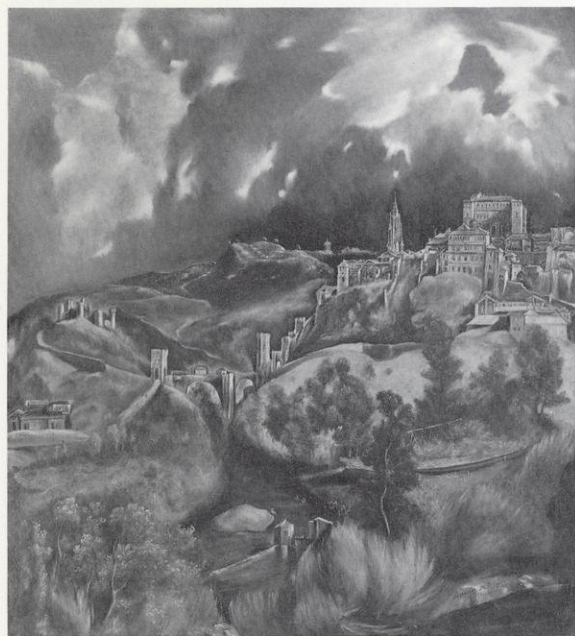


Fig. 6 El Greco, *View of Toledo*, c. 1600, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929. The H. O. Havemeyer Collection.

contemporary art and founded the Museo Español de Arte Abstracto in Cuenca. In this drawing, Zóbel, dressed like a monk, sits before a table on which rest a wide variety of objects including a box for displaying coins, a portrait miniature, a rolled oriental scroll, a Chinese bowl and several pieces of cut glass. This type of assemblage foreshadows the many tabletop still lifes of the 1980s with their similar displays of objects from the artist's collection. Zóbel holds a candle and before him is an open volume of the writings of the Roman playwright Terence, a reference to the erudition of the sitter. In fact, the portrait is conceived in the tradition of Renaissance-Baroque depictions of scholar-ecclesiastics. A specifically Spanish precedent (if not a direct source) for this type of image is *A Spanish Ecclesiastic*, attributed to Juan de Valdés Leal (Fig. 1). In both paintings, the sitter is captured in a moment of contemplation and inspiration. In each, there is an accompanying text. Bravo's



Fig. 7 Attributed to Luis Niño, *Our Lady of the Victory of Málaga*, c. 1750, Denver Art Museum.

Latin text tells the viewer the name of the subject (FERN.ZOBEL AYALENSIS—Fernando Zóbel de Ayala), his age (38) and that the work was conceived and executed by Claudio Bravo in 1963. Portraits of artists traditionally show them either painting or in close proximity to works they have created. Here, we see an abstract canvas by Zóbel in the upper right corner. At first glance, the perspective of the room and the table may seem odd and the figure a bit stiff. These are, I believe, not so much testimonies to a youthful hesitancy on the artist's part as self-conscious archaizing elements designed to make the image refer back to hieratic medieval concepts of portraiture. Indeed, the use of "imperfect" perspective employed for symbolic reasons (to suggest, for example, that the sitter or other subject is removed from the realm of mundane reality) can be seen in the work of many later Spanish artists. Velázquez often created an ambiguous fusion of floor and background space in his portraits that suggests a disquieting floating sensation. Spacial planes in Zurbarán's multi-figured compositions seem to collide with one another, a feature seen later in certain compositions by Goya. Picasso's experiments with Cubism can also, I believe, be linked to this Spanish tendency to manipulate perspective in a very precise and conscious way.

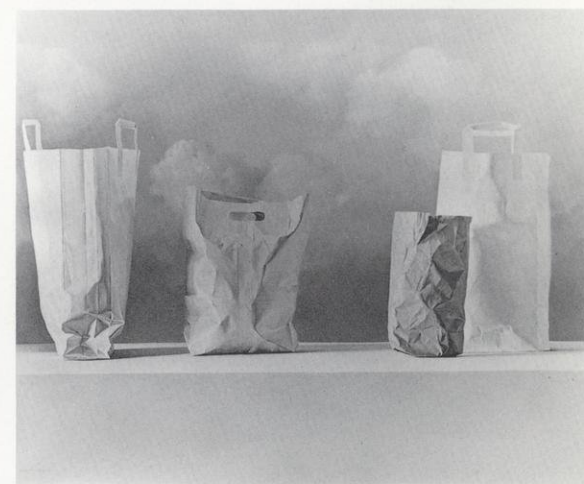


Fig. 8 Claudio Bravo, *Phantasm of a Supermarket*, 1969, private collection (photograph courtesy Staempfli Gallery, New York).



Fig. 9 Claudio Bravo, *Abdullah and the Sponges*, 1974, Longmeadow, Massachusetts, private collection (photograph by David Stansbury).

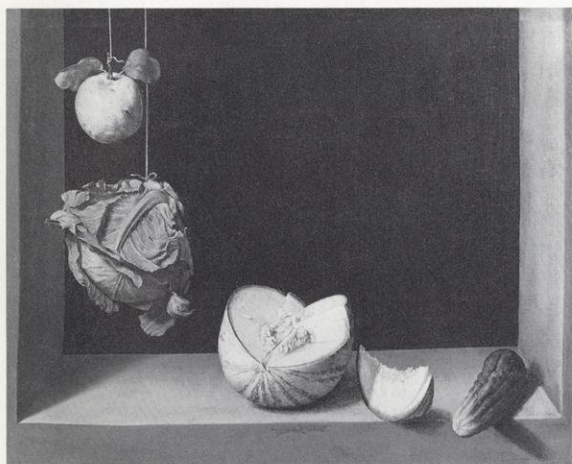


Fig. 10 Juan Sánchez Cotán, *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber*, c. 1602/03, San Diego Museum of Art, Gift of Misses Ann R. and Amy Putnam, 1945.

Many of Bravo's other paintings of the 1960s (as well as a number of works from the 70s) display elements derived directly from traditional Spanish painting. From the same year as the Zóbel portrait (1963) comes a particularly odd group portrayal of three young girls on a pedestal (Fig. 2). Each is shown in varying states of dress and undress, from "Isabel"

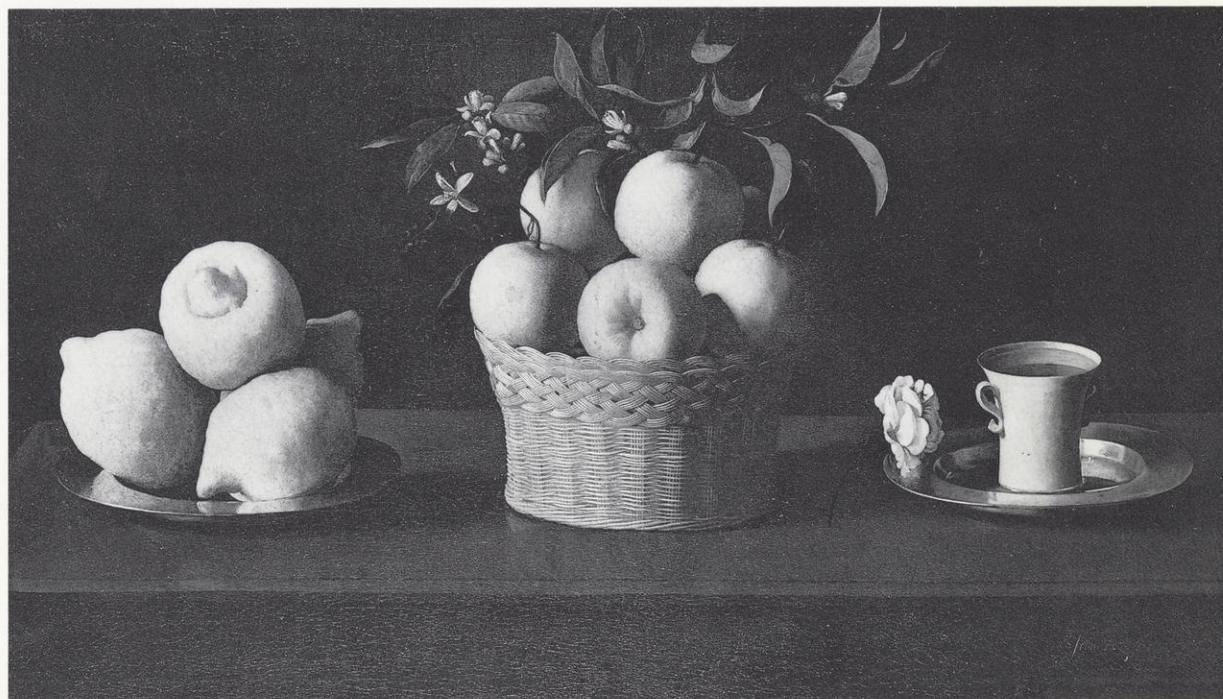


Fig. 11 Francisco de Zurbarán, *Still Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Rose*, 1633, Pasadena, The Norton Simon Foundation.

(their names are inscribed on *cartellini* above them), clad only in a farthingale, to María, at right, in a skirt and Cristina in full garb, reminiscent of the central character in Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* of 1656. Of his Madrid portraits Bravo has said: "I never wanted to do—and hope I never did—a conventional picture. I always set my subjects in somewhat unusual or odd surroundings—on a beach, in a garden, on a city street with a hint of mystery there." Although the artist may not have intended it, this portrait has a distinct air of eroticism, or budding sexuality. There is here a hint of the same kind of suppressed erotic tension that one finds in the photographic portraits of young girls by Lewis Carroll. Somewhat more benign, yet no less expressive, is the portrait of *Doña Inés Bemberg de Vicuña and Her Two Daughters* of 1964. As in many portraits in oil (or, as in this case, in red, black and grey pencil), the subjects are poised against the background of a Renaissance street. Sometimes these settings take on a mysterious, even slightly threatening tone, vaguely reminiscent of the

lurking, ill-defined fears present in the cityscapes of Giorgio de Chirico. Here, one of the daughters holds an astrolabe, as arcane an instrument as any of those on the table in the *Portrait of Fernando Zóbel*.

When Bravo left Madrid for Morocco, he had decided to flee the constraints of both life as a member of high society circles and as a portrayer of that world. Freedom from the demands of portraiture opened avenues for expansion—the possibility to explore new themes and develop new techniques. He did not shun portraiture altogether, however. "In Morocco I do a couple of portraits every year," says Bravo, "but they're not like the ones I used to do in Madrid. They don't have the studied quality of formal portraits. They're of my friends and of people who work for me in Tangier." These pictures are not portraits in the conventional sense at all, as they essentially represent studio models. Nonetheless, the approach is traditional in that the uniqueness and individuality of each person painted is stressed. In Bravo's more recent depictions of the human figure,



Fig. 12 Claudio Bravo, *Still Life with Candle*, 1983, New York, private collection (photograph courtesy Marlborough Gallery).

we see not "types" but individuals, even if we do not always know their names. *The Red Turban* of 1972 could almost be confused with a Renaissance depiction of a young Italian nobleman. The influence of Raphael is clear (see his 1510–11 *Portrait of a Young Cardinal* in the Prado), yet in place of a prince's sober doublet, we see a dark grey djellabah. As in portraits by Giovanni Battista Moroni, a strong color accent, in this case the element for which the picture is named (it has also been called *Portrait of Scubi'doo*, the sitter's nickname), punctuates the sobriety of the image.

Later portraits of artists, such as the 1984 *Self Portrait* or the portrait of *Rafael*, derive from traditional

depictions of painters at their easels. The *Rafael* depicts Rafael Cidoncha, the Madrid artist who has often worked with Bravo in Morocco. We are reminded of the detail from *Las Meninas* in which the artist paints himself with raised brush. The most unusual series of portraits Velázquez ever painted, his studies of dwarfs done in the 1630s, has also inspired Bravo. Depictions of short-statured persons were not unusual in the Renaissance or the Baroque eras. They can be found in works by Mantegna, Antonio Moro, Anthony Van Dyck, and many others. These artists showed dwarfs in the company of the persons to whom they were attached as servants or

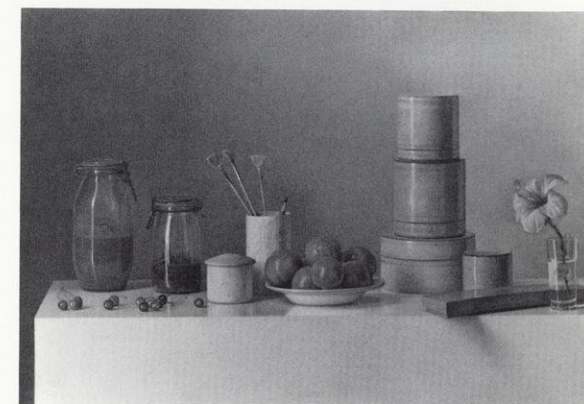


Fig. 13 Claudio Bravo, *Red Still Life*, 1984, New York, private collection (photograph courtesy Marlborough Gallery).

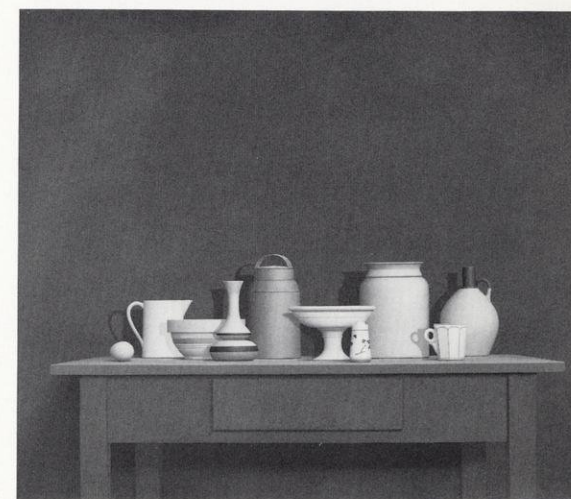


Fig. 14 William Bailey, *Monte Migiana Still Life*, 1979, Philadelphia, The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Purchased with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Contemporary Arts Purchase Fund, Bernice McIlhenny Wintersteen; The PAFA Women's Committee, Marian B. Stroud, Mrs. H. Gates Lloyd, and Theodore T. Newbold.

buffoons. They were rarely treated individually and even more rarely with any sense of personal dignity. Velázquez, however, seeing the inherent nobility of spirit in these men, portrayed them with unusual human warmth. Bravo's large conté crayon drawing of *The Dwarf* (43×29½ inches; Fig. 3) partakes of

the same forthrightness of spirit and directness that makes those paintings by Velázquez so compelling. A particularly close parallel might be drawn between Bravo's picture and its principal source, Velázquez's *Portrait of Francisco Lezcano* (also known as *The Child of Vallecas*; Fig. 4).

Returning to Bravo's early years in Spain, we should consider an unusual, unpublished painting that shows how the artist employed and transformed earlier images. Shortly after he arrived in Madrid, Bravo began to frequent the Prado Museum. "I had known most of the important masterpieces from reproductions in books that I had in Chile; so many of the images were already familiar to me. What surprised me, though, were the colors—which you can never judge from reproductions—and the dimensions. . . . The artists that I gravitated to during those early years were Velázquez, of course, and Zurbarán. I also studied the works of Ribera and Goya but was, perhaps, less effected by them." An artist whom Bravo rarely mentions is El Greco. The strange exaggerations and intense spirituality of his art seem to have little in common with Bravo's realism. Nonetheless, in Bravo's *Toledo* of 1962 (Fig. 5) there is an unmistakable reflection of the famous "portrait" of this town by El Greco, who spent most of his mature life there. The principal similarity between Bravo's canvas and that of El Greco (Fig. 6) is in the treatment of the sky. Dramatic dark and light contrasts and tormented clouds serve as theatrical backdrops to both townscapes. It is well-known that El Greco reversed the position of the major architectural monuments of Toledo. Bravo has not done this, nor has he used Greco's feathery brush technique to suggest flame-like grasses and trees. Bravo's *Toledo* seems closer to an architectural model of the town. The buildings look as if they were made of pieces of wood and the ground from a plaster mold. The painting is at the same time both an homage to El Greco and a rejection of his "mystical" rendering of Toledo.⁷

One of the most unusual and intriguing of Bravo's early Madrid works is the *Cat with Anemones* (1963). Here, a cat is dressed in a pyramidal cloak, decorated with flowers at the neck and base. The background is formed by a cloth that shows the outlines of where it had been carefully folded. Behind the

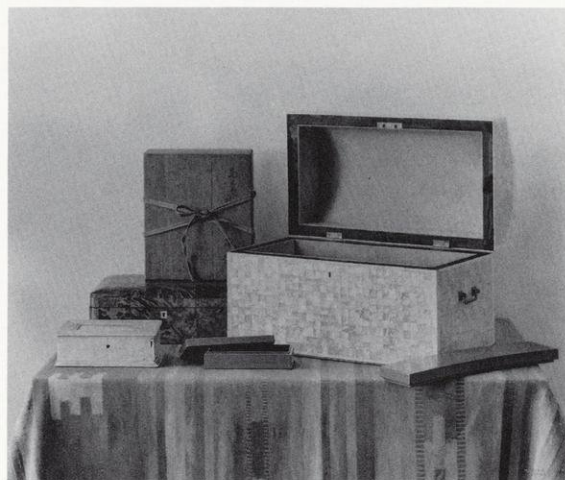


Fig. 15 Claudio Bravo, *Cajas*, 1986, private collection (photograph courtesy Marlborough Gallery).

cloth is a strange landscape, with a Stonehenge-like configuration of rocks at the extreme right. Above, at left and right, are potatoes or other tuberous vegetables, and below, the cat rests on an altar-like shelf between two glass orbs. There is a hieratic, almost totemic feeling to this figure. The feline has been changed into a queen or princess, set apart for veneration. The "cloth of honor" relates this image to both Byzantine and Renaissance depictions of the Virgin Mary as queen of the universe. Devotional images of Mary by Fra Angelico and many other early Renaissance artists come to mind. Perhaps there is another element behind the creation of this haunting picture—that of the countless depictions of the Virgin alone or with the Christ Child that were done in the Andean countries of South America from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. A typical example might be *Our Lady of the Victory of Málaga*, attributed to the Bolivian painter Luis Niño and painted in c. 1750 (Fig. 7). These Virgins always wore elaborate dresses, often adorned with flowers either applied to them or, as here, below their figures. Set in niches or against plain backgrounds, they were worshipped with intense fervor in churches, chapels and private homes. The link between the *Cat with Anemones* and depictions of the Virgin from South America is especially interesting as it would seem

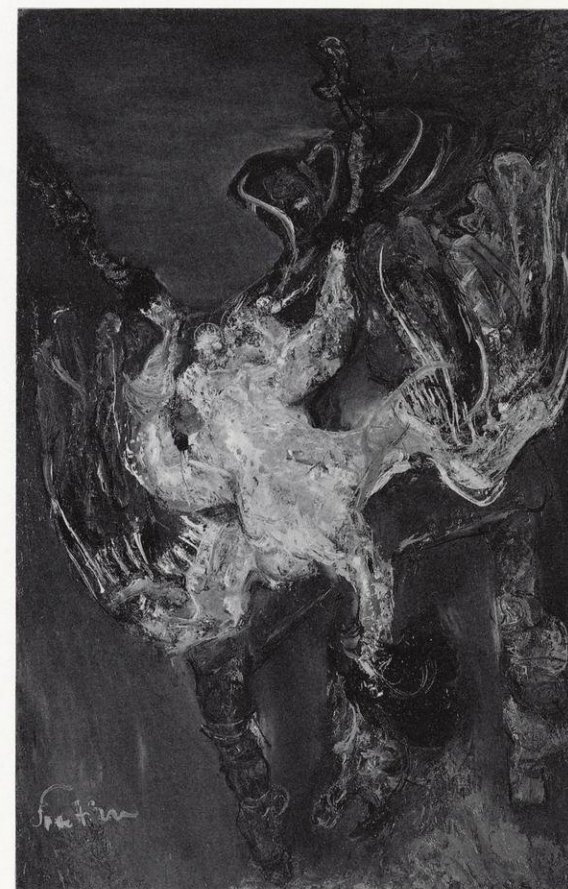


Fig. 16 Chaim Soutine, *Dead Fowl*, c. 1926-27, The Art Institute of Chicago, Joseph Winterbotham Collection.

to be the only instance in which Bravo may have drawn direct inspiration from the traditions of his native continent.

Beginning in the mid-1960s, with his earliest "supermarket" and "wrapped package" paintings, Bravo began to respond to Pop Art. Artists like Andy Warhol, with his Campbell's soup cans or Roy Lichtenstein, with his paintings derived from comic strips, embodied the spirit of Pop, a form of art that ultimately derived from the Cubists' use of the everyday "found" objects of a throw-away culture. Some of Bravo's pictures share the Pop artists' use of quotidian reality, such as his *Phantasm of a Supermarket*

(Fig. 8) and the canvases using paper shopping bags as their focal point of interest. Bravo, however, did not share the ideology of the Pop artists, who were at times commenting on the flashiness of "modern life" with its vulgarity and futility. Neither was he, as were the Pop artists, reacting against the individualism and esotericism of Abstract Expressionism. Bravo, who is neither tendentious nor concerned with critical dialogue, found a way to express his realities through the creation of thoroughly mundane images. This same sensibility is present in the paintings in which food tins or plastic containers are placed almost at random on a table. In *White and Silver* it is the tins (without labels) that dominate. They are not painted simply because they are commonplace objects, easily discarded simulacra of our contemporary "junk culture" but because the silvery luster and their varied shapes are beautiful. Although Bravo may have been inspired by Pop Art, what he does with these materials is the opposite of what Pop masters do. He denudes the shopping bags, food tins, or Coca Cola bottles of their temporal meaning as utilitarian objects and studies them for the inherent interest or appeal of their shapes and forms—memorializing and universalizing, allowing them to become statements of perfection. Paintings such as the 1974 *Abdullah and the Sponges* (Fig. 9) and *Pinball Machine* also respond to the Pop stimulus. The garish colors of the pinball machine remind us of the bright tones and comic strip-derived imagery of Lichtenstein but, like *Abdullah and the Sponges*, it contains a human figure peering out at the viewer. These figures are either semi-mysterious (*Pinball*) or contemplative and abstracted as in *Abdullah*.

Some of Bravo's most affecting paintings are more conventional still lifes. Many of these evoke a mood of quietude and contemplation that relate them directly or indirectly to the Spanish Baroque still life tradition. The beginnings of Spanish still life can be found in Castille, and especially in Toledo, during the early seventeenth century. Although there are definite parallels to the still life traditions of Flanders and Italy, masters such as Sánchez Cotán, Blas de Ledesma, Alejandro de Loarte and others developed a highly distinctive Spanish style.⁸ Still life flourished

throughout the Baroque era. Juan van der Hamen developed it at the court of Madrid and, in the 1630s and 40s, Zurbarán and his followers established the Andalusian school of *bodegón* painting. The tradition was handed down to masters of the eighteenth century (Luis Meléndez is the principal figure in the Rococo era) and, ultimately, to Goya, whose simple, almost severe renditions of edible objects on table tops provided examples for Manet and others in later years.

It is the early Baroque still life to which Bravo is most attracted. In works such as the well-known *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber* by Juan Sánchez Cotán (Fig. 10) or the 1633 *Still Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Rose* by Francisco de Zurbarán (Fig. 11), every object is treated with equal care and attention. Each element (or group of elements) is separated one from the other almost as if they were sacramental objects on an altar (especially in the case of the Zurbarán). Indeed, there has been a great deal written concerning the possible covert religious references in these Spanish *bodegones*.⁹ William Jordan has noted "[this] view . . . certainly cannot be disproved but the significance [of it] may have been exaggerated."¹⁰ Concerning the Sánchez Cotán painting, numerous critics have pointed to the mathematical rigor of its composition. Recently, Alfonso Pérez Sánchez stated that this picture was reminiscent of the "Neo-Pythagorean fervor" at the Spanish court in the early years of the Baroque period.¹¹ With his growing passion for tranquility and equilibrium in art and his interest in classical form and balance, Bravo was naturally drawn to this type of still life. One of the paintings closest to the Spanish tradition is his 1984 *Cabbage and Garlic*. Here, only two items are included, several bunches of garlic tied together and a head of cabbage. They are straightforwardly presented on a simple wooden table, defined by a clear, even light. The 1983 *Still Life with Candle* (Fig. 12) is a somewhat more complex composition, one of the very few works in Bravo's oeuvre which suggests nighttime (the artist has said "I always paint during the day, never at night"). The light recalls certain pictures by caravaggesque artists (like Hendrick Terbrugghen or Georges de la Tour) who were fascinated by the effect of a candle's flame. Nonetheless, here too



Fig. 17 Salvador Dalí, *Shades of Night Descending*, 1931, St. Petersburg, Florida, The Salvador Dalí Museum.

each object is separated as in the Spanish old masters. The *Red Still Life* of 1984 (Fig. 13) presents us with a work whose overall harmony is produced by a unity of color. In this pastel, the flower, boxes, fruits, brushes and the substances of the jars blend with the background to form a smooth continuity of red tones. The *Red Still Life* is one of many works in which we detect Bravo's connection to other contemporary masters. Perhaps the most striking parallels may be drawn between some of his compositions and those of the American painter William Bailey. In Bailey's *Monte Migiana Still Life* of 1979 (Fig. 14), there are analogous color harmonies, concerns with form and simplicity of presentation.

Bravo has stated "I want everything in my still lifes to be in perfect balance. Still, I don't want my compositions to look as if they'd been artificially composed. I want them to look decomposed, that is to say, natural." His most recent work, however, evidences increasing complexity and a more lavish use



Fig. 18 Yves Tanguy, *Mama, Papa is Wounded!*, 1927, New York, The Museum of Modern Art.

of detail. This can be seen in some of his 1985 pastels and in his most recent oil paintings, such as the 1986 *Cajas* (Boxes; Fig. 15). Here the profusion of objects is richer than before and the artist emphasizes the sumptuous values of the things he paints by placing a luxurious mother-of-pearl box in the center of the composition.

Bravo's borrowings for his still life paintings raises complex issues. Virtually every work abounds in references to the history of western (and eastern)¹² representation. Most of the still lifes display a harmonious unity; the objects themselves are usually beautiful to look at. However, several of the canvases show dead animals or parts of animal carcasses. The *Sheep Heads* of 1976 and *Dead Chicken* of 1986 are exceptionally disturbing. Although painted in synchronous tones of browns and greys, the heads themselves may remind us of tortured sacrificial victims (or, more specifically, of the sort of animal sacrifice common in Morocco). The *Dead Chicken* imparts

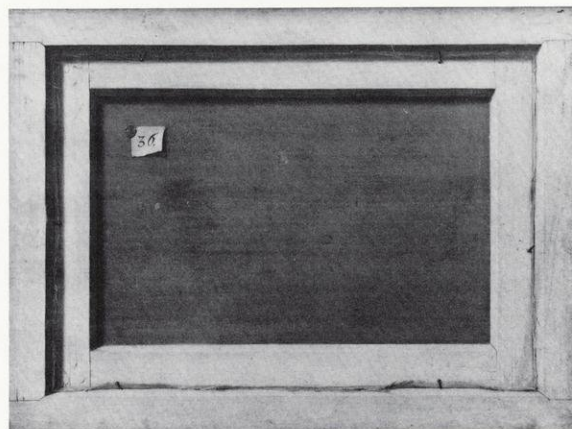


Fig. 19 Cornelis Gysbrechts, *Turned Over Canvas*, c. 1660, Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst.

an even more hallucinatory effect given the particularly strong emphasis placed on the feet that almost seem to encroach on the viewer's space. We are reminded, more than anything else, of the fetishistic use of animals both dead and alive in some of the films of Luis Buñuel (e.g. *Los Olvidados*). Bravo has said that he has often been inspired more by films than by other paintings, and he has acknowledged a special debt to Buñuel. The iconography of the slaughtered animal has a long history in modern and old master painting. We inevitably think, for example, of Rembrandt's *Slaughtered Ox* (c. 1640) or, closer to the present day, Chaim Soutine's *Dead Fowl* (Fig. 16), an image similar in theme but, with its vigorous, expressionistic brush stroke, far removed from Bravo's detached, placid rendition of the subject.

Bravo often relishes, in his still lifes, the juxtaposition of the bizarre and the mundane. In the *Still Life with Paint Tube* of 1983, a Chinese bowl and a red lacquer box are presented on a table top with less exalted objects such as cardboard tubes, tin boxes, a tube of paint and a shower cap. The almost surreal coming together in one image of such disparate elements suggests a link with Surrealism. *Stones* of 1970 is one of many pictures of randomly distributed rocks or pebbles. "In the early 70s," Bravo has said, "I became very interested in Zen philosophy. In my readings concerning Zen, I was often impressed by passages describing meditation on stones thrown at

random onto a surface. Each time they are thrown they will take on a different configuration. They will also make completely different patterns when thrown by different people. Its like the chance quality of life." Bravo's watercolors and oils with this subject were in part the result of his readings. However, there are other visual references in the stone paintings. In each case, the stones are poised against a vast, panoramic backdrop. These "lunar" settings, as well as the objects themselves, are strongly reminiscent of the surreal landscapes of both Salvador Dalí and Yves Tanguy. In the 1931 *Shades of Night Descending* (Fig. 17) by Dalí a similar sense of desolation is evoked as in Bravo's canvases. Since his childhood, Bravo has admired Dalí's work. In fact, some of his earliest paintings in Chile were imitations of Dalí. Although he has long ceased to turn to this Spanish Surrealist for inspiration, there are still occasional reminders of that early impact. A more immediate referent is the work of Tanguy where bean- or stone-like forms fill an equally deserted, barren terrain. Tanguy's 1927 *Mama, Papa is Wounded!* (Fig. 18) speaks to us in a hermetic tongue with signs and symbols more opaque than those of Bravo but the vocabulary is integrally related—as if Bravo's were a latter-day dialect of the French Surrealist's language of expression.

One of the subjects for which Bravo is best known is his series of wrapped packages and canvases, themes hardly within the limits of conventional still life. Here too, however, we find sources in past traditions. In none of Bravo's "package" paintings that we understand to be wrapped canvases is it completely clear that underneath the wrapping there is indeed a canvas. We infer this from the shape and from the suggestion of the support of the canvas by the cross-tied string or cord. The artist has often given these works simple names like *White Package* or *Red Package*. We presume that they are canvases not only because of their shape but also because we recall other depictions of such objects. In the tradition of *trompe l'oeil* painting there are numerous instances of artists painting the backs of canvases. Antonio Forbora's 1686 *The Artist's Easel* (Avignon, Musée Calvet) depicts both the back of one canvas and, above, the front of another. In the mid-seventeenth century, the Dutch painter Cornelis Gysbrechts made

a specialty of this subject.¹³ His *Turned Over Canvas* (Fig. 19) is a stark rendition with little more than a small piece of paper with the number "36" in the upper left hand corner to break the minimalist monotony of the image (and also to make us believe that this is part of a series of such paintings). Nineteenth-century American artists such as William Harnett, John Peto, Victor Dubreuil and John Haberle often depicted the backs of canvases. Peto's *Lincoln and the Phleger Stretcher* of c. 1900 (New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut) shows a cut-out portrait of the President tacked to the back of a canvas. John Haberle's *Torn in Transit* (Fig. 20) is one of several versions of this theme. It portrays what appears to be the back of a canvas with a painted sketch and a small tintype portrait affixed to it.¹⁴ Its torn paper and string remind us of similar elements in the works of Bravo. Such paintings as those by Gysbrechts and Haberle are interesting coincidences of a theme—a depiction of the artist's own materials. Bravo was not familiar with these images when he painted his "packages." He was very much aware,

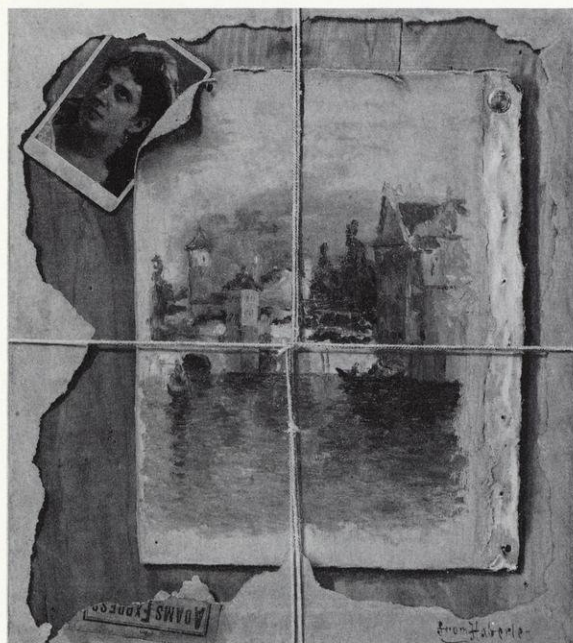


Fig. 20 John Haberle, *Torn in Transit*, c. 1890, Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, Marion Stratton Gould Fund.

however, of the versions of the subject done in various media by Spanish artists.

Bravo has said that he was interested in some of the paintings of Antoni Tàpies that included string as a pictorial element. Tàpies also executed a work representing a canvas stretcher, not by painting it but by taking a real canvas, turning it around and presenting it as a finished piece. The 1962 *Stretcher Painting* (Fig. 21) seems to be, in effect, exactly what is beneath Bravo's paper wrappings. Bravo, however, poeticizes or even romanticizes these objects by shrouding them with colored paper and twine. Other artists of the mid-1960s in Spain were doing similar things with canvas backs. Some of the works of the Valencian artists Manuel Boix and Arturo Heras might be thought of as analogues for Tàpies' image.¹⁵

In the United States, Roy Lichtenstein began to paint the backs of canvases beginning in 1968 with the *Stretcher Frame with Vertical Bar* (private collection), a straightforward, unadorned depiction of the object. This subject was elaborated upon in several works of the early 1970s including the *Trompe l'Oeil with Leger Head and Paint Brush* (1973, private collection) and *Things on a Wall* (1973, collection David Whitney) which, according to Lawrence Alloway "exemplify the incompatibility of reality (out there) and imagery (on the canvas). [Here Lichtenstein] takes the well-known formats of *trompe l'oeil* and demonstrates them in non-illusionistic terms."¹⁶ While Bravo's images are naturally quite distinct from Lichtenstein's approach to the theme visually, they are nonetheless integrally related in a conceptual way.

Since he has been in Morocco, Bravo has painted landscapes of the desert regions in the south of the country near Marrakesh and views of the coast near Asilah on the Atlantic shore. Recently he has executed the large *Landscape of Marshan* which will be discussed below. He also paints views from the window of his studio located next to a cemetery. The tombstones often figure as important elements in his delicate pencil drawings and in his paintings. Also from his window he paints views of the Straits of Gibraltar, the distant Spanish coast and passing ships. Bravo's landscape and some of his figure compositions have been linked to the art of the Orientalists, mid- and late-nineteenth-century artists like

Horace Vernet, Charles Gleyre, David Roberts, Ludwig Deutsch and especially Jean-Léon Gérôme, artists who catered to the romantic taste for the far-away. These painters often filled their canvases with characters in native garb that inhabit brightly-colored, sharply focused scenes of Morocco, Algeria, Turkey or the Holy Land. In a superficial way, of course, Bravo shares with the Orientalists the North African locale. Yet his paintings, illuminated by a clear and even light define none of the "picturesque" qualities that appealed to the artists of that earlier era. If we compare, for example, Gérôme's *Medinet-el-Fayoum, Upper Egypt* (Fig. 22), with any of Bravo's North African scenes we perceive a very different approach to the depiction of this part of the world. While Gérôme looks at the scene as a tourist with a tourist's picture-postcard mentality of the charming, quaint and pretty, Bravo (who is not the "cultural

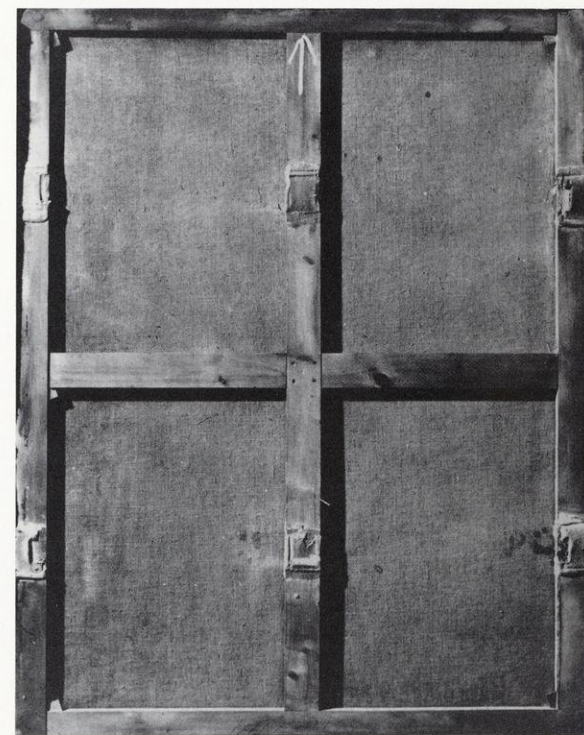


Fig. 21 Antoni Tàpies, *Stretcher Painting*, 1962, Barcelona, private collection (photograph from *Antoni Tàpies, Retrospektive 1946–1973*, exhibition catalogue, Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 1974, no. 34).

voyeur" that the Orientalists were and who lives the experience of North Africa on a day to day basis) is able to capture a much more convincingly real and sober view of the Moroccan coasts or deserts.¹⁷

William Dykes, who has written of Bravo's affinities with the "New Realism" groups in Madrid, Seville and Valencia, has stated that "while [Bravo] appears to surpass the Madrid Realists in sheer technical skill, rendering virtually any shape or texture rapidly and accurately with either pencil or brush, he falls short of them in the question of content, which he is prone to ignore altogether. . . ."¹⁸ While his affinities with this group are undeniable (Bravo has spoken of his great interest in the work of López-García) it is a mistake to think of his art as lacking content. The point is that the meaning of Bravo's work is different from that of his Spanish contemporaries. López-García's *Wash Basin and Mirror* of 1967 (Fig. 23) epitomizes the sort of dreamy meditations on the realities of middle-class life that characterizes this artist's most recent work. Bravo's realities are quite different. He takes his objects outside of any ordinary context, exalts and transforms them into simulacra of a higher state of being.

There is, however, one genre in which we do sense a definite symbiosis between Bravo and López-García: the cityscape, López's specialty.¹⁹ In his cityscapes of Madrid (such as *South Madrid* of 1964–85; Fig. 24), López-García attempts to capture a specific quality of light. Working slowly and meticulously, he paints only at the time of day and in the precise light he is attempting to capture. The result is frequently enormously evocative and convincing. Bravo's 1986 *Landscape of Marshan* depicts the district of Tangier where the artist lives. It shows, in a highly detailed manner, the buildings of this Mediterranean city. Although painted much more rapidly than López-García's *South Madrid*, it nonetheless approaches the latter's Madrid townscapes in realistic detail and strong evocation of specific time and place.

Many of Bravo's figure compositions recall devotional paintings, as pious as any painted during the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. A case in point is his *Madonna* (Fig. 25) of 1979–80. This work represents what is essentially a Venetian *sacra conversazione* with the Virgin poised against a cloth of honor



Fig. 22 Jean Léon Gérôme, *Medinet-el-Fayoum, Upper Egypt, 1870*, Williamstown, Massachusetts, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

(reminding us of the earlier *Cat with Amenones*) and the sleeping child at her feet. Of the baby, Bravo has said, "I wanted to paint him as a real baby, not as traditional artists of the Renaissance would depict him, as a little man, completely in control of himself, standing or sitting on his mother's lap—but sleeping on his stomach as babies do." Flanking the central group are Saints Sebastian, Francis, Agatha and Lucy. Saint Lucy, patroness of persons with eye defects, holds a branch with two leaves onto which are affixed two eyes. (Bravo has stated: "When figs open up, the inside of the fruit looks like an eye, so I took advantage of this shape and gave Lucy her eyes on a fig branch. This idea was partly suggested to me by an Antonello da Messina painting where the saint's two eyes are on a pear.") According to Barbara Gallati

. . . it would be simple to dismiss this painting as . . . a slick recapitulation of a Renaissance type, [but] to do so would be to miss the point entirely. Bravo asserts and refers to his own existence by using an identifiable Moroccan vista and thus fixes the time of the action in the present. Knowledge of his other work informs the viewer that the people depicted are models he frequently uses and, in spite of the format in which they appear, the models possess a decidedly modern look. On that basis *Madonna* can be seen as a reconstruction, or *tableau vivant*, as it were, rather than a creation founded on genuine religious sentiment.²⁰

Bravo himself has said that he is not a religious man, but with his Jesuit education and the intensely religious atmosphere of South America, he, like so many other Latin American artists, is naturally drawn,



Fig. 23 Antonio López-García, *Wash Basin and Mirror*, 1967, New York, private collection (photograph courtesy Marlborough Gallery).

in one way or another, to religious subject matter.

Bravo also borrows from past traditions in his search for a renewal of meaning or a "modernization" of older forms of art in his figure compositions. *Vanitas* (Fig. 26) is one of his most important figure paintings. In this work of 1981, Bravo uses one of his favorite models, the guardian of his Tangier house and his young son Mohammed. They are posed in Bravo's studio. Although they wear their everyday clothing, they seem to us to be dressed like figures from the seventeenth century ("I love Morocco and I love traditional Spanish painting. I often mix Moroccans and Spanish saints"). The table between the two depicts a skull crowned with laurel, gourds, a lute, a candle (with its flame just snuffed out, as we can see from the smoke), playing cards, coins, a clock, roses in a glass vase and other elements. Most of these are derived, as are the figures themselves, from specific Spanish pictures painted in the Baroque age. The bubble-blowing boy (iconographically denoting the swift passage of earthly life) can be traced to another



Fig. 24 Antonio López-García, *South Madrid*, 1964–85, Madrid, collection of the artist (photograph courtesy Marlborough Gallery).

Vanitas by Juan de Valdés Leal (Fig. 27). The sleeping man is derived from a figure in *The Knight's Dream* by Antonio de Pereda (Fig. 28). In Bravo's painting we sense a true recreation of a traditional sentiment. While not specifically religious, the emblematic suggestion of the essential futility of earthly riches is, in fact, the central meaning of the work. Many of the contemplative aspects of Bravo's pure still lifes are repeated here, although with an intensified transcendental meaning. Although this work might also be dismissed as a "stage piece" or an arcane costume study, we sense that the artist, living as he does in an area that might be considered culturally remote in western terms, is painting what we know are models and are as such, part of a real-life situation while creating a work that embodies Bravo's own philosophical thought, his search for the possibilities of the mystical in mundane reality.

In *The Guardian's Friend* we are again shown the artist's guardian, seated in conversation with a younger man. There is a wry twist to this picture. The guardian is often posed in the guise of a Spanish saint or presented as a part of a more "exotic" ambience. Here, however, Bravo makes it completely clear that he is portraying two figures in everyday dress. The guardian wears a djellabah, but on his feet are sneakers. He holds a string of beads. These are not rosary beads but one of the many strings that Bravo owns and often uses as props in his paintings. The other man is dressed in thoroughly occidental garb. The artist appears to be telling us to be aware that the seemingly "remote" aspects of what he paints are not always so far removed from our own contemporaneity.

Other ambitious works have more complex or "literary" allusions. The *Temptation of St. Anthony* of

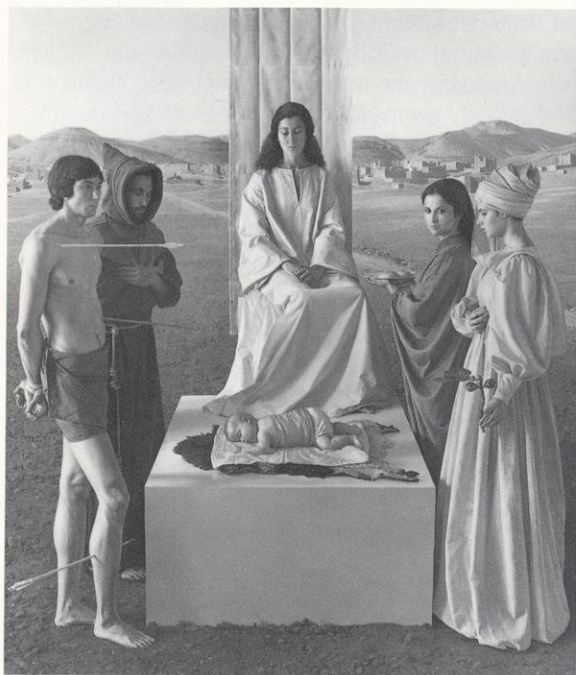


Fig. 25 Claudio Bravo, *Madonna*, 1979–80, Aachen, West Germany. Neue Galerie, Sammlung Ludwig (photograph courtesy Marlborough Gallery).

1984, an allegory of sin and temptation, is such a picture. It has been described in detail by the artist and it is worth quoting his words on this subject:

In traditional scenes of the Temptation, Anthony is set upon by specters of the most horrible sort, monstrous devils, syphilitic beings with hunched backs and hideous chancres on their faces. Who could ever be tempted by such creatures? I decided to make my temptations mysterious, beautiful people who could really tempt anyone. I loosely based my *Temptation* on a film by Luis Buñuel [*Simon of the Desert*] about a saint who had retired to the wilderness. There are no specific elements in the painting drawn from the movie, but it was my general source. The cut-off cock's feet at the lower left are derived from a *Temptation* by Hieronymus Bosch in the Prado Museum. There are blotches of mud dirtying the space of the saint, de-sanctifying it. There cannot be spiritual rest without cleanliness. Cleanliness has an ethereal quality for me. The saint kneels on a rug made of lambs' wool. Its like the prayer rugs that Moroccans carry with them. The small lamb, a sym-



Fig. 26 Claudio Bravo, *Vanitas*, 1981, Stamford, Connecticut, private collection (photograph courtesy Marlborough Gallery).

bol of Christ, sticks out his tongue at the saint. The flying angel [based on an angel in Caravaggio's *Seven Acts of Mercy*] holds an absurd imbalance of money and two hearts . . . here the hearts are outweighed by the money. The angel is really a devil; all the tempting figures are really devils. The boy with the leather jacket is coming from a discotheque and has earphones playing pop music. He's a boy of today found in a context where the devil resides. I hate noise. The noise of discos is hellish to me. Beside the saint is a girl with a turban who comes to torment Saint Anthony with a brochette or shish-

kabob of raw meat. This is one of Buñuel's ideas. Raw meat has macabre connotations—it is a metaphor for violence.

The woman at the left of the composition looks like a figure from a Masaccio painting. She's seductively offering her heart to the saint, but at the same time she's tied at the toe with a thin string. She could represent infidelity. She's possibly tied to a husband, to a set of circumstances outside the picture, but the circumstances could be broken with a movement of her foot. She's an unfaithful woman. She reminds me of the donkeys in the Moroccan countryside who are

tied by their feet and try to eat objects beyond their reach. I often study these animal details and then later transfer them to my human figures. Against the wall is a Chinese scroll that's hardly seen. Its an abstract element meant to enhance the verticality of the picture. The figure at the back right was derived in part from the hooded men who walk in the Holy Week processions in Seville. They accompany the statue of the Virgin in processions but they look absolutely diabolical. They also remind me of my early wrapped package pictures. This figure has just finished tempting the saint but without success. In the same position I had first painted a large and very ugly dog I own in Tangier. I later painted her out; she looked like a huge rat. There's a chameleon crawling up the robe of Saint Anthony. Although chameleons are harmless, they look like the most devilish of creatures.



Fig. 27 Juan de Valdés Leal, *Vanitas*, c. 1660. Hartford, Connecticut, Wadsworth Atheneum, Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection (photograph courtesy Joseph Szaszfai).

In this work I'm not using symbolism like the seventeenth-century masters used it. They were completely Catholic. I'm using a mixture of many places and many religions. I combine all these elements to paint my pictures.

Bravo has created several images of Saint Sebastian. According to legend, Sebastian was a captain of the Pretorian Guard under the Emperor Diocletian. He was condemned to death for his Christian faith and was to be executed by being shot with arrows. Miraculously, he survived this torment and was cured by the pious woman Irene. He was later cudgelled to death and his body thrown into the Roman *cloaca maxima*. Since Medieval times Sebastian has been portrayed either as a paradigm of religious steadfastness or a figure for suppressed eroticism. As Marga-

ret Walters has written: "Some artists—Mantegna in one [painting] or Sodoma—dwell sadistically on the pain caused by the arrows; but the effect, as the fleshly body seems to writhe in masochistic delight, is even more explicitly erotic. . . . The martyr is often . . . an excuse to paint a lascivious classic nude; he also provides an outlet for usually suppressed homosexual fantasies."²¹ In Bravo's drawing of *St. Sebastian* (1984; Fig. 29), the saint is posed against a backdrop of the cemetery in the vicinity of the artist's Tangier house, a voluptuous semi-nude figure (draped only in a loin cloth). His hands are tied behind him, and he looks up to heaven as three arrows fly through the air. One has already pierced his leg and a small trickle of blood runs from the wound. In this and in a related drawing of the *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* of



Fig. 28 Antonio de Pereda, *The Knight's Dream*, c. 1660. Madrid, Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando.

1986 (Fig. 30), the emphasis is almost entirely on the erotic potential of the well-defined muscularity of the young man. As in other paintings and drawings of nude male models, there is a palpable homoerotic content created, not only by the sultry presence of the figures, but also by the hint of potential pain. The arrows can be understood, in the case of Saint Sebastian (as they can in other artists' depictions of Saint Theresa of Avila's ecstasy) as signifiers of sacred or profane love and ecstatic pleasure as well as suffering.

Bravo's erotically suggestive paintings never resemble pin-ups. The same classical calm and restraint can be found in images such as the 1978 *Black Nude* (Fig. 31) which we can as easily relate to

the anatomical studies of Leonardo da Vinci, the depictions of African slaves by Gérôme or the close-up 'mug shots' of Chuck Close. Some of the more narrative pictures like *Before the Game* have equal components of classicism and eroticism. "Soccer is a very erotic sport," Bravo has said, and in this work, as much attention is paid to the muscularity and vigor of the players as to the preparations for the game itself. Yet, here too, we find Bravo looking back into the past and disclosing a variety of sources. The central figure, with his back to the viewer, is derived from that of the executioner in Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of St. Matthew* in San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome. The disposition of the characters also recalls such

nude studies as Pollaiuolo's print of a *Battle of Ten Naked Men* (1465–70) or Luca Signorelli's 1499–1500 fresco of the *Damned Cast into Hell* in the Cathedral of Orvieto.

There is also female eroticism in Bravo's work. *Venus* (Fig. 32) is fashioned after Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* of 1649–51. (Other later, related images come to mind such as Manet's *Olympia*.) Although voluptuous and certainly more frankly erotic than his male nudes, it possesses a coldness and distance that renders its aphrodisiacal forms substantially less convincing than those of her male counterparts.

Bravo's 1970 *Self Portrait*, representing the artist emerging from a package, shows him in heroic

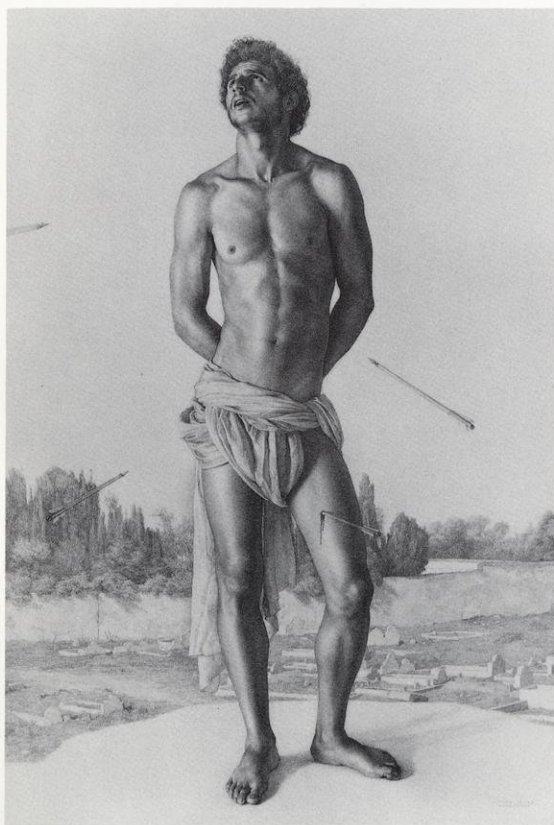


Fig. 29 Claudio Bravo, *St. Sebastian*, 1984, New York, private collection (photograph courtesy Marlborough Gallery).

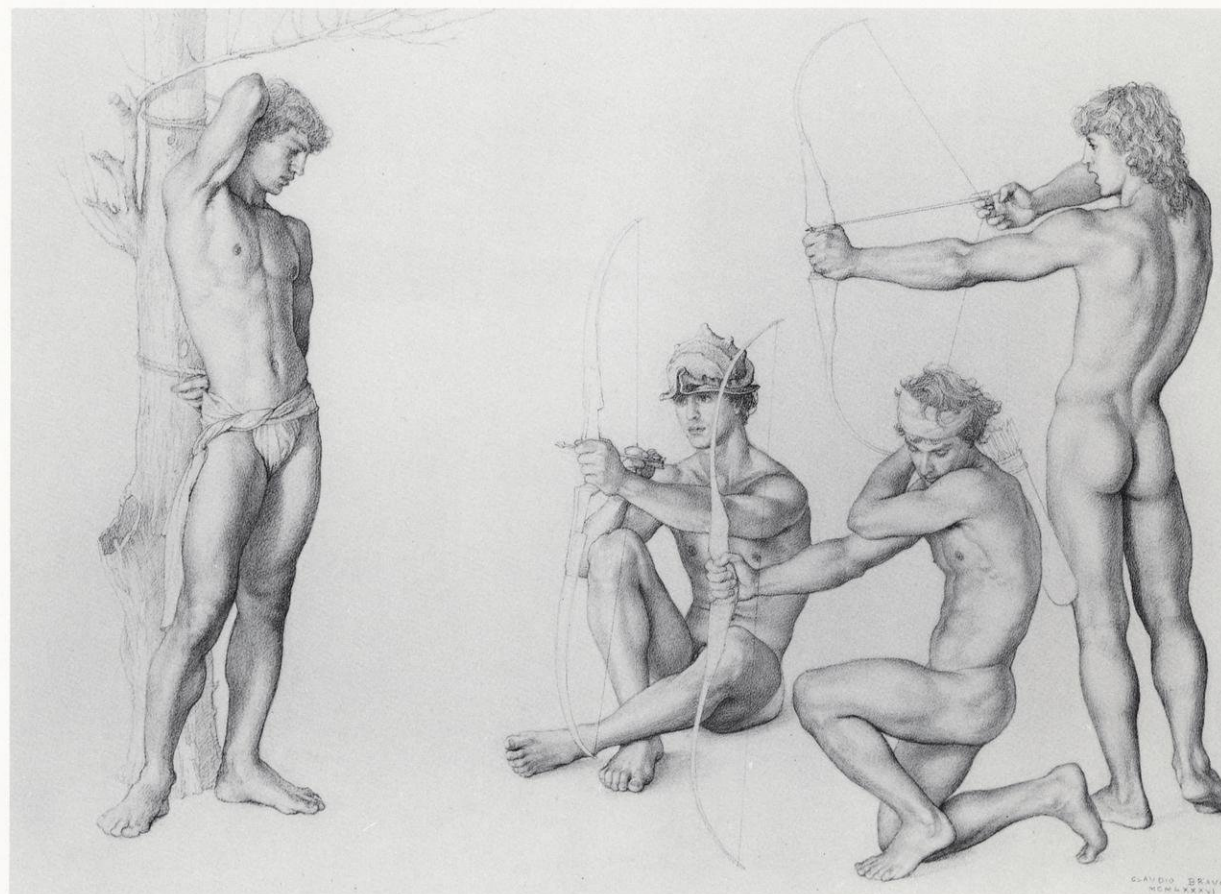


Fig. 30 Claudio Bravo, *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*, 1986, private collection (photograph courtesy Marlborough Gallery).

nudity, embodying the Vitruvian proportions illustrated in Leonardo's drawing of c. 1485–1490. As Valerie J. Fletcher has written of this work "Bravo also proclaimed his status as an artist by means of a visual pun: in the painting he stands triumphantly on the kind of paper whose *trompe l'oeil* effects in Bravo's paintings had provided a basis for his art and for his success."²² Even more intriguing, the 1973 *Portrait of Antonio Cores* (Fig. 33) portrays the essence, though not the physical presence of Bravo's friend the boat and race car driver. The empty suit retains the shape of its owner. There is an aggressive, almost erotic suggestion in this portrayal of the accoutrements (including the crash helmet, boots and gloves) of Cores's profession. The color of the jump suit, a searing orange, enhances the forcefulness of the image. This representation of a person through the display of objects of integral, intimate importance to him is not a totally new one. Vincent Van Gogh painted a portrait of his friend when he created *Gauguin's Chair* (1888, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Vincent Van Gogh). By showing only the chair, the work suggests the presence of the other artist in a more psychologically palpable way than would any conventional likeness.

The *Portrait of Antonio Cores* is a restrained, even a quasi-abstract work. Restraint and quietude, a concentration on the balanced aesthetic components of visual experience is what Bravo tries to achieve in all his paintings and drawings. His art engages the viewer in a cerebral and visual dialogue. His vision is one that recreates the harmonious accord between the thing observed and the inner life that he finds palpitating in every object, from a simple box to a tree, or the most voluptuous of human figures. Bravo, a "visionary of the seen" can be thought of, then, as a transmitter through whose imagination the essences of things and meanings beyond the scope of our everyday grasp are presented to all who look at his work with openness and sensitivity.

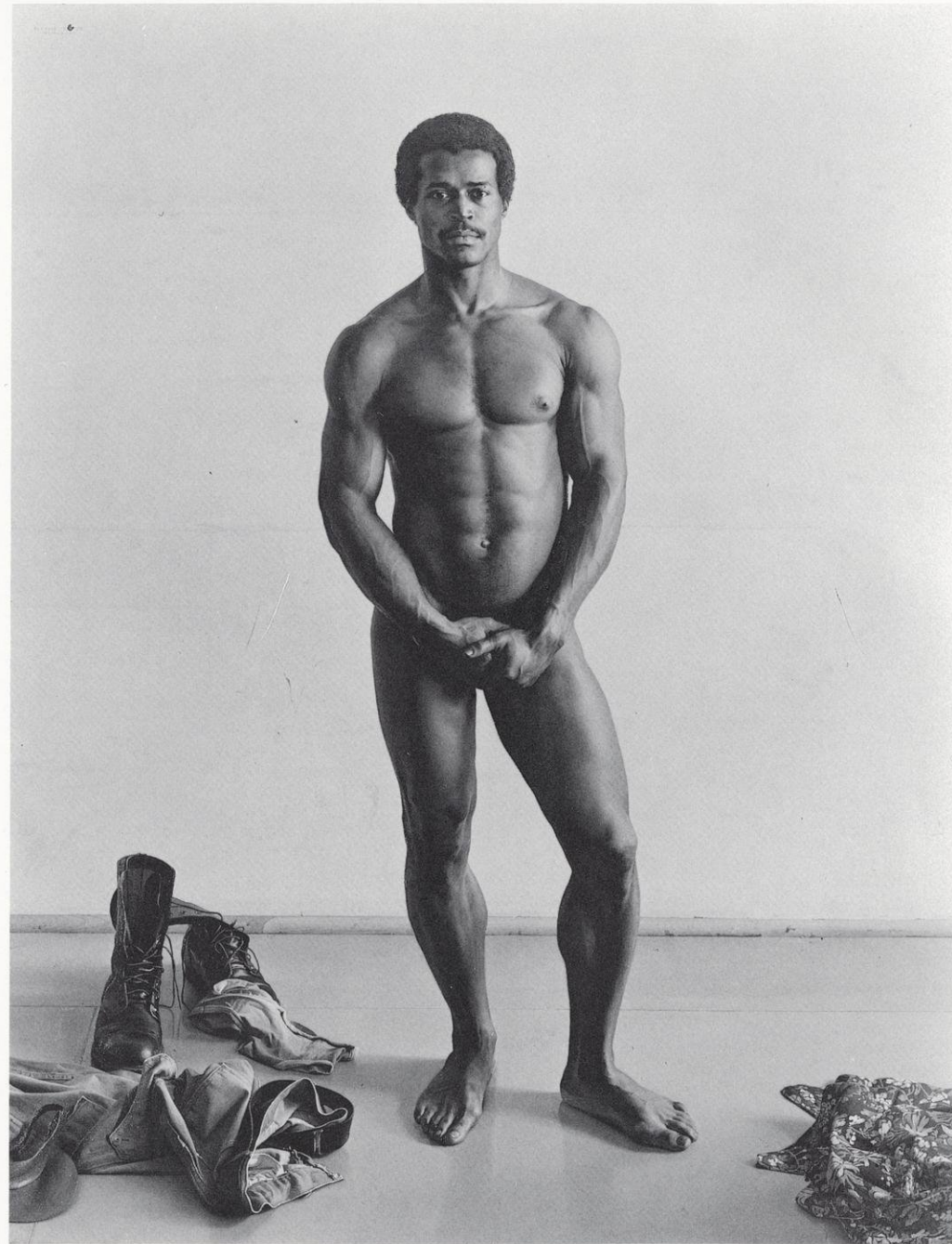


Fig. 31 Claudio Bravo, *Black Nude*, 1978, New York, private collection.



Fig. 32 Claudio Bravo, *Venus*, 1979, San Antonio, Texas, private collection (photograph courtesy Marlborough Gallery).



Fig. 33 Claudio Bravo, *Portrait of Antonio Cores*, 1973, Tampere, Finland, Sara Hilden Art Museum.

Notes

1. Charles S. Moffett, "On Claudio Bravo's Realism 1971–1973," *Art International* 19, VII (September, 1975):7.
2. Edward Lucie-Smith, *Super Realism* (New York, 1979).
3. Irving Sandler, "Philip Pearlstein and the New Realism," in *Philip Pearlstein, a Retrospective* (exhibition catalogue; New York, 1983), 16.
4. William Dykes, "The New Spanish Realists," *Art International* 17, VII (September, 1973):29–33.
5. Edward J. Sullivan interview with Claudio Bravo, New York, April, 1985. All further quotations included in the text are from interviews with Claudio Bravo conducted by the author in New York, March–April 1985; in Tangier, June 1985 and November 1986; and in Madrid, November 1986.
6. From his early "Madrid period" to the present Bravo has signed his painting with capital letters and includes the date in Roman numerals.
7. For this painting, Bravo borrowed another element from El Greco's *View and Plan of Toledo* (c. 1610–14, Toledo, Museo del Greco). The angels at the upper right of the Bravo painting, who carry a banner with the inscription *Toledo*, are analogous to those angels who carry the Virgin Immaculate in Greco's version. For an illustration of this work see Jonathan Brown, et. al. *El Greco of Toledo* (exhibition catalogue; Boston, 1982), pl. 9.
8. For the latest theories on Spanish still life painting see William B. Jordan, *Spanish Still Life in the Golden Age 1600–1650* (exhibition catalogue; Fort Worth), 1985.
9. See Julián Gállego and José Gudiol, *Zurbarán, 1598–1664* (London, 1974), 49.
10. Jordan, *Spanish Still Life*, 22.
11. Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, *Pintura española de floreros y bodegones de 1600 a Goya* (exhibition catalogue; Madrid, 1983), 34.
12. See Moffett, "Claudio Bravo's Realism," 7, for Bravo's sources in Chinese ink painting.
13. On Gysbrechts and other painters of this subject see Martin Battersby, *Trompe l'Oeil, The Eye Deceived* (London, 1974).
14. For a discussion of American artists working in this tradition see Robert F. Chirico, "Language and Imagery in Late Nineteenth-Century Trompe L'Oeil," *Arts Magazine* 59, VII (March, 1985):110–114.
15. For movements related to the art of Tàpies as well as a discussion of his career see the forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation by Manuel Borja, *Antoni Tàpies*, Graduate Center, City University of New York.
16. Lawrence Alloway, *Roy Lichtenstein* (New York, 1983), 86.
17. Gérôme had visited this Egyptian site during his "great safari" to North Africa and the Middle East in 1868. See Gerald M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme, with a Catalogue Raisonné* (New York, 1986), 78, 80, 228 (no. 206).
18. Dykes, "The New Spanish Realists," 33.
19. The largest compendium of reproductions of works by López-García (including his cityscapes) can be found in the exhibition catalogue *Antonio López* (Brussels, 1985).
20. Barbara Gallati, "Claudio Bravo," *Arts Magazine* 56, V (January, 1982): 7.
21. Margaret Walters, *The Male Nude, A New Perspective* (New York, 1978), 82.
22. Valerie J. Fletcher essay on Bravo in *Modern Portraits. The Self and Others* (exhibition catalogue; New York, 1976), 20.

THE ARTIST SPEAKS: an interview with Claudio Bravo

Sullivan: Tell me something about your childhood as it relates to your art.

Bravo: I was born in Chile in 1936. We were a family of seven and I always thought that I had a great responsibility, being the oldest boy. But I wanted to have nothing to do with this responsibility—I always knew that I wanted to paint, even as a child. My father was a rich man who loved cars, tractors and farm animals. He had three *fincas* [ranches]. He owned one and rented two. He organized a cattle fair in the province next to Santiago and I had to work there every weekend for years, selling and tending the cattle. I remember that one day before he died, he took me up into the mountains and showed me the *fincas* and said "Soon, all this will be yours." I felt like Christ on the mountain being tempted. "How horrible," I thought. "What will I ever do with all these animals?" I just wanted to paint. My father had very little interest in art. He always said to me "Finish your studies and then you can dedicate yourself to painting." He thought, of course, that by that time I'd forget art altogether. One day he even burned all my painting materials. I'd become obsessed by painting and did nothing else and I hadn't done some task that he asked me to do, so he burned all my paints and brushes. By the time I became successful as a portraitist, my father had died.

Sullivan: Did your mother support your interest in art?

Bravo: Yes, my mother was a very sensitive woman who had painted in her youth. She had always taken me (and my brothers and sisters) to the few art museums that existed in Chile in those days. She lived to see me make a success of myself and it made her very happy.

Sullivan: Did you study drawing in school as a child?

Bravo: I began to draw long before I took any formal classes. The little bed that I slept in until I was about ten years old is still in our house in Chile. It had been painted bright red and then there was a coat of beige paint over that. I would take a nail and trace scenes of cowboys and Indians, all of which were very realistic. In school I was obsessed by drawing. The prefect

of my elementary school, a difficult and very aggressive person, discovered my notebooks filled with drawings and he liked them. I liked him and was always at his side. He became my confessor (he was a Jesuit). One day he said to me: "Even though your father doesn't want you to paint, I'm going to take you to the studio of Miguel Venegas so that you can see it." Venegas was the only art teacher in Santiago and when I began to go to his school, it was like I had discovered the world for the first time. Everything seemed fabulous and beautiful to me.

Sullivan: Did your father finally approve of your studies with Venegas?

Bravo: No. During the first month he knew nothing of my classes. My priest friend gave me the money for the lessons and to buy paints and brushes. Later my father learned of this and reluctantly let me continue. But he often said "You'll starve. You'll be a flop, a bum."

Sullivan: What was your training with Venegas like?

Bravo: Venegas was a realist, conventional and very academic.

Sullivan: Did you have life drawing classes?

Bravo: Impossible. Venegas was a deeply conservative and religious man. He wouldn't allow us to paint or draw from the nude. He himself often painted nudes, however. I posed for several of them. It never bothered me to pose nude; it was very natural. I remember seeing a photo of Ronald Reagan one day posing nude in an art class when he was young. That made me admire him.

Sullivan: How long were you with Venegas?

Bravo: Only for a couple of years. I was actually thrown out of his studio. One day a friend, who is now a portrait painter in Rome and I had a mock duel with swords that hung on the wall. Venegas was furious and demanded that we leave. I was offended and wouldn't return. Then, after two years, my father died. Venegas sent me a letter of condolence which was, in effect, a letter requesting me to return to him.

I did, although I didn't take any more classes from him or anyone else. I learned a great deal from him, though. In his studio, I copied works of old masters like Vermeer. Fra Angelico and Baldovinetti. Venegas also taught Matta.

Sullivan: When you began working on your own, what subjects interested you?

Bravo: I was often asked to paint portraits. I once did a portrait of a male ballet dancer who looked so much like a woman that I painted him as one. I actually did almost any subject I could think of. I was impressed by my teacher's saying that an artist should paint everything that exists in the world. A painter has to be a bit cosmic, capturing everything on canvas. Look at the painters of the Renaissance who painted everything. That idea is still with me, although I have been criticized for not focusing on a narrower range of subjects.

Sullivan: How old were you when you had your first exhibition?

Bravo: Seventeen. It was in the Salón Trece in Santiago and consisted of sanguine drawings and some oil paintings in the manner of Picasso's Blue Period. Picasso and Dalí were the Spanish painters favored by Chilean art students then.

Sullivan: How long did you continue in this mode?

Bravo: Well, I did two or three pictures of sad and depressed people, like Picasso's paintings around 1900. Then I began to do Surrealist pictures in the Dalí manner, but using different themes. I also did some abstract paintings in my teens.

Sullivan: How much abstract work did you do?

Bravo: Very little. I painted a few abstract paintings when I went to Spain but that's all. I don't know where any of them are now. These things were very fleeting influences because I soon developed a drawing style that was very Renaissance, like the drawings of Raphael and Leonardo.

Sullivan: Did you make a living as an artist in Chile?

Bravo: Well, I was quite successful. After graduation from secondary school I had another exhibition at the Salón Trece. It got good notices. The critics mainly commented on my ability to draw. After that I wasted a bit of time, working in the theatre, dancing with the Santiago Ballet and writing plays and poems. Finally, I decided to get away from Santiago and I went to Concepción where I met the Chilean poet Lucho Oyarzún who was also professor of the philosophy of art at two universities in Chile. He became something like a guru for me. I learned a great deal from him. It was also in Concepción that I had my first real success as a portraitist. I painted lots of them. I really lived a frivolous life at that time. I'd bought a plane and travelled all around Chile in it with my friends. Most of my work involved doing portraits. I painted two or three a week with a facility that I have long ago lost. I did them in pastel, oil and other media. But I began to get really bored. And so many people were telling me that I had to leave Chile, to broaden my horizons and see new things.

Sullivan: Is that when you went to Europe?

Bravo: Yes. I left South America and have returned only very few times since.

Sullivan: Did you mean to go to Spain when you left Chile?

Bravo: No. I was determined to go to Paris. I travelled on the *Amerigo Vespucci*. I was going to leave the ship at Barcelona and travel by train to Paris but the crossing was so awful (everyone was sea sick) that I decided I couldn't travel any more and I stayed in Barcelona. Soon I went to Madrid where I felt completely at home. I'd brought quite a bit of money with me from Chile. I'd sold my airplane and was by myself. I first rented a small apartment in a rather fashionable district of Madrid called the *barrio de Salamanca*. I now own an apartment there—it seems as if I often return to places where I have been in the past. Anyway, I felt that in my new flat on the calle Conde de Aranda, I could work and invite people to visit. I began to paint and met many young artists at the Café Gijón where I would spend a lot of time (when I wasn't working or going to the Prado). I met

many young painters there—some Chileans and many Spaniards. Everything happened very fast. At the end of that first year, I was doing the portraits of members of Madrid's high society. This was in 1961. I was twenty-four. Everyone treated me well. Spaniards are very affectionate with young people—especially if they're polite and good looking, which I was.

Sullivan: How did this contact with big society actually begin?

Bravo: It came about naturally. One friend introduced me to another and that's how it happened. I spent ten years doing portraits.

Sullivan: Did you ever regret spending so much time as a society portraitist?

Bravo: Yes, a bit . . . although I did some very good portraits. I painted others, however, more out of a social obligation. It was very difficult to say "no" to a request for a portrait. On the other hand, while doing these portraits I was able to carry out a great deal of investigation into the human form, so it helped me prepare for the future. I never painted a conventional portrait. The subjects would almost always be engaged in some activity. They'd be on a beach, in conversation—never in a conventional pose. I still think that I paint portraits in a sense . . . the characters in the figural paintings I do now are really portrait subjects dressed up.

Sullivan: Did you do any further formal studies in Spain?

Bravo: No. I never went back to any school or academy. I studied art in museums or galleries, reading about it and travelling—that was my education. I also learned a great deal by talking with other artists.

Sullivan: Do you have much contact with other artists?

Bravo: Of course. I'm enormously influenced by my talk with good and sensitive artists. Conversations I have with Antonio López-García are as important for me as were the teachings of the Jesuits when I was in school—even more so. I have had fascinating conver-

sations with Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud. There was a point in my life when good films impressed me more than good paintings. Now, however, there seem to be many fewer good films than before.

Sullivan: Returning to the subject of your career in Spain, you were in Madrid from 1961 until 1972. Were you there continuously or did you spend periods in other places?

Bravo: No, in the late 1960s I had spent some time in New York. I was beginning to find that doing nothing but portraiture was too confining.

Sullivan: Was it in New York that you began to do your series of wrapped packages?

Bravo: Yes. They became very popular in Madrid with the same people who had commissioned the portraits. I suppose that the idea for these pictures came partly through looking at Mark Rothko's paintings of large fields of color, and partly through certain works that Antoni Tàpies had done using string across a canvas surface. The initial stimulus, however, was a very simple mundane one. Three of my sisters had come to stay with me from Chile. One day one of them came home with a number of packages and placed them on a table. I was fascinated by their forms and I painted them. I went on painting wrapped packages in many different ways, investigating the abstract possibilities of the forms while still creating recognizable objects.

Sullivan: Where did you have your first success with these paintings?

Bravo: In New York. I had already had a small reputation there. Two New York collectors, Frank Purnell and Melvin Blake, had purchased some of my work in Madrid in the 1960s. I had an exhibition at the Staempfli Gallery on Madison Avenue of twenty of the package paintings plus one picture of myself, nude, emerging from a package.

Sullivan: Did you want to give the impression, with these packages, of something mysterious, of something wrapped up in the paper?

Bravo: Oh yes. Certainly, there is a mystery there but it's an obvious mystery. I wanted to paint the wrapping itself. I wanted to give a sense of *trompe l'oeil*, to give a tactile sense. I'm a realist. Even when I painted abstract pictures, there was always a geological quality in them—a suggestion of volcanoes, landscapes, etc. I can't be anything but a realist. My entire concept of art is realistic. Anyway, my exhibition of the packages was a great success. It got good reviews, especially from John Canaday, in *The New York Times*. The same critic, however, called my work in another show "cheap and vulgar."

Sullivan: Are you very effected by the opinions of the critics?

Bravo: Critics have never effected me much. I've always thought of the fear that artists have of critics is something of a legend. It's like the fears we all have of spiders or rats. It doesn't mean anything because we know that if we're attacked by a spider we only have to step on it. I can contradict a bad review and I often ignore the good ones. They can be too flattering. The bad ones are more interesting. The only review I've ever saved was a scathing one by a Mexican critic. His insults were so incredible they were actually artistic. I'm much more effected by other painters when they talk about my work.

Sullivan: Your paintings of packages are among the best known. They have been reproduced in anthologies of Photo Realism and other works of contemporary art. How do you see your art in relation to that of the Photo Realists?

Bravo: I think that it bears little relationship to it. I don't consider myself a Photo Realist. They use photographs in their work and I do not. Whenever I see a photograph that appears to be a good photograph, I realize that it has virtually nothing to do with the way things look in reality. The eye sees so many more things than are captured by the camera. Photographs kill half tones. They also kill shadows and drastically change the color of light. I don't consider myself a machine and I don't work like the Photo Realists.

Sullivan: But you have been included in books and exhibitions on Photo Realism.

Bravo: Yes, I know, but Americans have done that and they always want to give a name or a title to everything, a name that they can relate to. In my work I use a model, whether it's a person or a set of objects—never photos. I work with the good and bad points of the model.

Sullivan: Have you ever worked without the model and, if not, are you interested in doing so?

Bravo: I change my paintings without the model present but I always prefer to paint with the model before me. Francisco Pacheco, the teacher of Diego Velázquez, lauded his use of the model and his faithfulness to reality. I have always thought about this and I also want to follow the suggestion of Pacheco—the better the painter, the stronger his use of the model.

Sullivan: You obviously have learned a great deal from the classic Spanish painters.

Bravo: Yes, indeed. I lived in Spain for ten years. I spent a great deal of time in the Prado and have enormous admiration for Spanish Baroque artists. Velázquez is perhaps my greatest love. His art is like life as we know and see it. I am also interested in Zurbarán. There is a sculptural, architectural quality in his work that attracts me. There's a dry, sober rigor to his art. I also admire Goya a great deal but I feel little of an emotional connection with him. He's a very modern painter in so many ways while I am rooted in the Renaissance and Baroque. I guess I could say that my passions are Velázquez and Vermeer, Michelangelo, Leonardo and Greco-Roman sculpture.

Sullivan: Your aesthetic orientation is entirely European. Why did you leave Europe and go to North Africa?

Bravo: In Madrid I could never be alone. While I was painting portraits I had an "open house" every day with my friends and models always coming to see

me. I needed solitude in order to develop myself and my art. My life of solitude gives me a great deal of energy. I could find that in Tangier. I knew no one and it was a new country for me.

Sullivan: In Tangier, however, you are somewhat isolated from the mainstream of contemporary art.

Bravo: Evidently, but I prefer this. I prefer to be away from crowds—and other artists. I prefer to develop my own vision in my own way.

Sullivan: Do you think that your having lived in Tangier for so long [since 1972] has effected your style or subject matter?

Bravo: I have the impression that my best paintings were done in Tangier—with a few really good ones in New York. The work I did in Spain is not of the same quality. That could, of course, be because I was younger—not as mature. Regarding the subjects of my work—they could have been done almost anywhere—Madrid, New York, Paris, Manila. Some of my paintings, however, do reflect more of a direct contact with the Islamic country where I live. I've used some local motifs—people dressed in native garb. I've painted the Moroccan countryside but I've never done a strictly Islamic theme. Even when I've done subjects that have to do with religion, I've painted Muslims as they would, perhaps, have been seen by a Zurbarán, or by a Caravaggio.

Sullivan: Tangier is a port city and very close to Europe. Why didn't you choose a more picturesque part of Morocco in which to live?

Bravo: I chose it principally because of the climate and the light. Tangier has a marvelous climate throughout the year. Places like Fez or Marrakesh are too hot in summer and too cold in winter. Tangier has an absolute Mediterranean light. I've always tried to capture a Mediterranean light in my work. Tangier has it—New York, for instance, doesn't. I see that the pictures I paint in New York (those done when I visited that city in the 1960s and 70s or those done in my apartment which I bought there several years ago) have an over-all grey tonality. In the Philippines,

where I lived for some six months in 1968, my paintings also appeared grey. That was because the light was so strong there. It killed color. I feel more at home with Mediterranean color. In my New York pictures I have to exaggerate colors to make up for the ash-like atmosphere there. Yet I paint in all parts of Morocco. The landscape in Morocco is something of a biblical landscape. My South American religious training has made me very sensitive to all things biblical—like our great poet Gabriela Mistral who often described biblical subjects in her poems.

Sullivan: What is your approach to religion in art?

Bravo: I am not religious at all, although religion is evidently a part of me as I was raised in a very Catholic country and was educated by the Jesuits. They taught me Greek, Latin, the lives of the saints, the Bible. Mysticism is something innately within me and for which I have a great affinity . . . also for the lives of the saints. Nonetheless, when I paint a figure composition in which I include figures from religious life they're there more because of my sense of fascination with the mystical and the surreal. In the *Temptation of St. Anthony*, for instance, I tried to paint a surrealist picture rather than a religious one. I also choose my saints for the attributes that they traditionally carry. In my painting of the *Madonna* which is now in the art museum in Aachen, Germany, there's Saint Lucy with her eyes attached to two leaves on a branch and Saint Agatha with her breasts on a plate. I also like to paint Saint Francis who, to me, is a most poetic figure.

Sullivan: Aren't the Oriental/Arabic aspects of mysticism and mystery more alive for you living in a place like Tangier?

Bravo: Religion is an everyday thing in Morocco. I hear people praying from the mosques every several hours. I see them praying constantly. All the servants in my house are very religious. They have beautiful poses for prayer and I have painted some of them. I am fascinated to see these people who are in such close contact with the world beyond. That's the type of feeling that I try to create in my paintings.

Sullivan: Concerning your models, who poses for you in Tangier?

Bravo: The people who work in my house, their friends, my telephone repair man. But I can only get male models in Morocco. Islamic women will not pose for me. That is one of the reasons why I recently bought apartments in Madrid and New York—to expand the range of types that I paint.

Sullivan: Isn't it true that you usually paint males?

Bravo: Yes, of course. I prefer painting males but I also get great pleasure from painting females.

Sullivan: What part does eroticism—especially homoeroticism—play in your work?

Bravo: I have been a very sexually-oriented person all my life and this evidently emerges in my work. It's very important. Nonetheless, I have never painted two people engaged in sexual activity. I'd rather paint erotic situations such as in my large picture of a *Bacchanal*, rather than painting sex itself. Perhaps that comes from my Catholic upbringing. The erotic elements in my still lifes are often commented on by others but they are completely unconscious. Eroticism is one of the great constructive forces of life. It makes me want to live. I have great respect for this life force. My eroticism is subtle, not obvious. I'd prefer to leave sexuality for the pornographers. Although there are some who have done good erotic paintings, good erotic cinema, I still find all that somewhat cheap. If someone paints a nude and there's no erotic effect on the viewer, then it's a bad nude. My nudes are always erotic and try to provoke erotic reactions. It's only logical. The Greeks wanted to do this with their sculptures. The Romans did it through their erotic art. If erotic pictures become pornographic, the artistic element is lost. Real art is much more sublime than this. The eroticism in my work is mainly an unconscious element. It's present in my depictions of men, women, apples. There's nothing I can do to change the fact that eroticism is a large factor in my inner life.

Sullivan: Many people have commented on the eroticism of your soccer players.

Bravo: Soccer itself is a very erotic sport.

Sullivan: Your pictures of hanging clothing and motorcycle helmets are also very sexual.

Bravo: There's more of a fetishism in those pictures, although I'm not at all a fetishist. Fetishists themselves see fetishism in those pictures. Actually, when I painted those works, I simply wanted to convey the essence of a person who had been there, who had worn those clothes or those helmets.

Sullivan: There seem to me to be some undeniably erotic elements in your still life paintings.

Bravo: In some of them there are, of course. In my still lifes with bread, I find eroticism. Breads are phallic forms. Mortars and pestles are also symbols. But, such things are everywhere. We mustn't look at these simply with that intention. It depends on the individual's eye and sensibility.

Sullivan: You have consistently given a great deal of emphasis to painting still lifes. Are there often other symbolic elements in them?

Bravo: Yes. My still lifes are often very close to Spanish seventeenth-century *bodegones*. In many of my still lifes, especially in the large *Vanitas* and others, every element is a symbol of something in life. Symbolism is one of the painter's languages. It helps us to see the hidden.

Sullivan: Many of your still life compositions seem ultimately derived from the Spanish Baroque in your choice of objects, placement and lighting.

Bravo: The objects I paint often transcend and magnify reality a bit. I use light somewhat in the way that Zurbarán did. He was one of the few painters that gave true transcendent meanings to objects. This treatment of light makes things appear more as they are . . . their essence is greater. An apple treated like that makes it seem twice an apple. When I paint something I want to define its true essence. I want to paint each loaf of bread as if it were the essence and the symbol of all breads. That's not an easy thing to do, I also want to have everything in perfect balance. I used to measure the spaces in my pictures. Now I don't and everything comes out perfect. I don't want my compositions to come out looking as if they've been composed. I strive for a "decomposed" feeling, a natural look.

Sullivan: If you had to choose a "school" or movement of European art to which your work was most closely linked, which would it be?

Bravo: Rather than any movement, I would link my art to a century—the seventeenth. I have some preference for the Renaissance, but the Baroque epoch was the great age of oil painting—and that is my most important contribution. The seventeenth-century painters copied nature in a conceptual way. The only touch of modernity in my work is that I do scenes of everyday life. Technically, however, I exist more in the past. I refuse to use acrylics. I use only oils. I refuse to do collage. Painting itself has such nobility that it needs nothing extraneous.

Sullivan: Nonetheless, you can't say that your art looks backward. There is much that is very contemporary about it.

Bravo: One can't escape the century in which one lives. Even if an artist tries to do something that looks like another time it usually isn't successful. Look at the Pre-Raphaelites in nineteenth-century England. Their work is purely in its time—nineteenth-century people dressed up to look like Renaissance or classical models. I never tried to have my work look like a different period. Although in my youth I admired Picasso and Dalí, I don't want my work to look anything like theirs.

Sullivan: What role does drawing play in your work?

Bravo: Drawing and color are the bases of my work. However, I seem to be doing fewer drawings these days—either preliminary drawings or studies for paintings. I draw directly onto the canvas and use that as the basis for my colors. I find that drawing is less and less important for me. Nonetheless, I've always been impressed by extremely quick, sketchy drawings and am planning to do a large series of them soon. I am an enormous admirer, for example, of the drawings of Degas who, with four lines, was able to suggest an infinity of movement and feeling. With these few lines he was able to suggest a completely recognizable figure. Rembrandt, at the end of his life, did the same thing.

Sullivan: You have been working a great deal in pastel recently.

Bravo: Yes. I had a large exhibition of my pastels at the Marlborough Gallery in New York in 1985. I realized then the magic quality of the medium. Pastels seem to embody a special light effect, directly reflecting the sun of mid-day while oil evokes the qualities of afternoon sun with its more sober tones. I feel that there are relatively few great works of art in pastel. Someday I'd like to do a large-scale human figure in pastel of the importance of Quentin de la Tour's portrait of Madame de Pompadour, the most important work ever done, I think, in that medium. I also have enormous regard for the pastels of Degas and Manet.

Sullivan: Your work—your figure studies, still lifes and landscapes—have been criticized, from time to time, as being “decorative.” Does this disturb you?

Bravo: No, it doesn't disturb me at all. Some of my work is decorative at times and I see nothing wrong with that. There is a tendency in the work of some contemporary artists to dehumanize the human figure—to paint it in an exaggerated, sometimes painful way. They seem to want to cut the human figure up and insult it. I have always been an aesthetic painter. If they call me “precious” or “super aesthetic” I consider it a compliment. I always thought of myself as an angelic rather than a diabolical artist. I would like to elevate the human spirit rather than degrade it. This is seen in the contemporary world as being “too aesthetic”—too Apollonian and not Dionysian enough. I've always wanted to be an Apollonian rather than a Dionysiac.

Sullivan: Your work doesn't seem to have undergone any great stylistic changes over the years.

Bravo: In a way, that's true, but there has certainly been an evolution. My work has evolved from an almost microscopic examination of objects to a somewhat more objective depiction of them lately.

Sullivan: Are there any definite changes or alterations that you'd like to make in your work in the future? Are there any new subjects that you'd like to treat in your painting that you haven't treated before?

Bravo: I'll always be a realist. I'm always studying color more and more closely. With a refined sensibility of color, I will be able to make the things I paint appear even more real. I'd like to make them almost jump off the canvas. The same thing is true of light. Even very bright paintings appear dark if they have few colors. And very dark paintings with lots of color appear bright. This is something that I want to study and experiment with more. In so far as composition is concerned, I want to experiment with more complex pictures.

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

1. *Figure from the Ballet 'Stars and Stripes'*, 1953
ink and pencil on paper
59.2×92.5 cm.
Lent by The FORBES Magazine Collection
Photo: Otto E. Nelson

2. *Head of Bach*, 1953
ink and pencil on paper
18.4×26.0 cm.
Lent by The FORBES Magazine Collection
Photo: Otto E. Nelson

3. *Head of Beethoven*, 1953
ink and pencil on paper
18.4×26.0 cm.
Lent by The FORBES Magazine Collection
Photo: Otto E. Nelson

4. *Head of Hayden*, 1953
ink and pencil on paper
18.4×26.0 cm.
Lent by The FORBES Magazine Collection
Photo: Otto E. Nelson

5. *Cat with Anemones*, 1963
oil on canvas
88.3×129.6 cm.
Private collection

6. *Portrait of Fernando Zóbel*, 1963
pencil and sanguine on paper
44×58.5 cm.
Lent by Fundación Juan March, Madrid

7. *Doña Inés Bemberg de Vicuña and Her Two Daughters*, 1964
white chalk, charcoal and sanguine on paper
106.5×106.5 cm.
Lent by María Inés Carmen Bemberg García

8. *Still Life with Flowers*, 1964
oil on panel
22.0×28.9 cm.
Private collection, New York
Photo: Ken Showell

9. *Head of a Man*, 1965
oil on canvas
38.3×28.3 cm.
Private collection, New York
Photo: Ken Showell

10. *Still Life with Stones (Naturaleza Muerta)*, 1965
oil on panel
69.8×49.6 cm.
Lent by The FORBES Magazine Collection
Photo: Otto E. Nelson

11. *White Package*, 1967
chalk, conté crayon and ink on paper
75.0×110.2 cm.
Lent by The Museum of Modern Art, New York,
Inter-American Fund purchase

12. *Seated Man*, 1969
oil on canvas
122.0×91.5 cm.
Private collection, New York
Photo: Ken Showell

13. *Self Portrait*, 1970
oil on canvas
200.0×150.0 cm.
Private collection, New York
Photo: Ken Showell

14. *Red Paper*, 1970
oil on canvas
126.4×105.5 cm.
Lent by Edward D. and Carolyn Sternat

15. *White and Silver*, 1971
oil on canvas
111.7×144.8 cm.
Private collection

16. *The Italian Chair*, 1971
oil on canvas
127.0×102.0 cm.
Lent by Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam
Photo: Dick Wolters
Color plate I

17. *Light Bulbs*, 1971
oil on canvas
59.2×92.5 cm.
Lent by Carolina Art Association/Gibbes Art Gallery

18. *New Hebrides Tusks*, 1971
pencil on paper
48.2×63.5 cm.
Lent by Doane College Department of Art
Photo courtesy of Staempfli Gallery, New York

19. *Still Life with Bread Molds*, 1972
black, red and white chalk on grey paper
48.3×60.0 cm.
Lent by The Art Museum, Princeton University. Given in
memory of George Kelleher, Class of 1972, by his friends.

20. *The Red Turban*, 1972
oil on canvas
82.0×65.5 cm.
Private collection, New York
Photo: Ken Showell

21. *Pinball Machine*, 1973
oil on canvas
169.6×119.4 cm.
Private collection, Madrid

22. *The Skull*, 1973
conté crayon on paper
89.9×70.9 cm.
Lent by The Museum of Modern Art, New York,
Gift of Gloria Kirby, Madrid

23. *Seated Model*, 1974
pencil on paper
57.2×37.2 cm.
Lent by Suzanne and Edward Elson
Photo courtesy of Staempfli Gallery, New York

24. *Legs and Hands*, 1975
charcoal and pencil on paper
63.0×48.0 cm.
Lent by Claude Bernard Gallery, New York
Photo: Eric Pollitzer

25. *Red Package*, 1975
oil on canvas
99.1×80.7 cm.
Lent by The FORBES Magazine Collection
Photo: Otto E. Nelson
Color plate 2

26. *Guardian*, 1975
oil on canvas
100.0×80.0 cm.
Lent by Claude Bernard Gallery, New York

27. *Man Reading a Letter*, 1975
pencil on paper
75.0×57.2 cm.
Lent by Jeffrey M. Resnick

28. *Dead Bird*, 1975
colored pencil on paper
61.0×40.7 cm.
Private collection, New York
Photo: Ken Showell

29. *Sheep Heads*, 1976
oil on canvas
50.5×65.0 cm.
Lent by Claude Bernard Gallery, New York

30. *The Guardian's Friend (L'Ami du gardien)*, 1976
oil on canvas
129.5×95.3
Lent by The FORBES Magazine Collection
Photo: Otto E. Nelson

31. *Messaoud and His Son (Messaoud et son fils)*, 1976
oil on canvas
129.5×96.6 cm.
Lent by The FORBES Magazine Collection
Photo: Otto E. Nelson
Color plate 3

32. *Moroccan Landscape (Sidi Moktar)*, 1976
oil on canvas
151.1×200.1 cm.
Lent by The FORBES Magazine Collection
Photo: Otto E. Nelson

33. *Landscape of Tangier*, 1977
oil on canvas
38.2×45.7 cm.
Lent by the artist
Photo: Ken Showell

34. *Two Friends, Marbella*, 1978
oil on canvas
149.8×198.7 cm.
Lent by The FORBES Magazine Collection, New York
Photo: Otto E. Nelson
Color plate 4

35. *Study for 'Black Nude'*, 1978
graphite on paper
22.9×30.5 cm.
Private collection, New York
Photo: Ken Showell

36. *Rafael*, 1980
oil on canvas
95.0×145.0 cm.
Private collection, New York
Photo: Ken Showell

37. *Eggs and Onions*, 1980
oil on canvas
65.3×55.5 cm.
Private collection
Color plate 5

38. *Still Life*, 1980
pencil on paper
36.2×52.4 cm.
Lent by Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, The University of
Texas at Austin, Barbara Duncan Fund, 1980

39. *Still Life with Persian Carpet*, 1981
pastel on paper
75.2×109.9 cm.
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Levai
Color plate 6

40. *Landscape*, 1981
pencil on paper
29.4×38.2 cm.
Lent by Marcia G. Levine
Photo: Robert E. Mates

41. *Landscape*, 1982
pencil on paper
30.0×38.5 cm.
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Roger Bayer

42. *Crucifixion*, 1982
oil on canvas
240.7×170.2 cm.
Lent by the artist

43. *Portrait of a Man*, 1982
colored pencil on paper
38.2×29.4 cm.
Lent by Oscar Maren
Photo: Robert E. Mates

44. *Nourreddine (Portrait of a Young Man)*, 1983
oil on canvas
146.0×114.0 cm.
Lent by The FORBES Magazine Collection
Photo: Otto E. Nelson

45. *The Leather Jacket*, 1983

oil on canvas
100.0×75.2 cm.
Private collection
Color plate 7

46. *Still Life With Paint Tube*, 1983

oil on canvas
52.4×65.1 cm.
Lent by Dr. Russell Albright and Mr. Michael Myers
Color plate 8

47. *Two Friends*, 1983

pastel on paper
75.0×110.2 cm.
Private collection
Photo: Robert E. Mates

48. *Before the Game*, 1983

oil on canvas
199.4×239.4 cm.
Lent by Frederick R. Weisman Collection
Color plate 9

49. *Study for a Footballer*, 1983

charcoal and white crayon on paper
109.3×75.3 cm.
Private collection, New York
Photo: Ken Showell

50. *The Guardian's Son*, 1984

pencil on paper
55.9×47.0 cm.
Lent by Mrs. Edwin A. Bergman
Photo: Robert E. Mates

51. *Study No. 2 for Portrait of Mohammed*, 1984

pencil on paper
38.3×28.5 cm.
Lent by Mr. Norman Dubrow, courtesy of
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Photo: Robert E. Mates

52. *Portrait of Mohammed*, 1984

oil on canvas
202.9×150.5 cm.
Lent by Marlborough Gallery

53. *Self Portrait*, 1984

oil on canvas
129.9×109.9 cm.
Lent by Marlborough Gallery
Color plate 10

54. *Temptation of St. Anthony*, 1984

oil on canvas
238.7×168.9 cm.
Lent by the artist
Color plate 11

55. *Garlic and Cabbage*, 1984

oil on canvas
52.1×65.2 cm.
Lent by The FORBES Magazine Collection, New York
Photo: Otto E. Nelson

56. *The Italian Collector of Roman Heads*, 1984

pastel on paper
75.0×108.7 cm.
Private collection, New York, courtesy of Marlborough
Gallery
Color plate 12

57. *Head of a Young Black Girl*, 1985

pencil on paper
123.9×35.0 cm.
Lent by the artist

58. *Bust of a Young Black Boy Holding a Flower*, 1985

pencil on paper
123.9×35.0 cm.
Lent by the artist

59. *Head of a Young Man*, 1985

black and red chalk on cream-colored paper
105.5×83.8 cm.
Lent by the artist

60. *Orchids*, 1985

pastel on paper
79.4×87.6 cm.
Lent by Philips Industries, Inc.
Color plate 13

61. *Ivories and Cactus*, 1985

pastel on paper
72.3×160.7 cm.
Lent by Mira Goldberg

62. *Interior with Colored Paper*, 1986

oil on canvas
119.4×99.7 cm.
Lent by Marlborough Gallery

63. *Dead Chicken*, 1986

oil on canvas
34.7×46.1 cm.
Lent by Marlborough Gallery
Color plate 14

64. *Landscape of Marshan*, 1986

oil on canvas
100.4×130.9 cm.
Lent by Marlborough Gallery
Color plate 15

65. *View of New York*, 1987

oil on canvas
141.7×121.9 cm.
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. John Berggruen
Photo: M. Lee Fatherree
Color plate 16

ILLUSTRATIONS

Note: The following color plates and black and white illustrations are arranged in catalog order within their respective sections.



Color Plate I (16.)





Color Plate 3 (31.)

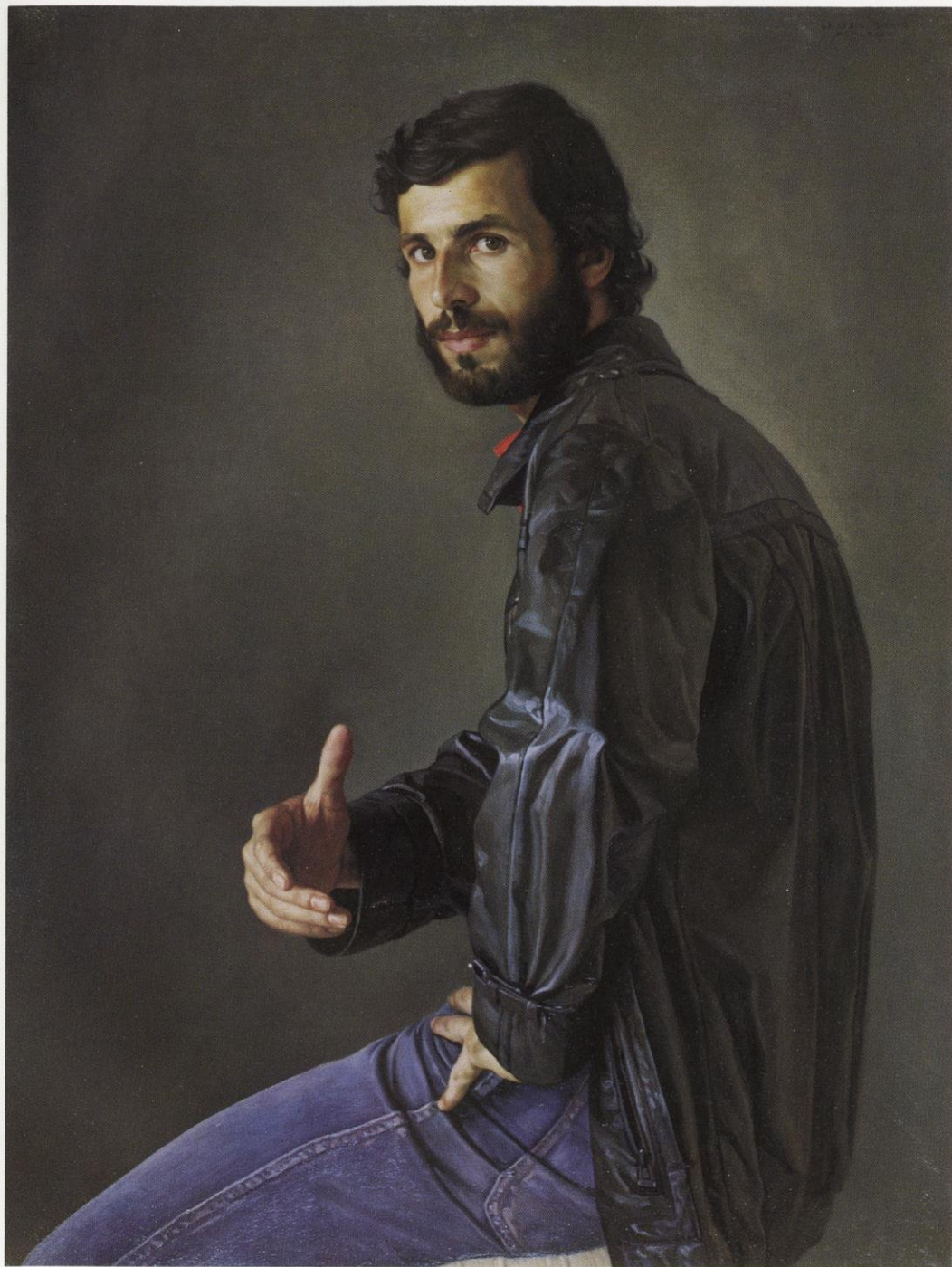




Color Plate 5 (37.)



Color Plate 6 (39.)



Color Plate 7 (45.)

CLAUDIO BRAVO
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Color Plate 8 (46.)



Color Plate 9 (48.)



Color Plate 10 (53.)



Color Plate 11 (54.)



Color Plate 12 (56.)



Color Plate 13 (60.)



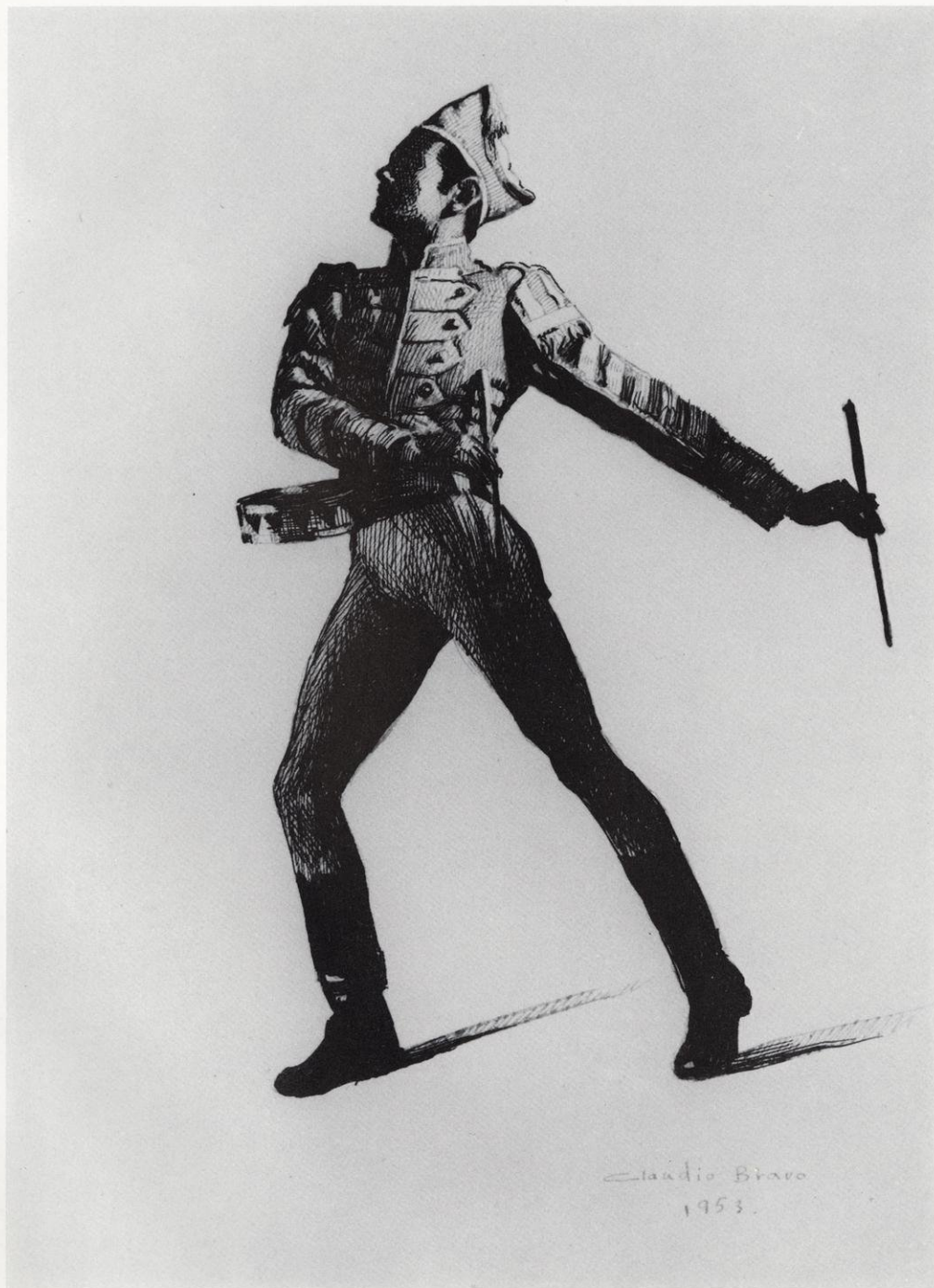
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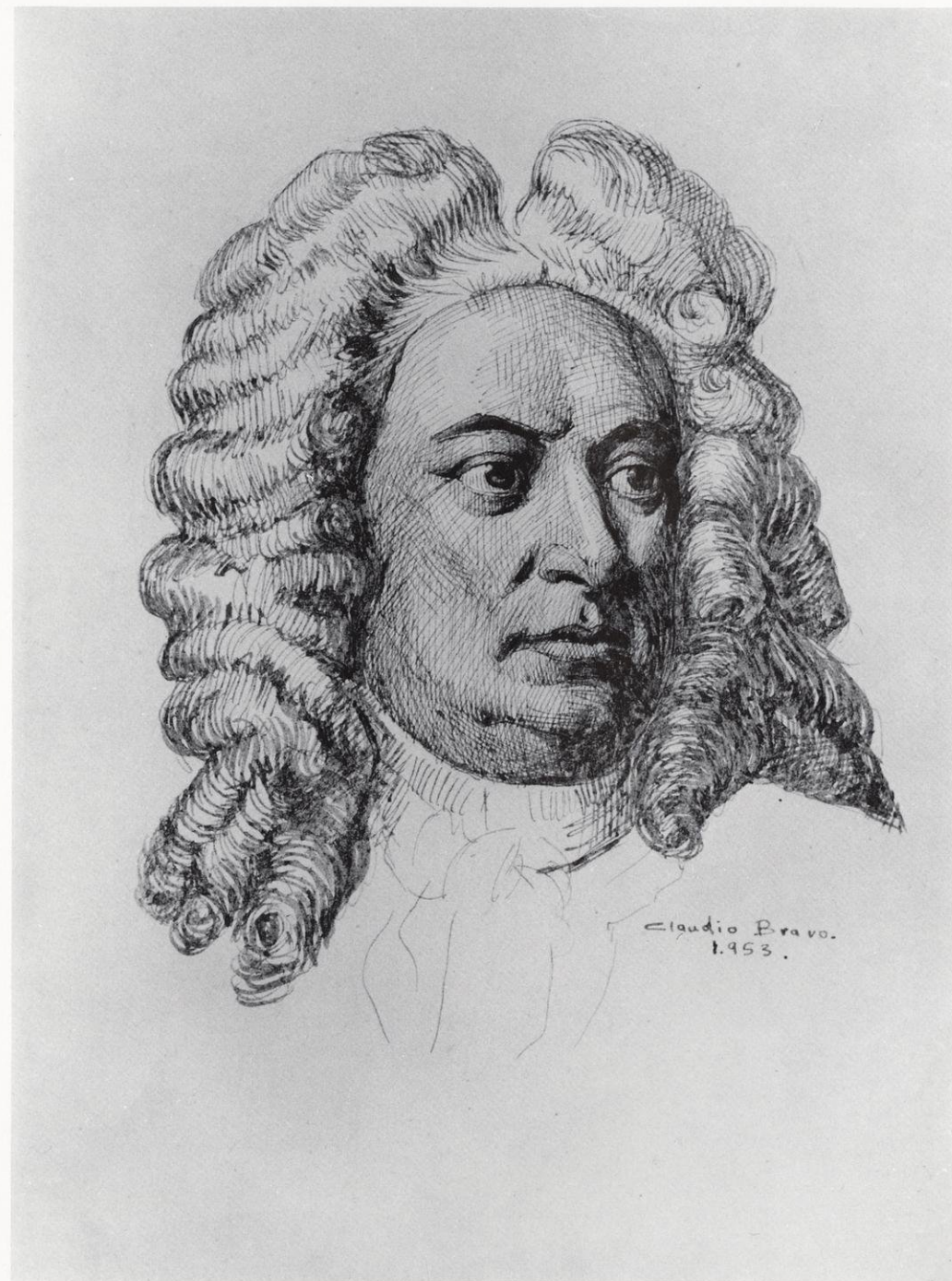


Color Plate 15 (64.)



Color Plate 16 (65.)



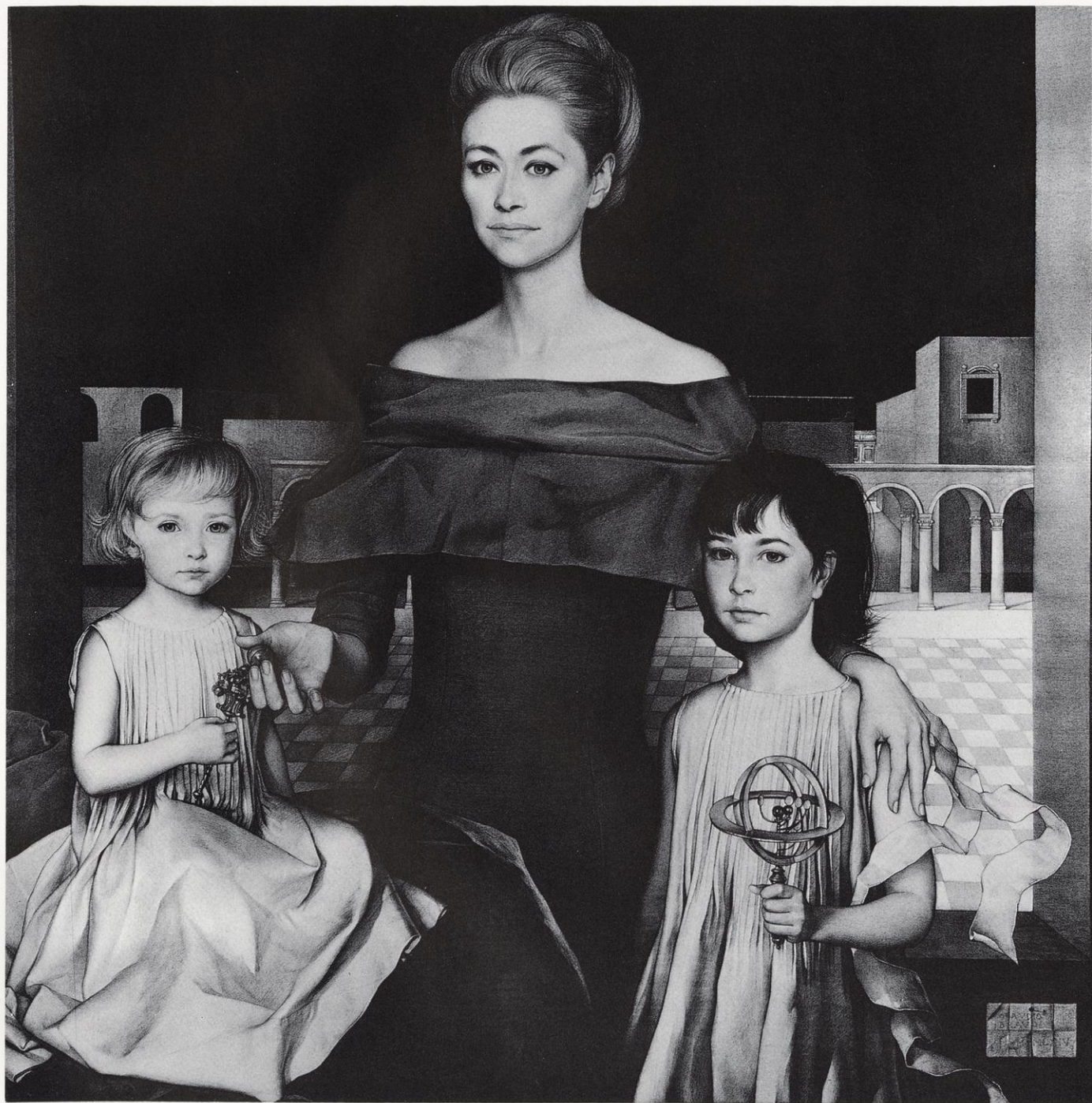




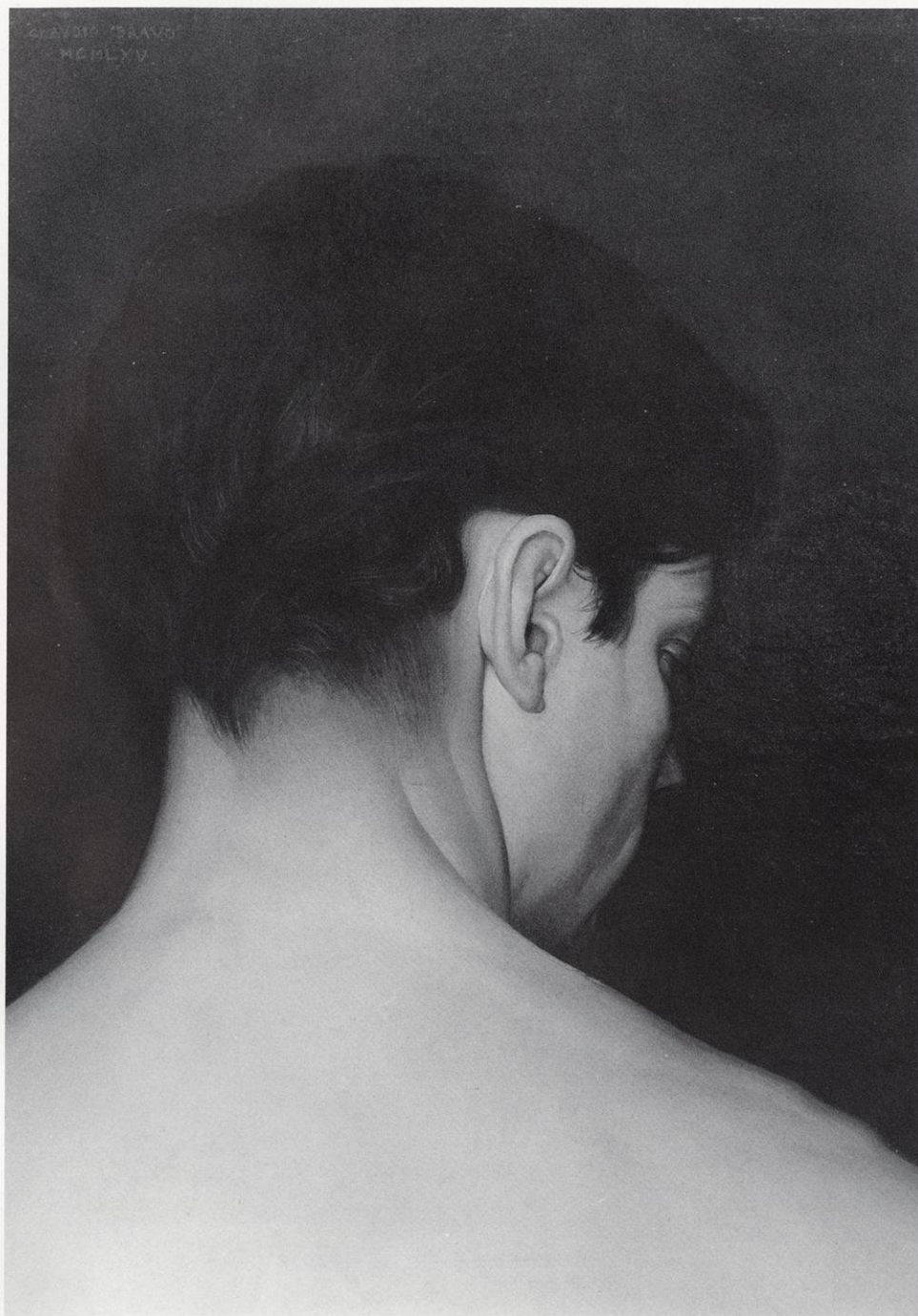


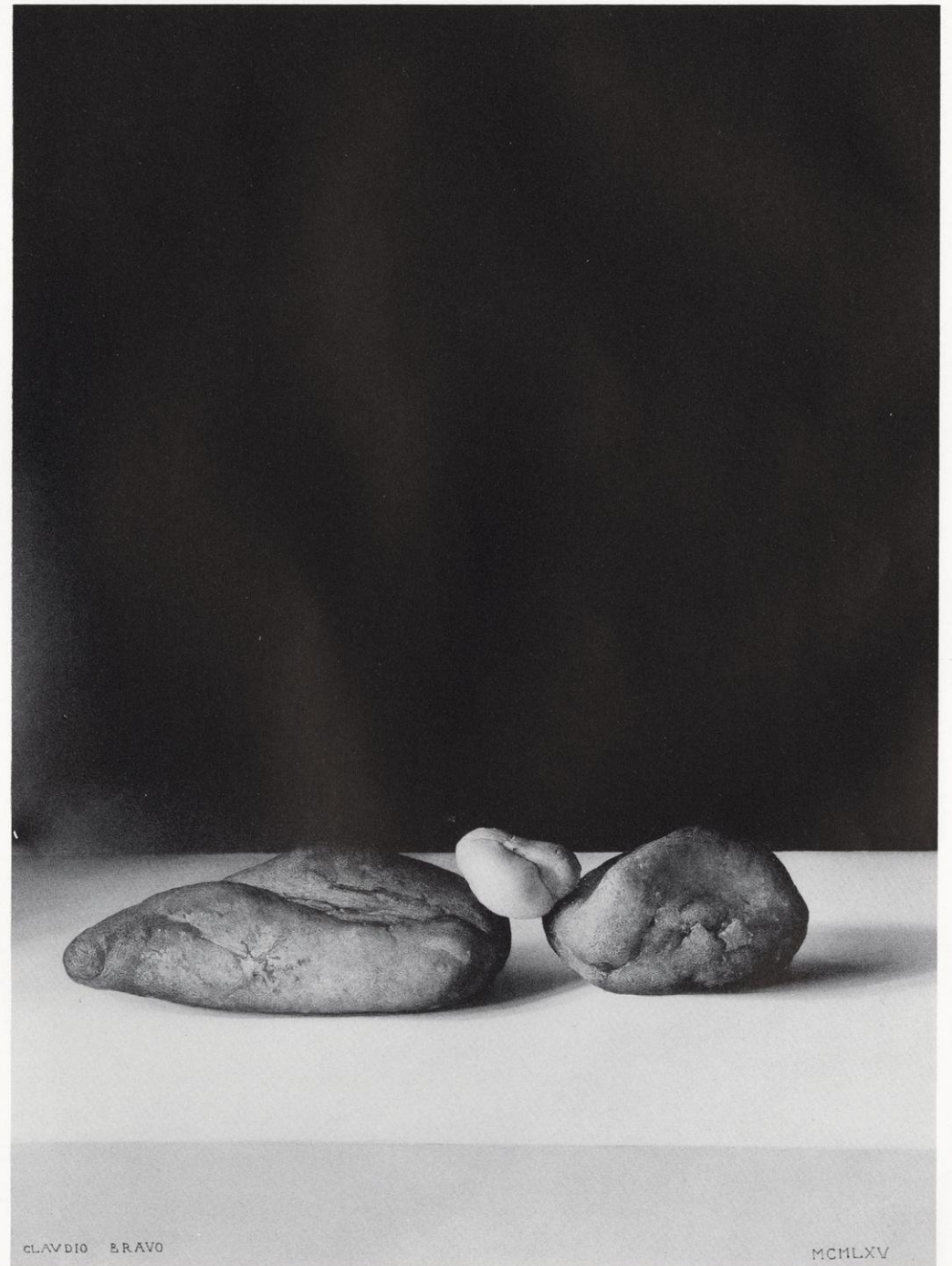






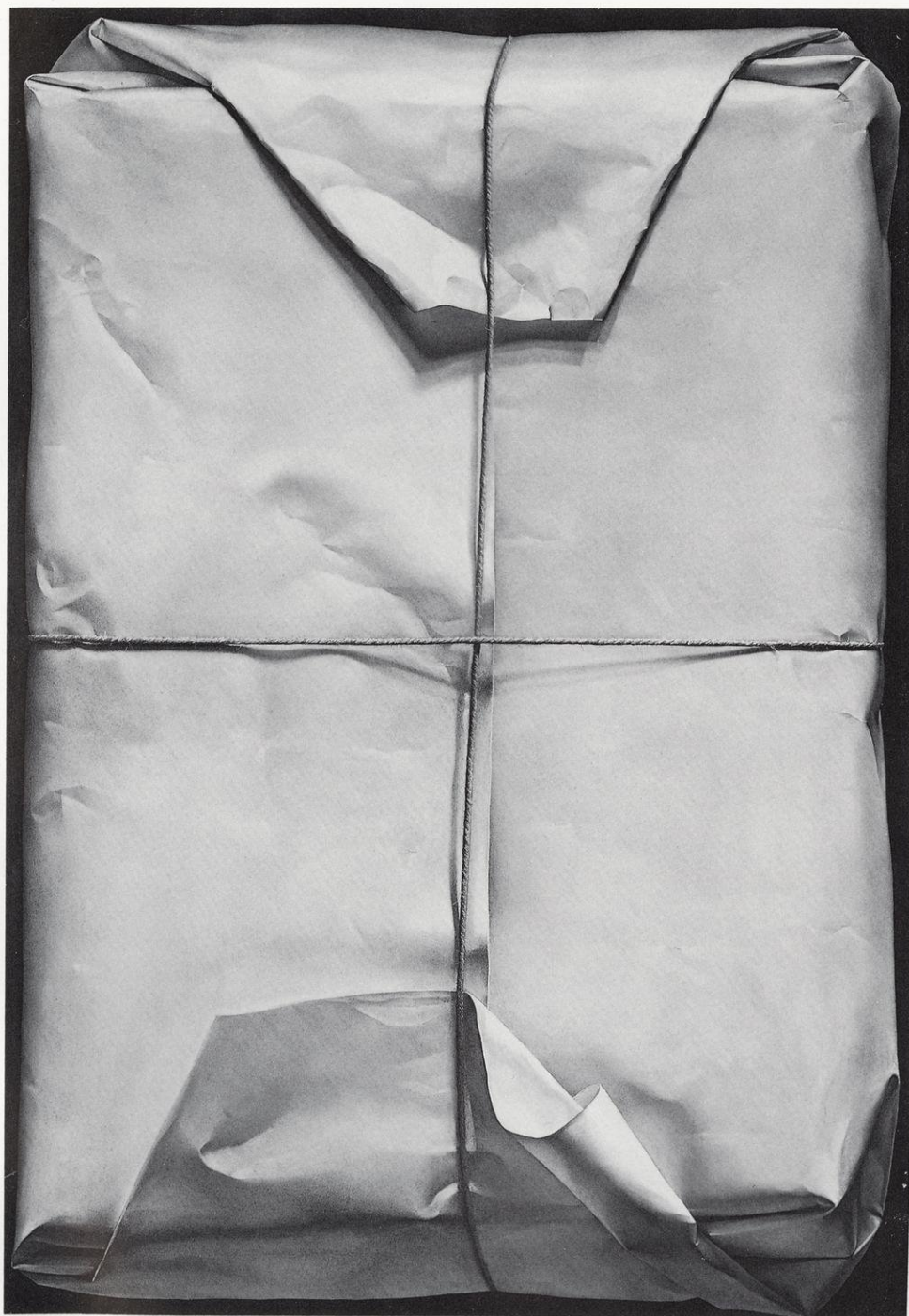


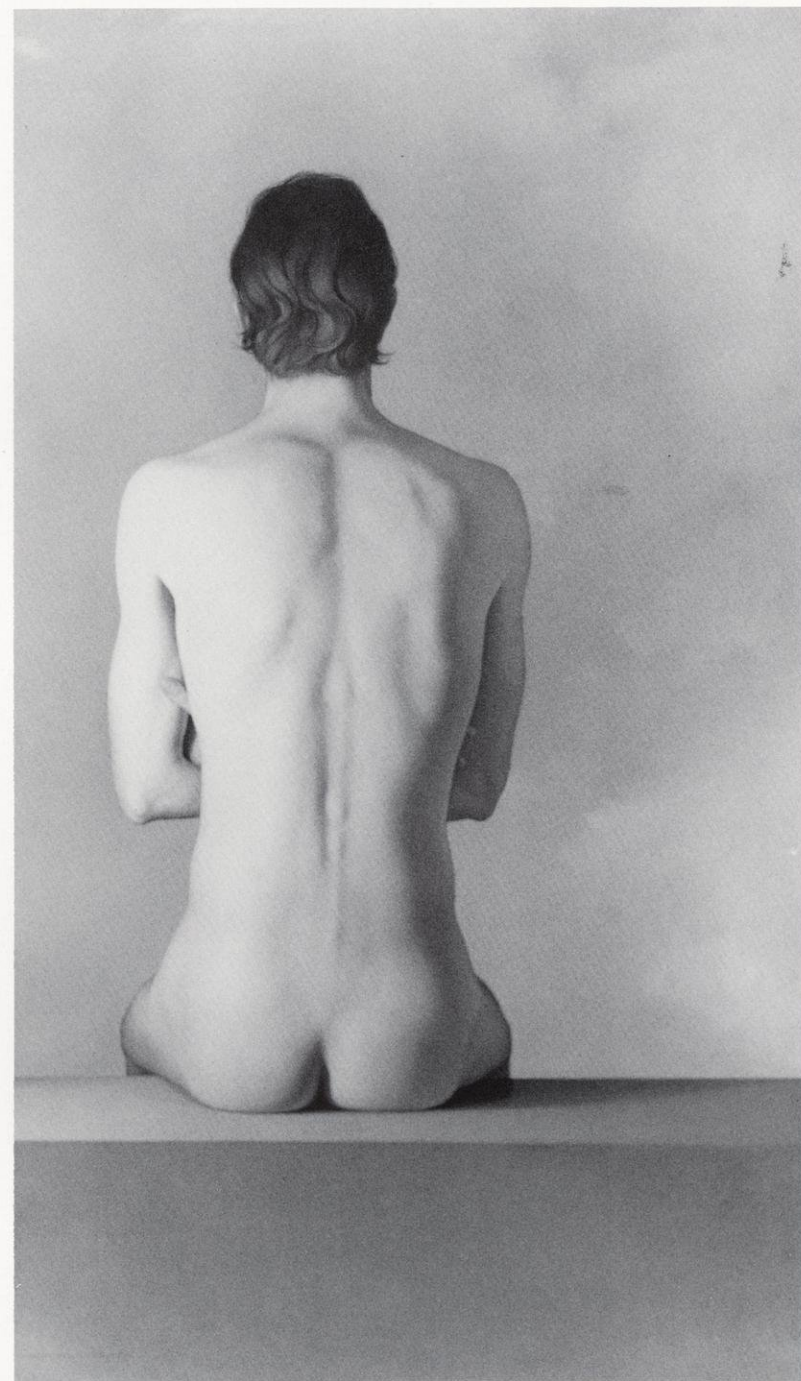


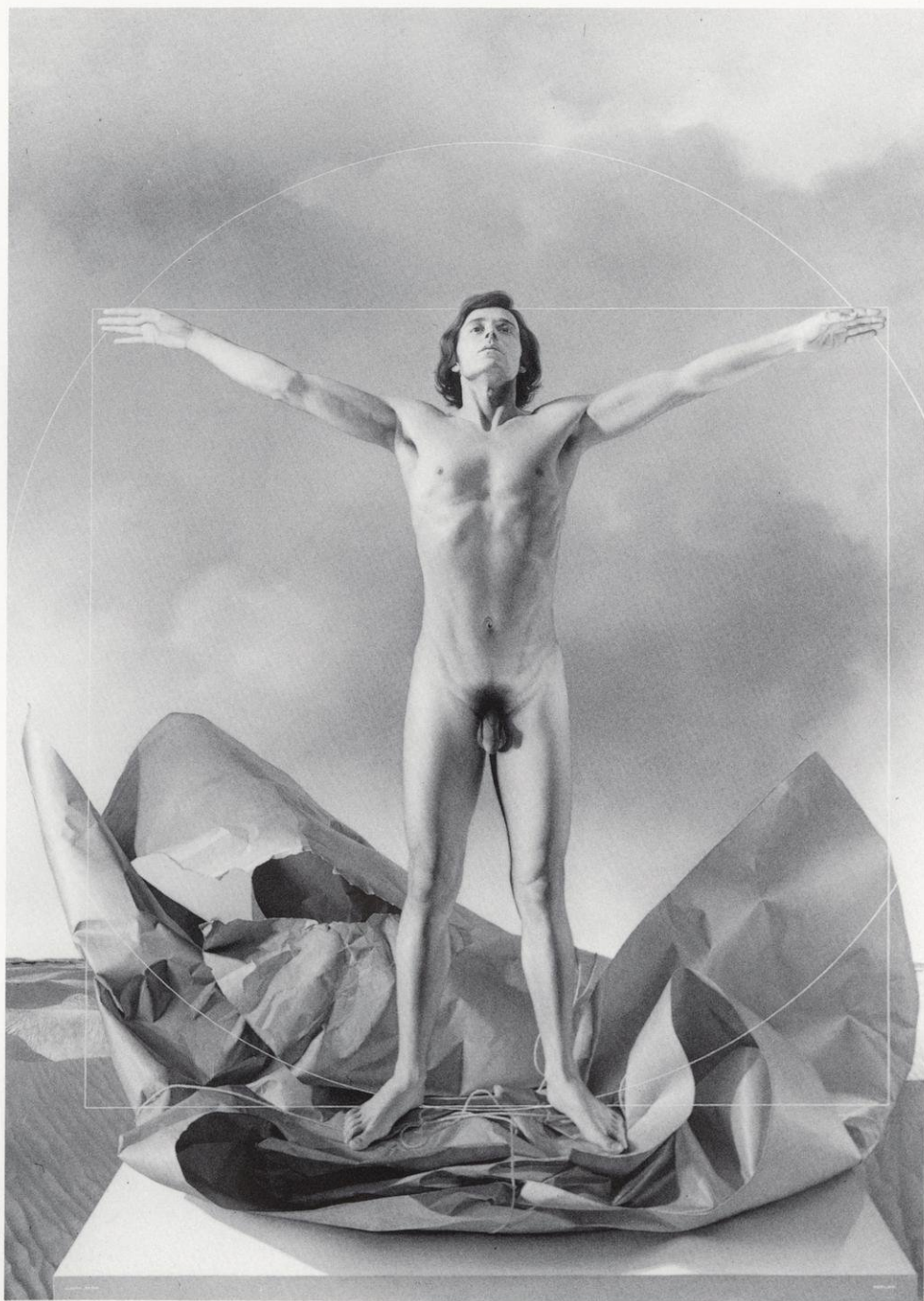


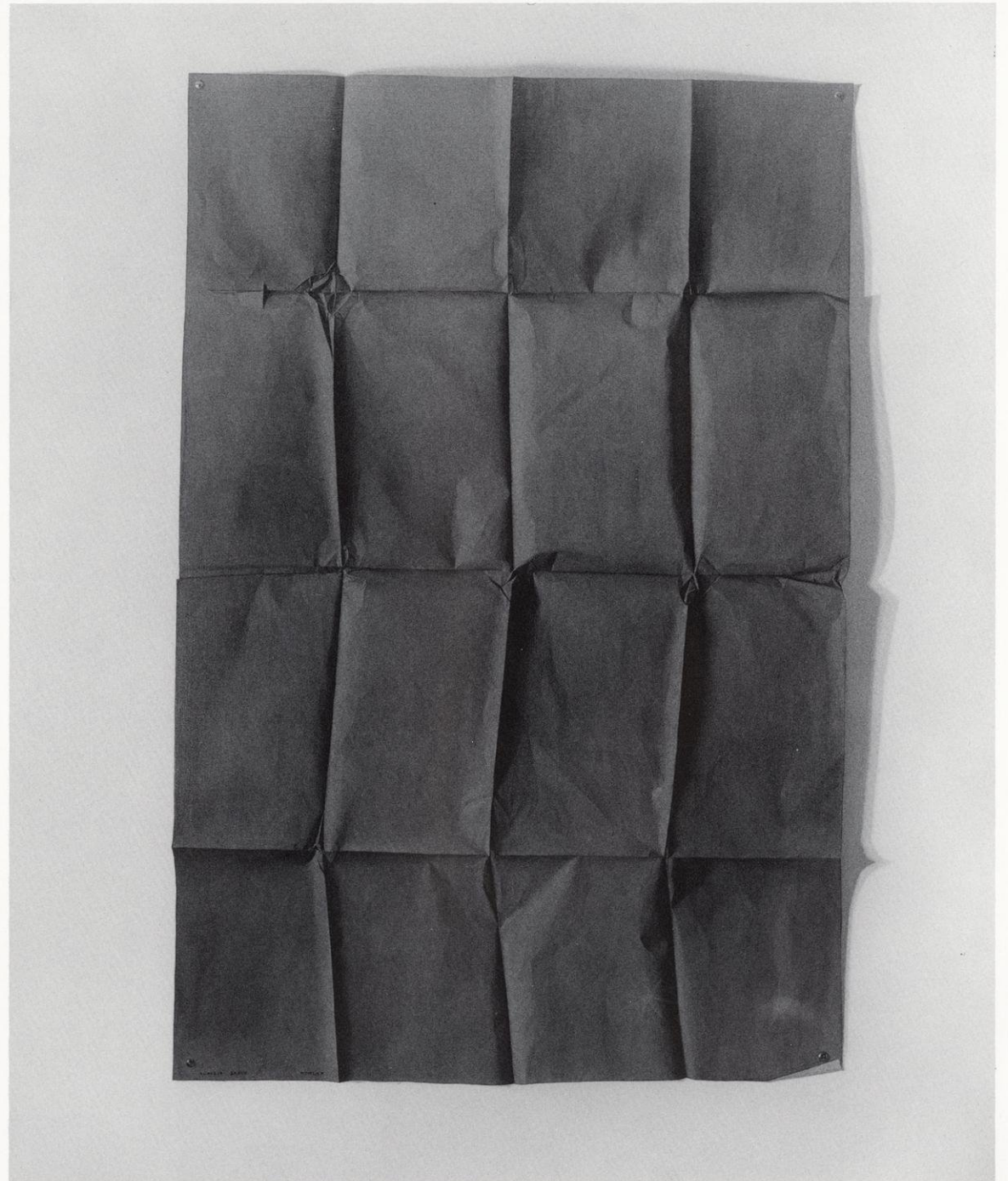
CLAUDIO BRAVO

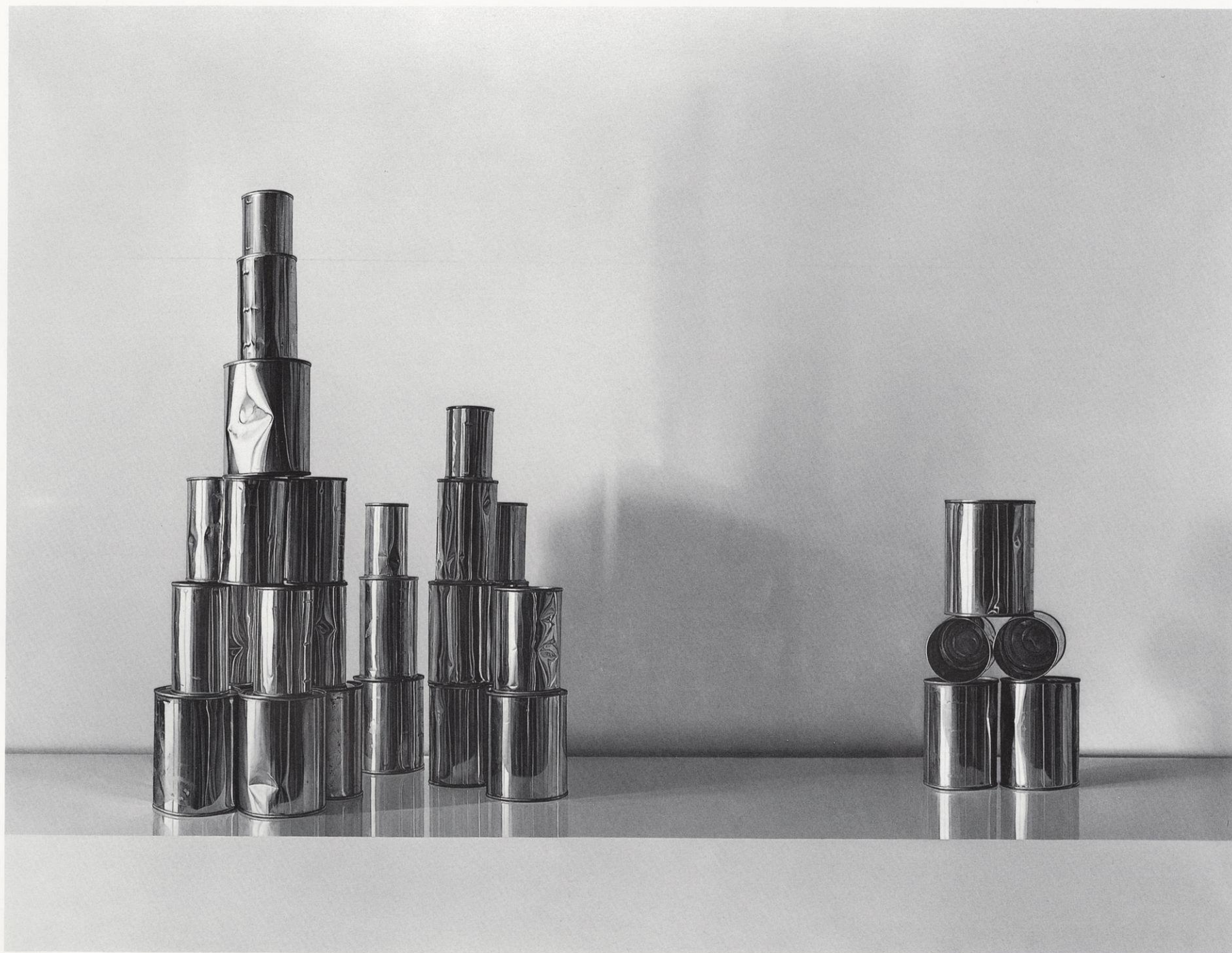
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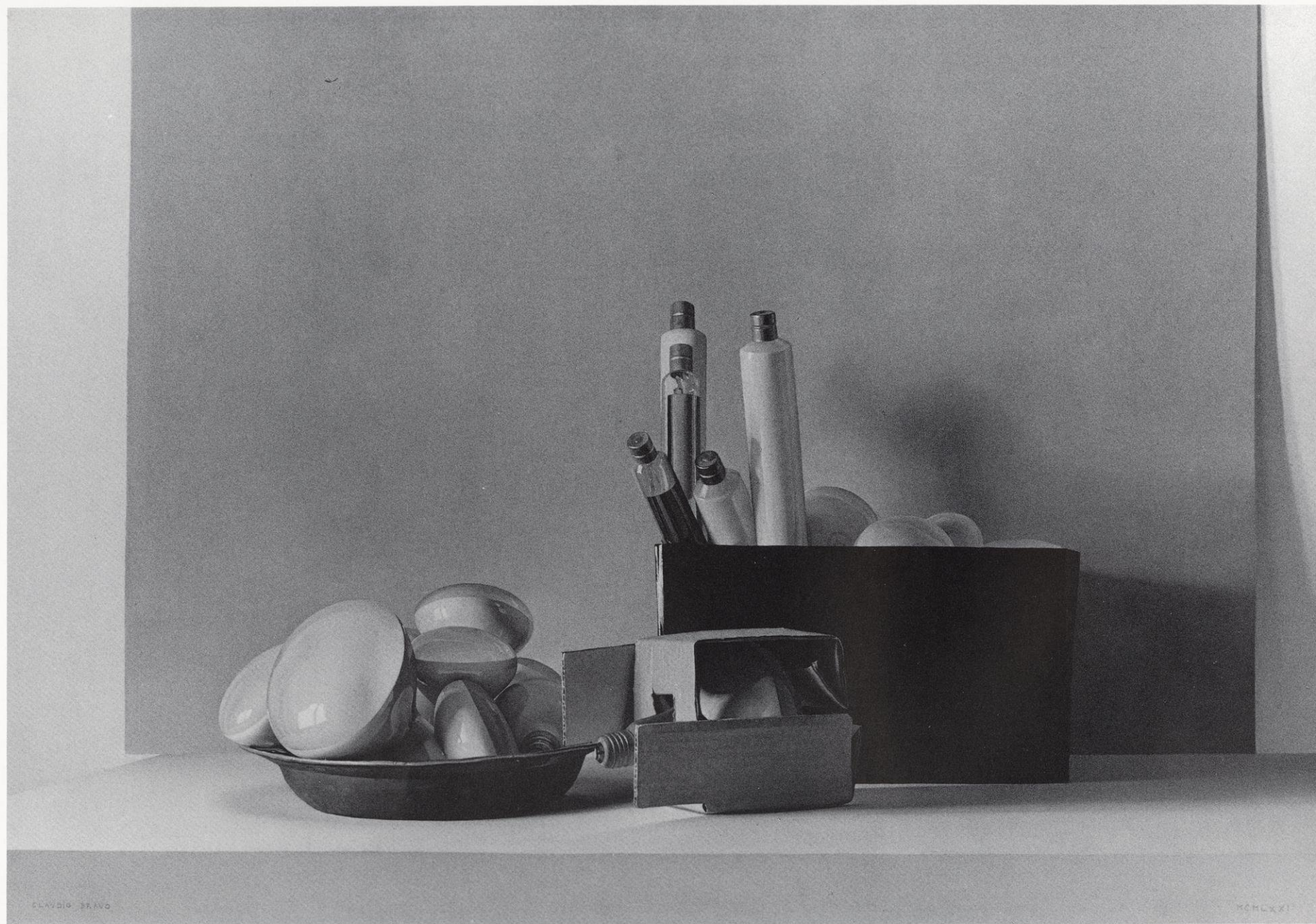


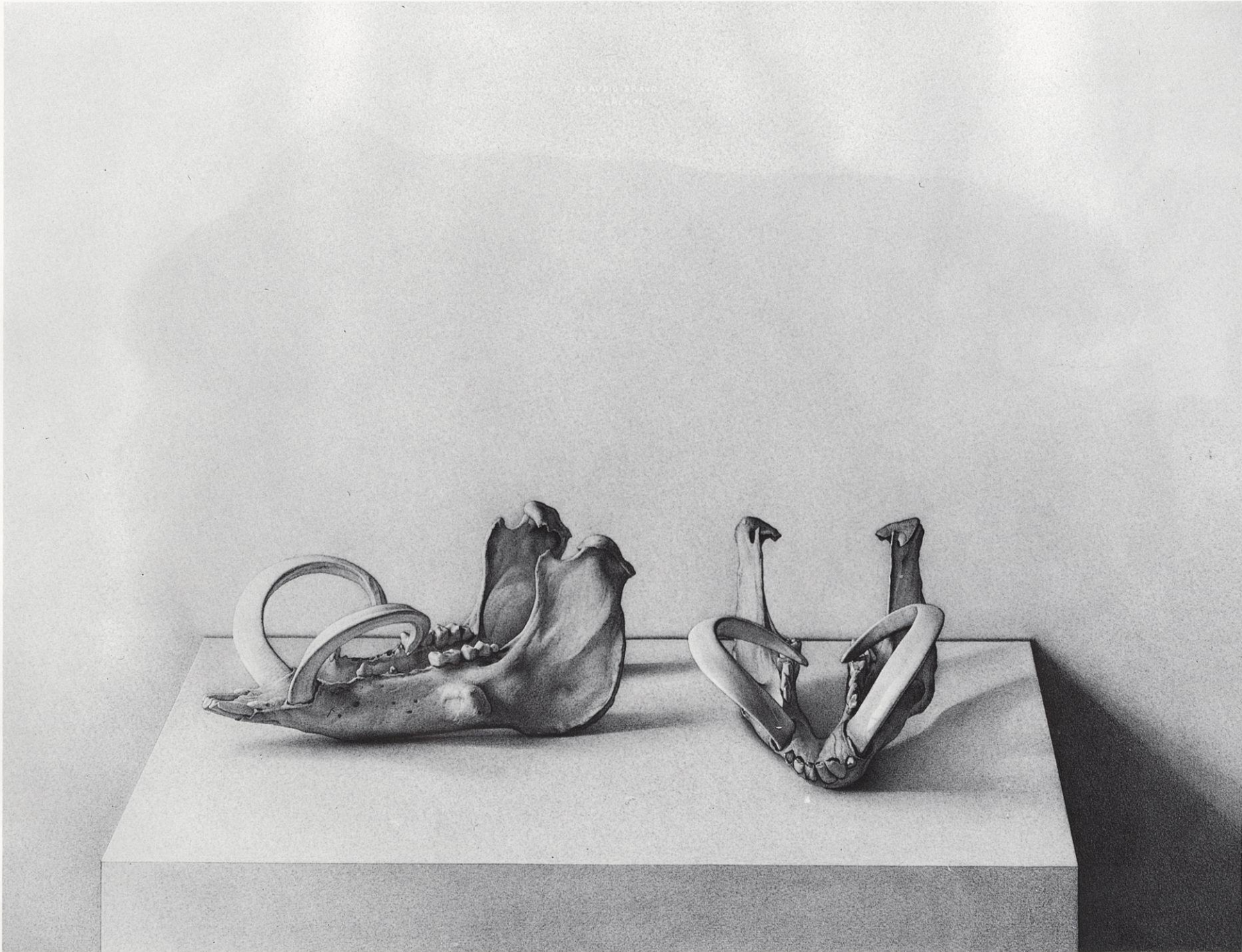




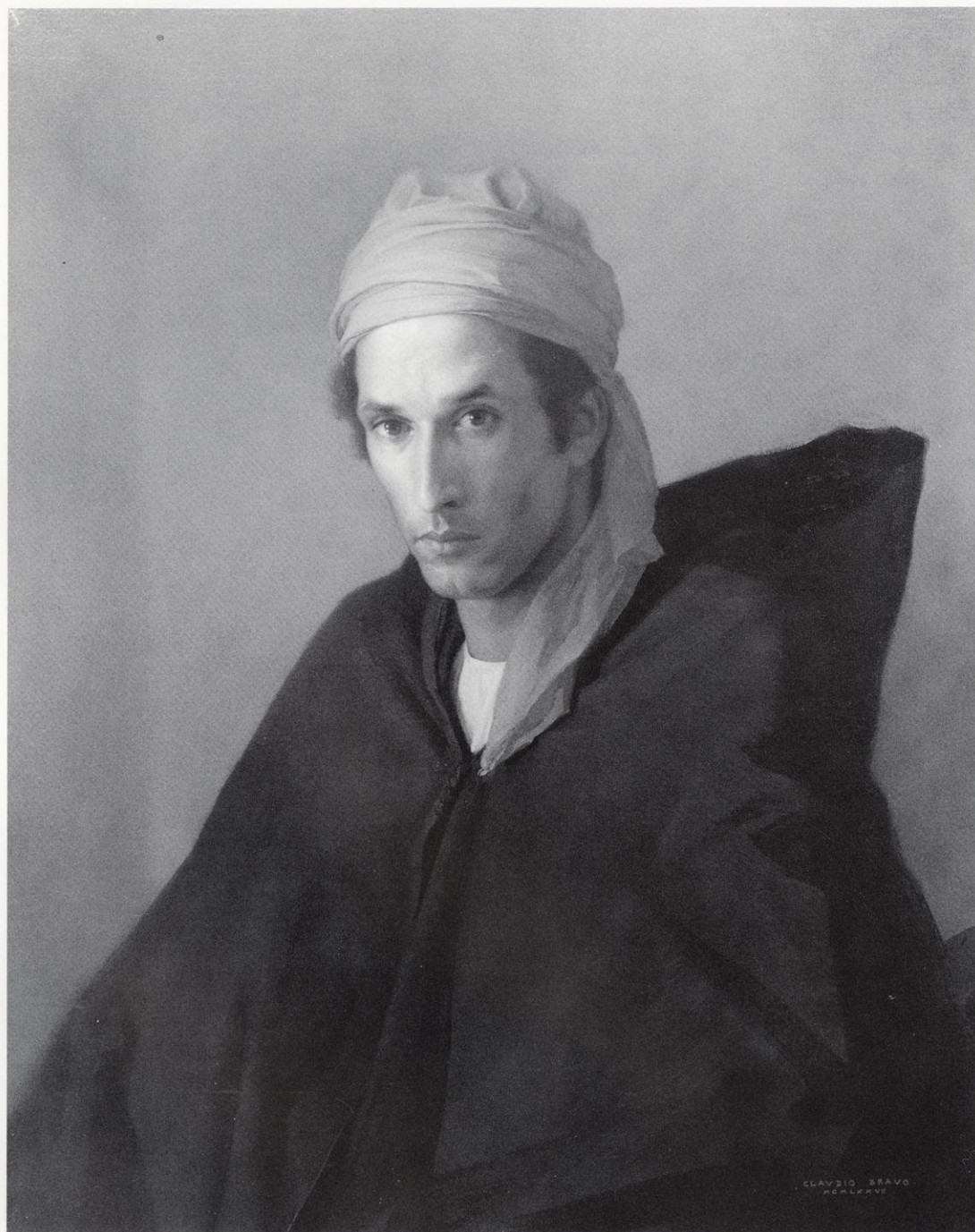


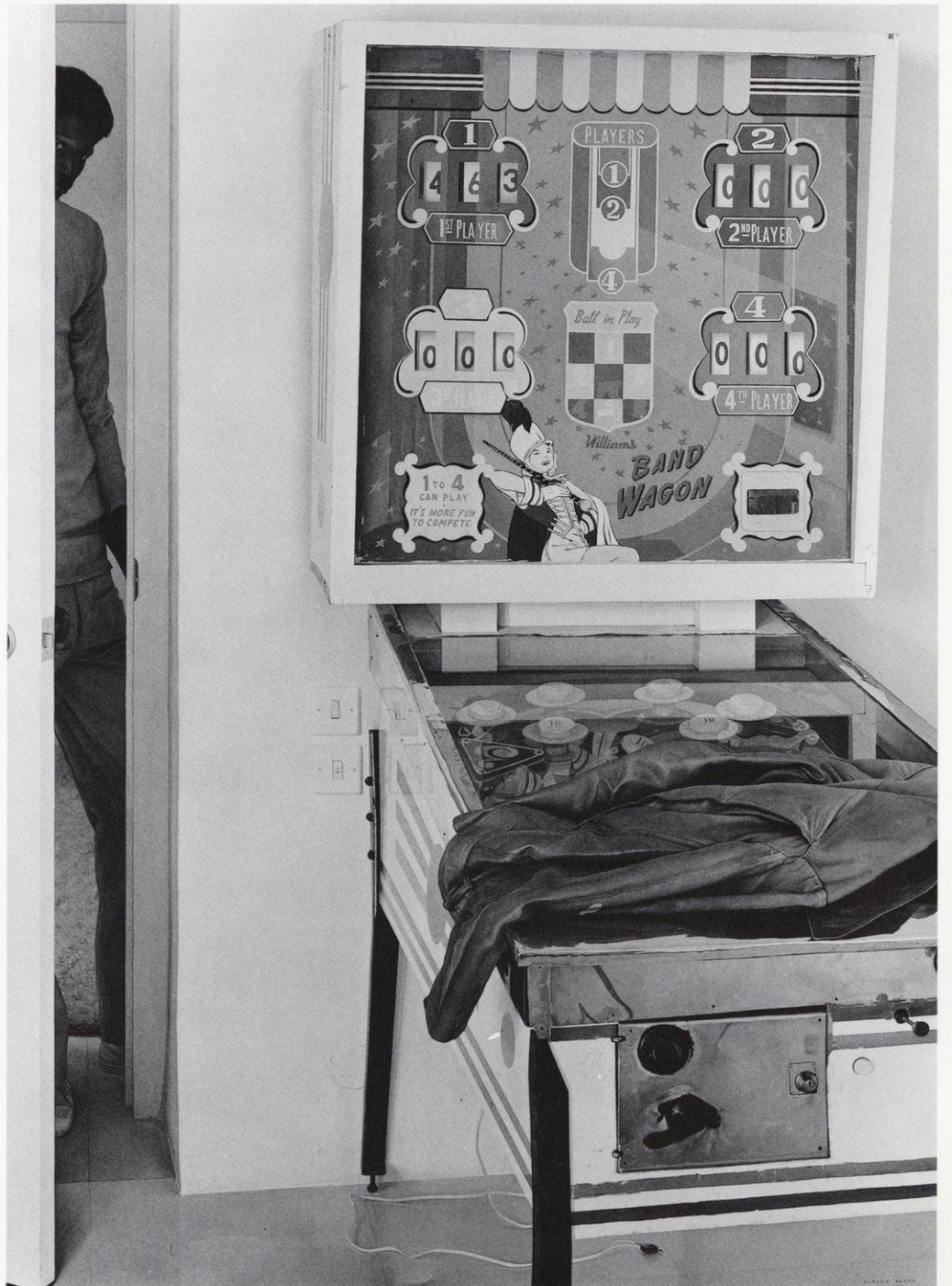


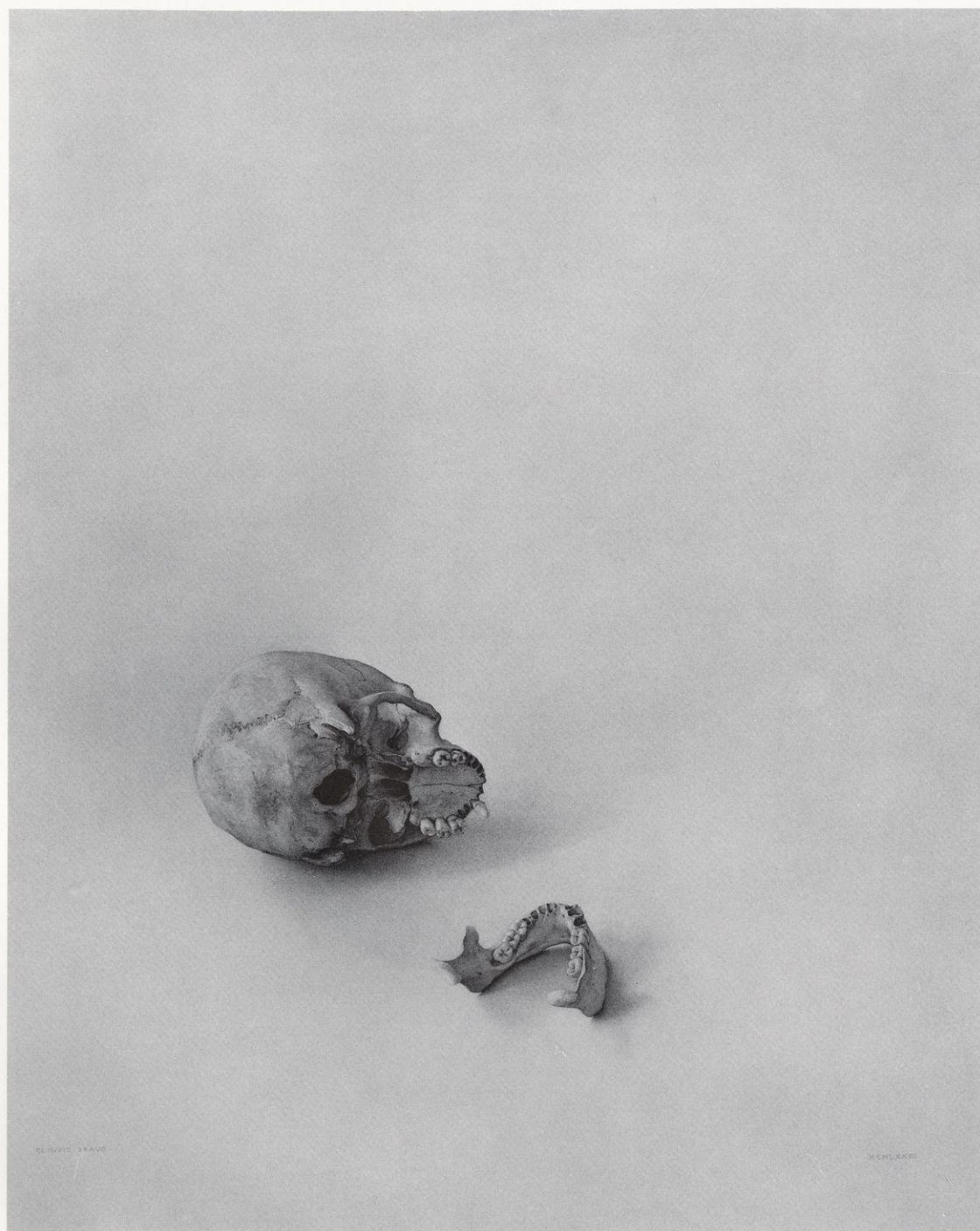








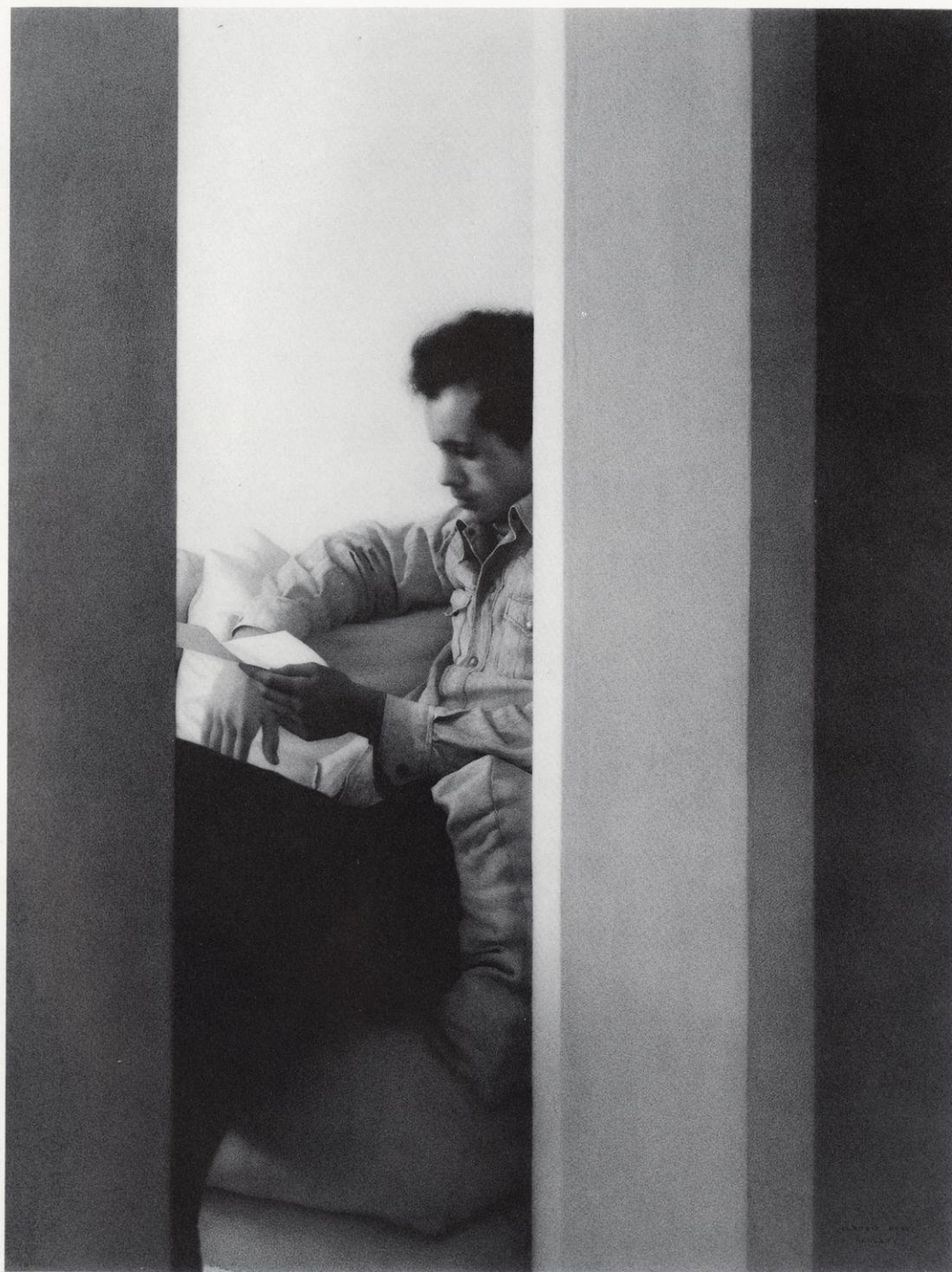














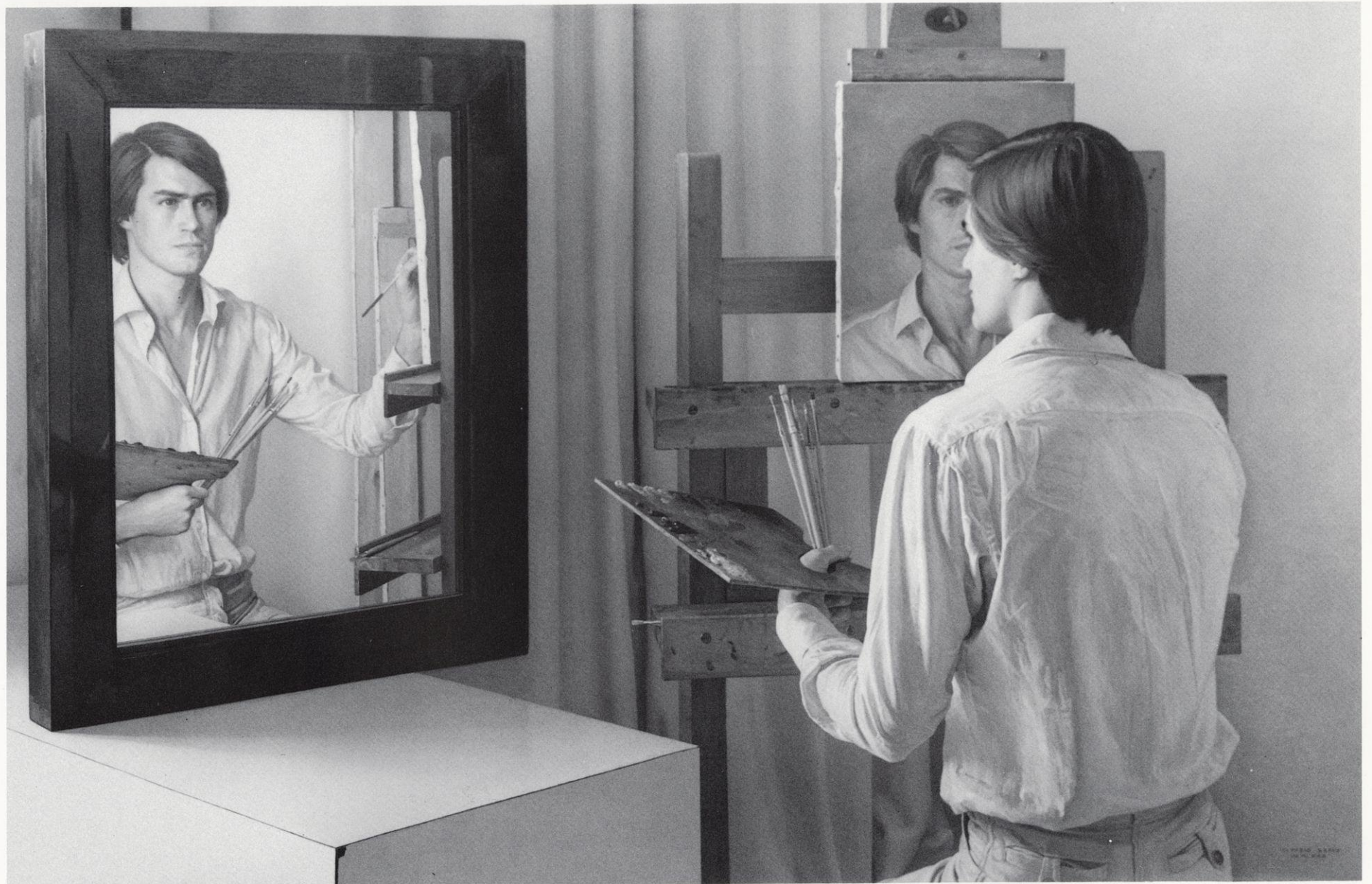


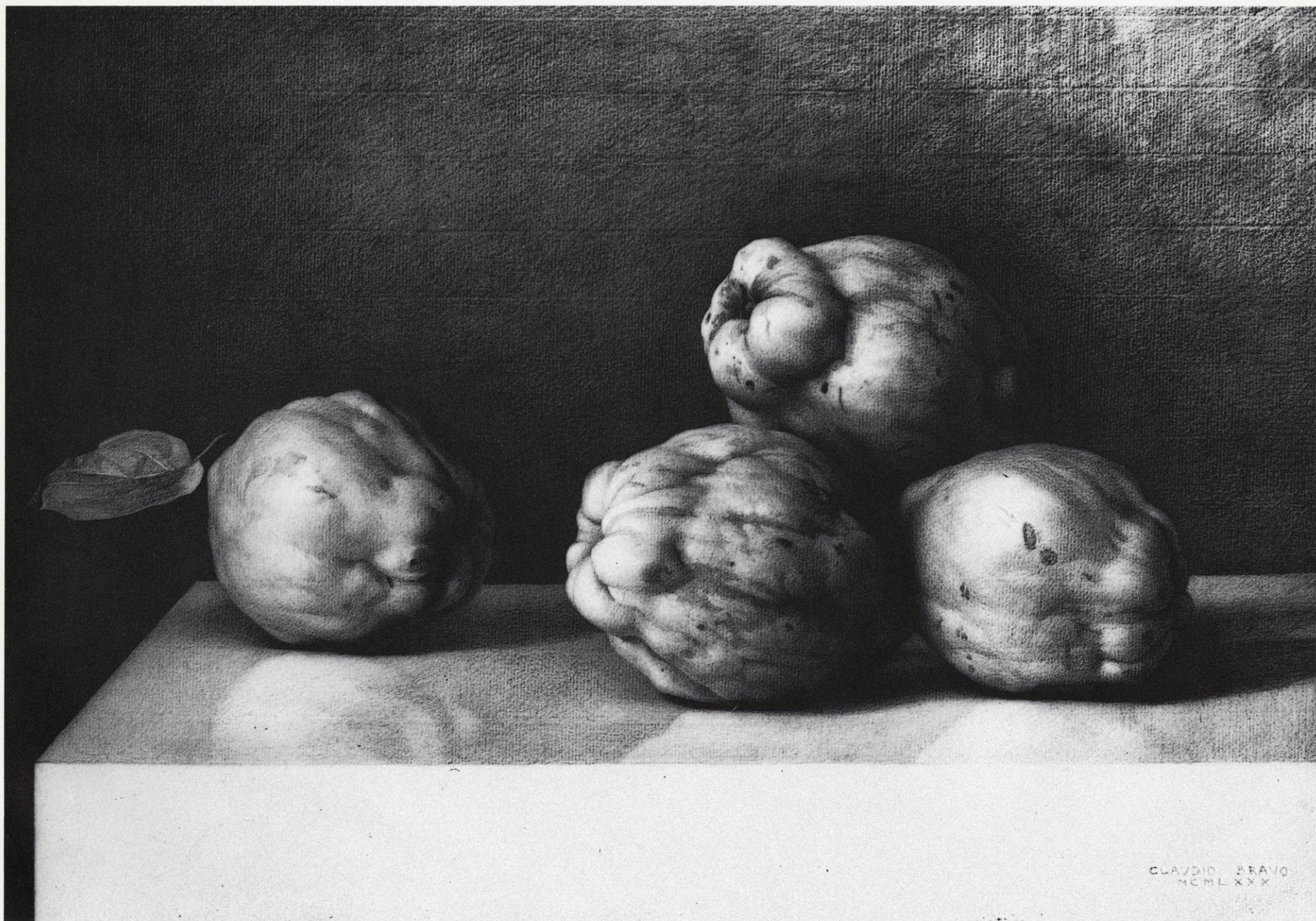




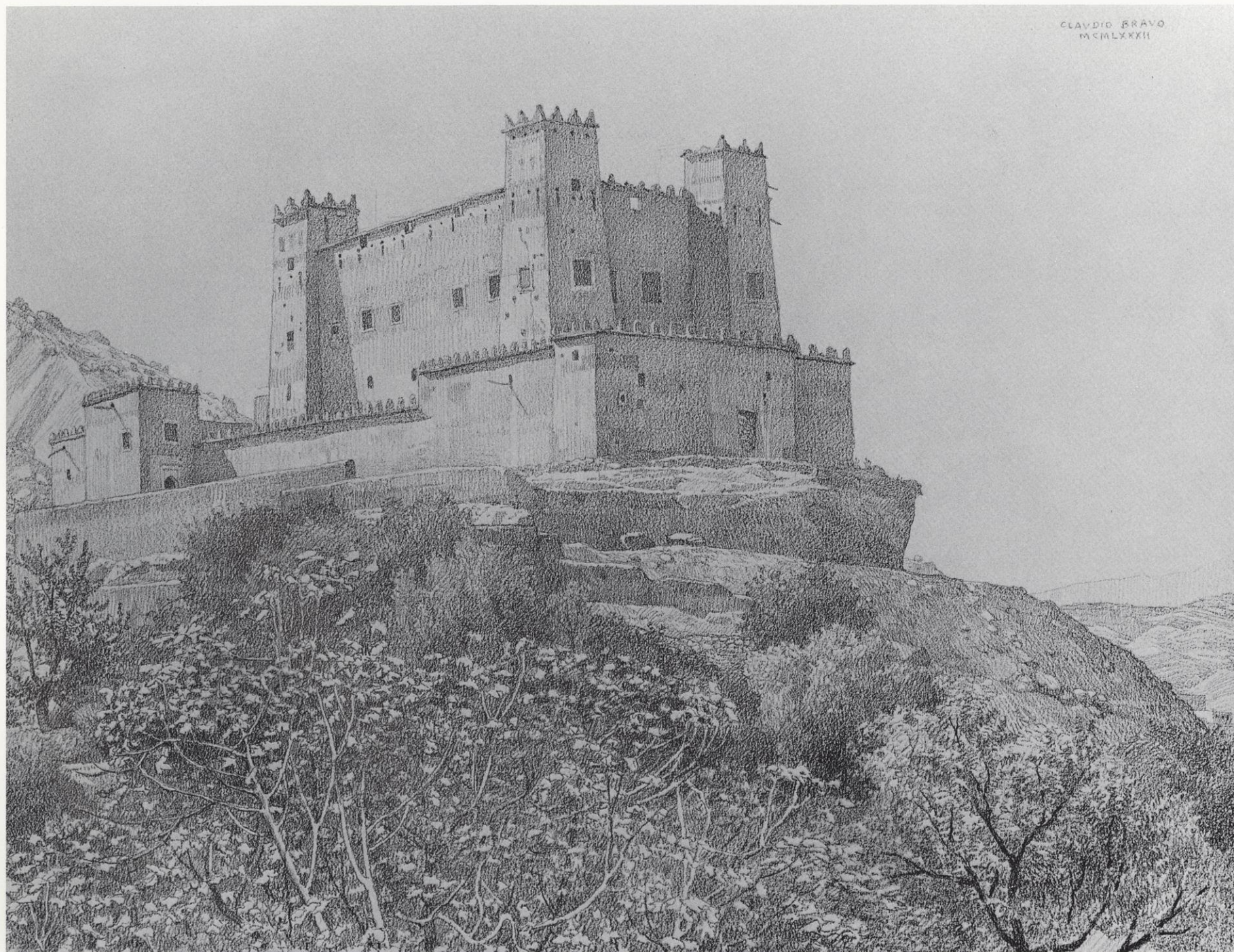


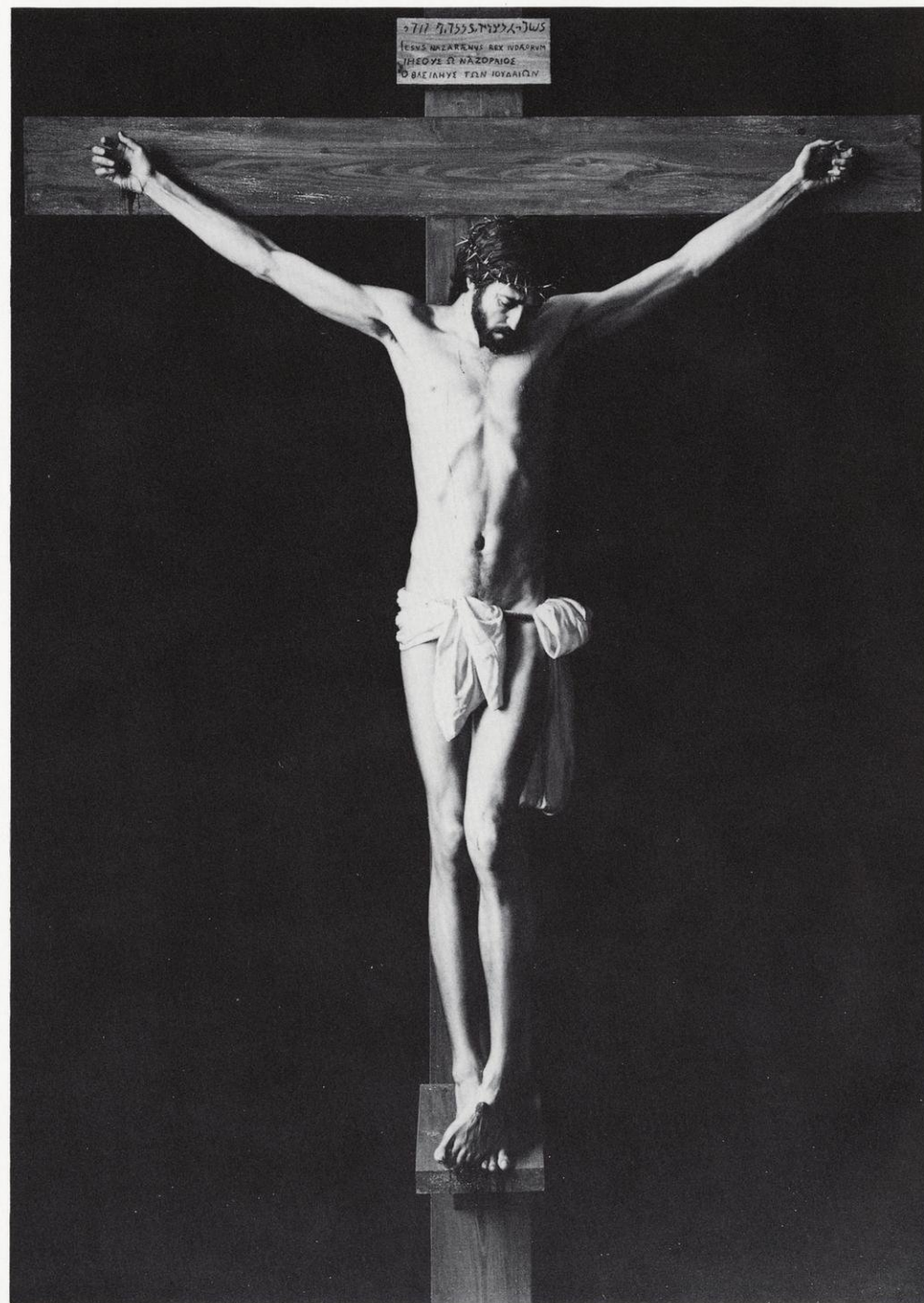


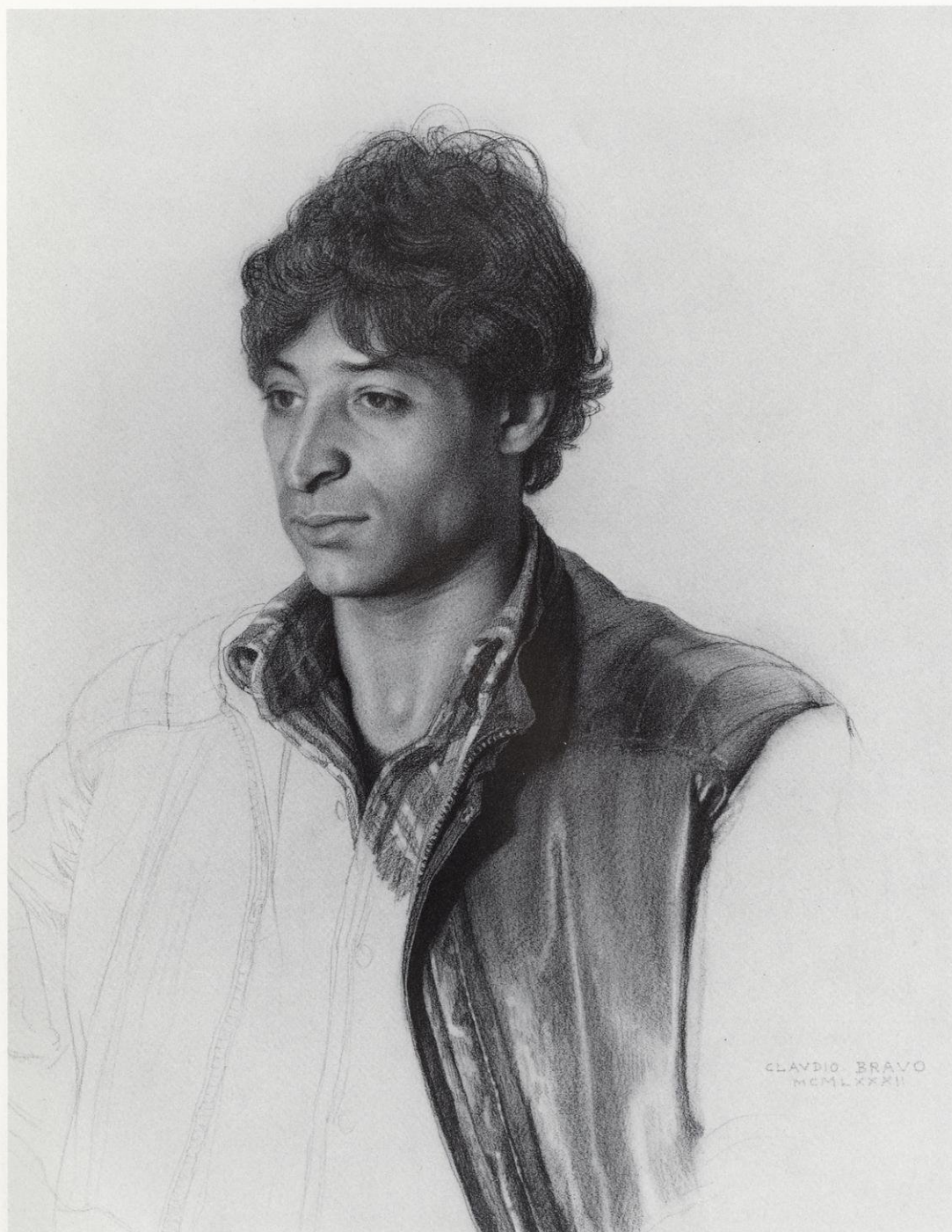


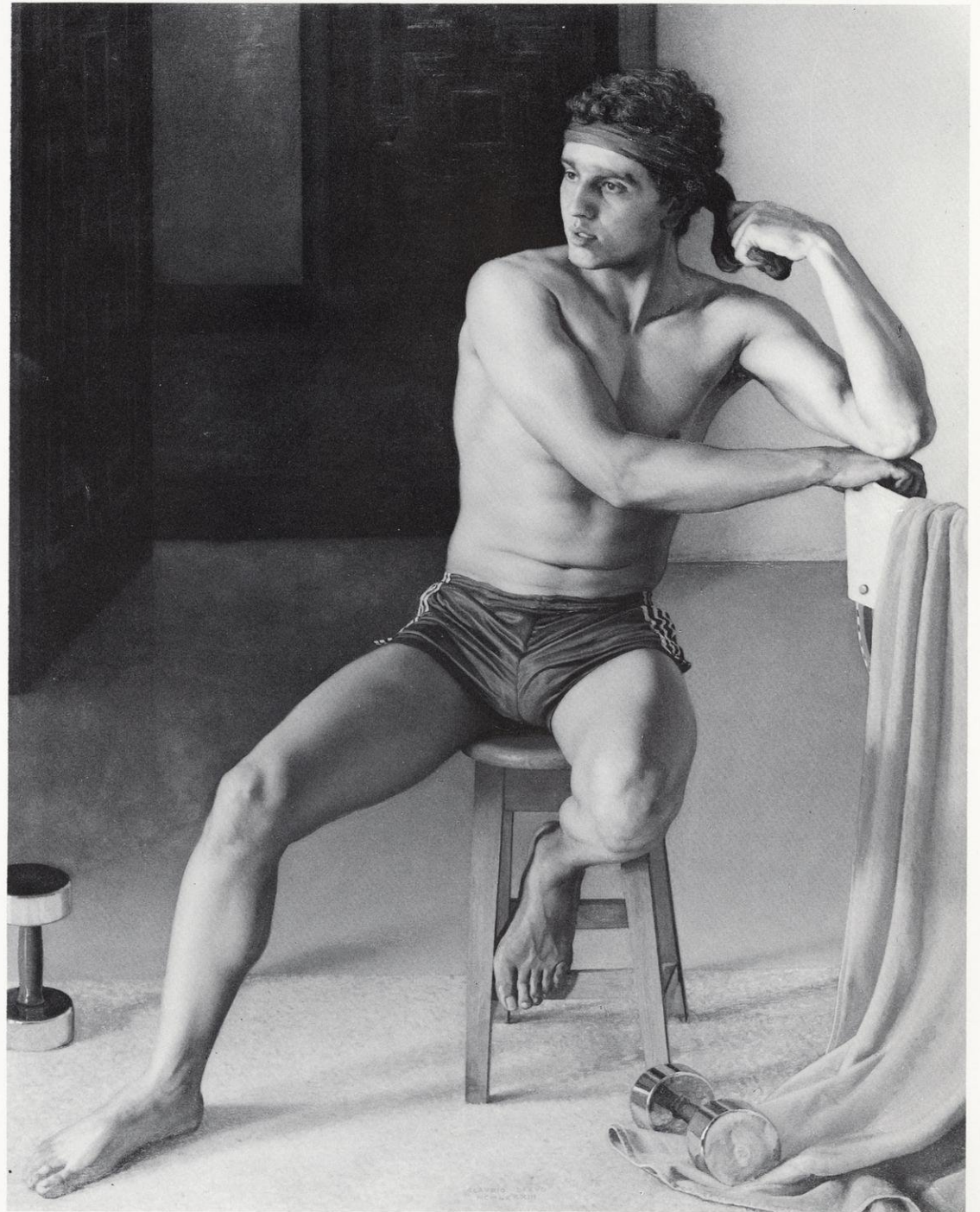




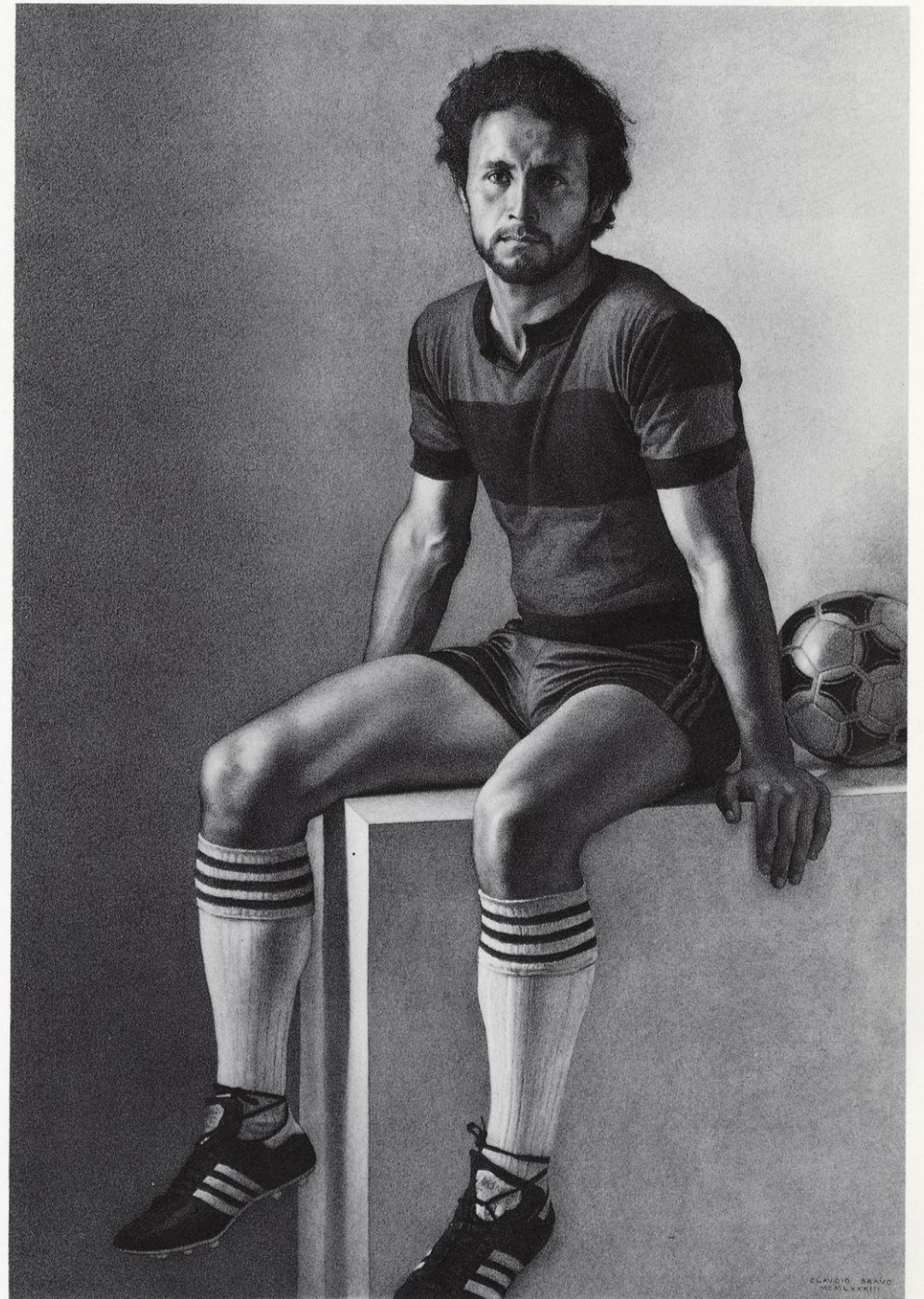




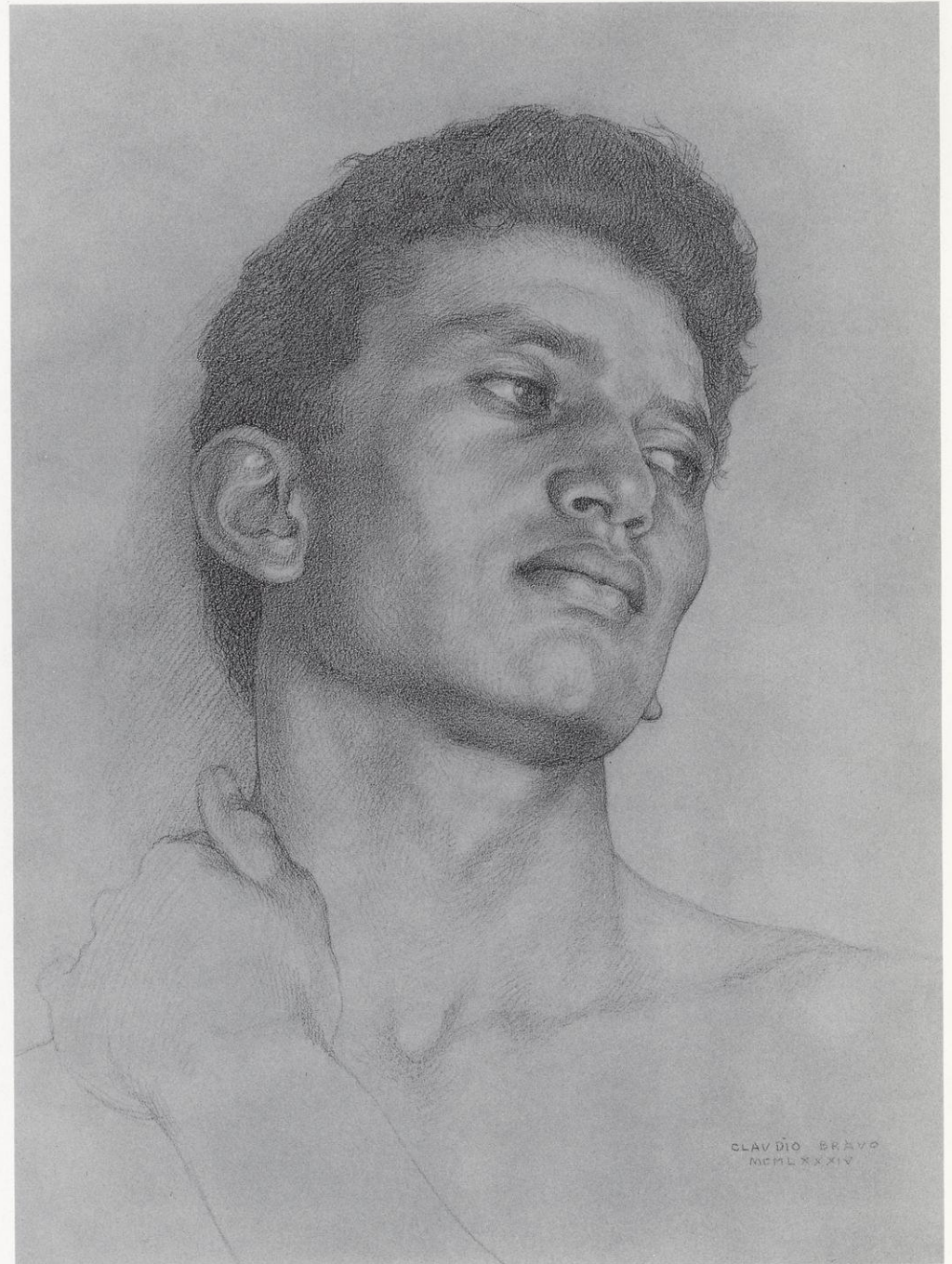


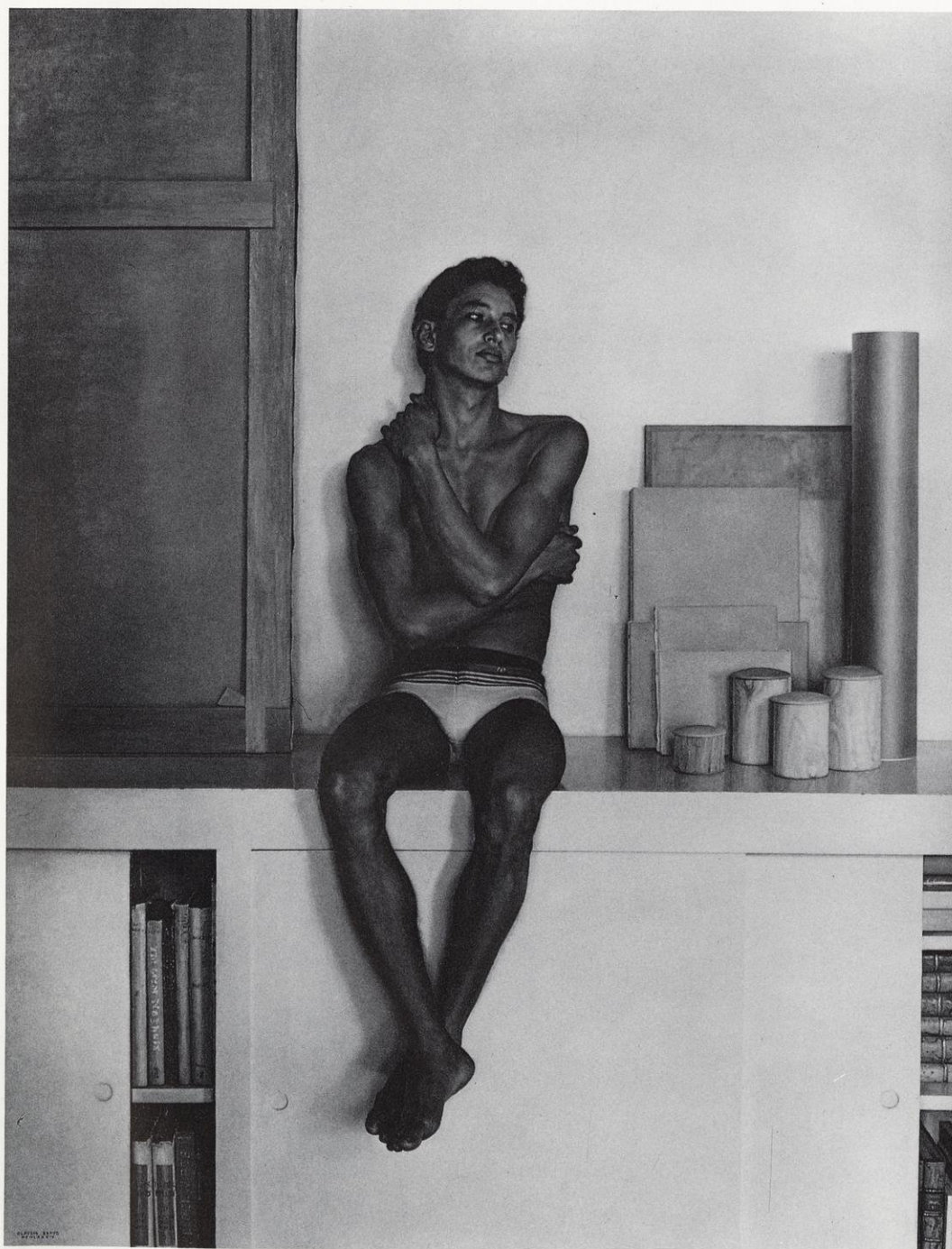




CLAUDE BRAY
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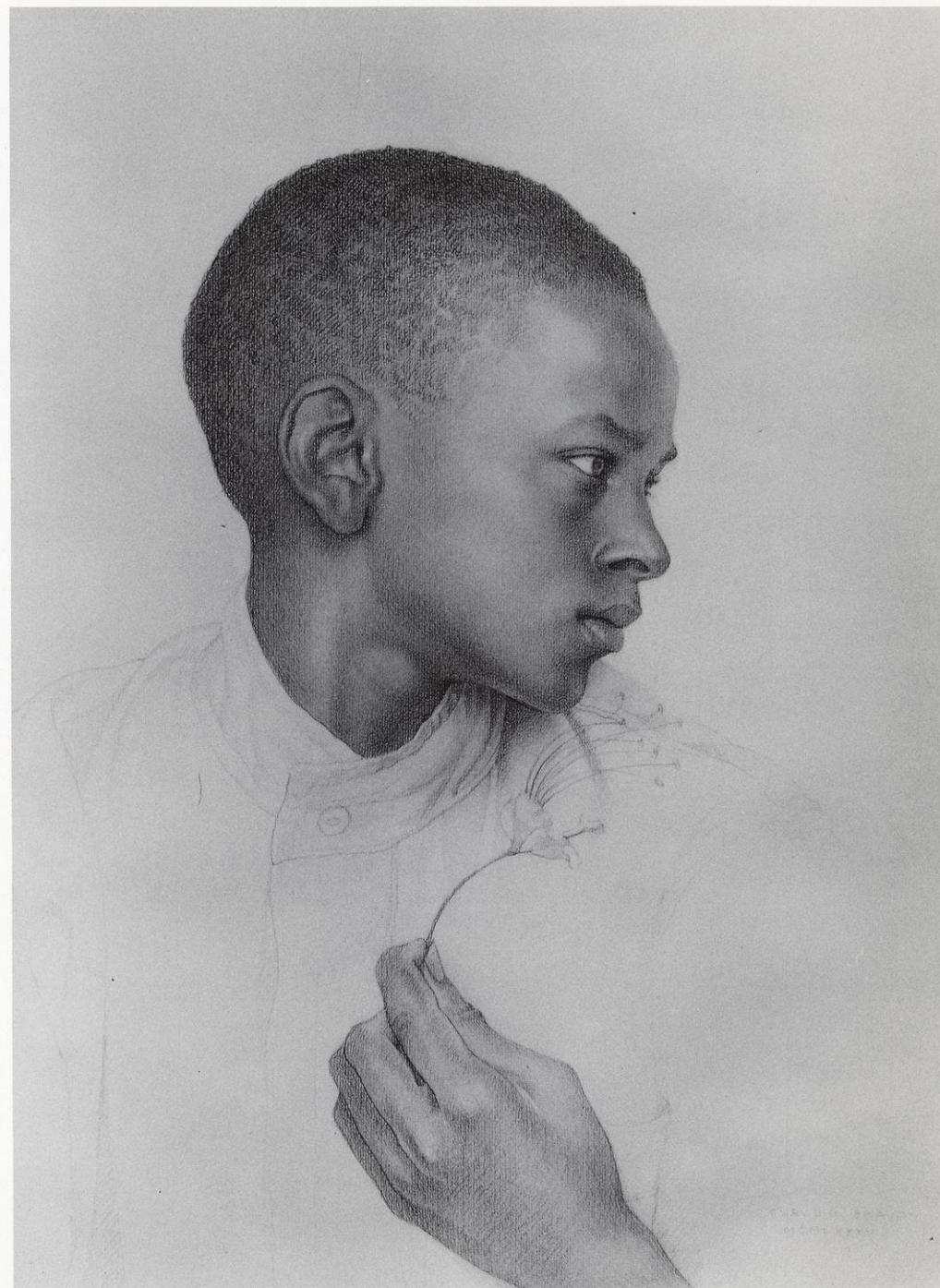


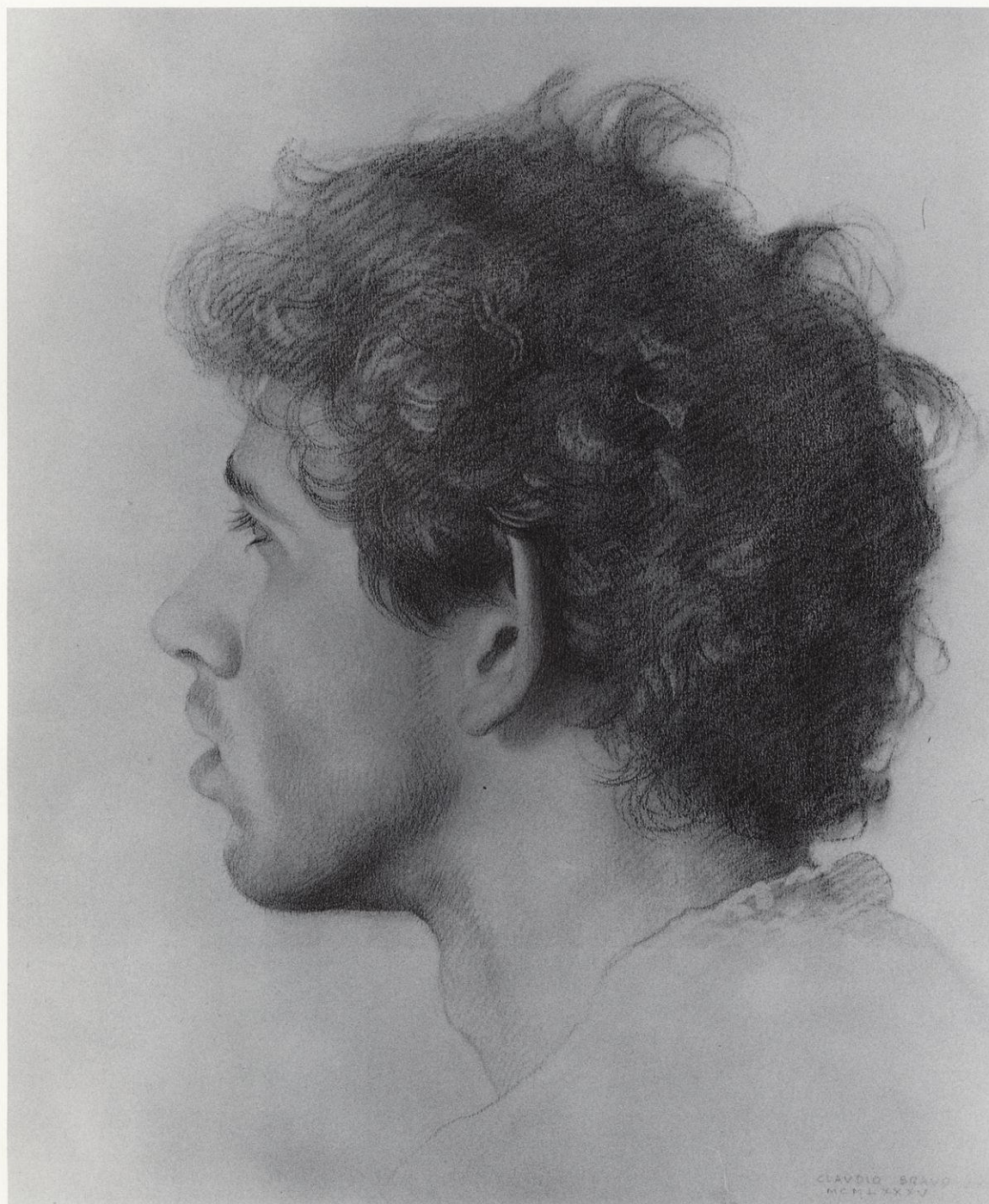
















Biography

- 1936 Born November 8 in Valparaiso, Chile.
- 1945–54 Studies at Jesuit school in Santiago. Studies art in the studio of Miguel Venegas Cienfuentes in Santiago.
- 1954 First exhibition at "Salón 13" in Santiago.
- 1955 Second exhibition at "Salón 13."
- 1955–61 Lives in Santiago and Concepción, Chile. Paints and also writes poetry, dances professionally with the Compañía de Ballet de Chile. Works for Teatro de Ensayo of the Universidad Católica de Chile.
- 1961 Leaves Chile for Europe. Establishes residence in Madrid.
- 1968 Spends six months working in Philippines.
- 1970 First exhibition at the Staempfli Gallery, New York.
- 1972 Moves to Tangier where he now lives.
- 1981 First exhibition at Marlborough Gallery, New York, where he now exhibits regularly.

Exhibition History

Solo Exhibitions

- 1954–55 "Salón 13" Santiago, Chile
- 1961 Universidad de Concepción, Chile
- 1963 Galería Fortuny, Madrid
- 1965–66 Galería Eburne, Madrid
- 1967 Galería Fortuny, Madrid
- 1968 Luz Gallery, Manila
- 1970 Staempfli Gallery, New York
- 1971 Galería Egam, Madrid (drawings)
- 1972 Staempfli Gallery, New York
- 1974 Galería Vandrés, Madrid
- 1976 Galerie Claude Bernard, Paris
- 1978 Staempfli Gallery, New York
- 1980 F.I.A.C. Grand Palais, Paris
- 1981 Galerie Levy, Hamburg
Marlborough Gallery, New York
- 1982 Museo de Monterrey, Monterrey, Mexico
- 1983 ARCO, Madrid
Marlborough Fine Art (London), Ltd.
- 1984 Galería Quintana, Bogotá
Marlborough Gallery, New York
- 1985 Marlborough Gallery, New York (pastels)
- 1987 Marlborough Fine Art (Tokyo), Ltd.

Group Shows

- 1971 *Art of Dream*, La Jolla Museum of Art, La Jolla, California
- 1972 *Documenta 5*, Kassel, West Germany
Humor, Satire and Irony, Art Center, The New School for Social Research, New York
Sharp Focus Realism, Sidney Janis Gallery, New York
La Paloma, Galería Vandrés, Madrid
- 1973 *Artistes Hyper-realistes*, Galerie des Quatre Mouvements, Paris
Hyper-realisme: Maîtres Américains et Européens, Galerie Isy Brachot, Brussels
Contemporary Spanish Realists, Marlborough Fine Art (London), Ltd.
Réalism Relativiste, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels
Tropic of Cancer—Tropic of Capricorn, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Super Realist Vision, De Cordova Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts

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- | | | | |
|---------|---|------|---|
| 1974 | <p><i>Ars 1974: Alternatives of Realism</i>, The Fine Arts Academy of Finland, Helsinki</p> <p><i>Drawings</i>, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York</p> <p><i>Kijken naar de werkelijkheid, Amerikaanse Hyperrealisten-Europese realisten</i>, Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam</p> | 1983 | <p><i>Forty Eighth Carnegie International Exhibition</i>, Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute Pittsburgh and Seattle Art Museum</p> <p><i>Works on Paper by Arikha, Botero, Bravo, Grooms, Katz, Kitaj, López-García, Petlin, Rivers, Welliver</i>, Marlborough Gallery, New York</p> |
| 1976 | <p><i>Modern Portraits—The Self and Others</i>, Wildenstein Gallery, New York</p> | 1984 | <p><i>International Masters of Contemporary Figuration</i>, Marlborough Fine Art (Tokyo), Ltd.</p> <p><i>The Classic Tradition in Painting and Sculpture</i>, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut</p> |
| 1976–78 | <p><i>Aspects of Realism</i> tour of thirteen Canadian museums</p> | 1985 | <p><i>Contemporary Narrative Figurative Painting</i>, Payne Gallery of Art, Moravian College, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania</p> <p><i>Pastels</i>, Nohra Haime Gallery, New York</p> <p><i>Twentieth Century American and European Artists</i>, Claude Bernard Gallery, New York</p> |
| 1977–78 | <p><i>Illusion and Reality</i> tour of seven Australian museums</p> | 1987 | <p><i>The First America: Selections from the Nancy Sayles Day Collection of Latin American Art</i>, Center for Inter-American Relations, New York (and other museums)</p> |
| 1980 | <p><i>Realism and Latin American Painting: The Seventies</i>, Center for Inter-American Relations, New York, and Museo de Monterrey, Monterrey, Mexico</p> <p><i>Latin American Paintings</i>, Latin American Gallery of the Metropolitan Museum and Art Center, Miami</p> <p><i>Printed Art: A View of Two Decades</i>, The Museum of Modern Art, New York</p> | | |
| 1981 | <p><i>International Contemporary Art</i>, Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City</p> | | |
| 1982 | <p><i>Drawings</i>, Nohra Haime Gallery, New York</p> <p><i>Important Paintings by European Figurative Artists</i>, F.I.A.C., Grand Palais, Paris and Marlborough Gallery, New York</p> | | |

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ISBN 0-932900-16-x

Design: Earl J. Madden
Printing: Litho Productions

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