

MUSEU NACIONAL  
D'ART DE CATALUNYA

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19.11.2021

6.3.2022

# GAUDÍ

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*Antoni Gaudí in front  
of the Sagrada Família.  
September 1920.  
Documentation Centre of  
the Orfeó Català.*

Organised and produced by:  
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya and Musée d'Orsay

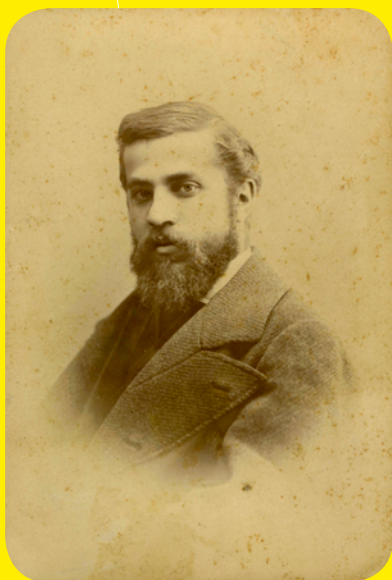
Curator:  
Juan José Lahuerta

Dates:  
**Barcelona:** from November 19, 2021 to March 6, 2022  
**París:** Musée d'Orsay, from April 11 to July 17, 2022

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# GAUDÍ



**Audouard i Cía.** *Portrait of Gaudí.*  
1878. Museu de Reus (IMRC).

Twenty years after the celebration of Gaudí Year, the Museu Nacional faces a critical review of the architect's work with a large-format exhibition that brings together more than 650 architectural, design and furniture objects, works of art, documentation, floor plans and photographs, avoiding clichés and offering a full review of Gaudí's career, from his years in training to his death and his mass burial.

Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926) is very well represented in the collection of the Museu Nacional, which has a large and complete set of his works and exhibits them along with those of other artists and architects of the period, with special emphasis on Josep Maria Jujol. The museum, which is a centre of reference for the arts of the Modernista (Catalan Art Nouveau) movement, will reformulate the presentation of his works in the rooms of the permanent collection to incorporate this new vision.

This project, which will travel to the Musée d'Orsay in Paris in the spring and has required a major research effort by the curator and the museum's teams, proposes a new narrative that frees architects from the many clichés and reductionist visions with which they have been loaded over time. The exhibition shows how Gaudí was not an isolated genius, misunderstood and ahead of his time, and places him in the international context by presenting a very important set of works by artists such as Auguste Rodin, Geoffroy-Dechaume, Violet-le-Duc, Thomas Jeckyll and William Morris.

Important novelties and pieces forgotten for many years are presented for the first time, such as the spectacular entrance hall furniture on the main floor of Casa Milà, dismantled and scattered in the 1960s; the Bust of the Fountain of Hercules in the garden of the Palau de Pedralbes; the plaster that was used to model the sculptures of the Sagrada Família, the photographs of Park Güell that were part of the Paris exhibition of 1910 and that have not been exhibited since, one of the tapestries made by Jujol for the Jocs Florals of 1907 and many other things.

The exhibition reveals a Gaudí of enormous complexity, who, like no other artist, captures the needs of the society in which he lives, a time of radical change, and produces the most powerful images, which last to this day.

In total, 74 national and international institutions and collections are cooperating in lending works for this large exhibition, which also features works from the museum's own collection.



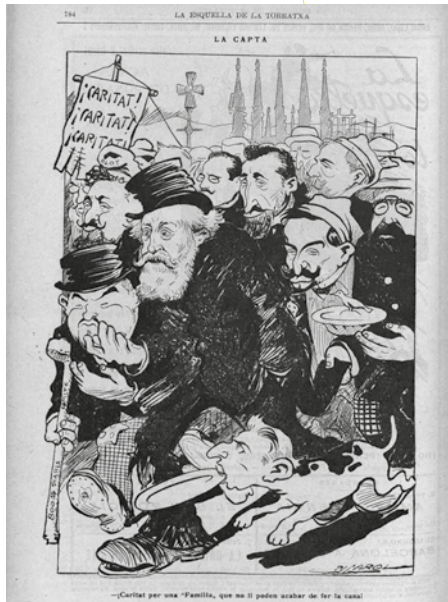
**A NEW VISITING  
EXPERIENCE:  
THE EXHIBITION NARRATED  
BY JOSEP MARIA POU**

This exhibition offers an unprecedented experience at the Museu Nacional, the possibility of touring it while listening to the narration of the actor **Josep Maria Pou**.



# ANTONI GAUDÍ

Gaudí was not by any means the isolated, misunderstood genius that many of the books written about him would lead us to believe. On the contrary, his work was done within very concrete political and ideological strategies. This doesn't mean to say that Gaudí was an ideologist, or that his work was directly determined by the interests of his clients, the high bourgeoisie and the church.



**Josep Costa (Picarol).** *L'Esquella de la Torratxa.* Barcelona, 1908. CRAI Biblioteca Pavelló de la República (Universitat de Barcelona).

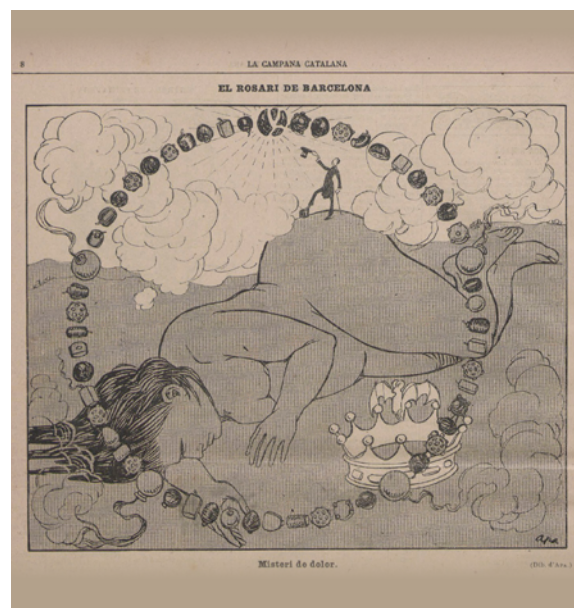
In reality, his particular way of understanding his work often caused Gaudí to confront his clients and society in which he lived. What's more, Gaudí's work constitutes the highest moment of the artistic and intellectual production of Catalonia of his lifetime. If today figures such as that of Eusebi Güell seem commonplace, it is basically thanks to the works that Gaudí did for him.

Barcelona, its image and character have an extraordinary and absolute relationship with the work of Gaudí. What would this city be, for better or worse, without those extraordinary buildings that he built and which constitute his deepest and inexhaustible treasure trove?

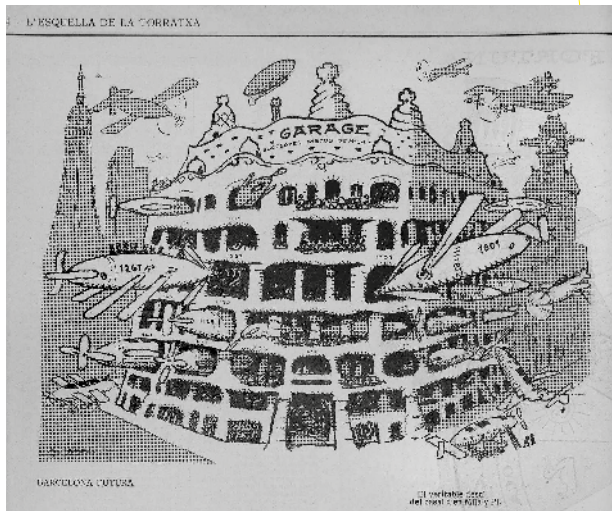
of inexplicable artistic craziness, but, in fact, from his ability to concentrate that period in his buildings, to contract all of it in such a complex body of work.

Gaudí's work has transcended far beyond the period in which he lived, those turbulent years around the turn of the 20th century. But if it has done so it is because he was able, like no other, to interpret his time, and to come up with some of the most powerful images. This is why it has lived on.

So one could continue talking about Gaudí in excessively praising, formalistic, folkloric or esoteric terms, there are so many: they are all useful terms to forget him, to convert him into this comfortable and gigantic tourist "icon" into which he is inevitably becoming more and more.



**Feliu Elias (Apa).** *La Campana Catalana.* Barcelona, 01/04/1908. Biblioteca de Catalunya.



Josep Costa (Picarol) *L'Esquella de la Torratxa*. Barcelona Futura. Barcelona, 1912. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Library Folch i Torres.

But if we want to understand his work in all its profound intensity, we cannot forget his era. We have to understand the way in which his buildings were interwoven with the political and ideological strategies of his time, that is, with the desires and needs of his prestigious clientèle.

Gaudí's architecture isn't formalist but symbolic. It is not architecture wrapped up in its own ideas, but on the contrary, absolutely committed to the life of a Barcelona torn by class struggle.

And he is no mystic absent from the world, but a political figure, present like few others on the stage of this struggle. Or, quite literally, Gaudí was the builder of some of the most important symbolic backdrops to this class struggle, of the architecture of modernity.

## THE TWO SIDES OF BARCELONA

The Barcelona that Gaudí encountered upon his arrival there in 1868 was nothing like the city as we know it today. It was a city in the midst of a transformation, undergoing a growth as fast as it was contradictory. It was dominated by the great void that opened up before it after the demolition of its city walls. The immensity of the plain that extended before it became the clean slate where, thanks to the gridded design of the Cerdà Plan, anything was possible: one could not imagine a better symbol of the bourgeois *laissez faire*.

The rapid occupation of the *Ensanche* area is a clear example of the accumulation of capital by the Barcelonian bourgeoisie. The luxury and novelty of buildings, public or private, as well as the generous breadth of the streets and boulevards, constitute the most optimistic face of this bourgeoisie.

But that modern city, which looked to the future by creating an "Occitanian-style Paris" was only one side of the coin. The other side, popular and revolutionary, which rose from this same Barcelona, now known as "*Rosa de Fuego*" (the Rose of Fire), the perfect setting for the class struggle, with all its violence and terrible inequalities.



Eusebi Arnau. *Bust of a matron representing Barcelona*. 1897. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.





PARANINFO.  
sección transversal escala 1:50

Antoni Gaudí. *Paraninfo*. 1877. Càtedra Gaudí. ETSAB. UPC.

## GAUDÍ'S FORMATIVE YEARS

One of the myths surrounding Gaudí is that he learnt everything he knew thanks to a type of infused science, looking at nature through a child's eyes. Or that he inherited the moral and material qualities of artisan work through the generations of metal workers that he had descended from. Nothing could be further from the truth: Gaudí trained intellectually at the recently opened School of Architecture in Barcelona. An optimistic school in all regards, that wanted to respond to the material and symbolic needs of a city in great expansion and, at the same time, of a bourgeoisie seeking to express itself in its own, modern and cosmopolitan language. During his formative years, as we can see in his student projects, Gaudí participated actively and consciously in the intellectual controversies of the time. He was critically acquainted with the works of some of the leading European theorists and architects such as, Viollet-le-Duc, John Ruskin and the contemporary British design reformers. He also had access to the extraordinary bibliographic and photographic resources that the School had acquired since its foundation and which it made available to its students.

Although his family had sufficient means to fund his career in Barcelona, the truth is that, in his professional beginnings, Gaudí had to work, very reluctantly, as an employee for other architects. He worked for Josep Fonseré on the works for the Ciudadel Park, for example, and for Francisco de Paula del Villar on the works for the Camarín de la Virgen chapel in Montserrat.

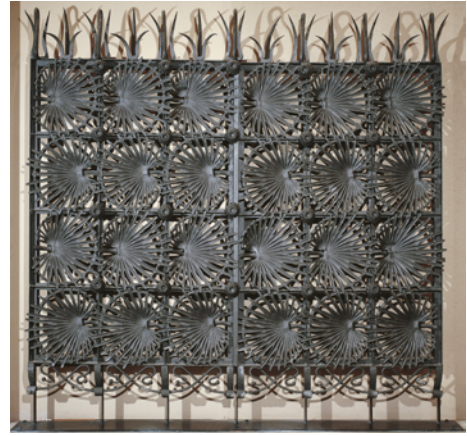
In addition, the projects carried out for the Mataró Workers' Cooperative, his first work as a professional, mainly correspond to what we nowadays refer to as "urban furniture" —advertising supports, newspaper kiosks, lamp posts and shop windows—.

A type of work that was very representative of the transformations to which a city is turned into the merchandise and shows of the new urban masses.

Already in the decade of the 1880s, Gaudí received his first architectural commissions in his own right: Casa Vicens and the Güell Pavillions in Pedralbes. Gaudí turned these small works into authentic displays of his own abilities, both in the magnificent use of materials and techniques and in the great variety of cultural and visual references. In these early works, Gaudí used his own expressly eccentric style and absolutely new in the Barcelona panorama of the moment.

## PROJECTS FOR EUSEBI GÜELL. PALAU GÜELL, PARK GÜELL AND THE COLONIA GÜELL CHURCH

According to legend, the association between Gaudí and Eusebi Güell began when Güell saw a window display that Gaudí had planned for glove retailer Esteve Comella at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1878. But it is more likely that they were introduced by Joan Martorell, architect for the Güell family and Gaudí's employer. Whichever it was, after the building of the Pedralbes Pavillions, Gaudí became Eusebi Güell's personal architect. Thus, a relationship was formed between the two that their contemporaries compared to that of the great patrons and artists of the Renaissance, or with that of Ludwig II of Bavaria and Richard Wagner. The genius's daring



**Antoni Gaudí.** *Double gate, Casa Vicens.* c. 1883-1885. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.



**Antoni Gaudí.** *Dressing table, Palau Güell.* c. 1886-1889. Private collection.



**Josep Parera.** *Caricature of Eusebi Güell i Bacigalupi.* c. 1889. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.



has a direct impact on the public recognition of his patron's liberality, who was the one who approved them.

The aristocratic ideology of Eusebi Güell translates into the princely programme that Gaudí designed for him over the years: a palace in the heart of the old city (the Palau Güell), a suburban park (the Park Güell) and a temple (the church of Colonia Güell).

With these three works, Gaudí and Güell launched a programme of great symbolic tension and profoundly anti-urban ideology: the palace was the place on which the city founded its “new antiquity”; the park was the ideal image of a mythical land in which the typical Catalan landscape was developed; and the temple, the patriarchal vision of what they then called the “social problem” —that is, the class struggle, which was settled in sacred, redemptive terms—.



**Unknown photographers.** *Photographs of the interior of the Palau Güell. c. 1909-1927. Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic. Arxiu Mas.*

## CASA CALVET, CASA BATLLÒ AND CASA MILÀ: HOUSES IN THE ENSANCHE AREA

The construction of multi-storeyed houses in the Ensanche was one of the characteristic commissions undertaken by the architects of Barcelona. According to perfectly established typologies, their façades responded to a neoclassical model of balconies and cornices. From 1900, on the other hand, the façade was the place through which the owners expressed the new concept of superconsumption wealth: the architects were given free rein to design them with the greatest of eccentricities. Some streets in the city, such as the Paseo de Gracia, became a shop window for luxury, based on constant innovation. Far from the collective order of neoclassicism, the “modernist” façades were like pictures of an exhibition, furiously independent of each other and based on “discord”.



**Antoni Gaudí.** *Confidente. c. 1904-1906. Work loaned by the Fundació Junta Constructora del Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Família, 2014. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.*

Gaudí built three of these buildings. On Casa Calvet he had already proposed a uninhibited interpretation of the Baroque, which would also be present on the Casa Batlló and Casa Milà. On the façades of these two buildings, the laws of tectonics were under constant suspicion. These houses also demonstrate his knowledge of the most advanced European

works of the moment —above all, the works of Hector Guimard—. Also his interest in universal exhibitions, mass print media, exotic styles or “natural artistic forms”, especially from the underwater world, so popular at the time.

## EXHIBITION IN PARIS

In 1910, thanks to the patronage of Eusebi Güell, an exhibition of Gaudí's work was organised in Paris. The preparation for this exhibition, at which he presented scale plaster models, large format plans and photographs, was done in the workshop of the Sagrada Família. According to chronicles of the time, Gaudí never appeared to be very enthusiastic about this project, which he delegated to his assistants. The Parisian critics, little used to the eccentricities of an architect like Gaudí, who by then was very popular, was ambiguous. While recognising the originality of his work, they pointed it out as the compendium of “bad taste”.

1910 is also the year in which, after the “Semana Trágica” (the Tragic Week of 1909 during which many churches in Barcelona were burned), Gaudí would abandon all private commissions to devote himself exclusively to the Sagrada Família, which he did so until the end of his life. Thus, at the same time that Güell orchestrated an international projection of his work, Gaudí decided to seek refuge in his workshop.

After the fires of the Tragic Week, the architect's workshop became a kind of “refuge for the end of the world” from which to organise his redemption.

## RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE AND LITURGICAL RESTORATION. MALLORCA CATHEDRAL.

Gaudí had a long-lasting relationship with religious architecture and the design of liturgical objects furniture dating back to the start of his career. At the same time, in Catalonia,



**Antoni Gaudí.**  
Rose window with the eternal eye. c. 1900-1902.  
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

a deeply conservative ideological project, which identified the foundations of the country with its Christian origins, took shape in the theories and practice developed by bishops like Josep Morgades and Josep Torras i Bages. The reconstruction, —or invention— of the medieval Romanesque and Gothic monasteries, such as the ones at Ripoll and Poblet, or the celebrations surrounding the millennium of Montserrat, served to create a symbolic network that put Catalonia in direct contact with the social restitution of the church. This was done through very concrete images, in which the architecture —old and modern alike— played an essential role.

Gaudí's deep concern for the redemption of the Church and the homeland through architecture is evident in the project of the "liturgical restoration" of Mallorca Cathedral. This project is resolved, on the one hand, as a gigantic collage in which all elements are displaced from their original position to achieve new symbolic meanings. And, on the other hand, in the use of the most experimental techniques and languages, be it in the design of the furniture, in the paintings in the chancel or in the use of trichromy in the stained glass windows.



**Ferran.** *Gaudí's workshop in the Sagrada Família.* c. 1926. © Ferran. Arxiu Històric del COAC.

## LA SAGRADA FAMÍLIA GAUDÍ'S WORKSHOP

The idea of building a temple dedicated to the Holy Family emerged in the decade of 1870, promoted by a series of deeply conservative people and entities, who interpreted in an apocalyptic way the transformations that had occurred in the previous decades: from the loss of the power of the Pope to the successive revolutions and popular insurrections (the most prominent: The Paris Commune of 1871), to the general liberal drift of the bourgeois governments of the European nations.



**Josep Maria Jujol,** *Cloth dedicated to Faith.* Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya 2021.

This perception of being witness to a sort of end-of-the-world reached, in the particular case of Barcelona, the most radical extremes. Let's not forget that Barcelona was then a city fraught with social violence, known as "the city of bombs" and, later, as "Rosa de Fuego" (the Rose of Fire).

This is the context in which the Association of Devotees of St. Joseph decided to build a temple of atonement in the city. But were the sins to be cleansed the sins derived, precisely, from the class struggle?

The works were started by the architect Francisco de Paula del Villar, who abandoned the project in 1883. This same year Gaudí was commissioned to complete the project, who at the time was 31, and whose life from then on would be inextricably linked to the church.



Gaudí made the Sagrada Família the central focus of all his work: he set up his workshop on the premises. Over time, he converted what was initially an eccentricity of a group of Catholics into one of the most important artistic, ideological and symbolic centres of modern Barcelona.

The idea explained by the poet Joan Maragall of the unfinished and incomplete temple, of the temple that was always awaiting its altars; of the construction that was at the same time a destruction, fulfils its redemptive mission; and of the visionary architect that gave it shape, was more than fulfilled Gaudí's lifetime.

Upon Gaudí's death the Sagrada Família was already, without a doubt, the most popular monument in the city of Barcelona, and remains so to this day.



**James Johnson Sweeney. José Luis Sert. Antoni Gaudí.** New York. 1960. Biblioteca del Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya.

## GAUDÍ'S DOUBLE FORTUNE

When Gaudí died on 10 June 1926 just before his 74th birthday, three days after being hit by a tram, his posterity was projected into the future according to two diverging paths.

One arose from the local context and had to do with the enormous popularity that Gaudí had always enjoyed in the city of Barcelona, first as one of its great eccentrics, so indispensable for a superconsumer bourgeois society, then as a solitary, unsociable and misunderstood genius, and finally, as an "architect of God".

The path of the other road, on the other hand, is beginning at this very moment,

and its character, which does not count on the character of Gaudí, is going to be decidedly universal.

It will consist of fitting the work of Gaudí —or, at least, a part of his work, which will cancel the rest—, first, in the formal and ideological machinery of the avant-garde, and second, in the general economy of the so-called "Modern Movement", to make Gaudí a "precursor" of the avant-garde and a "master" for artists as diverse as Joan Miró, Salvador Dalí and Antoni Tàpies, among many others that claimed their origin.



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**Antoni Gaudí.** *Vista exterior de la iglesia de la Colonia Güell.*  
c. 1910-1911. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

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