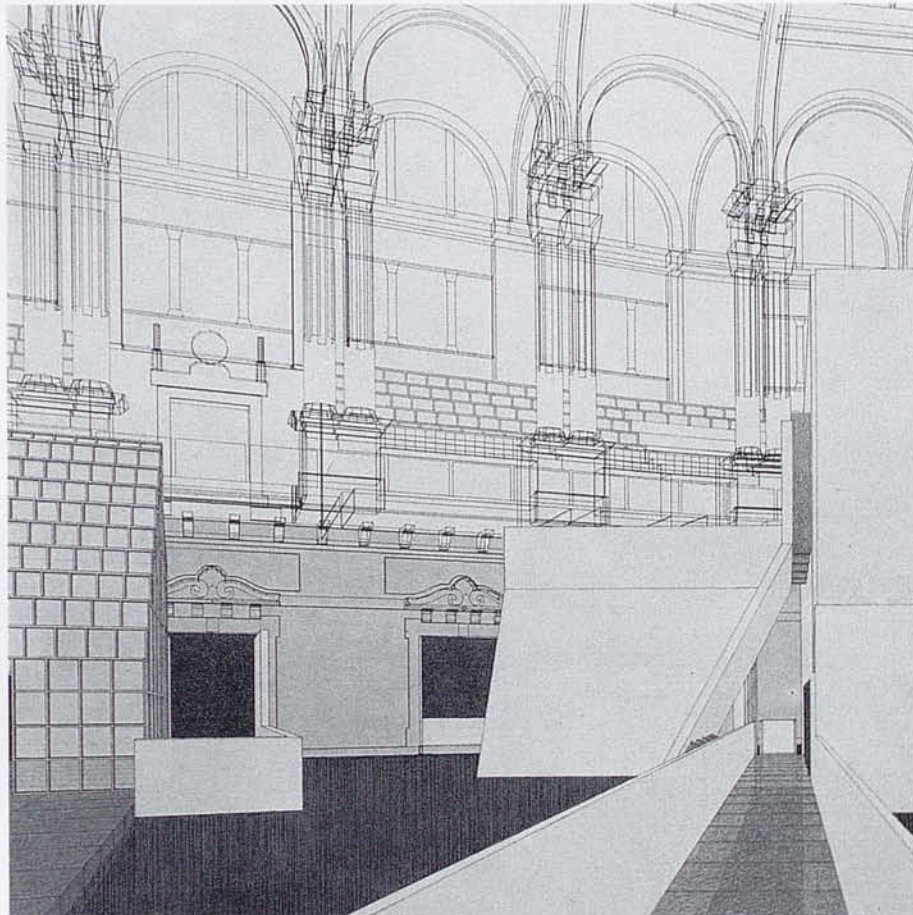


MUSEU D'ART DE CATALUNYA



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JOAN SUREDA I PONS DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEU D'ART DE CATALUNYA

People are nothing without their history. And of history, apart from the present, all that remains are the literary and artistic records. Catalonia is a land of creativity, one with a feeling for the arts; the Catalan people have always found in art the very reason for their existence at the same time as they use it as a medium of expression of their sentiments and of the way they see life and everyday reality.

The *Museu d'Art de Catalunya* is the maximum exponent of this wish to turn paintings and sculptures into something more than just aesthetic objects. The museum's birth reflects the Catalan *Renaixença*, which, from the nineteenth century on, with ups and downs and differing political, sociological and ideological significance, has led Catalonia to search for its cultural roots in the medieval world.

For this reason, the *Museu d'Art de Catalunya*, looking out from Montjuïc over one of the most impressive views in Barcelona, has become the seat of the most important collection of medieval art in the world. The impressive collection of mural paintings that historical events left in the valleys of the Pyrenees, are now the real treasures of the museum.

Visiting the museum's halls, we not only enter a highly stimulating world of images, but also the thoughts and feelings of those men who, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were forging the cradle of western civilization.

But to be able to appreciate the full grandeur of this Romanesque art, nothing better than to look at the exhibits through the eyes of modern man, following the example of Picasso, Miró and many other artists.

Romanesque art, whether the paintings carried out on walls or those done on wood, in no way responds to the laws of visual logic. Its aim was not to represent what man saw every day: the hills, the trees or the objects of his dreary day to day life. Romanesque art—the art we can admire in the museum's halls—moved away from what was immediate and individual to search for the perfection of the infinite, of that which has neither beginning nor end, of the perfect image of divine beauty.

No painting is more representative of this ideal than the one from the apse of Sant Climent de Taüll (c. 1123), called the "Sistine Chapel of Romanesque art". In the representation of the Christ of Taüll,



the religious symbols (the hand, the ring) are a clear example of the supernatural aspect of the apocalyptic vision that inspires all Romanesque painting.

But the *Museu d'Art de Catalunya* contains treasures of other types of art; the world of the Gothic is also present with Catalan painters (Bassa, Serra, Borrassà, Martorell, Dalmau, Huguet) who learnt from the Italians and Flemish to create their own art which went from transcendence to the pulse of life close to man, still a rather idealistic pulse, however, susceptible both to the exaltation of the tender love between the Virgin Mary and her



child and to the latter's crucifixion.

With the crisis in Catalan art at the end of the Middle Ages, the visit to the museum is deflected through halls dedicated to the principal schools or the greatest international artists of Renaissance or Baroque art: Botticelli, Filippo, Lippi, Andrea del Sarto, Tintoretto, El Greco, Zurbarán, Velázquez, Tiépolo, Fragonard, etc.

Like many of the great museums of the world, the *Museu d'Art de Catalunya* has recently started an ambitious programme of modernization, including an architectural reform directed by the Italian architect Gae Aulenti, aimed at the perfection of its installations and services (archive, library, restoration centre, etc.) as well as the inclusion of works of art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at present in the *Museu d'Art Modern*.

In this way, the dream a few Catalans had at the beginning of this century, of making the *Museu d'Art de Catalunya* a museum which would take us from the art of the birth of Europe to our own century, will at last be a reality. ●