

Avant-garde Architecture in Barcelona

Josep Lluís Sert and GATCPAC



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JOSEP LLUÍS SERT I LÓPEZ (Barcelona, 1902–1983)

In the first half of the 1930s the Generalitat of Catalunya was a government committed to addressing social needs. At that time more modest neighbourhoods in cities like Barcelona had serious hygiene and health problems, and the government of the Republic considered it urgent and necessary to emphasize policies for social and urban betterment.

The Generalitat commissioned various projects to the GATCPAC, a group of architects who introduced the criteria of modern architecture into the country, welcoming innovative proposals to dignify cities and housing, thinking above all of the working class. These initiatives gave rise to projects in both urban planning and residential construction where the main priorities were public health, hygiene and socialization, along with the prerogative to come up with innovative solutions in construction. With their manifestos and writings, the GATCPAC reformulated the foundations of architecture as a profession. The group was active in a period when architecture and urban planning played a key role in Catalan development. The rationalism introduced by the GATCPAC in Catalonia brought with it new criteria and ideas that were likewise being conceived and put into practice in the most advanced countries of Europe. At the same time, the group paid attention to the country's vernacular architecture and traditional construction techniques, which in the end were understood as expressions of pure functionalism. Avant-garde Architecture in Barcelona, seeks to encourage understanding of the GATCPAC's architectural legacy and its best known architect, Josep Lluís Sert, in relation to the city of Barcelona. This guide-map is a reflection of the importance of the GATCPAC in the development of modern society and on Barcelona as it is known today. This publication includes all buildings of the GATCPAC that have been preserved to the present.

The GATCPAC (Group of Catalan Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture) was comprised of a group of young, ambitious architects who took a belligerent stance against the dominant architectural style in the country in the 1920s, striving to rethink twentieth century Catalan architecture in general. It was no coincidence that a few months before the start of the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition an exhibit on the group was inaugurated at the Galeries Dalmau, entitled Arquitectura nova [New Architecture], setting itself up in contrast to the outdated style of the majority of buildings done for the World's Fair. The group's first projects were shown in the gallery, under the influence of new architectural currents emerging across Europe.

During a voyage throughout Europe, a group of GATCPAC members were able to see the emergence of new rationalist, avant-garde architecture first-hand. This movement was grounded in functionalism (the function of the building was meant to determine the form) and did away with everything considered superfluous, such as ornamentation. The emergence of new materials and technologies applied to construction, allowing for standardized industrial production, was also particularly valued, paving the way for architectural innovation. The movement spread to the rest of the Spain and caught the interest of architects from all over the country, who created the group known as the GATEPAC in 1932. It was organized into three sections, including the Catalan group: Grupo Centro, based in Madrid, Grupo Norte, with its headquarters in Bilbao, and Grupo Este (GATCPAC), working out of Barcelona. The Catalan Government during the Republic, driven by the desire to modernize the country, worked on policies to improve the social, labour and life conditions of the working class. In this political context, the GATCPAC became the technical branch of the government, putting the principles of the new architecture into practice. The main projects of the GATCPAC were conceived with the goal of improving health and living conditions in

cities and residential buildings.

On an urban scale they proposed the Macià Plan (1932-1934), a new urban plan for the city of Barcelona developed along with Le Corbusier. The plan sought to rethink Cerdà's Eixample Plan with the goal of responding to the social needs of the moment and clean up the historic centre. It also proposed improving communication with the beaches on the Llobregat Delta as part of the study for the creation of a City of Rest and Vacations, primarily destined to the working class.

Furthermore, the GATCPAC did research on housing materials and medical-service buildings in relation to health and hygiene, redefining the minimum standards for twentieth century society. The concrete problems of their immediate context (namely Barcelona and Catalonia) allowed them to reflect and come up with solutions that could be extrapolated to common problems found worldwide.

Their determination to spread these new ideas led them to publish the journal AC. Documentos de Actividad Contemporánea [AC. Documents of Contemporary Activity], which became a shared organ for all groups in the GATEPAC. Besides publishing projects and manifestos on architecture and urban planning, they printed articles on other cultural fields (painting, cinema, design, and others). Furthermore, they opened an exhibition space and sales point known as MIDVA (the Catalan initials stood for Furniture and Decor for Today's Home) on Passeig de Gràcia, where they showed furniture and design products in the style of the Modern Movement. After the Spanish Civil War broke out, the activity of the GATCPAC fell off sharply, as the majority of the projects they were working on were dependent upon the public administration.

In 1937 the last issue of the magazine AC was published, and in 1939 they closed the MIDVA space. The dictatorship meant that many GATCPAC members were prohibited from working in Spain, and quite a few chose to go into exile Debate and research related to architecture took some

time to be reactivated after the Civil War, and it was not until 1951 that Grup R would be founded, a collective that brought together architects from a broad span of generations (Oriol Bohigas, José Antonio Coderch, Josep Martorell and Antoni de Moragas, amongst others) with the idea of continuing the GATCPAC legacy and forging international ties anew

The delegates of GATCPAC in Athens (1933)



OUTSTANDING ARCHITECTS

Josep Torres Clave (Barcelona, 1906 – Els Omellons, Lleida, Spain, 1939)

Hospital

Joan Baptista Subirana Luis Lacasa i Subiraña Navarro (Rosario de Santa Fe, Argentina, 1904 -Barcelona, 1978)

(Ribadesella, Asturias, Spain, 1899 – Moscow, Russia, 1966)



Sixte Illescas i Mirosa (Barcelona, 1903–1986)

Ricardo de Churruca (Manila, Philippines, 1900 –

Barcelona, 1963)

Antoni Bonet i Castellana

(Barcelona, 1913–1989)

1942 The publication of the book 1933-1937 Can Our Cities Survive?, opens the

for South American cities.

1922–1928 Meets Josep Lluís Sert, Josep Torres Clavé and other future members of the GATCPAC at univerin the founding of the GATCPAC. sity. Works with Josep Goday and **1930** Designs the Delegation of the Jaume Torres Grau, architects in National Tourism Board, on the Gran the noucentista neo-classical style Via.. • 1931 With Germán Rodríguez After finishing university he opens Arias, he designs the single family a studio with Josep Lluís Sert. · 1929 dwelling on Plaça de Mons. • 1935 Participates in the exhibition Argui-Designs the residential building on Iradier Street. • 1935-40 With Gertectura nova [New Architecture] at the Galeries Dalmau, with a project mán Rodríguez Arias, he builds the for an airport terminal. Participates residential buildings in the block in the founding of the GATCPAC, and defined by Diagonal, Enric Granados and París streets. After the Civil War receives the commission for Casa Vilaró, one of the first examples of he turns to business pursuits. modern architecture in Barcelona. • 1930 Attends the founding meeting for the GATEPAC and becomes a member of the board.• **1935** Resigns as a board member of the GATCPAC • 1934–1935 Designs the residential building on Padua Street, an exam-

1928 Designs the Gran Hotel Atlántico in Cadiz. • 1929 Participates

Works at a young age on projects like the Macià Plan and the City of Rest and Vacations in Castelldefels. \cdot **1931** Participates in the founding of the MIDVA. • **1932** Collaborates in the studio of Josep Lluís Sert. • 1933 While still a student he attends the CIAM conference held on a cruise ship from Marseille to Athens. • 1936 Works in Le Corbusier's studio in Paris.. • 1937 Works with Josep Lluís Sert again on the project for the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic in Paris. • **1938** Goes into exile to Argentina and does various architectural and furniture design projects. • 1953–1960 From Argentina he designs the La Ricarda residence, in Prat del Llobregat. • 1962 With Josep Puig Torné, he designs the Canòdrom Meridiana grevhound racing track. • **1963** With J. Puig Torné, he designs the Mediterrani

building. 1975–1980 Designs the

Constitutional Courthouse

in Madrid.



Born into a family of the upper Catalan bourgeoisie in contact with the world of art (the painter Josep Maria Sert was his uncle) and intellectual circles, throughout his life he would cultivate cultural relationships. Joan Miró, Alexander Calder and Pablo Picasso were amongst his closest friends. 1923–1929 Studies at the Barcelona School of Architecture (Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura de Barcelona). • 1927 Travels to Paris where he learns of the work of Le Corbusier. • 1929 Finishes his degree and joins the Le Corbusier studio. • **1930** Returns to Barcelona and receives his first commissions. The GATCPAC is constituted and Sert will be its main participant. • **1932** Cofounder of ADLAN (Amics de l'Art Nou) [Friends of New Art], an initiative that strengthens his ties to the national artistic community. · 1936–1939 During the Civil War, with Luis Lacasa, he designs the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic for the 1937 Paris International Exposition. While the war lasts in Spain he remains in exile. • 1939 After the fascist victory, he is prohibited from working as an architect in Spain and leaves for the United States

He founds a new architecture office with Huson Jackson and Ronald Gourley. On the Harvard University campus he designs various buildings with a Mediterranean feel. **1976** He receives the Gold Medal of the French Academy of Architecture • **1981-1983** He receives the Gold Medal for Architecture, awarded by the Spanish College of Architects, and the Gold Medal of the Generalitat de Catalunya. Some of Sert's most representative works: 1930-1931 **Residential building On Muntaner Street** (Barcelona) 1933-1939 With Josep Torres Clavé and Joan Baptista Subirana (Barcelona) 1933-1934 **J. Roca Jewellery Shop** Currently Tous boutique (Barcelona)



he creates the Town Planning Asso-**Universal Exposition** (Paris) (rebuilt in 1992 in Barcelona) ciates, designing urban plans, many

• **1947–1956** He is named president 1955 of the CIAM. • **1953–1969** He is Joan Miró Studio

Currently part of the Fundació Pilar named Dean of the Harvard Graduated School of Design and moves to i Joan Miró (Palma de Mallorca) Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1958

> 1958-1966 Holyoke Center, (Cambridge, United States)

> > 1960 **United States Embassy** (Bagdad)

1962-1966 **Peabody Terrace**

Apartment buildings at Harvard University (Cambridge, United States) [1]

1964 **Maeght Foundation**

(Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France) (3) 1966-1971

Houses at Punta Martinet (Ibiza)

1970-1973 Science Center Harvard University (Cambridge, United States) (2)

1970-1975 **Apartments at Roosevelt Island and**

Yonkers, (New York, United States)

1972-1975 Fundació Joan Miró (Barcelona)







Architect with Josep Lluís Sert of Architect with Josep Lluís Sert the Casa Bloc and Tuberculosis of the Casa Bloc and Tuberculosis Hospital 1926 Receives a degree in Math-Born into a well-off family who were

founders of the Foment d'Obres i Construccions construction company. From a young age he proves to be skilled in drawing and painting. • 1914 His father, Raimon Torres Grau, dies prematurely. Jaume Torres Grau, his uncle, a noucentista (neo-classical revival) architect, tutors his education and later on invites him to join his studio. • 1926–1927 Studies architecture, meeting Josep Lluís Sert and Sixte Illescas. Travels with them to Italy to study master painters. • 1929 Finishes his degree in architecture. Participates with Josep Lluís Sert in the exhibition at the Galeries Dalmau Arquitectura nova [New Architecture], with a project entitled Planning of a village on the coast, a group of residential buildings based on novel concepts. • **1930–1937** Participates in the founding of the GATEPAC and the magazine AC, which he comes to direct. Associates with J. L. Sert and J. B. Subirana. Begins his participation in projects that will lead to some of the masterpieces of Catalan rationalist architecture: the Macià Plan for Barcelona, the Casa Bloc, the Tuberculosis Hospital and the City of Rest and Vacations. • 1936–1937 Intensifies his activity to apply progressive ideas to urban planning and architecture. As the founder of the Union of Architects of Catalonia, he reorganizes the techni cal services of Barcelona Town Hall, and as the director of the School of

Architecture, he renews its ageing

academic structure. • 1938-1939 He

goes to the front during the Spanish

Civil War, where he is killed during

the retreat of the Republican army.

ematics. • 1930 Receives his degree in Architecture after studying in Barcelona, Madrid and Berlin. Also receives his PhD in Exact Sciences. Begins his professional career winning a contest for the construction of inexpensive housing in Valencia, doing schools in Madrid and Valladolid. • 1931 Works with Walter Gropius during a stage in Berlin • 1931–1932 With Fernando García Mercadal he organizes the International Exposition of Modern Schools. • **1932–1938** Becomes an active member and founding director of the GATCPAC. Works with Josep Lluís Sert and Josep Torres Clavé until the onset of the Civil War. • 1933 With F. Garcia Mercadal he designs a project for popular beaches in Jarama, Madrid, inspired in the City of Rest and Vacations. • 1934 Participates in creating regional hospital organization policy in Catalonia and does projects to renovate and enlarge various hospitals, some in collaboration with Josep Torres Clavé. • 1939 After the Civil War he stays in Barcelona, finishing the interrupted projects of the GATCPAC and restarting his professional career in spite of two expulsion orders against him for collaborating with the government of the Republic.

Architect with Josep Lluís Sert of the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic

While he was not a member of the GATCPAC, he contributed to the introduction of the rationalist movement in Spain, and is considered a member of what is known as the Generation of 25. • **1921** Receives his degree from the Madrid School of Architecture and continues his studies in urban planning at the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany.. • 1926–1932 With Manuel Sánchez Arcas he wins contests for the construction of hospitals and the Rockefeller Institute in Madrid, demonstrating the combination of rationalist principles and traditional construction practices. 1925–1930 Member of the organizing committee of the 11th National Congress for Architecture and the 1st National Congress for Urban Planning. Participates in the creation of the College of Architects of Madrid. Befriends Alberto Sánchez, Federico García Lorca and Luis Buñuel. Is a founding member of the Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas para la Defensa de la Cultura (Alliance of Anti-fascist Intellectuals for the Defence of Culture]. • **1928–1932** Designs a new building as a student residence at the University City of Madrid.. • 1937 Together with Josep Lluís Sert he designs the Spanish Pavilion for the Paris International Exposition ... • 1939 With the beginning of the Franco regime Lacasa is punished with the total suspension of his right to work as an architect in national territory. Goes into exile to Moscow, where he lives until his death

Raimon Duran i Reynals

[Barcelona, 1895–1966]

His first works as an architect are in the noucentista neo-classical style. • **1926–1929** Does the lobby of the Estació de França train station in Barcelona and the Graphic Arts Palace of the 1929 International Exposition. • 1931–1935 Influenced by Rationalism, he becomes a member of the GATCPAC. Basing his designs on rationalist criteria, he designs the Casa Espona (1934–1935), the Casa Cardenal (1935–1940) and the Can Móra single-family dwelling (1935). After the Civil War he does architecture influenced by the Renaissance.

Ricard Ribas i Seva

(Barcelona, 1907-2000)

1933 Joins the GATCPAC. With Francesc Perales, designs a prototype flower stall on the Rambla. $\cdot\,1934$ de Torras i Bages. • **1935** Designs the residential building at 166-168 Balmes Street, in a clearly rationalist style. With the Civil War, political positions polarize and he leaves the GATCPAC. Also separates from certain family members linked to exile and lives and works in Milan, Paris, Bogotá and Buenos Aires. 1949 Marries in Uruguay.

1952 Returns to Spain.

(Barcelona, 1902–1987) 1929 Takes part in the founding of the GATCPAC. Travels to Ibiza, and studies its rural architecture, introducing interest in traditional architecture into the criteria of the GATCPAC. • 1930–1931 Designs the Rodríguez Arias building, built for his own family. • 1933–1934 Designs the Astoria building, whose facade recalls the style of the Bauhaus. 1935-1940 With Ricardo de Chur-

ple of modernity. After the Civil War

his professional activity falls off

considerably.

Germán

Rodríguez Arias

ruca, he designs the group of residential buildings in the block defined by Diagonal, Enric Granados and París streets. • 1939 After the Civil War he goes into exile, ending up in Chile, where he continues his career and ends up working for Pablo Neruda, who commissions him various projects.• 1956 Returns to Ibiza where he lives and works. Spends his final years in Barcelona.

Works as a labourer on the prototype "house and garden" done on Passeig the Falange. • 1936 Decides to go into





WORKS 1933–1939 **Casa Bloc**



Josep Lluís Sert, Josep Torres Clavé and Joan Baptista Subirana Pg. Torras i Bages, 91–105

08033 Barcelona

Building complex with five apartment blocks for workers, commissioned to members of the $\ensuremath{\mathsf{GATCPAC}}$ by the Republican Generalitat in 1932. The Casa Bloc was a pilot project to resolve one of the key problems of the city of Barcelona during the twentieth century: shanty towns and poor living conditions of the most needy. Now considered a symbol of rationalist architecture in Barcelona, it represents a new way of conceiving social housing. It also applied new ideas and solutions that were already present in some parts of Europe but still unknown



Good natural light, efficient

these three principles.

ing, bathroom, dining room

and terrace) and an upper floor

in Spain.



ventilation and the perception of open space are the three basic principles the proposal was featuring the bedrooms. formulated upon. In this way, The blend of rationalist archiproject decisions such as the tecture and Mediterranean layout in the open city block, vernacular architecture is the the elimination of interior venmost significant contribution tilation shafts or the placement of the GATCPAC to the Interof the main rooms to enhance national Style. This is seen in their orientation respond to the Casa Bloc project both in the design of the spaces and in The Casa Bloc apartments are construction techniques. organized as duplexes, with a lower floor for daytime activity (kitchen, sink for clothes wash-



1933-1937

Hospital

Tuberculosis



Clavé and Joan Baptista Torres i Amat, 8 08001 Barcelona The Central Tuberculosis Hospital (Dispensari Central Anti-

tuberculós, in Catalan), located in the Raval neighbourhood of Barcelona, was a commission of the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance of the Republican Generalitat, and was part of the campaign against tuberculosis. The Hospital sums up all the postulates and ideological aspirations its designers had set out and developed in isolation until then. It combines the use of new materials (iron, glass bricks) with respect for local construction traditions. It is a health services building with a

modern, innovative conception,



setting out parameters that have been used in hospitals since then. The building is laid out as an "L", the two wings set off from a communication and service

> axis, marking out a wide exterior access space. The layout is based on hygienist criteria to optimize conditions of sun and ventilation, freeing up a good light conditions part of the lot to ensure a gar-Along with the clarity of the dened area and the rationalizalayout, a direct feature of tion of the functional concept. In the lateral wing various services and rooms are placed linearly, with the corridor accessing them given the least favourable orientation. In the wing set across from the en-

its functional program, the constructive idea features a metallic structure in porticos differentiated from the closures. These latter were resolved with light modular elements and the use of new materials such trance there is an auditorium as iron moulding and glass in a preferential location. brick walls. With its smooth parabolic vault it serves as a model and is studied for its acoustic and

Josep Lluís Sert, Luis Lacasa Year built: 1937. Rebuilt in 1992 by Antoni Ubach and Miquel Espinet Architects and J. M. Hernández León

1937. Rebuilt in 1992

of the Republic

Pavilion

Av. Cardenal Vidal i Barraquer, 34-36.08035 Barcelona

The Pavilion of the Republic was built to represent the Spanish Republic at the 1937 International Exposition in Paris. The content of the pavilion had a double goal: first, to denounce the situation of the Civil War devastating the country; and second, to seek out international alliances to defend the Republic from the fascists. For this reason various well-known artists were invited, such as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Julio González, Alberto (Alberto Sánchez Pérez) and Alexander the architectural promenade, Calder, with the idea of creating incorporated into the design



and exhibiting politically committed work. Despite the difficulties of the time and the lack of material and organizational resources, the pavilion was the most important concentration

of Spanish avant-garde art in history to date. Pablo Picasso showed Guernica, a representation of the bombing of the Basque city on the part of German aviation. Joan Miró did an in situ mural on an inside wall of the pavilion, called The Reaper (Catalan Peasant in Revolt), which disappeared with the demolition of the pavilion itself. The building features the combination of functionalist principles and the Mediterranean character that typifies Sert's work. The influence of Le Corbusier comes to the fore. with his idea of



of how the pavilion was to be

walked through, as proposed

by Sert and Lacasa. While other

pavilions at the Exposition, like

the German pavilion and that

of the USSR, competed to prove

who could be the largest and

most spectacular, the Pavilion

of the Spanish Republic put the

emphasis on the unique talent

and unarguable power of its

artists. In 1992 a replica of the

pavilion was built in Barcelona's

Vall d'Hebron neighbourhood. It

currently is the location of the

CRAI Library of the Pavilion of

of Barcelona.

the Spanish Republic, University



1972-1975

Fundació

Parc de Montjuïc, s/n 08038 Barcelona

Found half-way up the mountain of Montjuïc, the Fundació Joan Miró is one of the most important art centres in the city of Barcelona. Joan Miró sought to open a foundation that would not be just a container for his important collection, but also be able to present temporary exhibitions of other artists and become a centre for cultural museum is a fine example agitation, serving as a platform

of how to guide the visitor's to spread knowledge of emerexperience using architectural ging young art. strategies and features. The The Foundation is an artistic combination of single height institution that was conceived and double height spaces and as a shared venture of the the opening of visual perspecartist Joan Miró and the architives and axes between various tect Josep Lluís Sert. spaces in the same museum Josep Lluís Sert's last great promeans the visitor unknowingly ject is one of the best examples ends up following a route that

of the symbiosis of International Style rationalism and Mediterranean architecture On the one hand, then, the function determines the form

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The relationship between the interior and the exterior, between the museum and its surroundings, is so strong that it is difficult to know where the limits lie. Along with this, great effort has been made to let natural light into all the exhibition spaces in the building. This becomes immediately clear by looking up, with the building's roof featuring a great many vaulted skylights.