

Antoni Plàcid Guillem Gaudí i Cornet

1852 – 1926

Antoni Gaudi is, worldwide, one of the most important architects of modernist style.

He studied in Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia¹, and right from the beginning his drawings were considered those of a genius, or of an insane person.

Today, Gaudi is a renown and admired artist, this was not the case in his times.

His style was too new, too different from that of his contemporaries, provoking. However, the Count Eusebi Güell (1846-1918) - Catalan industrialist (who thrived thanks to the industrial revolution in Catalonia in the late 19th Century) and politician – became Gaudi's patron. They met at the start of Gaudi's career and discovered they had similar interests, including faith (both were devout Catholics).



Antonio Gaudi was influenced during his studies by the romantic movement "La Renaixença Catalan"² (that flourished between the 19th and 20th century). Then, after 1890, he progressed towards the Catalan version of Art Nouveau and Jugendstil called "Modernismo".

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Catalonia was formerly a principality of the Crown of Aragon. From the 17th century it became the centre of a separatist movement that now and again dominated Spanish affairs. Catalan separatism re-emerged in the 1850s, when Catalan was revived as a living language with its press and theatre - a movement known as the Renaixença ("Rebirth"). Catalan nationalism became a serious force after 1876, when the Carlists' defeat led the church to support the movement for autonomy. Catalan nationalism had two main components: a conservative, Roman Catholic one and a more liberal, secular one. The former was initially dominant, particularly during the first decades of the 20th century. By 1913, Catalonia had won a certain degree of autonomy, but it was repealed in 1925 by the dictator Primo de Rivera (1923-1930). Primo de Rivera's policy led to the formation of a left-wing coalition party in Catalonia, the Esquerra Republicana. The Esquerra won a sweeping victory in the municipal elections of 1931, and two days later its leader proclaimed a Catalan Republic. A compromise was worked out with the central government, and in September 1932 the statute of autonomy for Catalonia became law. Catalonia played a prominent role in the history of Republican Spain and in the Civil War (1936-39). The Nationalists' victory in 1939 meant the loss of autonomy, however, and Gen. Franco's government adopted a repressive policy towards Catalan nationalism. The establishment of democratic rule in Spain after Franco's death (1975) did not lessen Catalonia's desire for autonomy. In September 1977 limited autonomy was granted. Full autonomy was granted in 1979 with the establishment of the autonomous community of Catalonia. In 2006, Catalonia was granted the status of "nation" and given the same level of taxation responsibility as the Spanish central government.

² In 1813 appeared the Gramatica y apología de la llengua catalana ("Grammar and Apology of the Catalan Language) of Josep Pau Ballot; its publication heralded the Renaixença ("Rebirth"), the literary and linguistic renaissance that characterized the Romantic period in Catalonia.

He was initially inspired by medieval books, gothic art and nature. Throughout his life, he studied nature's shapes and curves, and incorporated them in his buildings. His works were also characterized by Moresque patterns and uncanny ornamental details.

He spent 43 years of his life working on his most ambitious project *La Sagrada Família*, nowadays still under construction.

In order to develop his architectural works, Gaudí gathered many competent collaborators: architects, sculptors and craftsmen (plasterers, blacksmiths, carpenters, glassworkers, ceramists, etc.).

Gaudí lived in a period of booming urban and economic development. Politically speaking, he belonged to the Catalan movement that was struggling against Spain to regain Catalan sovereignty.

On the 7th of June 1926 Gaudí was run over by a tram. Due to his ragged attire many cab drivers refused to pick him up. He was eventually taken to a pauper's hospital. Nobody recognized him.

His friends found him the next day. When they offered to move him to a better hospital, Gaudí refused, saying "I belong here among the poor."

He died three days later at the age of 73. He was buried in *La Sagrada Família*.



His major works are:

- Casa Vincens (1884–1885)
- Palau Guell (1885–1889)
- College of the Teresianas (1888–1890)
- Crypt of the Church of Colònia Guell (1898–1916)
- Casa Calvet (1899–1904)
- Casa Batllò (1905–1907)
- Casa Milà (La Pedrera) (1905–1907)
- Park Guell (1900–1914)
- Sagrada Família, Nativity façade and Crypt of the Sagrada Família church (1884–1926, although the work is still underway)