

# Bourgeois Taste in Decorative Arts in the Collections of the Museu Nacional D'Art de Catalunya



Mariàngels  
Fondevila  
Spain



Gaspar Homar  
(1870-1955)  
*Settee with side cabinets  
and marquetry panel*  
Circa 1905  
120 x 154 x 4 cm  
Oak wood, marquetry,  
green velvet upholstery  
and leaded glass  
Inv. number:  
071703-000  
Purchased 1967  
Museu Nacional d'Art  
de Catalunya  
(Barcelona)

In 1880 the Italian travel writer Edmondo de Amicis observed while visiting Barcelona: *There are large buildings, long streets, regular squares. Luxurious homes are being constructed in the Eixample for the new middle and upper classes.*

By the end of the century, Barcelona had become the most industrialized, populous, and culturally advanced city in Spain, open to the outside world and proud of its economic potential after the success of its Universal Exposition of 1888. *Modernisme* was made possible in Catalonia by the growth of construction through the urban development project of the Eixample (expansion) following a plan by Ildefonso Cerdà. The old walls were demolished in 1854, and a new city sprang up. The emerging bourgeoisie, enriched thanks in particular to the textile sector, was looking for ways to show off its power. This was a golden age for the architects, the real protagonists of *Modernisme*, who broadened horizons and exercised their skills in other fields. Following the



Lluís Domènech  
i Montaner  
(1850-1923)  
*Hydraulic floor tiles*  
Circa 1900  
210 x 120 x 3,5 cm  
Hydraulic floor tiles  
Inv. number:  
153252-CJT  
Donated by OCSA,  
1991  
Museu Nacional d'Art  
de Catalunya  
(Barcelona)



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Antoni Gaudí  
(1852-1926)  
*Double sofa*  
Circa 1904-1906  
104,5 x 167 x 75,5 cm  
From Casa Batlló  
(Barcelona)  
Ash wood  
Inv. number:  
156070-000  
Permanent loan from  
Casa-Museu Gaudí,  
Junta  
Constructora Temple  
Sagrada Família, 1991  
Museu Nacional  
d'Art de Catalunya  
(Barcelona)

examples of Ruskin, Viollet-Le-Duc, and William Morris, they became multidisciplinary artists capable not only of conceiving the plans for a house but also of imagining all the little details of its furnishing and interior decoration.

One privileged setting for *Modernisme* was Passeig de Gràcia in Barcelona, where the most affluent families made their homes in the buildings that were most representative of the city's life. Worth special mention is a block of houses including Casa Amatller, Casa Lleó Morera, and Casa Batlló, remodelled by the architects Josep Puig i Cadafalch, Lluís Domènech i Montaner and Antoni Gaudí, respectively.

The Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya exhibits the interior decoration from the main floor, the most richly worked. Concerning Casa Amatller, Puig i Cadafalch explores there the rich possibilities of the revived decorative arts. Commissioned by Antoni Amatller, a chocolate manufacturer, photographer, and lover of great art, Puig i Cadafalch was responsible for designing the lights and furniture, as well as the bench and the ceiling lamps with medieval reminiscences. The nationalist sentiments of Catalan society were expressed through a late revision of medieval styles, and Puig i Cadafalch played an important role in medieval revivalism in Catalonia. During the same time that we worked in Casa Amatller, Puig i Cadafalch



organized the restauration of medieval churches and the transport of paintings back to Barcelona for installation in the museum.

The interior decoration of the main floor of Casa Lleó Morera, remodelled by the architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner, is the other great pillar of the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya *Modernista* collection. Lluís Domènech, posthumously described as an orchestral conductor for his group work with different craftsmen, entrusted the soloist Gaspar Homar (a cabinet-maker) with the wrapping of these private rooms of the main floor, where the owner's family lived. The case of Domènech and Homar is one of total and absolute rapport, and together they developed sets of great wealth and comfort that mirrored the tastes and the new lifestyles of the Catalan bourgeoisie. These very attractive sets belonged to the less hyperbolic Art Nouveau trend. Domènech was influential in reviving the old artistic crafts and trades, and not only designed the architectural structures for his project, but also supervised the finishing of both exteriors and interiors. His work embraced new sources of stylistic inspiration, from a review of histo-

Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926), *Door*, 1906, 218 x 75 x 4,5 cm  
Carved ash wood and metallic elements, Inv. number: 153434-000, Recovered 1986, From Casa Batlló (Barcelona)  
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona)



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Frederic Vidal (1882-1950), *Four-leafed glass door*, Circa 1900  
278,5 x 85,3 x 4,8 cm, From Torre Bertrand (Barcelona)

**Uncommon** Wood and 'cloisonné' stained glass, Inv. number: 131662-CJT

**Culture** Donated by the estate of Eusebi Bertrand i Serra, 1985, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona)

Frederic Vidal (1882-1950)

*Lily screen*

1899-1904

160 x 183 x 5 cm

Beads of 'cloisonné' glass, glass and wood

Inv. number: 131675-CJT

Donated by the estate of Eusebi Bertrand i Serra, 1985

From Torre Bertrand (Barcelona)

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona)



rical styles to a free interpretation of natural forms.

The Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya also holds a hydraulic paving from a demolished house in Barcelona. It was one of the tiles that Lluís Domènech designed for the firm Escofet, one of the most important manufacturers of its day, who used tilings designed by the most prominent architects, painters and decorators of the time.

Furniture from the main floor of Casa Batlló by Gaudí is another high point of our collection. These works, acclaimed by the French surrealists and especially by Salvador Dalí, are from the same period as the furniture of Casa Lleó Morera. In this case, Gaudí abandoned historical revivals in favor of original invention. Gaudí's outlandish furniture stands out for the physical qualities of the raw materials, with their textures, grain, knots, and cracks, highlighting the essence of nature. He appeals to essential universal forms and foregoes any superfluous extras. He has no use for typical textile elements, which Mrs. Batlló mis-

Joan Busquets (1874-1949)

*Display cabinet*

1907

190 x 85 x 40 cm

Gilded and pyroengraved wood,

repoussé gilded wrought metal and glass

Inv. number: 106039-000

Purchased 1969

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona)



sed and kept begging him for. Gaudí also forewent the techniques in vogue, such as marquetry or carving, which contemporary artists made such a show of, and proved to be a pioneer of ergonomic design. In summary, he creates sets that turn their back on the past and are a prelude to the modern and contemporary designs. For Casa Batlló, Gaudí also designed his hexagonal floor tiles with an allegory of the marine world: starfish, snails,



Francesc Vidal (1847-1914)

*Chest of drawers with doors*

Circa 1890

136,5 x 125,5 x 68 cm

Walnut wood with carving and gilded metal

Inv. number: 131629-000

Donated by the estate of Eusebi Bertrand i Serra, 1985

From Torre Bertrand (Barcelona)

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona)



and seaweeds in apple-green bas-relief. This was the same model that paved the curbs of Passeig de Gràcia. Gaudí clients were mostly members of the emerging bourgeoisie (Milà, Batlló, Calvet) and especially Eusebi Güell, magnate and industrialist. The Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya keeps the famous *trencadis*, irregular-shaped pieces of ceramic tiles from Park Güell, and liturgical furniture from the Colònia Güell. The latter is a visionary design like a *prie-dieux*, one of the last pieces of furniture Gaudí made that closes the cycle of liturgical objects (chandeliers, altar crosses,

confessionals) that he did for his other main client, the Catholic Church.

Gaudí made his first project for the industrialist Manuel Vicenç, and the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya exhibits twin Railings. It is the first important sign of the central role that iron was to play as an ornamental material, in which Gaudí opted for vernacular and Mediterranean plant themes: palmeto, the flowers growing in the garden of the house, which is still standing in Carrer de les Carolines in Barcelona.



Josep Maria Jujol (1879-1949)

*Handle*

1911

59 x 44 x 11 cm

From the former Mañach establishment (Barcelona)

Wrought iron

Inv. number: 208126-000

Donated by Ramon Tort Estrada, 2003

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona)



Josep M. Jujol, a partner of Gaudí who went beyond the aesthetic limits of Modernisme, is also present in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, thanks to the recent donation of a collection of furniture from the home of Pere Mañach, one of Picasso's first dealers. Jujol rejected traditional cabinet-making techniques and worked directly with his hands using rudimentary procedures. Jujol did not give precedence to noble or expensive materials, and a defining feature of his work is the use of recycled elements. The result shows an obvious creative ambiguity, halfway between painting, design and craft, with religious and symbolic connotations. He also decorated the interior of the workshop of Mañach, applying flashes of surrealism *avant-la-lettre* in 1911. From this unpreserved space an iron knob survives in the form of a heart pierced by an arrow, the sublimation of Jujol's pious devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Gaspar Homar (1870-1955)

*Clothes stand and umbrella stand*

Circa 1906

192 x 46 x 43 cm

Repoussé and cast brass elements, and brass tubes

Inv. number: 071735-000

Purchased 1967

From Casa Lleó Morera (Barcelona)

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona)



Joan Busquets (1874-1949)

*Armchair*

1907

103 x 60 x 57.5 cm

Gilded Scots pine and blue-grey natural damask upholstery

Inv. number: 106042-000, Purchased 1969

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona)



Alongside the architect, an artist who played a central role in Modernisme was the *ensemblier* or interior decorator.

The workshops of the furniture-maker Francesc Vidal, who headed a large manufacturing firm producing furniture, glass and metal objects, were the nurseries where a series of brilliant artists trained in different branches of *Modernista* decorative arts. Vidal, who competed with architects, satisfied the demands of a bourgeoisie who lived surrounded by stodgy furniture and objects that perpetuated historicist or exotic clichés such as neo-Renaissance, neo-Gothic, and Oriental. However, Vidal was also a man with a cosmopolitan mentality, abreast of novelties introduced by international events and with a first-hand knowledge of the experience of the arts and crafts thanks to his visits to London, where he made contact with an English manufacturer



Lambert Escaler  
(1874-1957)

*Winter*

Circa 1903

31,3 x 45,3 x 9,3 cm

Polychrome terracotta

Inv. number: 113300-000

Donated by Mercedes Escaler,  
daughter of the artist,  
1970

Museu Nacional d'Art  
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of *cloisonné* stained glass, which he imported to Barcelona through his son Frederic. In some projects he did for the industrialist Eusebi Bertrand in Barcelona, currently exhibited at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, he used a new technique called *cloisonné* (based on little coloured balls of glass and brass) in the design of screens, lamps and other items of furniture, with clearly *Modernista* floral patterns of oriental inspiration.

The cabinet-maker Gaspar Homar was one of the workers in Vidal's workshops. The Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya holds his furniture as well as ceramic tiles, metalwork, textile designs and his water-coloured designs, and in particular, it has collected a considerable number of *marquetrys*. These Symbolist "pictures in wood" are based on update repertoires *fin de siècle*. With the technique he used in making them, involving six to eight sheets of wood, he could incorporate this element in a given item of furniture, to decorate ceilings and walls, or use it as an independent, pictorial element and make various series in order to sell them.

Along with Homar, another *ensemblier* who devoted himself to the comfort and beauty of home interiors was Joan Busquets. During his stay in Paris in 1900, on the occasion of the Universal Exhibition, Busquets was a privileged observer of the French creations. From then on, Busquets acquiesced to the wishes of his clients, who were anxious to keep abreast of trends, and incorporated the Franco-Belgian Art Nouveau fashion. From the *Modernista* production of the Busquets workshop, the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya holds a set of furniture with graceful and slender lines and a Louis XV influence, the basic inspiration for French Art Nouveau.





Lambert Escaler  
(1874-1957)

*Maleïna*

Circa 1903

40.9 x 39.8 x 4.1 cm

Polychrome terracotta

Inv. number: 108217-000

Purchased 1970

Museu Nacional d'Art  
de Catalunya (Barcelona)



We must also mention the arts of the small objects, a hymn to the beauty and poetry of domestic home and bourgeois taste. The series of sculptures by Lambert Escaler are a good example of this. They were made in moulds, using a modest material such as clay, and were more affordable than marble sculptures. The leitmotif was the female figure, and they evoke fantasy, dreams, and the powerful sensuousness of the muses of the flesh that appeared on postcards and in publications at the turn of the century (Cléo de Merode, Sarah Bernhardt, La Bella Otero). In the field of artistic ceramics, one key figure is Antoni Serra, who defined the poetics of Symbolism with a particular affinity to Georges de Feure; he also assimilated Secessionist decorative features and sought out collaboration with artists of other generations.

The removal of barriers between the major and minor arts as propounded by *Modernisme* made for an unheard of approximation to the private and the intimate sphere of jewellery on the part of painters and sculptors. A small selection of these works is held at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. The jeweler and painter Lluís Masriera is the essential artist of the period. Having consolidated and perfected his knowledge in Geneva and in Paris, when he was shocked by René Lalique's fantastic creations exhibited at the salons, he broke with the eclectic repertory of the family business and introduced the new Art Nouveau fashion. With a Japanese influence (like many of the protagonists of Art Nouveau, he had an exceptional collection of Japanese art), flower-insect women and vaporous nymphs (without forgetting Saint George, the patron saint of Catalonia) are the most recurrent themes in these items of jewellery, which have gold and enamels as their basic materials.

Antoni Serra (1869-1932), *Vase decorated with a female figure*

Circa 1901-1907, 14,2 x 6,4 x 6,4 cm

Polychrome porcelain with gold outlines

Inv. number: 001579-000

Purchased at the '5th International Exhibition  
of Fine Arts and Artistic Industries', Barcelona, 1907

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Barcelona)



Lluís Masriera's jewellery, in addition to serving as a decorative accessory, became an accurate gauge of financial success, as the journalist Gaziell realised: *Barcelona is one of the most bejewelled of European cities [...] Since ancient times, jewels have been seen by the Barcelona bourgeoisie as the highest sign of economic power, the supreme exponent of social distinction.*

