

## Gregori Civera y Jorge Ribalta

Fever of Matter. Approaches to the Central Antituberculosis Dispensary in the Raval, Barcelona

### 20.3 > 24.5.25

àngels barcelona. C. Pintor Fortuny, 27

“What then was life? It was warmth, the warmth generated by a form-preserving instability, a fever of matter, which accompanied the process of ceaseless decay and repair of (...) molecules...”

Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, 1924

(trad. H.T. Lowe-Porter, New York, Knopf, 1927), 1924.



The Central Antituberculosis Dispensary (Sert-Subirana-Torres Clavé, 1933-37) is an emblematic building of the functionalist avant-garde architecture in Barcelona, with Josep Lluís Sert (1901-1983) as its main local advocate. It is also one of the landmark projects of GATEPAC and a symbol of the progressive healthcare policies of the Spanish Republic period (1931-1939). Additionally, it represents the first redevelopment aimed at regenerating the Raval neighbourhood, following the principles of rationalist hygienism. In 1932, *AC* magazine, published by GATEPAC, dedicated an issue to the Raval (then called Barrio Chino o Distrito 5 [Fifth District]), denouncing its insalubrity and its long-standing reputation as Barcelona's underworld, a sort of chronic disease within the fabric of the old city. In retrospect, this building can be seen as the starting point of a long process of urban reform in Raval, a process that became particularly decisive in the 1980s and whose regenerative or “curative” impulse still persists today.

With the decline in tuberculosis rates from the 1950s onwards, the building's use gradually shifted toward outpatient medical services. In the 1980s, the dispensary was integrated into the new Catalan Administration's public healthcare network. In this context, the Dispensary represented a historical legacy of progress, which gained renewed significance with the restoration of democracy in Spain in the late 1970s, after Franco's dictatorship and within the broader framework of the urban process that architect Oriol Bohigas called the “reconstruction of Barcelona” (Oriol Bohigas, *La reconstrucció de Barcelona*, 1985).

In 1982, a first renovation of the building was carried out, with the direct involvement of Sert himself, who had returned from the United States the previous decade and would pass away the following year. His collaborator was Mario Corea, who was also part of the team that later led the major rehabilitation between 1990 and 1993 (architects Corea-Gallardo-Mannino). The goal of this intervention was to adapt the building to its new function as a Primary Healthcare Center (CAP), a role it has maintained since then: CAP Raval Nord or CAP Dr. Lluís Sayé, renamed in honor of the renowned Barcelona-based tuberculosis specialist.

This rehabilitation was part of the “From the Liceu to the Seminary” plan (Clotet/Tusquets/Bassó, 1981), a set of urban initiatives that shaped Raval's evolution into a new central area since the 1980s, where cultural institutions played a key role in urban regeneration (and gentrification). The core of this redevelopment was the cultural cluster constituted by the CCCB (Contemporary Culture Center of Barcelona) and MACBA (Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona), built on

the former site of the Casa de la Caridad (charity house or poorhouse). The culmination of this transformation occurred within the larger urban renewal projects for the 1992 Olympic Games.

In 1993, the young photographer Gregori Civera, a recent graduate at the time, photographed the Dispensary for a monograph by Antonio Pizza (published by the College of Architects of Almería, 1993), coinciding with the completion of the renovation. Around the same time, Civera also documented the construction of MACBA, completed in 1995. Two decades later, in 2016, minor maintenance work was carried out on the Dispensary. At that time, Jorge Ribalta was photographing the building as part of a series of projects on Barcelona's urban evolution, which he had been developing since 2005. His work critically examines the post-2004 Fórum era, a period he interprets as marking the symbolic end of Cerdà's Barcelona. Some of his photographic series have been set in Raval. His series on the Antituberculosis Dispensary (2015-17) is a reflection on the origins of modernist architecture and its relationship with hygienist policies. Ribalta was partly influenced by the work of Beatriz Colomina, who argues that the fight against tuberculosis played a seminal role in shaping modernist architecture, where the search for light and ventilation was a guiding principle (Colomina, *X-Ray Architecture*, 2019). Modernism thus shaped not only a concept of health but also of morality: the triumph of good over evil.

Civera began photographing the Antituberculosis Dispensary in 2024. His interest stems from the anticipated change in the building's use and is part of a broader long-term documentation of the reform of Plaça dels Àngels, which began in late 2024 and is set to continue until 2027. This redevelopment continues and potentially concludes the urban plan "From the Liceu to the Seminary."

The aim at describing the current historical moment of Barcelona, the tension between what is ending and what is about to begin, is what unites these two photographers in this new exploration of the Antituberculosis Dispensary. Their convergence was largely coincidental. Each has photographed the building at different moments, independently of one another. Although their approaches differ, both share a commitment to capturing the materiality and public life of the building, steering clear of the idealized images that often dominate architectural representation.

---

**Gregori Civera (A Coruña, 1971)** is a specialist in architectural and editorial photography. In his work, he highlights the follow-up of new emblematic architecture in Barcelona after the 2004 Forum of Cultures. Between 2013 and 2014, he did a report for the Italian magazine 'Ottogono' about the new buildings by international authors that were emerging in areas of new centrality in the metropolitan area of Barcelona. He has been the photographer for the Ricardo Bofill studio for over two decades. Gregori Civera has been part of the exhibition: *An Unknown City Under the Fog. New Images of Barcelona's Neighborhoods*, curated by Jorge Ribalta for MACBA, Barcelona, and which is part of the Neighborhood Plan 2021-2024. Among the artists featured in the exhibition, we highlight: Jeff Wall, Martha Rosler, Manolo Laguillo, Pedro G. Romero, and Mabel Palacín.

**Jorge Ribalta (Barcelona, 1963)** seeks to insert itself into the tradition of the reinvented documentary, which dismantles and abandons the modern myth of photography as a transparent medium and universal language, making evident its insertion within power relations. The goal of his work is to produce a representation of the work in the field where he operates, namely, the field of cultural institutions. He is the National Photography Award 2024. Recently, his exhibitions have included: *Everything is True. Fiction and Documents* at the Mapfre Foundation and the University of Navarra Museum (2021-2022) and at the Botín Foundation, where he showcased the project *Variations Güell* (2023). He has also exhibited in institutions such as the Württembergischer Kunstverein, MOMA, Palais de Tokyo, La Caixa Foundation, MACBA, Reina Sofía Museum, and at the Rotterdam Photography Biennial, among others. With a long career as a photography curator, in 2024 he carried out for MACBA and the Neighborhood Plan the exhibition *An Unknown City Under the Fog. New Images of Barcelona's Neighborhoods*.

---