
Palau de Belles Arts. (1888-1942)

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El Palau de Belles arts ENDERROCAT PER FRANCO PER LA SEVA REPRESENTACIÓ DEL CATALANISME I VA TENIR ELS COLLON DE DIR QUE HO VA FER PK A EN MATEU DEL FERRO " NO TENIA FERRO"

PALAU DE BELLES ARTS. (1888-1942)

The Universal Exposition of 1888 provided the surroundings of the Parc de la Ciutadella with a whole series of buildings and pavilions that made up that historic international manifestation that served to project the city. The Palau de Belles Arts, designed by the architect August Font i Carreras (1846-1924), was one of its most emblematic. Font was also responsible for the completion of the current Gothic façade of Barcelona Cathedral and Las Arenas Bullring.

*1887.- The Palau de Belles Arts under construction.

The Palau de les Belles Arts was built in front of the Castell dels Tres Dragons, on the site delimited by the current Passeig de Lluís Companys, Passeig de Pujades, Passeig Picasso and Carrer del Comerç. It had a rectangular floor plan (91 x 50 metres) with an iron structure that covered a large space, the Queen Regent's Hall, with a surface area of 2,000 square metres. The upper floor was structured in several rooms, around the large central space with overhead light, which allowed events and exhibitions to be held. The exterior featured brick towers, with domes at the corners.

It was decorated with sculptures and paintings by the best artists of the time such as Modest Urgell, Eduard Batiste Alentorn or Marià Benlliure. The Hercules fountain, built in 1797, was installed in its gardens until it was moved in 1928.

The great hall hosted the opening ceremony of the Exhibition held on May 20, 1888 in the presence of the King of Spain Alfonso XIII, who was only two years old, and his mother the Queen Regent Maria Cristina of Austria.

*1888.- Aspect offered by the great hall of the Palau de Belles Arts during the opening ceremony of the Exhibition presided over by the kings of Spain.

*1888.- This arch-bridge attached to the façade of the Palau de Belles Arts was an ephemeral construction during the Exhibition. In the background you can see the houses on Commerce Street.

Between 1891 and 1915 it housed the Municipal Museum of Fine Arts, whose works would later be incorporated into the National Art Museum of Catalonia (MNAC). Throughout the first third of the twentieth century, the palace was used to host numerous artistic and scientific manifestations that often forced the provisional transfer of the works of the Museum.

On 16 April 1904, the Caja de Pensiones para la Vejez y Ahorros was founded. On November 1, 1910, the first Congress of Workers' Solidarity (Congreso de las Bellas Artes) was closed, which gave way to the foundation of the CNT. It also hosted the first editions of the Motor Show (1919) and the Barcelona International Trade Fair (1920)

*1912.- Another view of the palace from the corner with Paseo de Pujadas and the current Paseo de Picasso. (Photo: Cuyàs collection. Cartographic Institute of Catalonia).

*1920.- The Palau de Belles Arts on the left, during the celebration of the first Trade Fair in the Saló de Sant Joan.

The Palau de Belles Arts was also an incomparable setting for music lovers. Above the main hall was a large organ by Aquilino Amezua that had five manual keyboards with pedal and ran on electricity. At the time it was considered one of the best organs of its kind in Europe. The large hall was the usual venue for concerts by both the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra and the Barcelona Municipal Band. Between 1930 and 1936 the concerts of the Band were very popular, which were scheduled for Sunday mornings, were broadcast on the radio and conducted by Joan Lamotte de Grignon. Admission was free standing, while the seat cost one peseta.

Already in the midst of the Civil War, the bombs dropped on the city by the Italian fascist aviation in March 1938 hit the building and one of them fell on the Central Hall.

*1940.- Appearance offered by the palace after the Civil War with the roof and the structure of the building very damaged. It wouldn't take long for demolition to arrive. (Photo: AFG)

After the war, the poor condition of the structure and the large amount of iron used for its construction favoured the decision to demolish it. The use of iron, given the lack of this material in the difficult post-war years, also represented the death certificate of other buildings in the city such as the Olympia Circus Theater in Ronda de Sant Pau. The Catalanist significance of this palace, due to the large number of Catalan artistic manifestations it had hosted over the years, has also been invoked by some historians as another reason for the Francoists to eliminate it.

In its place was erected a new building for the Justice Courts, inaugurated by the caudillo on June 23, 1966 on one of his visits to Barcelona. A year later, the Courts of First Instance and Instruction were also installed in this building at number 1 of the then called Saló Víctor Pradera.

*1948.- Area resulting from the demolition of the Palau de Belles Arts