

# Jorge Ribalta

## NEW ANGELS

**Scenes of the Gardunya square redevelopment,  
Barcelona (2005-2018)**



*New Angels*—a title inspired by Walter Benjamin’s “angel of history”—is the first exhibition of the photographic survey carried out by Jorge Ribalta (Barcelona, 1963) of the redevelopment of Gardunya square, in which Ribalta pays particular attention to the alterations to the square’s morphology and public uses.

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[LA VIRREINA]  
CENTRE  
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Ajuntament de  
Barcelona



*This exhibition is dedicated to the memory  
of Julián Rodríguez (1968-2019)*

The redevelopment of the Gardunya square provides an understanding—if in an epigonic manner—of the nature of the logics of the old “From the Liceu to the Seminary” urban plan, devised by the Barcelona architects Lluís Clotet and Óscar Tusquets in the early 1980s for the renewal of the Raval district in Barcelona’s old downtown area. The Gardunya development repeats the logics of the successive reforms in the Raval area, where cultural institutions, in this instance the Massana School, served as a spearhead for “exercises in urban surgery”, as Tusquets himself put it. In other words, the arts have been instrumental in operations with a conflictive socioeconomic impact on the city’s urban fabric.

*New Angels*—a title inspired by Walter Benjamin’s “angel of history”—is the first exhibition of the photographic survey carried out by Jorge Ribalta (Barcelona, 1963) of Gardunya square over a period spanning 13 years from 2005 to 2018, in which Ribalta pays particular attention to the alterations to the square’s morphology and public uses.

Presented in reverse chronological order, the exhibition opens with the start of the first academic year at the then new Massana School in 2017 and the arrival in 2018 of the first residents in the new apartment blocks around it. It closes with photographs of the old square and of the rear of La Boqueria market, taken in 2005.

Thus, the museographical itinerary resembles an archaeological excavation that brings to light earlier strata and remains of former people’s lives, themed microstudies that are a record of different historical and urban episodes set in Gardunya square: the ancient gothic Convent of Santa Maria de Jerusalem, the old Academy of Medicine and the cemetery at the back of Hospital de la Santa Creu [Holy Cross], as well as of the Massana School’s move from its old premises to its new building, designed by Barcelona architect Carme Pinós, and the construction of the small housing development.

In this respect, *New Angels* examines the metamorphosis of La Boqueria market and its surroundings under rising pressure from tourism, that is, the shift from traditional trade serving locals to a new urban economy sustained by global tourism.

The exhibition also includes a range of historical objects, photographs, publications and documents that contribute to the narrative and problematize its own condition between artwork and document, between the exhibitionary and the archival condition.

This is the most recent of a number of Barcelona photographic series produced by Ribalta over the last 15 years. These constitute a wide photographic and historical survey of the city in the period after the 2004 Universal Forum of Cultures, the last major urban transformation of the contemporary city emerging from Ildefons Cerdà's classic plan from 1860. These series include: *Trabajo anónimo [Anonymous Work]* (2005), made on the last metallurgical workshop in the Can Ricart factory in Poblenou district; *Sur l'herbe* (2005-2008), about the audience at the Sónar music festival; *Futurismo [Futurism]* (2010-2011), on the urban landscapes of the new/old economy in the 22@ Poblenou technological district; *1888* (2012-2013), on the remains of the 1888 World's Fair in Barcelona; and *Litoral [Littoral]* (2009), which explores the area the El Prat de Llobregat beach area during the expansion of the airport.

**NEW ANGELS. SCENES OF THE  
GARDUNYA SQUARE REDEVELOPMENT  
BARCELONA, 2005-2018**

*Recent arrivals, 2017-2018*

Gardunya square emerged from the demolition of the former Convent of Santa Maria de Jerusalem in the 1880s. A residual and undeveloped space behind La Boqueria Market and the Hospital de la Santa Creu (Holy Cross Hospital), its very name captures its dystopian nature: La Garduña was a legendary criminal secret society much like the Neapolitan Camorra. As anthropologist Julio Caro Baroja explains, the term was popularly associated with theft and crime: "in Catalan argot [...] the prison yard is known as the 'gardunya yard' and 'La Gardunya' is also a part of ill repute of La Boqueria Market in Barcelona" (*Realidad y fantasía en el mundo criminal [Reality and Fantasy in the Criminal World]*, 1986).

La Boqueria Market opened in 1840 and, after the start of the demolition of the convent, it gradually spread towards the rear, where the former Cervelló street ran adjacent to the hospital, which stopped providing healthcare services in the 1920s when the new Hospital de Sant Pau (Saint Paul Hospital) took over its functions. Purchased in 1926 by Barcelona City Council, the medieval complex of the former hospital was turned over to new cultural uses: the Massana School opened in 1929 and the Biblioteca de Catalunya (National Library of Catalonia) moved there in 1940. The redevelopment works begun in the 1920s were completed in 1950. This and the demolition of the remains of Cervelló street opened up the square, which became a parking, unloading and services area for the market. The licensed paying parking lot opened around 1970.

The market was refurbished between 1998 and 2001 under the supervision of the architects Lluís Clotet and Ignacio Paricio, and an office block that altered the look of the square was built. This was the first sign of an imminent transformation.

Approved in 2008 and begun in 2010, the current redevelopment of the square was designed by the architect Carme

Pinós. Even though it has not reached full completion, its culminating point is determined by the opening of the doors of the new Massana School premises and the arrival of new residents in the housing accommodation, turning this place properly into a square, in other words, a developed and inhabited space. For the first time and after more than a century of dystopia. The echo of the old convent cloister still resounds in the square today, and this echo means an impulse for the restitution of the place into the city.

The works on the new Massana School began in 2015 and finished in the spring of 2017. In June, the school started to move out of its old home and by September was able to launch the 2017-18 academic year in its new premises. The photographs were taken in the first-year sculpture class taught by Mònica Chavarria at two different times: during a class on moulds and casting and during a life drawing class with a model.

Housing construction works began with the development of subsidised apartments in the summer of 2016. The works lasted for two years. The keys to the apartments were given to their new occupants in June 2018. The photographs show their arrival at the newly-completed and as yet empty apartments.

During the weekend of 21 April 2018, the former metal and sculpture studios in the Massana School were occupied during a protest in defence of immigrants and against the Spanish immigration law. The photographs were taken on 1 June and show some of the protestors watching the television reporting on the vote of no confidence taking place in the Spanish Parliament that put an end to Mariano Rajoy's mandate as president of the government.

Of the various people in costume in the square during Carnival in February 2018, there is a young student and Boqueria Market employee dressed as a nun.

#### *Déjeuner sur l'herbe, 2016-2018*

By the spring of 2016, the newly redeveloped square was open to the public. During the Easter holidays that year, the conditions were ripe for a new phenomenon in the square:

its occupation by tourists around noon and lunch hours. Given that Boqueria Market had already become a major tourist attraction on La Rambla, having moved during the previous decade towards selling prepared food, the square gradually and naturally transformed into the market's outdoor café or dining room, confirming the inexorable evolution towards the provision of meals and drinks.

The pictures in the room are organised from left to right in relatively geographical and chronological order. They proceed from the square outdoors into the side aisles and interior of the market and mostly show the uses of the square for leisure purposes in summer and during holiday periods. The reference to Édouard Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* is due to the spontaneous staging of the painting by a group of four homeless people in the square. This is just one of the various references to "the painting of modern life" included here. The earliest images date from spring 2016 and the last from the start of the summer in 2018. Some of the final photos allude to the terrorist attack on 17 August 2017, during which the market and Gardunya square were used as an escape route by the driver of the van used to run over the victims, among them the market employee Silvina Alejandra Pereyra, who was killed. Flowers were placed at the "Alonso y Josefina" fruit and vegetable stall, where she worked.

#### *The Convent of Santa Maria de Jerusalem and the Lady of La Gardunya, 2016-2018*

The Convent of Santa Maria de Jerusalem was founded in 1462 by Rafaela Pagés, a woman from Sarrià, following a trip she made to the Holy Land. She was later joined by nuns of the Order of St. Clare from Valencia. Construction began around that year, though the pace of work picked up following financial contributions given by the Catholic Monarchs. Donations were provided by King Ferdinand the Catholic in 1493 and 1495 and were ratified in 1517 by the newly crowned king, Charles V. In 1570, the convent had some 60 nuns.

In her *Guia de dones de Barcelona* (Barcelona Women's Guide) the historian Isabel Segura recounts an anecdote

recorded by Francesc Carreras Candi, a historian at the turn of the 20th century and a pioneer in the history of Barcelona. According to Carreras Candi, King Ferdinand asked the councillors in Barcelona that no taller building should be built around the convent in order to prevent anyone from seeing into the cloister, given that on occasions the nuns “do not hesitate to go about naked in the cloister” (*Geografia general de Catalunya*, III).

In the 19th century, the convent began to fall into gradual decline, a period marked by policies on the seizure of Church property and the eviction of nuns and monks from their convents and monasteries that began in 1835 and ended with the “Glorious” Revolution of 1868, a rebellion led by General Prim that resulted in the deposing of Queen Isabella II. The nuns were forced to leave their convent and embarked on a long peregrination around other convents and temporary homes. The original Gothic cloister was saved during the demolition and reconstructed in 1882 in the Sant Miquel School in the Eixample district, run by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. The cloister still stands there today and is part of the school playground.

Taken in initially by the convent of the Order of St. Clare in Pedralbes, the nuns moved into a new convent on Sant Elies street in 1887. Though the convent came under attack during the Tragic Week in 1909, when religious buildings in Barcelona were attacked by a working class angry mob, it was saved from destruction. Even so, the nuns left it on the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. In 1937, it was turned into prison where political prisoners were incarcerated and became known as the Sant Elies *checa*. The nuns returned after the Civil War. The urban growth of the Sant Gervasi district from the 1950s onwards meant that the locality gradually became unsuitable for the enclosed nuns and in 1966 the community started the process to sell the building and move elsewhere. In 1970, the nuns moved into a newly constructed convent in Vallvidrera, where they have remained ever since.

The community today still has the image of Our Lady of the Star and a number of other original sculptures and paintings from the former convent, such as an image of St. John the



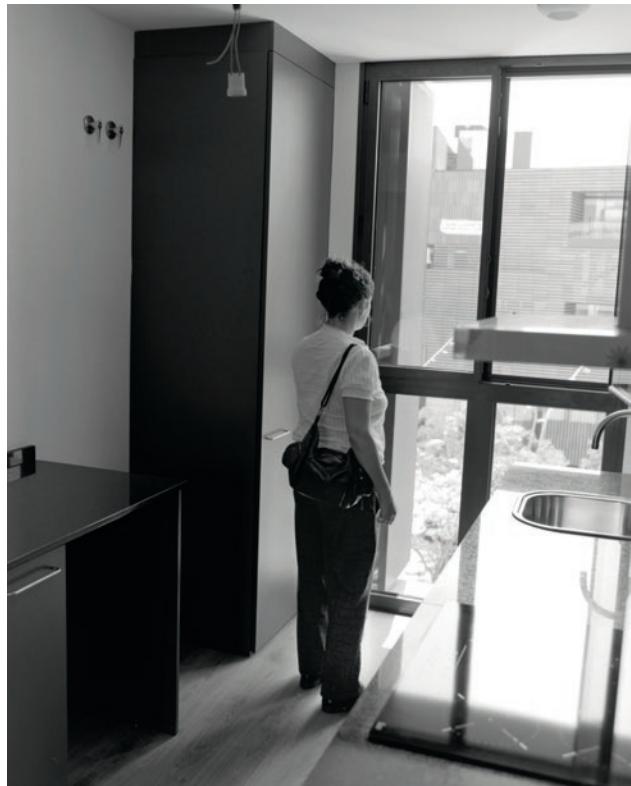
Archaeologists, December 2006



Work on the Boqueria underground  
car park, May 2013



Bruna Casas, Massana School,  
May 2016



Fátima Duarte, handover of the apartments,  
June 2018

Baptist and an altarpiece of the Visitation, which have survived the ups and downs in the community's circumstances. Photographs of the former convent also still exist, including one from 1868 that shows graffiti calling for freedom of religion painted on the now empty old cloister. The nuns make and sell biscuits called 'Estrellas de Jerusalén' (Stars of Jerusalem). In the photos we see Sister María del Sagrado Corazón Suñé and Sister María de Jerusalén Cantero, now the abbess, in the cloister at Vallvidrera. Isabel Segura also appears in Gardunya square as it is today, in the site where the convent's church once stood.

The history of the Convent of Santa María de Jerusalem overlays other older histories. The works for the new underground car park in Gardunya square were preceded by archaeological excavations carried out in several phases between 2006 and 2011. The oldest find was the Neolithic burial of a young woman with grave goods dating from 6500-5300 BP. The grave goods included a variscite bracelet and a pendant made of steatite and a boar tooth. The body and items buried with it were recovered by the municipal archaeological services and displayed in the *First Farmers* exhibition, held at the MUHBA (Barcelona City History Museum) in April 2016, which focused on the prehistoric settlements in the Barcelona plain 7,500 years ago. The image that appeared on the exhibition leaflet and invitation card was the face of this "first Barcelonan" digitally reconstructed from the skull found in Gardunya square.

#### *Social housing, 2014-2018*

The apartment building in Gardunya square contains two different housing developments, one public or subsidised, the other private. The building stands on the part of the square that borders on the Dr. Fleming Gardens on one side and Jerusalem street on the other, opposite the new Massana School. The subsidised housing consists of 39 apartments of between 60 and 85 m<sup>2</sup> with two to four bedrooms on a 75-year lease. The apartments are distributed around three staircases, one on each of the building's façades. The ground floor areas are given over to commercial premises. The project was launched by the PROHA

housing co-op, which merged with the Projecte Habitat 2000 co-op in 2015 to form the new Fem Ciutat co-op, which develops subsidised residential housing for families unable to find homes on the open market. The development was managed by the Soluciones services company and the construction was carried by the Tarraco company.

The start of the works was celebrated on 14 July 2016. Some owners signed bricks to be used in the construction and which were eventually laid in the entrance area of staircase 2.

The pictures include a survey of the concrete formwork and the shuttering work on the top floor and the roof in December 2016, as well as a tour of a show home in July 2017. There are also portraits of some workers and professionals involved in the various tasks in the construction process, among them the architect's team, the site supervision and management team and some of the construction workers.

The apartments were handed over in June 2018. On the 15th of that month, the official handover took place in the entrance area of staircase 2 at an event attended by representatives of the developer, the architect's studio, the Raval district administration and the Barcelona Federation of Residents' Associations. The first occupants moved in that same month.

#### *Massana School, 2015–2017*

The Massana School opened in 1929 and occupied some of the spaces in the former Hospital de la Santa Creu. It has evolved from being a traditional arts and crafts school to offering undergraduate and postgraduate training in art. It is owned by Barcelona City Council and its arts and design degree courses are part of the programme run by the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB).

The new building has been designed on the street frontage opposite the apartments, between Jerusalem street and the small Canonge Colom square, where the main entrance is situated. It has a total built surface area of 11,000 m<sup>2</sup> distributed across five floors and a basement. The atrium includes an area used as a gallery space. The cost of the works amounted to €11.5

million, paid for by the municipality. The architect Carme Pinós said: “The project emerged from exploring the site. In contrast with the residential building on the same square—and designed by the same studio—which aims to blend in with its surroundings, the school seeks to stand out. Whereas the intention was to achieve a domestic scale in the apartments, we worked on a more abstract and larger scale in the school. In order to prevent the building from dominating the entire square, the main entrance is positioned in front of the future connection with the courtyard of the National Library of Catalonia, thereby creating a new public space between this square and Canonge Colom square. The result is a dynamic building whose main façade avoids frontality in relation to Gardunyà square” (*Arquitectura Viva*, 14 August 2018).

The building work, undertaken by the Copicisa construction company, began in March 2015 and took two years to complete. The photographic sequence opens with various moments during the construction. The earliest pictures date from the summers of 2015 and 2016 and document the initial phases of the construction up to the point that the volumes of the building start to become recognisable. They are followed by pictures of a site visit made by the architect and her team in January 2017. The last pictures show details of the final phase of the construction in November 2016 and January 2017.

The old building with its entrance on Gardunyà square housed the sculpture and printmaking studios. The photographs were taken mainly in Mònica Chavarria's mould studio in the spring of 2016 and show the process of casting in bronze. This was a class with students in their final year and this casting was possibly the last one ever done in the premises of the rear courtyard of the old building. In Montse Gomis's printmaking studios on the other side of the courtyard, the Xavier Nogués experimental printing seminar was held in July that same year, as it is annually around the same date at the Massana School.

At the far end, the pictures show two different moments, the first being the installation of the *Apertus 01. The Ass Between Two Chairs* exhibition in the “espai 2” of the àngels barcelona gallery in November 2016. This show was a partnership

between the Massana School, the Han Nefkens Foundation and the àngels barcelona gallery. It presented the results of the workshop led by Arash Nassiri in which current and former students of the Massana School participated, together with students from the Llotja school and the Faculty of Fine Arts. The other pictures were taken during the dissertation work by some of the Monica Chavarria's final-year sculpture students. They show the students at work in the studios between January and February 2017, as well as the presentation of Jerónimo de la Parra's dissertation on 16 February.

Lastly, there are the pictures of the sculpture studios being moved from the old building to the new one in June and July 2017. By way of a goodbye party, the Massana School held an open day on 14 July that included tours of the building and other activities and which closed with live bands and DJ sessions.

#### *This is tomorrow callin', what have I to lose? 2015*

In early 2015, the new roofs and grilles at the back of the market were being fitted as part of the redevelopment of the square designed by Carme Pinós, which also included the new stalls in the rear part of the market, as well as the logistics zone and unloading bay, which were moved underground. These were the first architectural elements of the new square that was beginning to emerge, the first glimpses of the future. They were followed in the spring by seats and the planters in which the trees were planted. Though still under construction, the square was already taking on its new configuration, while at the same time work was starting on the new Massana School.

At the end of March, an official opening of the square was held on the occasion of the launch of the works on the Massana School. The then mayor of Barcelona, Xavier Trias, declared to the media: "We are not only creating a university school, which was warranted, but with this new amenity we are also making Barcelona the city of culture, knowledge, creativity and innovation and above all the welfare city we want".

"This is tomorrow" is a song by Bryan Ferry on his album *In your mind* (1977) and was also the title of a famous exhibition

of the Independent Group at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 1956. The technological utopianism intrinsic to the discourse of modernisation and progress is today mainstream, as can be seen in the discourses of institutional politics. Their false promise of happiness is countered by Walter Benjamin's 'new angel' of history, whose fate is memorably described: "But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress" (*On the Concept of History*, IX, c. 1940).

#### *Parking, 2005-2014*

This sequence is a timeline of the transformation of the square as a result of the works for the Boqueria underground car park.

In May 2005, the square still retained the same configuration, dominated by the car park, that it had had since 1970, apart from the new and jarring presence of the office building, the result of the refurbishment of the market in 2000. The excavation work began in 2010. There was already one underground floor but now the car park goes down three levels. The market's unloading bay and waste services have been moved onto the first of these. The car park is run by the Saba company. The works were carried out in two phases, one for each of the two halves of the square, which was fenced off until 2014. The surfacing and paving were begun towards the end of 2014.

#### *Cervelló street: the other side, 2005-2018*

The current Dr. Fleming Gardens, which border on Carme street, have a long history associated with the activity of the Hospital de la Santa Creu. Situated at the rear of the Royal Academy of Medicine, the gardens are a reminder that the place not only served as a hospital but was also involved in the history of medical education and its underworld. The Royal Academy's neoclassical building was constructed in the 1760s as part of

the ‘enlightened’ programme of King Charles III. Inside, it still has its anatomical theatre where corpses were dissected. It was active as an academy of medicine until 1929, when the hospital closed. The rear part of the academy that was adjacent to the former Cervelló street, now occupied by the gardens, was a squalid courtyard containing a cemetery for paupers and a morgue where the bodies used for dissections were presumably buried. In the square today, there is a plaque with a Latin inscription from this cemetery, popularly known as the ‘Corralet’ (little corral), which was lifted during the redevelopment of the area begun around 1930. During the course of these works, strange walls made of human bones were found in some parts of the exterior walls of the rear of the hospital. The courtyard was fenced until 1950, when the academy building was reclaimed and the constructions of its rear part were demolished.

The group of photographs presents a timeline of the environs of the Dr. Fleming Gardens, extending from prior to the start of the current redevelopment to the completion of the apartments. The first pictures were taken in June 2005 and the last in June 2018. The photographs of the Royal Academy of Medicine show details of the interior and the surroundings. During the works on the square, prefabricated cabins were installed here to provide working spaces and services.

The former Cervelló street connected Carme street and Hospital street. In his book of photographs of Barcelona taken in the 1920s, Wolfgang Weber included two shots of this street (presented as the rear or “other side” of the market), which disappeared due to the works and demolitions of the rear of the hospital in the 1940s. At the end where it joined Hospital street, currently the corner of Canonge Colom square, is the entrance to the new Massana School building. The photographic sequence records the transformation of this corner between 2009 and 2018. It begins with the old buildings and continues with the demolitions, the site and the construction of the Massana School and of the exit from the Boqueria underground car park. It ends with pictures from the *Raval. Canvi d'escena* (Raval. Change of Scene) exhibition, shown in the gallery space on the

ground floor of the Massana School in June 2018. The exhibition was prompted by the school’s move to its new premises and presented various photographic studies of the neighbourhood, including the photo-sequence described here.

#### *Remainders, 2005-2009*

In early 2005, there were still some market stalls and remains of the roof in the part of the square between Jerusalem street and Les Floristes de la Rambla street. Now abandoned, they were used as a place to sleep by a community of homeless people. In May, work to demolish them began. In December 2006, archaeological excavation work started on the remains of the former convent and afterwards it was fenced off for a number of years. The sequence of photographs begins in February 2005 and ends in June 2009.

In psychoanalysis, the *remainder* is a concept that designates residue, the trace of desire, a psychic material that is “extinguished” (Jacques Lacan, *Seminar 11*, 1964). Analytical work consists of the making of this remainder, which is taken up and restored. This remaking is what is termed a cure, restitution. The task of the angel of history is also to piece together what has been smashed, to save the ruins left by the storm of progress. Twenty years before his theses on the philosophy of history, written virtually at the moment of his death, Walter Benjamin wrote: “according to a Talmudic legend, the angels are created—new ones in countless multitudes every moment—so that once they have sung their hymn to God, they stop and vanish into nothingness” (Announcement of the journal *Angelus Novus*, 1921-22).

Jorge Ribalta

**Curator: Valentín Roma**

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**La Virreina Centre de la Imatge  
Palau de la Virreina  
La Rambla, 99. 08002 Barcelona**

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