



Barcelona Monument

by Linda Rapp

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The Barcelona memorial to gay, lesbian, and transgender people who have suffered and been repressed throughout history. Photograph by Will Shank.

On March 20, 2011 the city of Barcelona dedicated a monument commemorating the suffering of glbtq people. The inscription on the monument is in Catalan, the language of the region, and reads as follows: "En memòria dels gais, les lesbianes, i les persones transsexuals que han patit persecució i repressió al llarg de la història, Barcelona 2011." ("In memory of gay men, lesbians, and transsexual people who have suffered persecution and repression throughout history, Barcelona 2011.")

The monument is in the form of a large triangle of gray granite, approximately four meters wide at the top, surrounded by a thin band of pink. The installation is raised and slightly inclined to point toward the viewer.

The design simultaneously evokes the pink triangle as a symbol of persecution (it was used to designate homosexuals in the Nazi concentration camps) and as a symbol of glbtq identity and political activism.

The Barcelona monument bears comparison with Amsterdam's Homomonument, which it most obviously resembles, but also with George Segal's "Gay Liberation." All three are public works of art that commemorate the struggle of glbtq people for equal rights.

As with the Segal sculpture, the placement of the monument, officially commissioned by the city in June 2010, quickly became a matter of controversy. Initial plans called for it to be erected across the street from the iconic Catedral de la Sagrada Família (Cathedral of the Holy Family), which was designed by the Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926). The striking church is both an architectural jewel of the highest order and one of Barcelona's most important tourist attractions.

The original plan to locate the monument across from the Cathedral was at least in part prompted by the fact that the square in front of the basilica was the site of a massive "kiss-in" staged by the Barcelona glbtq communities to protest the visit of Pope Benedict XVI in November 2010, where he denounced Spain's socialist government for enacting equal marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples.

Typical of the opponents of the location was Alberto Fernández Díaz of the conservative Partido Popular (PP), who stated that it was "a real provocation" to situate the monument near the cathedral and who went on to add that it was "neither logical nor necessary for Barcelona to have a monument to gays."

Among others, Ricard Gomà of the Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds (the Catalan Green Party) fired back, describing Fernández Díaz's statements as more appropriate to the doctrines of the nineteenth century than to the ethics of the present.

Because of the opposition of the Catholic church and the PP, placing the monument across from the cathedral became problematic. In a 2011 interview with Cristina Savall of the *Periódico de Catalunya*, gay activist Jordi Petit suggested an alternative location, one in the main street of the city, la Rambla, the site both of the execution of gay men during the Inquisition and of the city's first demonstration for glbtq rights

in 1977.

The place eventually chosen was near one of the entrances to the Parc de la Ciutadella, a location in the center of the city, next to the Catalanian Parliament. The park has significance for the glbtq community because it was the site of the notorious murder of a cross-dressing man, José Rescalvo Zafra, also known as Sonia, who was beaten to death by six skinheads in 1991.

The monument was dedicated on March 20, 2011, with over two hundred members of the public in attendance, as well as representatives of all the political parties active in the area except for the PP.

As Barcelona Mayor Jordi Hereu rose to speak, some four dozen placard-wielding residents of the Trinitat Vella section of the city launched a protest about the deterioration of their neighborhood and the presence of drug dealers. According to a report in *Reservas Lésbicas*, Hereu deflected the intrusion by saying, "I ask you for a moment of respect! Let's not mix one thing with the other! Your fight has nothing to do with this other one! When this act is completed, we will listen to you and talk to you!"

With the disruption quelled, Hereu delivered a speech in which he referred to the lack of equal rights for glbtq people around the world, lauded those who have fought for equality and "have given all for freedom," and pledged his own support for the cause.

He also asked that it be remembered that in many other countries around the Mediterranean—and, he might have added, even more elsewhere—the dedication of such a memorial could not have occurred because of discriminatory laws.

Quim Roqueta, Vice-president of the Consejo de Lesbianas, Gays, Transexuales y Bisexuales de Barcelona, addressed the crowd, honoring the work of activists who persevered in times when glbtq people were viewed as "sinners, delinquents, or sick" and applauding the progress in legal reform made in Spain, while also warning that complete social acceptance of glbtq people remains an unrealized goal.

The inauguration of the monument also included a performance by a gay men's chorus, the Barcelona Rainbow Singers, who sang in several languages. In addition, local glbtq groups placed numerous bouquets of flowers all along the two descending sides of the triangle.

In his comments, Jordi Petit noted that the Barcelona monument is one of very few in Europe that commemorate the oppression of glbtq people. He cited the Homomonument in Amsterdam, a plaque installed by the International Lesbian and Gay Association at the site of the Nazi concentration camp at Mauthausen, Austria, and the dedication of a street in Toulouse, France to the memory of Pierre Seel, who was imprisoned in a concentration camp because of his homosexuality.

Petit also noted that the Barcelona memorial "is very suitable for the city that is the seat of the Mediterranean Union."

Another gay leader, Antonio Guirado, remarked that "This is a necessary monument to remember the discrimination, repression, humiliation, persecution, attacks, and assassinations that the LGTB community suffered for centuries and very especially during the Franco dictatorship."

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