



GAUDÍ IN SHAPING CONTEMPORARY URBAN LANDSCAPE IDENTITY **Performativity of Form, Urban Performativity and Heritage-Making in** **Architecture, Street and Digital Media**

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ABSTRACT

The study analyses how Antoni Gaudí's legacy is reinterpreted in contemporary architecture, urban art and digital mediations. Combining a morphological and performative approach focused on motifs such as trencadís, organic geometries and growth simulations with an urban and cultural approach, Gaudí is studied as an urban attractor and an identity resource. In turn, artistic work linked to his buildings is subjected to tensions between heritage preservation, touristification and artistic experimentation. Methodologically, a documentary review and analysis are carried out of architectural referents: Hundertwasser, Bofill and Calatrava; urban artists who employ mosaics and ceramics: Invader, Ememem; and recent cases such as videomapping of Casa Batlló, digital projections on the Sagrada Família and murals with Gaudian iconography in Barcelona and Milan. The results reveal the existence of a "living Gaudí" that, between critique and spectacle, through culture contributes to the construction of an urban identity.

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1. Introduction

Antoni Gaudí i Cornet (1852–1926) is a central figure of Catalan Modernism, a movement that integrated applied arts, architecture and symbolism in the context of industrialization and Catalan cultural affirmation at the end of the nineteenth century (Bassegoda Nonell, 2002; Zerst, 2019). His work is characterized by a singular synthesis between structure, form and ornamentation, where forms of curvilinear geometry inspired by natural elements and constructive experimentation achieve an unprecedented aesthetic unity (Huerta, 2006). According to UNESCO (2005), Gaudí “transformed architecture into a total art that integrates nature, religion and technology,” which is why seven of his works (the Casa Vicens, the Park Güell, the Casa Milá, the Casa Batlló, the Crypt and Nativity Façade of the Sagrada Família, the Crypt of the Colonia Güell and the Casa Vicens) were inscribed on the World Heritage List for their outstanding universal value.

This heritage condition of Gaudí’s work consolidates him as a cultural resource of global reach, contributing to the projection of Barcelona as a “brand-city”, which has been built through strategies of aestheticization and urban image associated with its modernist heritage (Degen, 2008; Palou-Rubio, 2019). In the words of Montaner (1999), “Gaudí turns architecture into a living organism, capable of producing identity and territorial rootedness,” a principle that explains his persistent validity as a cultural and urban icon.

As Barcelona prepares to commemorate the centenary of his death in 2026, the opportunity arises to reexamine Gaudí’s legacy under new contemporary lenses. In particular, the deployment of cultural and technological programs such as the videomapping on the Casa Batlló (n.d.) initiated in 2022 and the digital projections on the Sagrada Família for Sant Jordi (2024) have intensified the contemporary rereading’s of the Gaudian legacy, both in a digital and ephemeral key and in muralism and other urban art practices, situating these public interventions as privileged fields for dialogue with his architectural heritage.

This work maintains that such rereading’s operate on two planes:

- A. performativity of form, by animating or translating Gaudian motifs to digital or pictorial media.
- B. urban performativity, by activating dynamics of attraction, identity and conflict in the public space.

2. Objectives and Methodology

With the general objective of analyzing the contemporary rereading’s of Antoni Gaudí’s legacy (in architecture, urban art and digital mediations) in order to understand its cultural value and the critical tensions it generates in present-day Barcelona and in its global projection, the following eight specific objectives are established:

- I. Identify and typologize the Gaudian motifs currently employed, such as *trencadís*, ruled surfaces and organicism, through systematic visual analysis.
- II. Compare media, technologies and materialities (mural, mosaic, videomapping, AI) and their degree of integration with architectural support.
- III. Analyze the urban performativity of the interventions (location, visibility, relation to pedestrian tourist flows and scale).
- IV. Evaluate symbolic and cultural reception and narratives (commemoration, innovation, brand city, media institutionalization).
- V. Examine tensions and risks: heritage regulation, governance, ephemeral vs. permanent, spectacularization and touristification.
- VI. Apply a multiple case design with cross-case synthesis to detect patterns (monumental and digital vs. micro urban).
- VII. Consolidate inclusion and exclusion criteria and a matrix or records with triangulation of sources and methodological traceability.

VIII. Derive implications and recommendations for future interventions that balance identity, heritage pedagogy and material sustainability (including lessons from the white *trencadís* in Calatrava).

The study adopts two research approaches: (1) a critical historical approach that selects, in chronological order, architectural referents (Friedensreich Hundertwasser, Santiago Calatrava and Ricardo Bofill) and artistic referents (Invader, Ememem and Jim Bachor) that enter into dialogue with Gaudí; and (2) a qualitative comparative approach based on multiple case studies with a cross-case synthesis design (Yin, 2018), oriented to interpreting how the Gaudian legacy is rewritten in urban art, digital mediations and contemporary architecture. The framework of the study articulates two lenses:

- i. a morphological and performative reading (curvatures, *trencadís*, simulations of growth and polychromies) supported by systematic visual analysis (Rose, 2016)
- ii. an urban and cultural reading (brand city, public reception, heritage governance) that attends to the symbolic circulation of Gaudí across spaces, media and audiences.

The evidence proceeds from secondary sources: academic and technical literature (indexed journals, catalogues, institutional and curatorial documentation), specialized and general press and official websites of the cases. Triangulation is carried out across academic, institutional and journalistic sources, verification of links and citation traceability to strengthen inferential validity (Krippendorff, 2018). In accordance with the state of the art developed in the manuscript, the final corpus includes four cases with different media, scales and logics of reception that allow fruitful contrasts by means of a matrix of operational dimensions (Table 1):

- Barcelona Balconies (Cité Création, n.d.): mural *trompé l'oeil* in Barcelona.
- The Vision (Cheone, 2021): anamorphic mural inspired by Casa Batlló.
- Rosa, Rosae (Sagrada Familia, 2024): generative digital projection.
- Arborescent (Quayola, 2025): projection mapping on Casa Batlló.

Inclusion criteria: (i) explicit or implicit reference to Gaudian motifs, (ii) urban relevance, (iii) verifiable documentation, (iv) diversity of media and scales and (v) a recent time window (2019 to 2025) except for the historical case of Barcelona Balconies (1992), incorporated as a long-duration comparative anchor.

Exclusion criteria: interventions without verifiable documentation, cases without material or symbolic relation to Gaudian iconography and actions close to the public.

Table 1. Operational dimensions of the case studies.

Dimension	Questions	Subcriteria
Morphology and formal performativity	Which Gaudian motifs reappear? How are these motifs animated or made dynamic?	Formal performativity: reactivated Gaudian motifs: <i>trencadís</i> , ruled surfaces, organicism, simulated growth and mode of animation: movement, transformation, interaction, optical illusion.
Medium, technology and materiality	What is the technique? How is it integrated (or not) with the original surface? What degree of “transparency” is there between the projection and the original architecture?	Technique: mapping, AI projection, mural, painting, ceramic cladding, mosaic, degree of integration with the architectural support.
Urban and spatial context	Where is the intervention located? What visibility does it have? What relationship does it maintain with the immediate surroundings?	Location, interaction with flows of vehicular, pedestrian and tourist traffic and proximity to heritage.

Symbolic-cultural dimension and reception of the work	What discourse does it claim? Is it linked to tourism, to commemoration, to cultural experimentation? How has it been received in the media?	Narratives: commemoration, innovation, brand city, media coverage and institutionalization.
Critiques and tensions	Is there a conflict with heritage regulations? Is the use ephemeral or recurrent? Is there a risk of trivialization/excessive branding?	Heritage regulations, governance, permits, image rights, maintenance and ephemeral/permanent condition. And risks of spectacularization/touristification.

Source: Own elaboration, 2025

The analysis followed five stages, summarized in Table 2 with aims, inputs, methods, outputs, and decision criteria.

Table 2. Analytical procedure.

Procedure	Questions
Collection and screening	Directed search in academic databases and institutional repositories; compilation of dossiers, press kits and journalistic coverage; verification of official links and metadata.
Extraction and coding	Case sheet with variables from the matrix; open coding of formal motifs and mediations.
Intra-case analysis	Analytical description and comparative visual reading identifying formal correspondences between the Gaudian original and the urban and digital rereading.
Cross-case synthesis	Pattern matching and explanation building to identify convergences and divergences (monumental and digital versus micro urban; ephemeral versus lasting; ornament versus technical and political performance).
Theoretical contrast	Articulation with the theoretical framework and with the literature on brand city and living heritage.

Source: Own elaboration, 2025

The methodology of this study presents its own delimitations and limitations: (a) dependence on secondary sources without in situ fieldwork, (b) notoriety bias and unequal media coverage among cases, (c) temporality, including ephemeral events and link changes.

However, it is also based on four strategies that confer validity on the results: (1) triangulation of types of sources (academic, institutional and media), (2) comparison of key data (dates, attendance figures, technical descriptions) across independent sources, (3) methodological trace (archivable matrix and extraction sheets) and (4) explicit analytical delimitation of inferences and scope.

3. Theoretical framework. Architectural and artistic referents that dialogue with Gaudí

3.1. *Friedensreich Hundertwasser: color, glazed ceramics and anti-straight line.*

The architectural theory and practice of Friedensreich Hundertwasser are organized around an aesthetic ethics that rejects rectilinear geometry and promotes an ecological and participatory way of dwelling (right to the window, tree tenant, forests on roofs, uneven ground) in order to return the authorship of the environment to the inhabitants (Barak, 2017). This agenda, made explicit in an extensive body of his own production comprising 109 manifestos and programmatic

texts (Hundertwasser, 1971), materializes in architectural and urban works that integrate intense polychromy, ceramic mosaics and vegetation as project components (Figure 1). Within this framework, the dialogue with Antoni Gaudí emerges by affinity: both conceive architectural form as organic continuity and as a synthesis of applied arts (light, color, ceramics, iron) in the service of a sensory and symbolic experience of the city.

Figure 1. Markethall. Main façade and terrace. 1998 to 2001. Switzerland.



Source(s): Hundertwasser, 1996.

In his projects a ceramic and mosaic vocabulary is codified (columns, claddings, bands of tesserae, colored glass that, while not *trencadís* in the strict sense, has a logic of polychrome cladding and hand-wrought texture comparable to the Gaudian tradition). In Gaudí, *trencadís* is a technique of recomposition of glazed fragments of ceramics and glass that adapts to complex curved surfaces and whose materiality builds atmospheres of light and color, from the serpent bench of Park Güell to Casa Batlló and the pinnacles of the Sagrada Família (Gómez-Ramió et al., 2015). In Hundertwasser, the façade is made pictorial through the accumulation of tesserae and chromatic bands; in Gaudí, *trencadís* weaves chromatic and topological continuity, two convergent strategies to “musivize” architecture and activate the tactile and visual dimension of the substrate (Freixa & Saliné, 2022).

Color is a structuring operator in both authors. Hundertwasser declares it a vital and psychological principle, color becomes “envelope” and “skin” and he deploys it in patterns that reject the chromatic standardization of rationalism (Chiavoni, 2017; Hundertwasser, 1958). Gaudí, for his part, turns Mediterranean polychromy into the material foundation of the building, juxtaposing exposed brick and glazed ceramics and exploring glass mosaic as a refractive skin that modulates light. This coincidence can be understood within a genealogy of architectural polychromy with Mediterranean roots, from Islamic ceramics to modernisme (Stager, 2012), which both rewrite with different programs and techniques.

In morphogenetic terms, Hundertwasser combats orthogonality with curves, undulations and uneven ground to restore “human dignity” in the face of urban leveling (Hundertwasser, 1953) (Figure 2), while Gaudí develops a structural organicism of funicular vaults, arborescent columns and ruled surfaces, where geometry is optimized through form and expressed as natural growth (Huerta, 2006). The equivalence is not of style but of principle. In both cases, the organic is not a superficial metaphor but a design logic that affects structure, circulation and envelopes. Thus, Hundertwasser’s anti straight line and Gaudí’s structural curvature converge in a critique of mechanicism and a defense of the corporeality of dwelling (Hundertwasser, 1985; 1991).

Figure 2. Markethall. Interior and details. 1998–2001. Switzerland.



Source(s): Hundertwasser, 1996.

Hundertwasser's eco humanist program (tree tenant, right to the window, forests on roofs) positions him as a pioneer of an environmental ethics applied to architecture, with effects on urban identity (Hundertwasser, 1996). His postulates have been read as inspiration for environmental ethics and the notion of the ecological self (Barak, 2017), anticipating practices of integrating vegetation into facades and roofs. In Gaudí, the relationship with nature is a worldview: the recourse to geometries inspired by plant organisms (Huerta, 2006), the use of local materials and the dialogue with Mediterranean topography and light constitute a cultural ecology *avant la lettre*.

The urban and social dimension is also convergent. In Vienna, the Hundertwasserhaus has been studied as "living in a work of art," where the domestic is interwoven with tourist appeal and civic identity, generating extraordinary geographies of dwelling (Kraftl, 2009). In Barcelona, Gaudí's work structures symbolic itineraries and cultural economies of global reach. In both cases, the polychrome and curvilinear image becomes a city brand, with ambivalences between symbolic empowerment and spectacularization.

3.2. Ricardo Bofill: collage, mosaics and formal spatial complexity

Since the mid-1960s, the work of Ricardo Bofill Leví and the Taller de Arquitectura (RBTA) proposed an approach based on composition through the use of cellular modules, where spatial aggregation was understood as a kind of three-dimensional mosaic, a collage of typological, geometric and social pieces that, through addition and recursive adjustment, generate complex ensembles (Bofill Leví, 1975). This procedure, made explicit in the models and in the combinatory games of modules of *City in Space* and *Walden 7*, shows a conceptual kinship with Antoni Gaudí's *trencadís* both at the scale of the fragment and at the scale of the overall form. The logic of aggregation governs both the surface finish and the structure of the space of dwelling cells and communal voids (Álvarez Arce et al., 2020).

The late 1960s residential prototypes, such as *Barrio Gaudí* (Figure 3) and *The Castle of Kafka*, experiment with modular aggregation rules that allow the ensemble to adapt to different urban scales. These investigations were underpinned by the geometric work of Anna Bofill Leví, whose study on the generation of architectural forms posited a mathematical approach to typological growth (Bofill Leví, 1975; Gutiérrez Mozo et al., 2024). The relationship with Gaudí is twofold: on the one hand, in the use of three-dimensional models as a fundamental design tool (the funicular models in Gaudí and the combinatory models in Bofill) and on the other, in the translation of material logics into open spatial orders. Thus, while Gaudí fragments ceramics to recompose surfaces, Bofill fragments dwelling cells to recompose the city (Álvarez Arce et al., 2021). The opening paragraph has no indentation.

Figure 3. Gaudí Neighborhood, Reus (1964–1968), Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura (RBTA).



Source(s): RBTA Archive / Arquia Foundation (excerpt from Bofill booklet, 2019).

In the works *La Muralla Roja* (1968 to 1973) and *Xanadú* (1968), the collagist principle is intensified through the use of a chromatic tapestry that transforms the façade into a multi layered pictorial plane. The geometric blocks, organized on the basis of a matrix of Mediterranean and Maghrebi inspiration, are covered with ranges of reds, violets and blues that encode routes and depths (García, 2023). This use of color has a clear Gaudian echo. Thus, Bofill's chromaticism can be understood as a contemporary reinterpretation of Gaudí's Mediterranean polychrome tradition, in which color functions as a spatial and symbolic operator (Montaner, 1999).

The project Walden 7 (1970 to 1975) constitutes the most ambitious materialization of this mosaic logic. Conceived as a vertical labyrinth of 446 dwellings articulated around seven interconnected courtyards, its design responds to a modular composition in which the 30 square meter cells are grouped flexibly to generate diverse typologies (Álvarez Arce et al., 2020). The curved volumetry, the open courtyards and the use of glazed ceramics in interiors and claddings directly evoke the Gaudian tradition: light courts like those of Casa Batlló, ceramic surfaces as in Park Güell and curved volumes like those of the Sagrada Família. From an academic perspective, Walden 7 can be read as an attempt to transfer to the scale of collective housing the spatial and chromatic values that Gaudí had tested at the scale of the singular building (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Bofill's collages with works by Gaudí and interior image of the Walden 7 building (right).



Source(s): RBTA Archive / RTVE, Imprescindibles: Ricardo Bofill, the blank page (2023).

Taken together, Bofill's early work can be understood as a contemporary translation of Gaudí's Mediterranean ethos, where the integration of color, ceramics, organic geometry and spatial complexity are means to create community and build urban identity. Bofill expanded the complexity of Gaudí's architectural language toward collective housing and urban spatiality, generating a design genealogy in which the Gaudian tradition is reinterpreted in a postmodern and social key.

3.3. Santiago Calatrava: curved surfaces and white trencadís

The architectural poetics of Santiago Calatrava (between engineering, sculpture and architecture) relies on continuous curved surfaces, taut envelopes and a preference for whiteness as "matter light," features that the author himself links to a Mediterranean imaginary and to an organic reading of structure (Calatrava, 2015). Within this horizon, the dialogue with Antoni Gaudí lies in the idea that architectural form emerges from structural and natural logics, where curvature does not decorate but organizes circulation, light and acoustics (Figure 5). The comparison has been

noted in international criticism, pointing out that these are two “organics” seeking essential structures rather than naturalistic imitations, albeit with different grammars (McQuaid, 1993).

Figure 5. Facades of the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía (left) and the Auditorio Adán Martín (right).

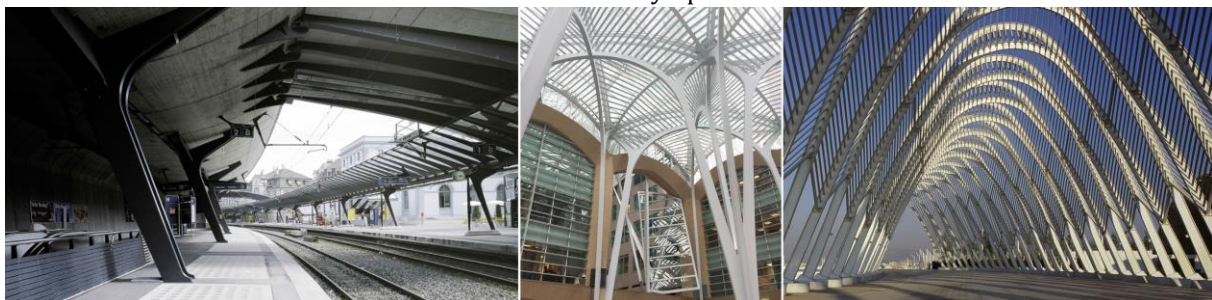


Source(s): Left: AV (2014), right: own elaboration (2025).

In Tenerife and Valencia, the Auditorio Adán Martín (2003) and the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía (2005) condense that aesthetic of white shells and, crucially, their ceramic cladding adopted the language of *trencadís*, but monochrome and snow white in contrast to Gaudí’s polychromy. The operation can be read as a contemporary transposition of Gaudí’s Mediterranean mosaic skin: if in Park Güell or Casa Batlló polychrome *trencadís* establishes a tactile topology of the façade and modulates light, in Calatrava’s works the white mosaic underscores continuity and sheen, emphasizing the sculptural unity of the whole. In both cases, ceramics act as a mediation between light and form, although Calatrava opts for monochromy to reinforce the perception of “habitable sculpture” and an almost bone like reading of the structure.

That said, the technical translation of *trencadís* revealed limits and lessons. In January 2014, after detachments in the exterior skin, the Generalitat Valenciana temporarily closed the building and decided to remove the 8,000 m² mosaic, with 60 percent of the surface having come unstuck (El País, 2014). The reports attributed the failure to an incompatibility and deficient execution of the bonding system on a curved metal substrate, with differences in thermal expansion between ceramic and sheet metal that produced bulging. The same case later occurred at the Auditorio Adán Martín (Moreno, 2017); in both cases, a lack of adhesive and inadequate site conditions was documented (Cardellicchio and Tombesi, 2021; Castro et al., 2023). The contrast with Gaudí is instructive: Gaudí’s *trencadís*, laid over mineral masonry and surfaces with a lower thermal gradient, has shown remarkable durability when traditional techniques and appropriate substrates are respected. Thus, the comparison not only illuminates formal affinities, but also offers, by contrast, the physicochemical constraints and construction detailing of each solution (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Left: Stadelhofen, Zurich. Center: Allen Lambert Galleria, Toronto. Right: promenade for the Athens 2004 Olympics.



Source(s): Calatrava (n.d.)

Beyond technical performance, these buildings operate as cultural infrastructures and urban symbols. The Palau and the Auditorium are present in tourist itineraries and in the international image of their cities, but their maintenance and operation have posed challenges (energy, accessibility, conservation of the ceramic skin), fueling criticism about functionality versus iconicity (AV, 2014). This dilemma also affected Gaudí, although in his case the debate is resolved

over long construction timelines and through a craft-based system that accompanies the building's life cycle. The lesson when comparing them is twofold: the mosaic language and curvature can strengthen the city brand and the public experience, and their sustainability depends on compatible construction systems, maintenance protocols and long-term technical and economic governance.

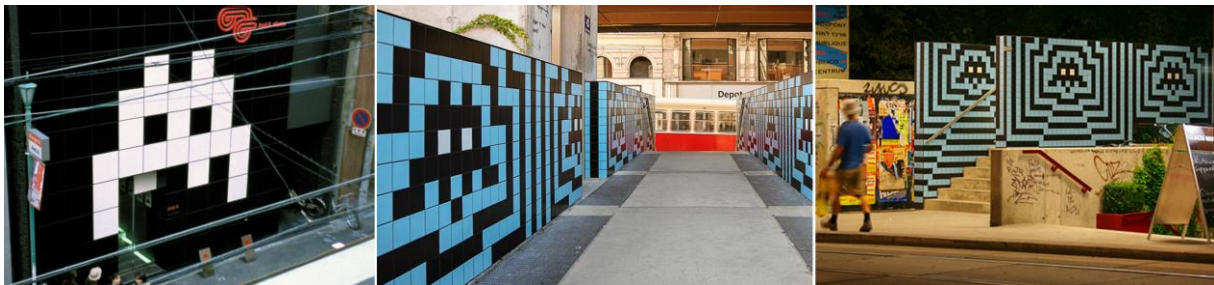
If Calatrava and Gaudí share an ontology of form, the curve as structural rationale and sensory operator and a ceramic culture that makes the mosaic an environmental skin, they diverge in code. While Gaudí builds polychrome geologies of recovered fragment and a craft structure relationship that sediments duration, Calatrava seeks sculptural unity through monochromy and prefabrication, with difficulties in the compatibility of materials when the mosaic is applied to curved metal substrates. The comparison, far from trivializing similarities, sharpens the framework of this research: to read the performativity of form and ceramic materiality as Mediterranean continuities with specific technical and operational conditions in the twenty first century.

3.4. Urban artists of mosaic and ceramics

In recent decades, various urban artists have used ceramics and mosaics as material languages to intervene in public space. Although these practices do not explicitly claim to be “Gaudian,” their technical link to ceramic mosaic and the logic of *trencadís* allows for comparative parallels with Gaudí. Just as Gaudí recomposes ceramic fragments to generate chromatic and symbolic continuity in the architectural skin (for example, the undulating bench of Park Güell or the pinnacles of the Sagrada Família), a part of contemporary urban art “musivizes” the city and reappropriates everyday surfaces to produce aesthetic and civic value (Gómez Ramió et al., 2015; UNESCO, 2005). In terms of urban art theory, this use of mosaic can be read as a material inscription situated in the common space, which negotiates visibility, consent and legitimacy (Bacharach, 2015; Baldini, 2022).

The French artist Invader has intervened in dozens of cities with small format ceramic mosaics that translate the aesthetics of the pixel and of classic video games (Figure 7) into the urban fabric by means of square tesserae, shifting a digital alphabet to an architectural substrate (Schacter, 2016). This remediation from bit to tile brings his method close to *trencadís* as a recompositing of elementary units on surfaces. While Gaudí exploits organic polychromy and the irregular fragment for topological continuity, according to Schacter (2016) Invader codes orthogonal matrices and pop icons that function as globalized cultural markers. This hybrid condition of public work, often noncommissioned and widely seen, has been questioned in the aesthetics of street art as a practice that creates tensions around the consent of public authorities and of the population (Bacharach, 2015).

Figure 7. Space Invaders Works in Japan and Austria.



Source(s): Left: Installation at Osaka, Japan, 2001. Center and Right: Invaded Bridge. Vienna, Austria, 2008. Quartier21+ Museumsquartier. <https://www.space-invaders.com/post/publiccom/>

On the other hand, the anonymous artist Ememem (Lyon) has developed since 2016 the flacking technique, which consists of repairing potholes and cracks with polychrome mosaics. His work (Figure 8) “heals” the wounds of the pavement and re-signifies the roadway as a support for

art and urban care (Eveleigh, 2023; Phillips, 2022). The affinity with Gaudí is found on two levels: technical and material, by recomposing fractured surfaces with ceramic fragments and ethical and aesthetic, by turning residue into value (a sensibility consistent with the economy of the fragment in Gaudí's *trencadís*) (Gómez-Ramió et al., 2015). Positioned within street art theory, these interventions can be read as inscriptions that call attention to urban maintenance and the legality of interventions (Bacharach, 2015; Bengtsen, 2020).

Figure 8. Ememem Works in Lyon and Paris.



Source(s): <https://www.ememem-flacking.com/copie-de-ememem-the-flacking-english>

This experience has also been tried in Chicago, where Jim Bachor has carried out since 2013 the series *Treats in the Streets*, with mosaics in potholes that depict ice creams, flowers, or ironic slogans, combining Roman mosaic craft with the socially critical charge characteristic of urban art (Jobson, 2015; Phillips, 2022).

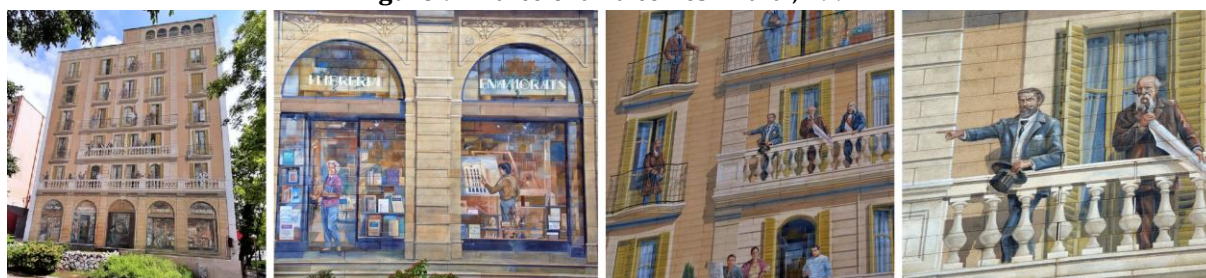
Invader translates mosaic into the language of the pixel, Ememem uses it as a repair strategy (flacking) and Bachor reinterprets it as in situ cultural critique. In all cases, the fragmentary recomposition and the public dimension of the musive gesture dialogue with the Gaudian ethos of *trencadís* understood as a material and sensorial continuity of the city (Gómez-Ramió et al., 2015). In light of the theoretical framework (Bacharach, 2015; Baldini, 2022; Bengtsen, 2020; Schacter, 2016), it is confirmed that urban mosaic functions as a device of aesthetic, social and technological mediation that inscribes identity, care and controversy in contemporary public space.

4. Analysis of cases of contemporary reinterpretations of Gaudí's legacy in public space

4.1. Case "Barcelona Balconies" mural near the Sagrada Familia

The Barcelona Balconies mural (Cité Création, n.d.), which occupies a party wall of approximately 450 square meters, simulates a typical Eixample façade with a composition and architectural elements that evoke the historicist residential buildings characteristic of the period in which Antoni Gaudí lived (Figure 9). It features portraits of figures linked to Barcelona: Gaudí, Picasso, Miró, Pau Casals, etc. It employs the stylistic device of *trompe l'oeil*, thanks to which the illusion of three dimensionality makes the balconies appear real, integrating with the surroundings.

Figure 9. "Barcelona Balconies" mural, 1992.



Source: <https://callejeandoporbarcelona.com/album/balcons-de-barcelona/>

Executed with a traditional muralist technique (acrylic on wall), the work relies on carefully modulated texture and chromatic gradation to achieve a realist effect that visually “fuses” the painted surface with its architectural surroundings. Its placement in Plaza de Pablo Neruda, directly opposite the Sagrada Família, endows it with strong symbolic charge and high tourist visibility: the street and the basilica operate as a real architectural backdrop that the mural deliberately echoes, creating a controlled continuity between the fictive façade and the heritage envelope.

As a visual homage that situates Gaudí alongside other figures of Catalan culture, the mural functions as a device of shared memory and local identity, while also operating as a point of interest incorporated into tourist routes and public-art guides (TripAdvisor, n.d.). At the same time, precisely because it is static and representational, it can be read as part of the visual touristification of the heritage setting: a crafted image that enhances the urban scene—and its consumable iconography—potentially more than it transforms the everyday spatial conditions of the place.

4.2. Case “The Vision” (mural inspired by Casa Batlló, Milan)

The Vision (Figure 10) is an anamorphic mural by the Italian artist Cheone (the pseudonym of Cosimo Caiffa), inaugurated on July 26, 2021, at Casa Maiocchi, Corso di Porta Romana 111/113, Milan. The work is conceived as an explicit homage to Gaudí, especially to Casa Batlló, “melting” windows and balconies into an undulating skin that recalls Catalan modernism (Basili, 2021; Guido, 2021; Redazione, 2021).

Figure 10. The Vision, Milan, 2021.



Source(s): <https://www.art-vibes.com/street-art/cheone-the-vision-murale-anamorfico-milano/>

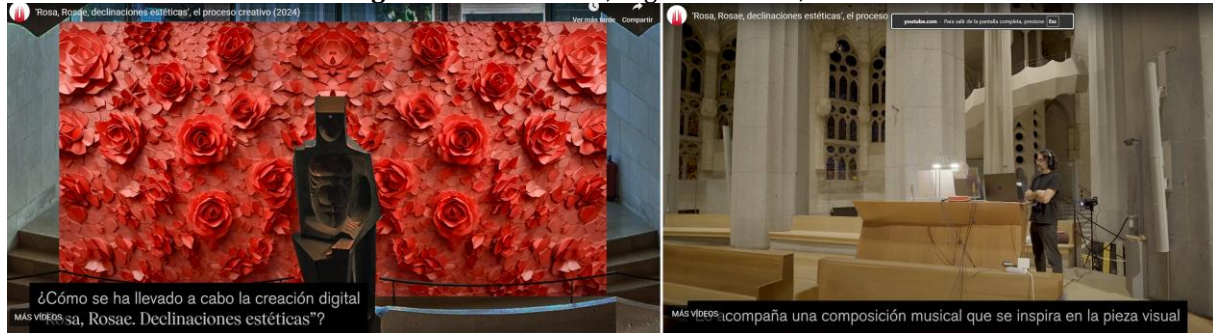
Basili’s mural recreates and subtly deforms signature elements of Casa Batlló—undulations, openings, and shell-like balconies—through *trompe l’oeil*, producing the illusion that the Milanese façade fuses with Gaudian motifs. The effect is optical and static rather than animated, grounded in anamorphosis and apparent volumetry; executed on exterior render prepared in situ and without digital interaction, it foregrounds pictorial technique and perspectival control to make the surface “vibrate,” clearly differentiating the work from video-mapping logics (Basili, 2021). Its placement on a central, highly visible urban axis with intense pedestrian flow has amplified circulation and “virality,” facilitating inclusion in street-art routes and guides (Collater.al, 2021; I Support Street Art, 2021; Tripadvisor, n.d.).

By relocating Gaudí’s iconography beyond Barcelona and recontextualizing it in Milan, the piece demonstrates how the Gaudian imaginary persists within contemporary public art; media reception emphasizes both Gaudí’s recognizability and the illusory device that “turns Milan into Barcelona for an instant” (Guido, 2021; Redazione, 2021). As an homage framed as respectful appropriation, it also raises questions about fidelity to the original form and about the durability and maintenance demands of the chosen technique and substrate. While its static character lacks the digital performativity of mapping, it gains in everyday presence and accessibility—without schedules or event logistics—thereby reinforcing the civic value of a Gaudí reinterpretation embedded in ordinary urban experience.

4.3. Sagrada Família (Rosa, Rosae) (AI, 2024).

On Sant Jordi's Day 2024, the Sagrada Família presented a digital projection generated by artificial intelligence, titled *Rosa, Rosae* (Figure 11), which combines rose forms with elements of Gaudí's architectural style. The piece was projected on a large LED screen installed in front of the Chapel of Sant Jordi, in dialogue with Subirachs's sculpture of Saint George and accompanied by organ music (Sagrada Família, 2024).

Figure 11. *Rosa Rosae*, Sagrada Família, 2024.

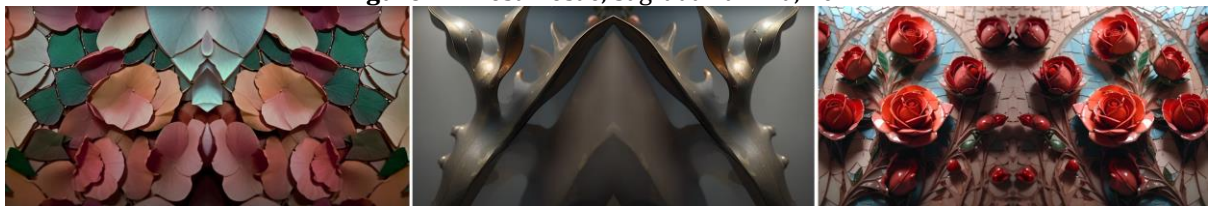


Source: <https://sagradafamilia.org/es/rosa-rosae>

Rosa, Rosae was active from April 22 to 27, 2024 and, according to media reports, part of its commission involved generating images from a database of documents related to the rose and to Gaudí's architecture, which were processed by AI to produce new visual forms (Catalan News, 2024; Església de Barcelona, 2024). The installation operates as an algorithmic extension of Gaudí's iconography, turning the basilica into a contemporary luminous flashpoint: by projecting motifs in dialogue with the rose—a strongly Catalan and literary symbol—the work translates medieval and modernist references into a digitally expanded register, framing a direct encounter between heritage and technology (ABC, 2024; Catalan News, 2024).

At the same time, the intervention's format—ephemeral and media-driven, deployed on a heritage landmark—raises familiar governance and urban questions: whether the basilica risks becoming a mere digital support, how schedules and costs are justified, and to what extent such technology-mediated experiences can integrate into everyday urban life. In this case, moreover, the piece does not alter the façade through direct projection onto the stone; instead, it uses an LED screen as a superimposed luminous layer that, as Figure 12 shows, draws indirectly on Gaudian geometries (curves, implicit trencadís, floral modularity) to produce the sense of an architectural flower dialoguing with the basilica's envelope (Església Barcelona, 2024).

Figure 12. *Rosa Rosae*, Sagrada Família, 2024.



Source: <https://sagradafamilia.org/es/rosa-rosae>

The intervention is fully digital, combining AI-generated visuals with LED projection. Rather than any physical painting or direct mapping onto the stone, it produces a luminous, temporary “garment” that overlays the basilica without materially altering it, working through light, color, and generative motion. Installed in the forecourt of the Sagrada Família and experienced at night, it reactivates the plaza as a performative space, where proximity to the monument intensifies the symbolic charge and amplifies the visual impact for passersby circulating through the heritage setting.

The communicative intent is to connect Gaudí with innovation, art, and technology through a symbolic gesture aligned with Sant Jordi. Catalan News (2024) highlights the intervention's pioneering character as the first AI-based visual projection on the basilica and notes the synchronization of image content and music with the sacred environment, confirming a contemporary logic of digital heritage reappropriation that sustains a narrative of a "living" Gaudí mediated by technology. At the same time, while such events expand the technological repertoire of street-art engagement, their ephemerality and symbolic saturation expose them to critiques of superficiality and to perceptions of local dispossession, insofar as residents may experience the monument as a mere digital screen deployed for touristic valorization (Catalan News, 2024).

4.4. "Arborescent" mapping on Casa Batlló.

Arborescent is the latest of the four video mapping interventions on the façade of Casa Batlló (Figure 13). On this occasion, this work by the artist Quayola was projected on February 1 and 2, 2025, integrating digital simulations of arboreal growth with Gaudian organic geometry and a soundtrack composed by the artist himself (Quayola, 2025).

This latest intervention has been chosen because its theme is related to the organic, in echo of Gaudí's work. The institution places the event within the program "The Heritage of Tomorrow," which invites digital art creators to dialogue with heritage and, according to its official report, the 2025 edition brought together more than 110,000 attendees and was broadcast on TV3 (an audience of 225,000 viewers, 12.9 percent share) (Casa Batlló, 2025).

Figure 13. Quayola, Casa Batlló, 2025



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhSsEAUfMBg&t=435s>

National press underlined that the animation of natural motifs on the modernist "skin"—branches that grow and "sway as if moved by an algorithmic noise"—reinforces the façade's reading as an "urban screen" while resonating with a Mediterranean tradition of polychromy and luminous dynamism (El País, 2025). At the same time, it warned that such spectacles risk being designed primarily for the large crowds of Paseo de Gràcia, narrowing the heritage experience to an ephemeral, technology-dependent format. Quayola's proposal, in this sense, simulates arboreal structures that branch, grow, and oscillate in dialogue with Gaudí's curved surfaces and trencadís, generating a geometric choreography that "reanimates" the organicism of the façade through visual algorithms (El País, 2025; Tsimpou, 2025); the artist frames nature as a "universal and infinite inspiration" and positions his work as an exploration of natural dynamics integrated with architecture (Quayola, 2025).

Technically, the piece combines digital projection with generative audio composed by Quayola himself, with mapping calibrated to the façade's topography (openings, balconies, ceramic envelope), producing a perceptual fusion between the digital layer and the material substrate. The intervention was presented within the ecosystem of ISE 2025, which included keynotes and highlights by the artist (AVIXA, 2024), and unfolded through periodic 10–12 minute sessions on Paseo de Gràcia; organizers reported attendance of just over 110,000 people, and the full work was later published in 4K on Casa Batlló's official channel. This scale, together with the

technological dependence and image-rights governance of a UNESCO-listed site, opens debate on cultural use of space and sustainability (capacity limits, organization, acoustics), even as the institution defends the mapping as a “gift to the city” and a tool for technology-mediated heritage literacy (AVIXA, 2025; Casa Batlló, 2025).

4.5. Comparative analysis of the studied cases of contemporary reinterpretations of Gaudí’s legacy in public space.

This section carries out a systematic comparison of the four cases based on a homogeneous set of indicators to identify patterns of “gaudification” of public space and of iconographic transfer between media and cities. Table 3 organizes these attributes and makes it possible to position each case, from static pictorial performativity to ephemeral digital performativity, as well as to distinguish the identity, tourism and heritage effects associated with each technical regime and each urban scale.

Table 3. Comparative analysis of cases of contemporary reinterpretations of Gaudí’s legacy in public space.

Indicators	“Barcelona Balconies”	“The Vision”	“Rosa, Rosae”	“Arborescent”
Event dates	1992	2021	2024	2025
Event morphology	Optical illusion in trompe l’oeil.	Pictorial mural.	Digital visual composition generated by AI.	Digital projection of arboreal structures on the façade of Casa Batlló.
Performativity	It turns a party wall into an imaginary façade with balconies and historical figures, including Gaudí. It integrates architecture, painting and urban narrative.	Casa Batlló are reinterpreted with visual deformations and fusions. It imitates <i>trencadís</i> , curves and chromatic fluidity in a static way.	The figure of the rose is projected on a screen on the façade of the Sagrada Família. Fusion between symbols and Gaudian geometry.	The movement of the “branches” generates a dynamic visual experience in relation to Gaudian organicism.
Medium and technology	Large scale acrylic mural painting. Craft technique of urban muralism. Durable, weather resistant. Non digital medium.	Mural painting on an architectural substrate. Craft technique of urban muralism. Durable, weather resistant. Non digital medium.	Generative digital art using AI and LED projection. Hybrid medium (technology plus sacred art) with an ephemeral and highly media driven character. The screen adapts to the façade.	High-resolution three-dimensional video mapping synchronized with music. Hybrid medium (technology plus art) with an ephemeral and highly media driven character. It is superimposed on the façade.
Urban context and scale	Urban party wall in the Sagrada Família neighborhood. Neighborhood scale but with tourist visibility.	Façade of an urban building in Milan. Neighborhood scale but without tourist visibility. International export of the	Sagrada Família plaza. Monumental and institutional scale.	Heritage façade on Paseo de Gracia (Barcelona). Great tourist visibility. Monumental scale and mass event (more

		Gaudian imaginary.		than 100,000 spectators).
Symbolic and cultural dimension.	Barcelona's cultural memory and homage to iconic Barcelona figures within the everyday fabric.	Pictorial rereading and explicit homage to Gaudí.	Contemporary and momentary rereading of the symbol of the rose on the Sant Jordi festivity and of Gaudian spirituality.	It promotes visual pedagogy about Gaudí through a light show.
Reception of the work	Identity and tourism function. The popular pictorial narrative creates everyday urban heritage.	Cultural transfer of Catalan modernism to the international context. Positive reception in street art media and on social networks.	Great media reception.	Great media reception.
Tensions and criticisms	Possible visual touristification and aestheticization of the heritage space. Its maintenance and durability depend on municipal policies.		Questions about the legitimacy of using sacred heritage for digital spectacles. Questioned for its superficiality.	Praised for its innovation and questioned for its touristic spectacle. Risk of trivializing heritage in its "theatricality." Dependent on technologies. Debate on the management of the cultural use of heritage façades.

Source: Own elaboration, 2025

The systematic comparison of the four cases based on a homogeneous set of indicators allows us to identify patterns of "Gaudification" of public space and of iconographic transfer between media and cities. The organization of attributes positions each case on a continuum that runs from static pictorial performativity to ephemeral digital performativity and helps distinguish the identity, tourism and heritage effects associated with each technical regime and each urban scale.

5. Discussion. Gaudí: performativity of form and urban performativity.

The analyzed cases show that contemporary reinterpretations of Gaudí's legacy, from the architecture of Calatrava or Hundertwasser to the video mappings on Casa Batlló and small-scale urban mosaics, echo a style and bring into the present an active logic of Gaudí's form. In all of them, organic geometry, ceramics, and material continuity operate as fundamental principles that produce new artistic and urban experiences.

This continuity means that Gaudí's work, beyond being an aesthetic reference, is also a model that integrates form and medium and centers on perception. His architecture acts as a matrix of procedures that today are updated through digital technologies, luminous resources, or participatory practices.

From a methodological perspective, this shift from material form to perceptual and symbolic effect can also be read through architectural drawing pedagogy: when digital tools are introduced, they only become meaningful if they are accompanied by methodological adjustments that keep

the focus on form analysis and the laws of visual perception, rather than on software technique alone (De Souza Sánchez et al., 2023).

From this Gaudí oriented approach, one can understand, on the one hand, the performativity of form as the capacity of architectural matter with organic connotations to influence the perception and behavior of inhabitants, contributing to more sensitive relations between them and the environment, and on the other, urban performativity as the manifestation of the transformation of public space through these forms that affects modes of use and the meaning of the city.

In that passage between the material and the immaterial, between forms and space on the one hand and perception and symbols on the other, Gaudí's legacy is a driver of cultural activation, where art, architecture, and technology converge in the ongoing and ephemeral production of urban space and its identity.

5.1. Public art, patrimonialization, and appropriation.

Urban art reconfigures public space as a territory of memory, expression, and symbolic dispute (Miles, 2015; Schacter, 2016). Reinterpreting Gaudí within this framework entails positioning his legacy at the intersection of heritage and urban culture, where interventions often fluctuate between symbolic or spatial appropriation and forms of tourist exploitation.

Beyond street-scale actions, heritage-led reuse of historic buildings can operate as cultural mediation: experience-oriented programmes may reactivate urban memory and generate a domino effect of neighbourhood revitalisation, strengthening place image and identity for both residents and visitors (Currало, 2015, pp. 14–15). In this sense, Gaudí-related reinterpretations can function not only as aesthetic citations but also as instruments through which heritage is translated into contemporary urban experience.

However, when Gaudian rereadings are absorbed into city-branding strategies, the risk of instrumental heritagization increases, turning the icon into a visual lure rather than a cultural mediator. This aligns with creative-city debates, where culture-led regeneration can unintentionally catalyse gentrification and displacement unless affordability and land-use safeguards are embedded in municipal policy (Ajuriaguerra Escudero & Di Guglielmo, 2025, pp. 113–114); moreover, digital place-branding dynamics may domesticate the critical potential of urban art, as shown in Lavapiés (Madrid), where Instagram UGC links urban art mainly to lifestyle markers, gastronomy and social fabric, with weak ties to political or civic participation (Urquía Uriaguereca, 2025, p. 1). Against this backdrop, community- or pedagogically oriented projects—such as local murals or Ememem's repairs—suggest that symbolic appropriation can reinforce collective memory without being reduced to spectacle, making the balance between heritage value, innovation, and respect for local populations a critical condition in Barcelona's role as a laboratory of urban events where art and heritage co-produce an artistic urban identity.

5.2. Gaudí as an urban attractor and symbolic resource.

From what has been seen, it can be stated that Gaudí functions as a global urban attractor: his legacy mobilizes tourist flows, drives cultural economies, and structures Barcelona's symbolic narrative (Rueda, 2019). His iconography—curves, trencadís, and chromaticism—operates as a language of visual identity reproduced both in mappings and in international artistic interventions; in a broader urban-regeneration frame, the integration of art into urban processes is likewise presented as a catalyst capable of attracting residents, businesses, and visitors, thereby contributing to neighborhood revitalization (De Souza Sánchez, 2025, p. 241).

However, this symbolic force also generates tensions—tourist saturation, aesthetic homogenization, and the trivialization of heritage. In response, urban art can become a space of symbolic resistance and critical reinterpretation, particularly when greater emphasis is placed on everyday-scale interventions rather than monumental ones; in this sense, Gaudí's legacy operates as a relational resource connecting urban symbolic spaces, public space, and the morphology of

form, and its analysis enables the articulation of three interlinked dimensions: (a) formal performativity, (b) urban performativity, and (c) urban appropriation.

5.3. Between the monumental-digital and the micro-urban.

The set of cases studied reveals a morphological and media continuum between the monumental-digital (Arborescent, Rosa, Rosae) and the micro-urban (Invader, Ememem, Bachor). At the monumental end, mapping and AI amplify Gaudí's formal performativity through dynamic simulations of light, color, and growth, though with the recurrent risk that the ephemerality of the event fails to permeate viewers' everyday experience in a sustained way (Cardellicchio & Tombesi, 2021; Rueda, 2019). From a digital-heritage standpoint, recent methodologies also argue for moving beyond the passive "digital twin" towards interactive environments—transferable to architectural heritage—integrating extended reality (XR), cloud-linked archives, and embedded AI to support exploration and research (Conde Melguizo et al., 2025, pp. 4–5).

At the opposite end, musive micro-interventions articulate a poetics of the human scale—minimal repairs, ceramic insertions, or humorous mosaics that revalorize ordinary space—thereby democratizing the Gaudian language by shifting it from the monumental icon to practices of urban care. Commemorative murals (such as Barcelona Balconies or The Vision) occupy an intermediate position, preserving the identity traits of the setting while offering an accessible, pedagogical, and visually persistent reading of heritage through Gaudí's work. Across this gradient, Gaudí's legacy ultimately exceeds the ornamental, drawing attention to technical, political, and economic questions of materiality and maintenance, as exemplified by the controversies surrounding white trencadís in Calatrava's Palau de les Arts.

6. Conclusions

This work confirms the analytical usefulness of a double performativity as an interpretive axis for artworks linked to Gaudí's oeuvre. Contemporary rereadings operate simultaneously on the plane of the performativity of form—when trencadís, organic curvatures, or simulations of growth are translated into pictorial and digital media—and on the plane of urban performativity—when those interventions affect uses, flows, and meanings in public space. Through the cases analyzed, the discussion shows that form and city co-produce one another within contemporary urban experience.

Urban identity, in this sense, does not reside in the icon as a fixed attribute but is mediated by the conditions of its insertion: the how and the where. Gaudí can be approached as an urban attractor and symbolic resource insofar as interventions avoid being reduced to exclusively monumental-scale events that detach spectatorship from lived public space. Because reception varies by medium, scale, and context—neighbourhood party wall, heritage façade, monumental plaza—identity is continually updated through the interpretive and inventive capacity with which artists engage Gaudí's formal repertoire.

The corpus also confirms a continuum between the monumental-digital and the micro-urban. Large-scale projections and video mappings tend to intensify formal performativity through light, colour, and simulated movement, whereas musive micro-interventions translate the Gaudian language into everyday practices of urban care and repair. This gradient of scales and media produces different effects on public experience and civic appropriation and should therefore inform the aims, formats, and evaluation criteria of future interventions.

At the same time, the analysis clarifies the dialectic between heritagization, city branding, and belonging. Gaudí emerges as an identity symbol capable of mobilising cultural economies and tourist visibility, yet these mediations risk instrumentalisation when oriented primarily toward spectacle. Situating reinterpretations within a horizon of public interest—pedagogical value, local accessibility, and community resonance—appears essential to counterbalance touristic capture and to sustain more durable forms of civic meaning.

In addition, the material ethics of *trencadís* is valued as a poetics of recomposition and care. The cases trace continuities between Gaudí's mosaic envelope and contemporary practices that "suture" deteriorated urban surfaces, generating aesthetic and civic value at neighbourhood scale. This line connects formal performativity with maintenance-oriented practices that, in turn, feed back into the construction of urban identity through ordinary, repeatable acts of repair.

Finally, the comparison with kindred architects helps delineate the reach and limits of the Gaudian legacy. While Calatrava and Hundertwasser share affinities with Gaudí in organic geometry and ceramic registers, the cases also show that materiality and maintenance condition public reception and long-term integration into the city. As a transferable outcome, the study consolidates an analytical framework that intersects morphological-performative reading with urban-cultural reading, enabling comparison across heterogeneous media and scales while preserving theoretical continuity—and positioning Gaudí as an open system of mediations through which urban identity continues to be produced, contested, and renewed.

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