

Joan Borrell i Nicolau (1888-1951)

A Chronicle of the Origin

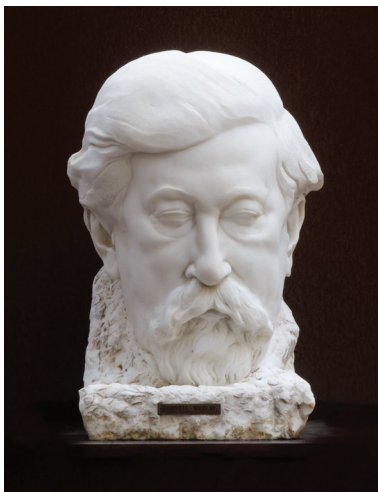
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Borrell i Nicolau is one of the most important -and at the same time, least well-known- Noucentist sculptors in our history of art. Just like his contemporaries Josep Clarà and Enric Casanovas, he found in the classical Greek spirit a concision of the aspirations for civility, order and wisdom which the Noucentists wanted for society as a whole. It was an ideal to which he contributed the influence of Catalan tradition, the Mediterranean character and the modernity of the new century.

This exhibition aims to draw attention and delve into the cornerstone his work: portraits and the female figure. It focuses on the years of emergence, culmination and decadence of Noucentism, which coincides entirely with the formative years and apex of Borrell's work. It is, then, a 'chronicle of the origin', the title of the exhibition, a journey into the development of the aesthetic and moral ideals of a sculptor with lofty aspirations.

The face as a reflection of eternity

Borrell i Nicolau excelled as a portrait painter when very young. His ability to capture the psychology of the character and give it severity and presence, striving for the Michelangelesque *terribilità*, immediately earned him a great reputation in Barcelona society and, later on, in the Spanish capital.



His portraits are balanced and delicate, but at the same time they are serious and show a certain harshness. These stem from the sculptures of the Roman Republican, whose depth and realism connect with the work of Rodin, from whom certain techniques were borrowed, for example, block and *non finito*.

Many a sculptors have turned to portrait painting as an important economic means, seeing it as something like a *modus vivendi*. Nonetheless, only a few have been able to transcend the simple portrait, the simple emulation of reality. Borrell i Nicolau is one of them, as he not only did he know how to transmit the model's character and strength to inert matter, but also the vitality of his own personality. He knew how to give people's ephemeral and temporary features the gift of eternity.



Image of the ideal woman

Naked torso, broad shoulders, muscular arms, full lips and hard features. We could use these words to define the women depicted by Borrell i Nicolau. They are strong, country women, but with the grace of the gods, the image of Woman, of all women, a corporeal image of the character of the Mediterranean woman. The sculptor, following the Platonic ideal, put his art at the service of society to give a face and presence to the world of ideas. The result is one of art that is serene and essential, with resounding volumes, presence and pace.

Borrell understands the feminine figure as an archetype, the perfect symbol of all virtues. The woman becomes the image of the Platonic essentiality of the universe, the image of Beauty, Good and Truth, but also Life and Origin, and so she is symbolised as Woman, Mother or Goddess. The gesture, on the edge between stillness and movement, is what transmits the values, and the material, what contains the soul.

