

# ENGLISH



## Rafael Casanova

La popularització d'una  
escultura monumental

## **The person. Rafael Casanova**

**Rafael Casanova i Comes** was the most prominent hero in the events of September 11, 1714. Born in Moià in around 1660, he was appointed Chief Counsellor and Governor of Barcelona in 1713, and therefore colonel of the citizen guild militia. He played an essential role in defending the city from the siege of the Bourbon troops led by Philippe, Duke of Anjou, during the War of the Spanish Succession. September 11, 1714 was the date of the final attack, in the course of which the mythical episode which immortalised the image of Casanova as a hero in popular memory took place: he led the first counterattack and hoisted the much-venerated flag of Santa Eulàlia. Injured during the attack as he defended the Sant Pere bulwark, he was quickly transferred to the Hospital de la Mercè, where he had to accept a pact to capitulate to the enemy troops. However, out of fear of retaliation, several friends and family members decided to fake his death. After some time underground, he reappeared in public after the Treaty of Vienna and worked as a lawyer, a profession he served until his death in Sant Boi de Llobregat on May 3, 1743. His withdrawal and the defeat of the city's resistance during the Bourbon siege precipitated the downfall of Barcelona and the subsequent repression to which Catalonia was subjected after the "Nova Planta" Decree in 1716.

## **The monument. The sculpture by Rossend Nobas**

In 1886, **Rossend Nobas i Ballbé** (Barcelona, 1838-1891) was commissioned by the Barcelona Town Hall to render the sculpture of Rafael Casanova, which was supposed to be part of the "Galeria de Catalans Il·lustres". The sculpture was meant to decorate the new "**Saló de Sant Joan**", the avenue that joined the new "Eixample" with the torn-down "Ciutadella" – built by Philip V to control the city – which would become one of the most popular venues in the 1888 Universal Exposition.

The monument has become the iconographic reference of Rafael Casanova *par excellence*, and it was made during the period when the contemporary Catalanist discourse was being forged, which entailed a rediscovery of the heroes in Catalonia's history.

Placed at the base of the "Arc de Triomf" for the opening of the Exposition, in 1914 it was moved to **its current location on the corner of Carrer d'Alí Bei and Ronda de Sant Pere**, where the bulwark that Casanova was defending when he was injured used to be located, on the occasion of the bicentennial of the events of 1714.

With its move to the "Eixample" in 1914, the sculpture was removed from its original pedestal designed by Josep Vilaseca and rendered by Joaquim Dieste, which was replaced by a more narrative one, a collaboration between Josep Llimona and Alexandre Soler i March. Here more than ever before, the statue became a national symbol, and this

very representativeness led it to be dismantled by the pro-Franco municipal authorities in 1939 after the Civil War had concluded. It was not to be recovered or reinstalled in the same location until 1977.

Rosend Nobas depicted Casanova as the Chief Councillor at an extraordinarily dramatic moment. Seriously injured, yet brave and determined, he kept the flag of Santa Eulàlia waving while he rested on his sword. This sculpture stands out among the statues in the "Saló de Sant Joan" because of its romantic spirit and dynamism.

A disciple of Agapit Vallmitjana trained at the Escola de Llotja, and a collector and teacher, Rosend Nobas was a renowned, celebrated sculptor at that time. His *Torero ferit* (Injured Bullfighter), on display at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, is a fine example of his smaller, more naturalistic works. However, he is particularly known for his public sculptures. He was the author of a host of works, including the *Victòries* (Victories) in the monument to Columbus, the group *La Quadriga de l'Aurora* (Aurora's Chariot) in the waterfall at the Parc de la Ciutadella and the *Mercuri* (Mercury) at Barcelona's Casino Mercantil. The monument to Rafael Casanova is one of his most famous, widely disseminated works.

## **The popularisation of a monumental sculpture**

Various smaller versions of the sculpture of Rafael Casanova are known. Made of different materials throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they reveal how the monument by Rossend Nobas, **a fine exponent of 19<sup>th</sup> century commemorative sculpture**, was extraordinarily popular, though subjected to the different historical vicissitudes of Catalonia.

## **Catalanism at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

The figure of Rafael Casanova, who still embodies courage and the struggle to defend the fatherland, began to resurge in popularity in 1865, when one of the city streets was named after him. However, he truly became a symbol of Catalan identity in the wake of the surge of Catalanism at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The floral offerings to the sculpture rendered by Rossend Nobas began in 1888, and the first mass demonstration directly related to September 11<sup>th</sup> was held before the sculpture in 1901 after the arrest of around 30 youths who were paying tribute to him.

It was in this context, the rise of the Catalanist movement, that the Barcelona-based artistic reproductions company **Hoyos, Esteva i Companyia**, a highly prestigious firm during the years of Modernisme, purchased the rights to reproduce and commercialise Nobas' sculpture in 1901 for a period of 80 years. From then on, it manufactured pieces

inspired by the original model, the most popular of which were around 125 cm tall.

On November 21, 1901, the magazine *Joventut* announced to its subscribers that for the first time they could purchase an artistic reproduction of the famous statue rendered by Rossend Nobas, the outcome of an agreement with Barcelona's Hoyos, Esteva i Companyia, with the goal of contributing to an act of "Catalanist propaganda".

Starting in January 1902, *Joventut* gave its subscribers the gift of a smaller reproduction of the monument made of plaster imitating bronze which came with a small pedestal which hinted at the stripes on the Catalan flag. The work measured 40 cm tall and was clearly decorative in purpose, designed as a living room sculpture. However, the magazine also offered its readers the chance to purchase a larger reproduction, one that was 125 cm tall, for the price of 155 pesetas, an ideal work to appear in private offices or meeting rooms of Catalanist organisations. *Joventut* readers could benefit from a special promotion and purchase it for just 55 pesetas.

This larger reproduction was also advertised in other Barcelona press outlets, such as the newspaper *La Renaixença*.

The reproductions of the monument to Rafael Casanova were extremely successful commercially, so much so that a

series of anonymous forgeries of the piece began to spread, which Hoyos, Esteva i Companyia condemned in the press. The sculpture of Rafael Casanova rendered in plaster made to resemble bronze that is conserved in the Frederic Marès Museum and exhibited in this hall is probably one of the reproductions by Hoyos, Esteva i Companyia from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as is the one conserved at the Museu d'Història de Catalunya, which was recently donated by a private individual, the one that the Museu de Sant Boi de Llobregat purchased in 2001, and other copies in the hands of private collectors.

## **The Republic**

The celebration of the bicentennial of September 11 in 1914 took place at a time of euphoria in the Catalanist movement. With the proclamation of the Republic – after years of repression under the Primo de Rivera dictatorship – the turning point to defend this celebration had finally come.

The President of the Generalitat, Francesc Macià, spearheaded the revival of the heroes who had fallen to defend the Catalan people, and as a **tribute to Rafael Casanova**, he officially unveiled monuments featuring bronze reproductions of the sculpture by Rossend Nobas in squares and public places in several Catalan towns.

## **The instatement of democracy**

Once the monument's long exile during the Franco years ended, it was returned to its location with the instatement of democracy and bore witness to the massive demonstration held on La Diada (Catalonia's national holiday on September 11) in 1977.

The production of other bronze copies of this sculpture can be situated within this context, such as the one on display in **the lobby of the Barcelona Town Hall** and the one in the **Frederic Marès Museum**. They are modern replicas most likely rendered based on the Museum's own plaster version.

## Captions

### Figure 1

Home in Moià where Rafael Casanova was born. Photo: Museu d'Història de Catalunya (Pepo Segura).

### Figure 2

Can Barraquer estate in Sant Boi de Llobregat, where Rafael Casanova died in 1743. Photo: *Imatges* magazine, September 10, 1930.

### Figure 3

First location of the monument to Rafael Casanova in the "Saló de Sant Joan" in 1888. Photo: Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, Arxiu Mas.

### Figure 4

In 1914, the monument was moved to the corner of Carrer d'Alí Bei and Ronda de Sant Pere. Photo: Fundació Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, Arxiu Mas.

### Figure 5

During the Franco regime, the sculpture was kept in the municipal warehouses on Carrer de Wellington, where it was hidden behind a partition until 1977. Photo: Pepe Encinas, published in Jaume Fabre, Josep M. Huertas and Pere Bohigas, *Monuments de Barcelona*, 1984.

### Figure 6

The sculptor Rossend Nobas with some of his most famous works. Photo: *La Ilustración Artística*, May 25, 1891. Photo: Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona.

### Figure 7

Starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, floral offerings to the monument to Rafael Casanova became a tradition. Photo: Pedro Moriguer, 1907. Biblioteca de Catalunya.

**Figure 8**

Advertisement for artistic reproductions of the monument in two different formats, in the magazine *Juventut*, December 19, 1901. The photograph shows the 40-cm tall reproduction.

**Figure 9**

Advertisement of the larger-sized reproduction in the newspaper *La Renaixença*, September 8, 1902. Photo: Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona.

**Figure 10**

Announcement condemning forged reproductions of the sculpture published in *El Poble Català* on September 2, 1914 by Hoyos, Esteva i Companyia. Photo: Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona.

**Figure 11**

Sculpture of Rafael Casanova at the Museu de Sant Boi de Llobregat, a piece in polychrome plaster purchased from a private individual in 2001. Photo: Museu de Sant Boi de Llobregat.

**Figure 12**

Official unveiling of the monument to Rafael Casanova in Plaça de l'Hospital in Moià by the President of the Generalitat Francesc Macià in 1933. Today the monument is kept inside the Casa Museu Rafael Casanova. Photo: Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya (Fons Francesc Macià).

**Figure 13**

Monument with the bronze reproduction of Rafael Casanova officially unveiled in Pla de l'Alemany Park in Berga in 1934. After the Civil War, it was stored in a municipal warehouse until 1979, when it was returned to its original location. Photo: Berta Francàs, Ajuntament de Berga.

**Figure 14**

Bronze replica of the statue by Rossend Nobas made between 1979 and 1982 and located in the lobby of the Ajuntament de Barcelona at the foot of the monumental staircase. Photo: Mutari.

## CREDITS

**Coordination:** Neus Peregrina

**Documentation:** Sílvia Llonch

**Preventative conservation and restoration:** Carmen Sandalinas

**Advice:** Cristina Rodríguez Samaniego and Irene Gras

**Graphic design:** Víctor Oliva. Disseny gràfic

**Assembly:** Relluc

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