



## Two capitals

The exhibition *Barcelona-Madrid 1898-1998* belongs to a tradition, which has received scant attention in Europe in recent years, of exhibitions about the cultural relationships—in the broadest sense of the word—between major cities. Barcelona-Madrid traces a century from a landmark year, 1898, which emphasises the marked differences between both cities: a date which, for some, represents a state of collapse, the nostalgia for the lost empire and a call for regenerationism; and for others it stands for a period which opened the door to new horizons and an opportunity to look beyond the Pyrenees.

Barcelona and Madrid are two capital cities: Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, and Madrid, the capital of Spain. Two capitals of two communities, one of which is part of the other. But they are also two capitals insofar as they are landmark cities, which extend their influence to areas beyond their administrative boundaries. They have a meaning on the symbolic terrain and are recognised around the world as having their own personality and characteristic traits.

Madrid has all the advantages of a State capital, but it also has all the drawbacks. The presence of political power always generates collateral effects. For instance, it acts as a pole of attraction for economic power, as the development of communication and culture industries confirms. However, it is also hampered by the fact that it is a bureaucratically contaminated city, which often makes administrative culture an onerous task. Barcelona is a purer city in civic terms. The absence of a State apparatus pressing down on it perhaps gives it another versatility, but the difficulties in managing to attract attention and resources are also far greater. Two capitals within one country, which also stand for two quite distinct models of urbanity. The awareness of the State which exists in Madrid becomes civic awareness in Barcelona. This is probably the reason why the citizens of Barcelona seem more involved in their city. We could say that the citizens of Madrid “know” the city is theirs and the citizens of Barcelona want to “feel” the city is theirs.

Two cities which have undergone extraordinary changes over the course of the century; which have passed back and forth the baton of the avant-garde, although for many years—mainly due to dictatorships—Madrid seems to have been located in Spain’s hinterland and Barcelona a corridor used to enter and leave the country. After 1980, these clichés no longer applied. The two cities have strengthened their status as international capitals, although through markedly different means and ways.

For many years, Barcelona and Madrid have found a pragmatic way of avoiding their rivalries: to ignore each another. More often than not, their relationship has consisted of them turning their backs on each other. When you tell a foreigner that you can get from Cadiz to Copenhagen without leaving the motorway, yet you cannot do the same from Madrid to Barcelona, or that the first high-speed train did not run between Barcelona and Madrid, they find it hard to believe. Yet there has not been a single demonstration, a single complaint because, at the end of the day, these obstacles suit everyone concerned. The air shuttle is there for all vital matters.

This exhibition seeks to explain these distances, as well as the solidarities and complicities established at the most difficult times. And it aims to put into words those things which have remained unsaid and often generate an absurd stalemate.

It is not a question of paying compliments to each another, to prosperous Madrid or to likeable Barcelona. These compliments are the rhetorical recourse used in order to avoid the underlying issues. We must consider who each of us is, and see how we have related to each other historically in order to get to



Prologues by Josep Ramoneda to the CCCB's catalogues

know each other better and to improve our relations as much as is necessary. And, above all, mutual tolerance is needed, as it is the only thing that ensures a good atmosphere between people and institutions.