

THE BUILDER (circa 1964), Jordi Bonet

This is the third stop on the Public Art, Public Memory tour of Loyola Campus.

As you move through the main floor hallway of the Richard J. Renaud Science Complex, a tall, narrow aluminum sculpture affixed to the west-facing concrete wall may catch your eye. Opposite, east-facing windows cast natural light onto the artwork, enhancing its presence. At over 2 metres high — or 213 centimetres to be exact — the sculpture may appear as a mid-century communications tower with antennae sprouting from its sides. If you are able to, look closely at the work. What other imagery do you see?

Jordi Bonet's *The Builder* is a vertical network of geometric and abstract shapes that protrude at various depths from its base, creating a pattern of crevasses and rivets that envelop the sculpture. We invite you to pause and reflect on the work. Observe its details closely. Does your eye naturally follow certain pathways within the work?

Created in 1964 during a prolific period in the artist's career, *The Builder* was initially commissioned for an architectural firm and building developer. It was created a year after Bonet's similarly styled bas-relief wall panels, *L'Hommage à Gaudí*, were installed at Salle Wilfred Pelletier in Place des Arts. In 2012, *The Builder* came to Concordia by donation to mark the artist's 80th birthday and was installed between the Centre for Structural and Functional Genomics and the Richard J. Renaud Science Complex.

While its form may suggest a tree or a communications tower, the sculpture represents a three-dimensional abstract and futuristic cityscape, with elements resembling office towers, homes, rivers, bridges, highways, and other central arteries of a bustling metropolis. Though specific details about its construction are scarce, we can likely assume the aluminum artwork was cast together. The use of industrial materials and the assembly process mirror the very act of constructing a cityscape.

Born in Barcelona, Spain, in 1932, Jordi Bonet lost his right arm at the age of nine during the Spanish Civil War. He was educated at the Barcelona School of Fine Arts and soon after emigrated to Canada, settling between Montreal and Mont-Saint-Hilaire, Quebec, in 1954.

Bonet was active in the mid-20th century and was known to be prolific in his career creating over 100 public art murals — predominantly working in bronze, aluminum and concrete. His works were commissioned for public buildings such as the Grand Théâtre de Québec, Montreal's Pie-IX metro station, and the Our Lady of the Skies chapel at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York City.

Bonet maintained an atelier in Mont-Saint-Hilaire, where he was neighbours with Jesús Carles De Vilallonga, another artist featured in Concordia's public art collection. Vilallonga's work, *Imaginary Portrait of 24 Universal Geniuses of Today*, is located in the EV Building and can be explored on the Sir George Williams Campus - *Public Art, Science and Technology* tour.

Influenced by the asymmetry of Art Nouveau, the decorative styles of Antoni Gaudí and the surrealism of Salvador Dalí, Bonet's work reflects these inspirations. Subtle references to these styles appear in *The Builder*, evident in its curved lines, archways and abstract cityscapes.

According to a manifesto by the artist, Bonet developed a style called "pararéalisme," which he describes not as transforming or replacing the real, but rather blending well-known modernist styles: hyperrealism, surrealism, automatism and abstraction.

Driven by a desire to democratize art and capture the spirit of the city, Bonet created public art that he hoped would be accessible to people from all walks of life. As quoted in Concordia News, Bonet once said that "Art is part of the collective wealth of all. And everyone has a right to find it in his city, street or home, and among his daily objects."

Though it may be tucked away in a corner of the Loyola campus, *The Builder* offers a window into the diverse, bustling city beyond the campus confines.

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