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# The Roman Amphitheatre, Visigothic Basilica and Romanesque Church (Tarragona) 'Estrats' by Rubén Perdomo

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Most of the visitors to the amphitheatre, basilica and Romanesque church of Tarragona are looking for answers and they create in their minds a situation based on the objective information they receive from the site itself, the audio guide, etc. But they also use their own subconscious to build their own personal interpretation of its history.

With this audiovisual creation I would like to invite you to participate in my personal way of viewing the monument, through a fictitious and anonymous character who, using the *vomitoria* as entrances, will introduce you to the various strata –archaeological, organic and socioeconomic– found in it. The tour guided by this anonymous character goes from the upper stratum (where the slaves sat) to the pits, a place hidden from the public in the Roman period, where I have created my own more personal interpretation of this area.

Rubén Perdomo

## The Dialogue

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One of the things that makes Tarragona's amphitheatre exceptional is that with a mere glance and little effort you will see the passing of the centuries materialised before your eyes. This is not a more or less metaphoric statement, but rather something that is quite obvious. We can all see how the reconstructed ellipse of the Roman building contrasts vividly with the verticality and horizontality of the basilica and the Romanesque church built right on the spot where Fructuosus, Augurius and Eulogius were martyred.

It is precisely the fact that there are historical sediments of great importance preserved in just a few square metres that merited its designation as a World Heritage Site. It is also what most impressed Rubén Perdomo, who went beyond the first glance and, in addition to studying the archaeological strata in depth, decided to investigate, visually and artistically, the social and organic strata it included and includes.

The amphitheatre pits were built right over what had been a branch of the Via Augusta, a road flanked by tombs and burial areas. In Tarraco, with the amphitheatre already built, 12,000 spectators took their seats according to their social statuses to witness confrontations between man and wild beast. The construction material, apparently immutable, has played an active role in the formation of an individual character... We are speaking, there-

fore, of layers that concentrate an extraordinary vital and spiritual tension (sadness, contemplation, euphoria, struggle, violence, submission and punishment all merge in its centre). Perdomo wishes to show us all this through a personal discourse that, throughout the work, passes progressively from an objective and didactic perspective to a subjective and poetic one, with the intention of thus adding a fourth leg that links them all: that of the narrative strata.

Indeed, another element the artist took most delight in, which is not commonly seen, is the counterweights from the hoists used in Roman times to raise animals and people from the pits to the arena. Roughly cut and with a hole in the middle through which to pass the ropes, from the darkness, they changed the scene above. In Rubén's work, they become symbols of life and death, but at the same time they are the elements that make it possible to compensate for, contrast and modify the conventional narrative of history.

Rosa Comes

## The Creator

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**Rubén Perdomo.** born 1968, Santa Cruz de Tenerife

Rubén Perdomo is a photographer and video creator born in Santa Cruz de Tenerife who came to Barcelona at the age of ten and who currently has his studio in Carrer del Vidre, in the heart of Tarragona's historical quarter. He became interested in photography at the age of fifteen and, with a Konica TC belonging to his father and an enlarger from his grandfather, he set up a lab in a 4-square-metre room. At the age of nineteen, having completed his studies in Sound and Image, he began working in the world of the audiovisual, focusing on video and montage and working as a freelance for different TV channels and production companies of recognised prestige (Barcelona, Madrid, etc.). During those years, photography remained in the background.

Up to today. In 2011 he once again began to look through the camera lens and started to take pictures that would soon define his style and personality. The result of his works reflects a clear interest in lines (architecture, interiors, shadows, etc.), the imperceptible details and particular universe of each human being. In short, he began to prepare a body of work in which his interior world blended with reality, one in which he looked from a certain distance and applied an aesthetic analysis, without pretensions, allowing the spectator to define or interpret the message transmitted by what they saw. His photographs are a window onto the particular world of each individual. They are fragments of a single reality that, in turn, is different for everybody. [www.rubenperdomo.com](http://www.rubenperdomo.com)

## The Place

# The Roman Amphitheatre, Visigothic Basilica and Romanesque Church

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The construction of the Tarraco amphitheatre in the 2nd century AD completed the trilogy of buildings in which to hold spectacles (theatre, circus and amphitheatre), necessary distinctions for any important Roman city and, therefore, essential for the capital of a province. The amphitheatre was built outside the city walls, very close to the Via Augusta and next to the beach, from where the animals used in the spectacles were unloaded.

Two types of event were organised in the amphitheatre: gladiator combats (*munera*) and combats or simulated hunts of wild beasts (*venationes*). It was also where death sentences were carried out.

The arena, the space in which the spectacle took place, is approximately 62.50 x 38.50 metres. Cutting across it are the *fossae*, where, in a small chapel-like room a mural painting depicting Nemesis, the protector goddess of gladiators, was found. The arena was separated from the seating by a *podium* and the stands were divided into three sectors for the different social classes. Archaeologists have also identified the tribune, the main exit gates from the arena and a very small part of the façade.

The building was reformed in the year 221, during the reign of Heliogabalus. Years later, on 21 January 259, Bishop Fructuosus and his two deacons, Augurius and Eulogius, were burned alive in the amphitheatre arena during Emperor Valerian's persecution of the Christians. To commemorate this event, in the 6th century a basilica dedicated to the worship of the martyrs was built. In the 12th century, the Romanesque church of Santa Maria del Miracle was built over the early Christian basilica. This superposition of buildings of great historical value, which goes beyond the 12th century, has made the amphitheatre an exceptional archaeological site that well deserves its World Heritage status.

