

Portugal: 20th Century Architecture

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Portugal: 20th Century Architecture

1. SITUATION

The exhibition (and catalogue) *Portugal: 20th Century Architecture* that will be presented in Portugal at the Exhibition Center of Centro Cultural de Belém between June 25 and August 25 this year, is part of the Deutsche Architektur Museum program, under the direction of Wilfried Wang, has been promoting, reflecting at the time of the great cultural event that represents the Frankfurt Book Fair, the architecture of each of the theme countries, thus enriching the reading of each country's culture. After Austria, which opened the cycle, it was Ireland's turn, and Portugal's in 1997. Sweden, Switzerland, and Greece followed. Finally, Germany will close this set of records of the century's European architectural production, which significantly articulates the relationship between dominant cultural production centers and the peripheries, which receive the cultural models as a sign of attentive museum programming that confirms the vitality of the German Museum of Architecture and the qualified effort of its director and collaborators in disseminating architecture of European roots and its history.

After a long journey through the desert, Portuguese architecture has been the object of some international attention and publicity in recent years. Of course, there are several reasons that have triggered this recent international interest like never before. Numerous monographs in the most prestigious magazines, exhibitions, international awards, competitions, and especially the "pilgrimages" to the works of Álvaro Siza, the inescapable Portuguese architect whose work is most closely followed by the international circuits and who intelligently, that is, without losing his genuineness, has allowed the consummation of a singular internationalization, dragging with him the name of Portugal, and arousing the interest of other contemporary authors.

Of course, the political changes that occurred with the transition from dictatorship to democracy have something to do with this situation, but this is certainly because architecture produced recently has been welcomed internationally as an authentic contribution with its own personality. In fact, the change may not have occurred so much in Portuguese architecture, but more in the cultural model of reference. Indeed, it seems clear today that the dominant production centers have begun to welcome less common architectural products with interest to the look and information of these circuits. To all this we must certainly add other factors, such as people's mobility and above all the intensification of information networks that integrate the concept of globalization, and which tend to attenuate the distance and even values between center and periphery.

From what has been said, the proposal to present internationally the architectural production of the century in Portugal is a stimulating challenge. Firstly, because it was the possibility of recording with some breath a long-term journey when only the point of arrival was disclosed and known. Secondly, because it unavoidably revealed the confirmation of the quality of that production. It is a necessary work at the end of the century, that allows us to fix our contemporaneity honoring a close past, of the pioneers of modernity and a path made of advances and retreats, of experience and achievements, of tears, but above all greater accent in continuity.

The peripheral location of Portugal, a small country in the western and southern part of Europe, has contributed to shape the path of Portuguese architecture and create a situation at the end of the century with some impact on international production. Peripheral location, time lag, and technological delay have been mentioned as determining factors in the definition of the specificity of Portuguese architecture based on the desire to create safe methodologies, a situation evident in the most significant authors of recent decades. Therefore, we can say that this production, on the sidelines, but not because of that less qualified, is affirmed through a path with some solidity and continuity, more permeable to external influences than influencing them. This consistency will certainly come from the fact that it is an architecture sustained with "real things", built from the response to the multiple implications of programs, budgets and sites, and the will of creators and commissioners, which constitutes a true tradition of pragmatism sometimes more decisive than cultural tradition itself. In other words, it can be said that the bulk of qualified production has shown a demand for constructive realism, a practical meaning in the resolution of programs or in the concrete viability of singular or genuine projects within the European framework.

2. METHODS AND OBJECTIVES

This exhibition allowed to gather a collection of more than a hundred works resulting from a program structured in chronological and programmatic cross-network that constitute an updated synthesis of Portuguese architecture. Pointing to a panoramic view, it refuses the pretension to remake an ideologically unitary panorama. It is a question of reevaluating the author's architecture in the framework of an eclectic sampling, reflecting the pluralism that characterizes the production over a century. It defends an approach with the author's responsibility in the light of the historiography of art, in particular the history of contemporary architecture. We believe that this way architectural production can be clearly characterized from methodological and

scientifically globalizing perspectives. The aim is not to produce a catalogue or compendium of works; on the contrary, the intention is to characterize a production by framing in a whole the remarkable situations, those that in an inescapable way mark the shape of time. The theme is the Portuguese architecture of the 20th century and not only the so-called "modern" architecture produced in Portugal. The subject is that of architecture extended to the city and not reduced to the object. Tracing the path of 20th century Portuguese architecture, valuing its originality and specificity, is the goal.

The methodological foundation is based on a periodization defining the context in which works were produced, analyzed in the light of the dominant typologies or programmatic themes, allowing the contents of the exhibition to be defined in a structured way, far from the randomness of a casual choice. The works that integrate each time reflect the reading of the century as a long-term time and confirm the authorial option of valuing the works independently of the authors. In fact, it was about the fixation of works and not authors in which the thread serves to record the constructions that build history. Likewise, the catalogue, incorporating monographs, thematic and chronological essays by specialists in the various subjects that constitute an important technical support for the exhibition, seeks to outline a critical balance of the architectural production of the 20th century in Portugal and a first reference work in the fixation of a heterodox synthesis of our contemporaneity.

3. STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Assumed as said in the condition of authorial risk, seven periods are considered, as well as seven the dominant programmatic themes in the context of the history of architecture in Portugal in the 20th century.

The contours of the first period are drawn between 1900 and 1921, highlighting the issue of the Portuguese house and the new programs. The architecture of the century was defined between a functionalism and an established taste that was imagetically adapted to the program. Two vectors, patent in the two works that were presented in the Competition for the Portuguese Pavilion at the Universal Exhibition of Paris (1900), marked the limits of this practice. On the one hand, nationalism, "Portugueseism", and revivalism were themes of debate in Portuguese culture, highlighting the magisterium of Raul Lino and the question of national identity as a recurring theme. On the other hand, the affirmation of a certain cosmopolitanism conformed the influence of *the Beaux-Arts* disseminated by the Parisian scholarship recipients (Ventura Terra and Marques da Silva) in the framework of a modernity understood through the new equipment programs with functionalist concerns. The ephemeral Modernism, which introduces the modernity of the 20th century, analyzed throughout the 1920s and 30s draws a second time (1922-1938), in which *Art Deco* taste evolves into an experimental modernism, but also monumental, condensed in the "Golden" decade of Public Works. It was a time of affirmation of *Estado Novo* through architecture and the "Politics of Spirit". The historicist and regionalist demand were suspended to it, overlapping the growing use of international models (German, Italian and a little Dutch), based on the growing dissemination of the "architecture of the modern movement". The more immediate and somewhat epidermic international influences understood as another "style", tended to counteract a search for monumentality and the values of dignity that integrate the sense

of public work, paradigmatically condensed in the official works of Pardal Monteiro. In the context of current production stands out the linguistic renewal operated in the image of income buildings from qualified interventions of Cassiano Branco, creating a formal code easily understandable and repeatable.

It follows the period of affirmation of the *Estado Novo* Architecture as a regime architecture (1938 to 1948), focused on the search for roots by the monumental or regionalist path: symbolic and desired timeless monumentality in the urban sets of representation of the "capital of the Empire"; also, regionalist ruralism in the small school (Economic Neighborhoods and single-family houses of the upper bourgeoisie). In this context, the reference to a certain collective history is explored through the exaltation of the values of nationality and embodied in the commitment of the Directorate-General for National Buildings and Monuments, fixing, and constructing the manifestos of a memory. The Portuguese World Exhibition is understood as a cultural reference, Areeiro Square as a model and "Alta de Coimbra" an urban paradigm of power. A third way sought to develop a modern another approach to tradition and the question of cultural identity (Távora published *O Problema da Casa Portuguesa*, 1947, whereas Keil, *A Arquitetura e a Vida*, 1942). In a superimposed time, modern contamination of Oporto with Losa, Artur Andrade, Viana de Lima was designed.

The post-war situation shaped the modern rupture and the questioning of the International Style developed over the following period (1948-1961). It was the time of the contestation to the regime in the context of the heroic Congress of architects who started to claim the adoption of the principles of Architecture of the Modern Movement and the functionalist response to new programs. The new magazine *Arquitetura* and architects' organizations (ODAM, ICAT and MRAR) revealed a new class conscious of its social mission. The search for local references, contextualization, and the revelation of Popular Architecture with the task of the "Survey" (1955-1961) would give rise to critical organicist and regionalist explorations, in the framework of a production in a peripheral situation and with a sign of resistance.

In the fifth period (1961-1974), the plurality of the 1960s developed. The beginning of the decade was marked by the outbreak of the African war, which broke with the established peace and constituted the germ of increasing opposition to the regime. In the same year, the publication of *Arquitetura Popular em Portugal* fixed the memory of a territory and construction. It is the gestation of a time defined between rupture and nostalgia. The territory tends to be transformed with large tourist enterprises, the city to internationalize with large service buildings and the scale of intervention to change. The "modern" by the imagery of the International Style tends to be trivialized to the taste of a growing capitalist speculation emerging "architectures" of rupture with the city. Organicism is affirmed along with the growing diversity, Pop culture, the vernacular appreciation, and the architecture of detail. It is the time of "professionalization", the formation of large project companies and construction management. A cleavage in 1968 announces the 1970s: Portas publishes *A Cidade como Arquitetura*, Siza designs in Caxinas and Avenida da Ponte. At the turn of the decade, a rationalist approach is outlined and denounces the impending end of the modern situation, while new themes are brought to debate: the return to the city, the culturalist approach to the heritage issue and the emergence of disciplinary research.

The years of the Revolution (1974-1976) constitute the sixth period, whose experiences led Portuguese architecture across borders and where for the first time its contribution was understood as original. Power in the form of Residents Commissions became the main customer. With the SAAL operations, populations saw the real possibility of responding to their housing problems, the architects the possibility of designing and building in unusual dimensions and effectively intervening in the transformation of the city and part of the political-military power the real possibility of moving to what was then called popular and participatory democracy.

With the end of the revolutionary period, another period was defined (from 1976 to the end of the century), in which the phenomenon of the opening of Portuguese architecture accompanies the growing number of architects and a certain geographical dispersion. Modernity tends to assert itself as an operative value alongside the contestation of rationalism and modern architecture in a postmodern situation. It was the time of Álvaro Siza's internationalization and consecration, as well as the affirmation of Oporto School. The construction outbreak, often leading to the destruction of the territory, the expansion of the towns and cities in the countryside, were factors of transformation that implied the formation of an awareness that tended increasingly to value the landscape and natural resources, as well as the need for the management of the territory and heritage. Portugal's admission to the EEC has triggered some development efforts in such a way that rehabilitation, large facilities, with emphasis on universities and polytechnics, real estate operations and prestigious architecture tended to be defined as dominant themes.

The chronological sequence described above intersects horizontally with the seven programmatic themes equally problematized in the catalogue. Housing, not forgetting the single-family dwelling, when it presented progress and experiences resumed, but naturally favoring the multifamily unit and its extension as a city design were elected themes. Understood as signs of the times, public equipment, major works or notable buildings, the most significant buildings for the community were, for this reason, the privileged typology in this collection and that somehow clarified the evolution of architecture throughout the century. The national representation, condensed in the exhibition pavilions, functioned as a barometer, as an extreme position of a public image, electing at the time the most significant case, the one that had the importance of determining consequences during architecture. Also, the fixation of a certain collective unconscious represented by religious architecture seemed significant to enrich this panorama. Finally, in a country with a significant memory of the past, monumental, but also vernacular, interventions in heritage could not fail to integrate the structuring network of the exhibition since the reuse of buildings has been a constant of Portuguese architecture and a confirmation of their vitality.

4. EXPOSITIVE CONCEPT

Organized in innovative ways that confirm its vocation or historiographical thesis, this exhibition presents exclusively original documents, sketch drawings, final canvases, sketches, design sketches, revealing the creation process and bringing the visitor and the reader closer to the world of architecture. This principle somehow conditioned the selection when it was not possible to locate and gather the original drawings, or when authorship was not clarified. On the other hand, this type of work based on the study of



sources proved to be of great use, allowing to confirm dates of projects and authorship of works, information for future studies in the framework of historiography of contemporary Portuguese architecture.

Along with the record of the works of the century, one can read another story, that of its representation, that of drawing. For the first time, a material scattered in archives of various authors and institutions is gathered, exposed, and fixed in catalogue, constituting an important set of original documents, representing the most significant works of Portuguese architectural production of the 20th century. The choice of records was deliberately diversified both in terms of the scale and the content of the documents, presenting perspectives, plans, sections, detailed drawings and even design sketches. Also, regarding iconographic collection, period documents were favored, collecting images from the various photographic archives available, so the works are accompanied by period photographs, models, and some pieces of furniture to contextualize the pieces presented. The result of a thorough research work aimed at fixing the possible situation of the architectural production of this century; the PROJECT of dissemination materialized in the exhibition and catalog Portugal: Architecture of the 20th Century constitutes the basis of a serious research and contribution to the construction of the historiography of contemporary Portuguese architecture.

Finally, it must be mentioned that this work would not have been possible without the support and dedicated cooperation of authors, archives and lenders that made it possible to assemble a set of drawings rarely disseminated. Indeed, an exhibition of this size depended heavily on the generosity of researchers, friends, and collaborators captive in the catalogue, to whom we appreciate the scientific support given in the structuring of the content, as well as the moral support so often demonstrated.