

A background image of a beach scene. On the left, a person with curly hair is painting a wooden structure. On the right, there is a wooden structure with a blue arched opening. The ground is sandy. The sky is clear and blue.

POST WORLD'S END ARCHITECTURE

PORTUGAL

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In the third of our Post World's End Architecture reports, we look at Portugal. Once the apex of contemporary excellence, the country's architecture scene has paralleled the Eurozone crisis, with a fall from grace. But there may be hope: a new wave of architects is uniting with the community to create provocative projects with the potential to reclaim the civic domain

When the Pritzker Prize winner was named in March 2011, Portugal's architects were overjoyed. The Porto-based Eduardo Souto de Moura was the second Portuguese architect to be distinguished with the award, after Álvaro Siza's triumph in 1992. The accolade officially helped set in stone – both inside and outside of Portugal's borders – a national architectural aesthetic. But two months later, in May 2011, a €78bn IMF-EU financial bailout was approved and with it the collapse of the country's economic system was made official. Young architects fled the country to greener shores in Brazil, Angola and the UAE, where large-scale projects abound.

And yet the crisis may well have been the best thing to happen to Portuguese architecture since the 1974 Carnation Revolution, which freed the nation from half a century of fascist dictatorship. The country that has produced two Pritzker-Prize winners has also created a powerful, crystallised professional architecture elite, nurtured by the years of economic boom that followed the 1986 entry of Portugal into the EU – when



European funds allowed large-scale public works and a national infrastructure overhaul. Such a professional group actively engages in the aesthetics and processes of the masters – consolidating what could be deemed a Portuguese style.

In a counter-move fuelled by the crisis, the past two years have seen a rise in the formation of small, experimental studios that seek alternative ways to practice architecture. Their founders are young, motivated, well-educated; many have lived, studied and worked abroad. Driven by a strong idea of what architecture should be, many have been disillusioned by their first, more traditional work experience. Idealistic on the whole, some are downright subversive, while others rely on humour and formal puns. Their work is fundamentally small-scale – from performance to self-build housing – but their methods offer glimpses of what could be a systemic change, offering living proof that even a crisis can precipitate opportunities for civic engagement and the profession.

In the context of their surroundings, these architects work

in multidisciplinary teams, collaborating with artists, designers, social scientists and engineers. Their scale allows them to focus on basic, fundamental issues of architecture, such as housing and the domestic space.

The results and ambitions are wide in scope and range. Lisbon-based studio ateliermob, for example, was honoured at the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale for Working with the 99%, a self-built neighbourhood mapping project, while Arrebita! Porto uses specific architectural interventions to revitalise the historic centre of Porto, where roughly half the dwellings are empty.

If the country's economic woes have opened the door for rehabilitation projects, many of these practices are taking the opportunity to test methods and create change, rather than conducting plain aesthetic operations. In Lisbon, this can be seen in projects by architect José Adrião; multidisciplinary self-build practice Polígono, and Artéria, which is creating a map for the rehabilitation of the city's historic centre.

Simultaneously, new opportunities for financing these kinds of projects suddenly abound, such as the Lisbon Municipality's BIP-ZIP grants for interventions in critical areas of the city, or private funds, such as the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's FAZ competition, which awards large sums to projects involving social intervention. Both have been awarded to several architecture and urban intervention projects.

Similarly, large cultural initiatives in the realms of art, architecture and urban intervention – such as the recent 2012 European Capital of Culture in the northern city of Guimarães – open doors to explorations of public space, temporary installations and performative acts of architecture, from Like Architects' large-scale formal puns that force passers-by to reconnect with their surroundings, to Pedrita and Ricardo Jacinto's Unidade, a 'loud, clunky, bright yellow contraption' that brings industrial production processes – creating concrete seating – to a public square.

For these young practices, public space can become a stage for research or combat. Aurora Arquitectos' catalogues document and celebrate typologies in Lisbon – including rain pipes, vents and bricked-up windows. O Espelho (The Mirror), is a broadsheet periodical and political manifesto pasted on walls around the capital, provoking the public rather than rarified theorists. And

while editorial projects find their way into public space, even the traditionally rigid and closed-off academic world is starting to engage with the real one, through the work of individuals such as Pedro Bandeira and Paulo Moreira.

Pushing the limits and boundaries of the practice, these initiatives are creating more than a fertile terrain for exploration – they are effectively building the foundations for large-scale change. Surprisingly, this impulse is slowly finding its way to the mainstream. Headed by André Tavares and Diogo Seixas Lopes, the new editorial board of the Jornal Arquitectos, the Portuguese Architect's Association official publication, is tackling experimental issues and themes. Significantly, Portugal's biggest architecture event, the 2013 Lisbon Architecture Triennale, promises to be experimental in a way the country has never seen. Its title this year is Close, Closer; myriad events are programmed to highlight these small-scale practices and their engagement with local citizens and stakeholders, bringing the discourse of architecture back to the streets.

1 – Casa do Vapor, by EXYZT and ConstructLab (2013) is a temporary community hub for the fishing village of Cova do Vapor, Almada

1 ALEX ROEMER



Architects as mediators

While challenging Portuguese architects to redefine their role, the country's economic woes have created success stories, including Lisbon-based studio ateliermob. Founded in 2005, the practice focused on a traditional competition model, but was forced to reinvent itself in 2008, engaging in a series of urban intervention projects that connect different agents and stakeholders. Fully assuming the role of architect as mediator, ateliermob acts across variety of scales and contexts. Its Working with the 99% self-built neighbourhood mapping and rehabilitation project in the northern periphery of Lisbon is funded by one of the Lisbon Municipality's BIP-ZIP grants. Its open-air theatre in Rio de Moinhos is a striking, multifunctional concrete structure that serves as a community meeting place. Through complex long-term projects, the studio's founders actively engage in the country's political and educational spheres

and are seen as an inspiration.

At a smaller scale, the temporary public space Casa do Vapor (Vapour House) acts as a hub, connecting artists, architects and students from a number of countries to community agents of the self-built South Lisbon neighbourhood of Cova do Vapor. Kick-started by the international collective EXYZT, this repurposed wooden construction was built collectively; it is now a neighbourhood meeting point, home to educational and leisure activities. It received a Lisbon Architecture Triennale 'Crisis Buster' grant.

While international architects find a fertile terrain to work in Portugal, a few others are sticking with the role of mediators even as they establish international collaborations. For example, studio blaanc borderless architecture has developed projects that extend as far as Brazil and Mexico. In Oaxaca, it is building sustainable housing in collaboration with the local community, as the pilot project for the NGO Adobe for Women.



2 – ateliermob's Open-Air Theatre in Rio de Moinhos (2013)

3 – NGO Adobe for Women was founded by blaanc borderless architecture and CaeiroCapurso, two Lisbon studios

2 ZORAIMA DE FIGUEIREDO



New domestic dimensions

— A number of young Portuguese architects engage in explorations at the domestic level: architecture's most basic unit. José Adrião, for example, has made a name for himself with a series of detailed, carefully curated house renovation projects, and the recently founded practice Polígono uses domestic space to test out a multifaceted, small-scale, self-build approach to architecture. From the renovation of its own office space or a room in a traditional family house, to the self-built construction and rental of the São Miguel 13 apartment, the studio advocates a multiplicity of roles for the architect, from consultancy to financing and construction. Each project serves as a petri dish not only for materials and techniques but also for alternative economic models. Polígono aims for sustainability in its projects and attempts to break the cycle of over-inflated construction budgets by taking matters into its own hands – literally.

Rehabilitation as a method

— Lisbon-based studio Artéria's reflections on the goals and limits of rehabilitation led to systematic approach that materialised in its 2012 Edifício Manifesto (Manifesto Building), renovated in the heart of Mouraria, a dilapidated neighbourhood at the centre of the city. The development of the Edifício Manifesto took place in partnership with the neighbourhood association, as part of a holistic process that not only allowed the studio to develop and reinforce its own beliefs, but also to question assumptions and preconceived notions on rehabilitation itself and how to make it sustainable. The studio has continued to reflect on a model for urban rehabilitation that encompasses social, cultural and economical interventions, in a range of projects including a map of old buildings to buy and renovate in Lisbon. Similarly, in the city of Porto, the Arrebital! Porto (Smarten up!

Porto) project has been developing a sustainable renovation pilot project. By creating a network of diverse agents – from contractors and material suppliers to newly graduated architects and engineers, – the association is now working on renovating a building from scratch, in an effort that they hope can be replicated to a city-wide scale and become a catalyst for social transformation in the city. Addressing a social need through architecture, Arrebital! Porto was one of the winners of the 2011 edition of FAZ, a competition that funds social intervention ideas. The 2013 edition of FAZ honoured the Rés do Chão (Ground Floor) urban intervention project. Developed by a team of four young architects, the project seeks to rehabilitate the ground floors of buildings in Porto's historic centre – many of which were previously occupied by retail spaces that were forced to close their doors – creating a system that links building owners, municipalities and communities.



Performative spaces

— While many young architects undertake explorations in the domestic sphere, a series of public cultural events in recent years has opened the way for explorations of public space. Most notably, the 2012 European Capital of Culture (ECC) featured the Performance Architecture cycle which proposed five diverse temporary occupations of public space in the city of Guimarães, curated by Pedro Gadanho – the Portuguese curator of architecture at New York's MoMA. Among these, Pedrita and Ricardo Jacinto's Unidade brought the noisy reality of industrial production to a square, creating an furniture assembly line powered by passers-by. Similarly, Porto-based LIKE architects occupied a series of fountains throughout the city with a limited set of ready-made props, transforming them into 'public pools' and promoting an unexpected use for pieces of urban fabric. The studio specialises in curious

replications of industrially produced products – from fruit crates to IKEA lamps – to create spatial solutions that seek to question and re-evaluate our relationship with public space. Its markedly formalist approach distinguishes it, and finds success in subtle interventions such as the 2011 Christmas illumination project for the Lisbon square of Rossio. In the same vein, MOOV's Kitchain project proposes a modular table that since 2009 has been the site of impromptu dinner parties which subvert traditional usage of public space. The table was originally designed as the central meeting space for Feibourg's Belluard Bollwerk International Festival, and has since been redesigned for subsequent editions of the festival, integrating new modifications and possibilities of use with each iteration.



4 – Painting a ceiling rose at Casa de la Luna by Polígono; below, the practice office

5 – Edifício Manifesto, a before and after of a dilapidated cottage renovated by Artéria (2012)

4 POLÍGONO 5 (BOTTOM IMAGE) RUI PINHEIRO

7 ANTÓNIO LOURO & BENEDETTA MAXIA

6 – LIKE architects' stunning spatial interventions using mass produced objects

7 – Kitchain, from MOOV, is a modular table for impromptu and itinerant dining events



Mapping the surroundings

— Beyond temporary interventions, public space in Portugal is being used as the stage for numerous demonstrations and political protests. An old political slogan proclaims ‘The street is ours!’ and the semi-permanent state of protest maintained by many young architects has overflowed into outlets such as O Espelho (The Mirror). This editorial initiative was kick-started in the summer of 2012 by a collective of architects, artists and journalists: it consists of a public newspaper fly-posted on city walls and distributed around town. Since its inception, topics addressed have ranged from architecture and public space to political themes of the moment, and the paper’s clearly politicised initiative has won a 2013 Lisbon Architecture Triennale ‘Crisis Buster’ grant.

In contrast, for Lisbon-based practice Aurora Arquitectos public space becomes a source of inspiration in a genuinely formal dimension. The studio has been documenting a series of typological variations throughout the capital city, in a series it calls Catalogues. From typical rainpipes to the evidence of the a cyclical dialogue between graffiti and clean-up markings, Aurora’s collections of images form a curious encyclopaedia of absurdities commonly found in Lisbon’s built environment.

Academic provocateurs

— Although architectural academia is prone to isolation in Portugal, a few researchers have been connecting academic investigation with real-world problem solving, becoming active cultural agents in significant contexts, or acting as provocateurs by way of speculative proposals. Paulo Moreira, who commutes between London, Porto and Luanda, has conducted extensive research on the spatial and social nature of informal urban development in the former Portuguese colony of Angola, developing a series of mapping workshops with local students and the community called Mapeamento Colectivo da Chicala (Collective Mapping of Chicala).

Porto-based architect and scholar Pedro Bandeira launches constant provocations using a multidisciplinary approach. Specific Projects for a Generic Client is a series of humorous intellectual explorations that take a specific moment in the history of architecture as a starting point. Bandeira’s references to history and scholarship are constant, as well as his subtle mockery and questioning of the present. His most recent project – under the name of Pierrot Le Fou – will lead to a performance at the forthcoming Lisbon Triennale called The Future is the Beginning.

8 – Redacted graffiti, as catalogued by Aurora Arquitectos

9 – Fly-posting pages of O Espelho (The Mirror) around the city of Lisbon

10 – Paulo Moreira’s mapping workshop in Chicala, Angola (2011)



GETTING CLOSER...

The third Lisbon architecture triennale takes place against a backdrop of hardship. However, as Anne Bellamy discovers, its ‘belligerent spirit’ promises a socially charged programme full of surprise and delight

Lisbon’s third architecture triennale, titled Close, Closer, starts in September. Under guidance from chief curator Beatrice Galilee and her team of Liam Young, Mariana Pestana and José Esparza Chong Cuy, this year’s edition takes a left-field and speculative view of spatial practice, shaping a city-wide programme of events, discussions and installations.

Although an infant on the circuit of worldwide cultural events, with its first edition only in 2007, the Trienal de Arquitectura de Lisboa has secured a reputation as a thoughtful and engaging addition to the architectural calendar. This year’s addresses ideas close to the bone for Lisboa. Split into four main programmes of Future Perfect, New Publics, The Real and Other Fictions, and The Institute Effect, it will take civic interests and Lisbon itself as the focus for discussion.

To bring spatial practice (of which architectural production is just one element) ‘closer’ to new and broad audiences, the exhibitions, talks and fringe events organised by the curatorial team examine the political, technological, institutional, and critical contingencies.

Manuel Henriques, executive director of the Trienal de Arquitectura de Lisboa, recognises that attracting the attention of the architectural audience is not a problem; the challenge lies in engaging the imagination of local people. This aim has moved the Trienal away from the formal discipline of architecture and towards embracing broader socio-political issues. Lisbon Open House, introduced last year, invited Lisboa inside the city’s landmark buildings, often for the first time. The number of visitors was twice what had been expected, demonstrating a growing interest among locals in engaging with their built environment.

Henriques recognises the particular hardships that Lisbon and Portugal have faced following the Eurozone crisis but says that this edition of the Trienal can suggest ways in which one can act on the city despite constrained circumstances.

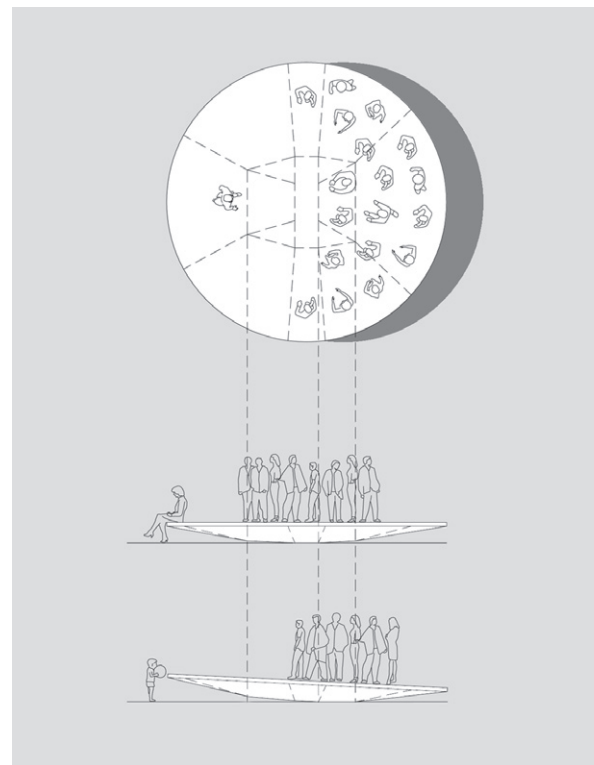
In conjunction with the main event of the Trienal, Henriques promises ‘crisis busters’, an array of funding prizes for community-focused initiatives; these run alongside the Good Neighbourhood scheme, ‘a hyper-local programme of cultural events... which breaks boundaries between the institution and the people.’

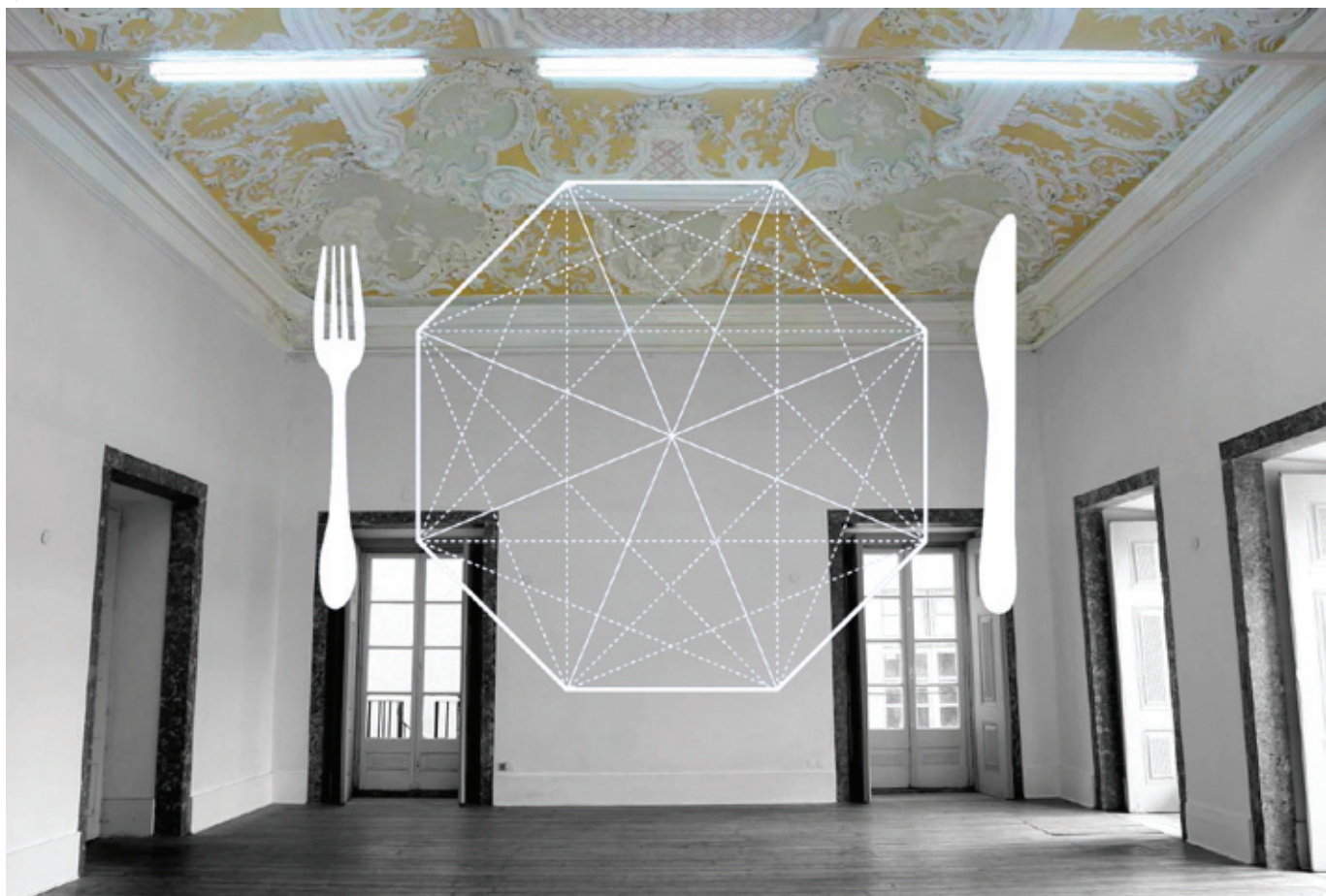
‘Because of all this activity, local people are starting to take a renewed interest and even take pride in where they live,’ he says. The speculative nature of Close, Closer, with its focus on challenging established organisational structures and the formation of new forms of exchange, resonates at a time of volatile economic conditions and tough consequences.

It is not just the people of Lisbon who have been feeling the strains of living and working in the city; getting the Trienal itself up and running was a considerable challenge. Having worked on the Shenzhen & Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism & Architecture in 2009 and the Gwangju Design Biennale in 2011, Galilee is no stranger to the organisational challenges inherent in international cultural events. However, where the culturally aspirational and robust coffers of China and South Korea afforded relatively large budgets, the situation in Portugal presents ‘an extremely uncertain terrain.’ Challenging constraints and financial volatility have formed, rather than destroyed the Trienal’s spirit, claims Galilee: ‘We’re in guerrilla warfare, and have been quite belligerent about maintaining the quality and diversity of our programme.’

11 – Close, Closer curators, from left to right: Liam Young, Beatrice Galilee, José Esparza Chong Cuy and Mariana Pestana

12 – Located in a public square, Frida Escobedo’s Tilting Stage is a precarious platform for civic discussion





That her team's clarion call has been heard is evidenced in the diversity of associated (that is to say, independently funded) projects, as well as an imaginatively curated programme. 'We have this incredible array of projects and participants, our foot-soldiers; it has a sort of fighter spirit!'

Despite financial worries, the programme has been developed as planned; the overall aim of its provocative initiatives not only pose questions for the present state of spatial and architectural practice, but will hopefully set up examples for future communities, as a legacy for the city. Galilee reveals that for her, 'that sense of a legacy is really positive and productive. It's not just about remembering beautiful things you have seen but also having something slightly more humane and civic'.

The four curated sections will be playing host from 12 September to 15 December to a wide variety of events, installations, discussions and publications, as well as the independent associated projects.

Future Perfect, curated by architect and educator Liam Young, offers up an 'interactive iceberg' by the deliciously named Marshmallow Laser Feast, equipped with GPS sensors that tracks your movements, and adjusts its own landscape and soundscape, for an immersive sensory experience; other confirmed participants include Bruce Sterling and Neri Oxman.

For physical and intellectual nourishment, curator and spatial practitioner Mariana Pestana has curated *The Real and Other Fictions* which, among other participations, features the Planetary Sculpture Supper Club. Collaborators from the Centre for Genomic Gastronomy will cook up a series of extraordinary thought-provoking feasts; for example a sauce made of plants

bred from mutations – which questions how we use and abuse intensive agriculture and bioscience in the kitchen. Dinners will be attended by artists and architects as well as prominent members of the city government and media commentators.

Led by Dan Hill, FABRICA will be transforming the MUDE (Museo do Design e da Moda) into a space that will house a constantly rotating programme of new 'institutions' for The Institute Effect. The Benetton-funded communication design academy will be designing and furnishing the space with all the expected – and some unexpected – accoutrements of a cultural institution, in order to frame questions towards the validity of such organisations.

But it is José Esparza Chong Cuy's New Publics that should provide the most gripping series of events – quite literally. Visitors may have to grab on to something (or someone) to keep a balanced perspective atop Frida Escobedo's Tilting Stage. The hemispherical central platform is installed at Praça da Figueira, and forms the location for a provocative programme of public discussions, performances and talks. ■

The Blueprint series Post World's End Architecture will feature as a Close, Closer Associated Project at Lisbon Architecture Triennale. On 14 September Blueprint will host an informal round-table discussing innovative approaches in architectural practice across the Iberian peninsula. Guests include Portugal's Polígono and ateliermob, plus Andrés Jaque and Zuloark from Spain.

For further details and a map of Lisbon Architecture Triennale venues, please visit blueprintmagazinebeta.co.uk

12 – Space, menus and discussions complement each other at 'The Planetary Sculpture Supper Club'