

CAN AN EXHIBITION REHEARSE A MUSEUM? NOTES ON DESIGN EXHIBITIONS AND EXHIBITION DESIGN IN THE PORTUGUESE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Abstract: *Focusing on several exhibitions of Portuguese design presented to the public throughout the 20th century, this article reflects on the relationships between exhibitions, archives and museums. Considering the concept of para-museological practice, on the one hand, and a canon of a normative museological discourse, on the other hand, the article seeks to analyse different relationships between design exhibitions and the musealization of design objects in the Portuguese context.*

Keywords: *design exhibitions; Portuguese design; archive; para-museum.*

Resumo: *Centrando a sua atenção em diversas exposições de design português organizadas e apresentadas publicamente ao longo do século XX, este artigo reflete sobre possíveis relações entre exposições, arquivos (públicos ou privados) e museus. Considerando, por um lado, o conceito de prática paramuseológica e, por outro lado, partindo de elementos caracterizadores de discursos museológicos normativos, o artigo procura analisar diferentes relações entre exposições de design e formas de musealização dos objetos de design no contexto da segunda metade do século XX português.*

Palavras-chave: *exposições de design; design português; arquivo; paramuseum.*

This article sets off with a question enunciated in its title, in such manner it reveals its interest in introducing a reflection focused on the analysis of exhibitions by thinking of them as a medium identifiable with the notion of para-museum¹.

Nora Sternfeld suggests that we look at the para-museum as a tangential device to the institutionalised museum, something which is simultaneously inside and outside. In such way, the para-museum might establish a parasitic relationship with the museum or operate as a subversive gesture that appropriates it — materially or semantically.

These force and value relations between the para-museum and the museum are not one-sided. Museums also interfere on the para-museum practices by intervening on or institutionalising them. A relevant example of this is when temporary exhibition's contents are integrated into a museum's collection and, consequently, museumised.

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¹ STERNFELD, 2017.

This text invites the reader to look at an exhibition as a device capable of operating within different media — downstream and upstream of the exhibition itself, such as: the poster which communicates the exhibition; the catalogue which preserves its memory and expands its interpretive base; and/or the public programming which often comes along with it.

Even though the focus today lies on design exhibitions, the references presented below will go beyond the design discipline to fields such as visual arts or architecture, to name a few, yet to fields where design projects were either exhibited or present as editorial.

The reading of Mary Anne Staniszewski's work *The Power of Display* analyses the understanding of exhibition design both as an aesthetic medium and as a historical category, one of the most neglected dimensions in cultural history. Since the 1980s, the author acknowledges a growing interest in the study of exhibitions, however she also recognises that how artefacts «are seen and displayed remains a relatively overlooked consideration»².

Similarly in our national context, exhibitions, even in a broader disciplinary spectrum (art, design and architecture), are object of limited formal research. However, in recent years some relevant work has emerged in the academic context such as: Ana Neiva's doctoral thesis *Exhibiting Portuguese Architecture. Twentieth-Century Curatorial Strategies* published in 2020; and the comprehensive analysis³ focus on *Núcleos de Arte e Arquitetura Industrial and Design Industrial* of Instituto Nacional de Investigação Industrial, who were responsible for holding the *1st Exhibition of Portuguese Design* and *2nd Exhibition of Portuguese Design* in the early 1970s; and the succeeding pioneer studies of Helena Souto⁴ on Universal Exhibitions (1851-1900) and Margarida Acciaiuoli's⁵ study on the Estado Novo's exhibitions in the period between 1934 and 1940. Yet, the research gap remains in regard to the development of a survey of all exhibitions made, the reflection on discourses and curatorial practices, and the comprehensive analysis of their cultural, political, economic impacts. This lesser attention given to exhibitions, their strategic importance and cultural reverberation is even more significant when it clearly contrasts with the number of exhibitions developed, their programmatic ambition and, in some cases, the influential ballast they generated in various planes of the Portuguese reality.

In some aspects, yet seeking not to create overlaps, this article will continue the survey and exhibition's analysis initiated in two previous studies⁶.

² STANISZEWSKI, 1998: 21.

³ COUTINHO, SOUTO, *coord.*, 2017.

⁴ SOUTO, 2011.

⁵ ACCIAIUOLI, 1998.

⁶ BÁRTOLO, 2016: 54-73; BÁRTOLO, 2014: 51-66.

Within the broad time frame of the Portuguese twentieth century, this text proposes a differentiation between two types of exhibitions: *regime or regimental exhibitions* and *independent exhibitions*.

The regimental exhibitions present themselves, particularly inseparable from the Estado Novo regime, although not exclusively. They were usually promoted as part of a more extensive programme and worked as a regime's propaganda device, in which a particular staging of power, nationality, and values were constructed. This event's typology had its paradigmatic conception in *Exposição do Mundo Português* (1940). Yet its aesthetic and ideological characterisation began earlier with *Exposição Portuguesa* in Sevilha (1929), already under the influence of António de Oliveira de Salazar, it goes on in the *1.ª Exposição Colonial Portuguesa* (1934), *Exposição Internacional de Bruxelas* (1937), *New York World's Fair* (1939), and it culminates with the remarkable installation project by Pedro Cid in the *Exposição de Bruxelas* (1958), and then expanding to 1970 with its participation in the *Expo '70*, Osaka, Japan.

The independent exhibitions, on the other hand, are not totally circumscribed to a political programme and it is possible to recognise a significant set of them in which three typologies can be identified:

1) *individual exhibitions* which enable reflections on authorship's appraisal in Portuguese design before 1974. To name a few, António Soares, Bernardo Marques, Paulo Ferreira, Jorge Barradas presented their work in individual and collective exhibitions. It is worth mentioning the existence of an exhibition and design objects sale's space named Galeria UP because it precedes the opening of identical spaces in Lisbon such as Casa Quintão or Casa Aguiar from 1930s onwards.

2) *archive exhibitions* which, unlike regular exhibitions and for programmatic reasons, intended to be ephemeral. This exhibition's type arrived evidently late in Portugal, and it focused on developing research, archiving, and musealization of design artefacts. Already in a democratic context, the exhibition *300 Anos do Cartaz em Portugal* (National Library of Lisbon, 1975-1976) stands out for its importance and significance. This documentary exhibition was promoted by the Secretaria de Estado da Cultura (Secretary of State for Culture) in collaboration with the Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa BNL (National Library of Lisbon) and was based on a remarkable set of edicts, flyers and protoposters from the BNL's archives, between the late 18th century and mid-19th century. Nonetheless before this event, it became apparent the rarity of posters from the subsequent period, so the exhibition was developed with the implication of research efforts, acquisition and offers, which resulted on an archive of around 200 posters, reaching the beginning of the 1970s. As relevant examples, the SNI (National Secretariat of Information) posters were borrowed from

the Museu da Comunicação Social, as well as donations were received from the National Lithography and Bulhão Printing Works. Thus, it enabled the constitution of a significant, treated and organised collection.

3) *corporate exhibitions* which here the term «corporate» intends to refer to the coordinated efforts to institutionalise Portuguese design beyond a regime's programme or authorship's affirmation. These exhibitions represent collective initiatives of a national design assertion, associated with concerns on how to communicate it, reflect on it and promote it commercially. The first corporate exhibition with a modern awareness of design was perhaps the 1.º *Salão Nacional de Artes Decorativas* (Palácio Foz, Lisboa, May-June 1949). Although it presented itself as «a simple trial, a simple rehearsal for a future exhibition», it attempted nevertheless to affirm design's importance, especially in the attempt of bringing design and industry closer together: «we are aware that, in many cases, the industry professionals have not yet felt the interest in using decorative artists to improve their production, and on the other hand, artists have not yet discovered — due to the lack of this collaboration — the immense possibilities open to their practice»⁷.

42 years were necessary for this rehearsed exhibition to take place again, then named 1.ª *Exposição de Design Português* organised by INII Instituto Nacional de Investigação Industrial and by INTERFORMA Equipamento de Interiores, Lda., sponsored by the Fundo de Fomento de Exportação and Associação Industrial Portuguesa, which opened in Lisbon, at FIL, on March 20th, 1971. This exhibition, along with the necessity of collaboration between design and industry pursued by 1949' *Salão*, brought the ambition of internationalising Portuguese design: «the ever-growing need to export and to qualitatively increase the value of exported products, as well as the greater intensity of international relations and communication, are certainly two of the most determining causes of stimulus for Portuguese creators and *designers*»⁸.

Amongst the *corporate exhibitions*, whose development was intensified with the creation of Núcleo de Arte e Arquitectura of the INII in 1960 and which had successfully produced the 1.ª *Quinzena de Estética Industrial* (1965), appear the 2.ª *Exposição de Design Português* (1973) and the exhibition *Design e Circunstância* organised by Associação Portuguesa de Designers in 1982. These exhibitions are also particularly interesting because they assert themselves as efforts to inscribe Portuguese design historically and to build upon what is called a *discursive construction* of design as an autonomous disciplinary field.

⁷ AA.VV., 1949: 12.

⁸ AA.VV., 1971: 7.

BEFORE THE FIRST PORTUGUESE DESIGN EXHIBITIONS

In 1935 the architect Paulino Montez published his work *As Belas-Artes nas Festas Publicas em Portugal*⁹, although Montez does not primarily focus on exhibition design and considers broadly «the constructions and decorations that are executed for the effect of some festival», the author reflects on the dimension of display as «the pavilions, the platforms and ornaments that in general usually appear, always show the same shapes and paintings, with their inexpressive and decadent aspects»¹⁰.

The ephemeral architecture and installation projects developed by Paulino Montez himself for the *Exposição das Caldas da Rainha* (1927) appear as modernisation's examples of exhibition languages alongside the work of Silva Porto and Columbano Bordallo Pinheiro.

Furthermore, a focus on exhibitions can be found in no. 9 of the «Revista Oficial do Sindicato dos Arquitectos» (Official Magazine of the Architects' Union) from April/June 1939, which is precisely dedicated to this theme. This magazine, directed by Cottinelli Telmo, analyses projects such as: the *Exposição Histórica da Ocupação* (1937) designed by Artur Fonseca and Fred Kradolfer; the *Exposição-Feira de Luanda* (1938) designed by Vasco Palmeiro; the Portuguese Pavilion at *Exposição de Nova Iorque* (1939) designed by Jorge Segurado; and the various pavilions conceived for the 1940 *Portuguese World Historical Exhibition*.

Although an absolute stable glossary cannot be found, in these exhibition's initiatives promoted by the State, it is clear that in most cases the designation of *Commissioner* is used for those who have the responsibility of coordinating the project, who also politically answer to those who promote it, and the *Decorator* designation is used for those who deal with the installation project and graphic design. However, there are exceptions.

In the catalogue *Secção Colonial da Exposição do Mundo Português* by José Salvação Barreto appears the term «Chefe de Curadoria», in a direct translation of the Anglo-Saxon term «Chief Curator» which refers to an employee with administrative oversight functions rather than someone with an artistic task.

Generally, until the end of the 20th century, the person who takes responsibility for the exhibition's conception and coordinate the other artists involved tended to be called the *Commissioner*, with a semantic value identical to the French term «commissaire», which represented a French-speaking affiliation of Portuguese culture; in turn, the term *Conservator(a)* was used to identify the responsibility for a museum collection.

⁹ MONTEZ, 1935.

¹⁰ MONTEZ, 1935: 51.

In order to identify a time frame, we can recognise that after Portugal joined the EEC in 1986 and the gradual influence of Anglo-Saxon culture, the term *Curador* (curator) began to appear with more remarkable recurrence.

THE FIRST EXHIBITIONS OF PORTUGUESE DESIGN

«What is shown in the *1.º Salão de Artes Decorativas* (itself a simple attempt, a simple rehearsal for a future Exhibition) has no pretensions to be more than the basis of the work to be done, an indispensable starting point to make the endeavors' route safe»¹¹ and together with the author's point raised on the lack of collaboration between the industry and design (and consequent missed possibilities). Those were the bases presented in the text written by the exhibition's General Secretary Júlio Coyolla, as the expressed intentions of this exhibition organised by SNI – Secretariado Nacional da Informação, Cultura Popular e Turismo, in Palácio Foz, between May and June 1949.

Other aims of the event were «the desire to highlight the achievements made: more frequent call to specialised artists (abandoning consequently “amateur” solutions, always flawed even though well-intentioned); better use of certain materials, until recently despised or unknown; the revival of certain traditions, which were given modern expression (such as filigree and single-figure tiles)»¹².

This exhibition was curated by Tom, possibly at the time the most commercially oriented Portuguese designer, and Manoel Lapa and Jorge Mattos Chaves, who also took care of the exhibition design. The exhibition's set-up was oversaw by Ruy Brito (carpentry), António Ferreira (painting), Duarte e Serra (electricity), and Sampaio e Laginha (stucco). Additionally, Mundet & C^a's cork coverings, Mosaicultura's ornamental plants and the general painting awarded to the company Belmur – Atlantic for which the designer Fred Kradolfer worked, among others renowned designers.

A catalogue was published for this exhibition with the cover's illustration by Alberto Cardoso, photography by Mário and Horácio Novais and the graphic production by Bertrand & Irmãos, Lda., one of the event's sponsor companies.

And some of the works presented were later integrated into the Museum of Decorative Arts' collection, inaugurated in 1953, even though this museum's primary collection originated from Ricardo do Espírito Santo Silva's collection.

Later in 1959, Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian decided to bequeath his assets to Portugal in the form of a foundation, which would immediately become a kind of autonomous state within the Portuguese state — a territory supporting the arts, culture, and scientific research, significantly extending the national borders beyond the bodies of the Estado Novo.

¹¹ AA.VV., 1949: 2-3.

¹² AA.VV., 1949: 2-3.

The Calouste Gulbenkian's Foundation plays a vital role in the sociocultural characterisation of this period. If *I Exposição de Artes Plásticas* promoted by the foundation still highlighted essentially the graphic artists whom Estado Novo's regime had consecrated, as well as their magazine «Colóquio» (1959) seemed to maintain in format, editing and graphic directions (by Bernardo Marques) a clear heritage from «Panorama» magazine, also associated with the regime, from the beginning of 1963 onwards (the year in which the Foundation began its 'scholarships abroad' programme in the design field), the Foundation's programme of activities and editions profoundly distinguished itself from the Estado Novo's cultural programming.

Only in 1971, 22 years after the actual first Portuguese design exhibition rehearsed in *Salão Nacional de Artes Decorativas* (1949), the second one happened entitled *1.ª Exposição de Design Português* held in 1971¹³.

Yet it is of great relevancy to mention that even before the *1.ª Exposição de Design Português*, in 1965 the *1.ª Exposição de Artes Gráficas* held at the SNBA (the National Society of Fine Arts) constitutes a pivotal moment to consolidate a critical discourse on design (evidence shown in the text by Sena da Silva, published in the exhibition catalogue). Though, as well as it would be the case of *Quinzena de Estética Industrial* (Palácio Foz, 1965), organised by the INII, and the *Bienal Luso-Espanhola*, organised by the Portuguese Publicists' Club, which took place between November and December 1968 in Lisbon, none of these para-museological initiatives gave origin to new museums or nuclei within existing museums.

Similar conclusions can be drawn regarding the exhibitions: *Design & Circunstância* (1982) and the exhibition dedicated to Portuguese graphic design presented at the *VI Bienal Internacional de Arte de V. N. de Cerveira* (1988). Both of these events coincide within a time period when: Portuguese design was being institutionalised, mainly through the creation of the Centro Nacional de Design (1985), later to become the Centro Português de Design; and when an intense partnership between ICEP and CPD towards the promotion and dynamization of Portuguese design was happening, also politically supported, and focusing on three fundamental axes — industry, internationalisation, and the creation of new public and consumers (eventually then becoming a distinguish imprint of the 1990s). So, exhibitions became not only the unique, as well as the primary mean of achieving this strategy. Approaching schools and other ongoing initiatives, particularly the *Jovem Designer* competition, aimed to feed and renew the exhibitions' content and authors.

This policy for design, undoubtedly unique in our contemporary history, sought to take advantage of community funds and the possibilities offered by significant events which marked the 90s such as: *Europália* (91), *Lisboa Capital Europeia da*

¹³ For further contextualisation, see COUTINHO, SOUTO, *coord.*, 2017.

Cultura (94), and *Expo'98*. Under this framework, both in Portugal and abroad, Portuguese design exhibitions multiplied: *Design para a Cidade* (1991), *Exposição de Design Português* (Tokyo, 1993), *Os Caminhos do Design* (itinerant exhibition passing through 22 cities, 1993), or among others, *A Road Show – Portuguese Products* (Frankfurt and Tokyo, 1996).

THE DESIGN EXHIBITIONS BETWEEN 1992 AND 1998

The exhibitions *Manufacturas – Création Portugaise Contemporaine* and *Diseño Portugués*, part of the exhibition *Lusitânia – Cultura Portuguesa Actual*, took place in 1991 and 1992 respectively, with identical protagonists, the curator Delfim Sardo and exhibition design by Pedro Silva Dias and both events responded to an identical programme. *Manufacturas* had been developed to be presented in Brussels, within the scope of *Europalia 91 – Portugal* (later itinerating to Cadeia da Relação do Porto), it brought together 32 designers from various areas (furniture, fashion, and jewellery) and the collaboration of 16 companies. Consecutively, *Diseño Portugués* was presented at the Madrid's *Círculo de Belas-Artes* and highlighted the design work done either by visual artists (Francisco Rocha's hybrids between sculpture and design), or by architects (Álvaro Siza, Pedro Ramalho, Souto de Moura), or even the work of a new generation of product and furniture designers such as Filipe Alarcão, Pedro Silva Dias, and Marco Sousa Santos.

These two exhibitions' curator Delfim Sardo reflected on them as revealing «substantial changes — and even lifestyle changes — in Portugal, which find their way into the tributary tendencies of a “return to the baroque” characteristic of contemporary culture. Specific to the presented set, and beyond the diversity of styles and trends, the same permeability to conceptual contexts that lie outside the strict domain of *design*, whether they be architecture, the visual arts, or purely of thought»¹⁴.

In addition to their function of promoting and internationalising design, these two exhibitions were taken on as a moment of self-reflection of Portuguese design and claimed a heritage close to that of the *1.ª Exposição* and *Design & Circunstância* as «standing points» on national design, its public, and its productive relationships. Delfim Sardo speaks of the exhibitions as a «map of tendencies [...] that oscillate between modernism (as creative ethics) and the post-modernism present in the neo-baroque which characterize the 1980s. Therefore, and above all, it was sought to find connections and confluence's axes in the creators' concerns and in their expressive forms»¹⁵.

¹⁴ SARDO, 1992.

¹⁵ SARDO, 1992.

Until the end of the 1990s, several design exhibitions were being promoted: from remarkable exhibitions such as *Design para a Cidade* (organised by CPD, 1991), which took place in the Serralves Gardens and displayed objects and equipment that imprinted the urban landscape (from GALP's fuel pumps to STCP's bus stops), to itinerant exhibitions which focused on international projection such as *Design Português Contemporâneo – Uma Antologia* (1997) presented in Frankfurt and Barcelona's *Primavera do Design*.

Within *Lisboa 94 – Capital Europeia da Cultura's* programme, the *Design/Lisboa 94* exhibition was similarly ambitious, yet its critical reception revealed disappointment. In the *Anuário no. 21/22 (2000)* of Centro Português de Design (Portuguese Design Centre), Nuno Lacerda Lopes wrote that the exhibition, held in the recently inaugurated Centro Cultural de Belém, «allowed for a wide display of the different activities and concerns of Portuguese designers. From graphic design to furniture, from fashion to set design, the different conceptions and understandings of this disciplinary field were exhibited. It now appears to be quite rooted in the industry, leading some authors to consider it close to the commercial show and distant from the debate and theoretical reflection of the discipline».

This commercial tendency seemed to be reinforced by important initiatives: the creation of the Design Space by the Centro Português de Design and the Divisão de Feiras e Congressos da Associação Industrial Portuguesa, which allowed the organisation of the *Exposição de Design Português Contemporâneo* parallel to the fairs held at *Exponor*.

Exposição de Design Português Contemporâneo gathered four modules: Companies; Designers (exhibiting produced objects or prototypes); Invited Authors; and Schools (for the presentation of design projects developed in design schools).

Concurrently, the number of gallery stores dedicated to design was increasing, imposing new forms of independent curatorship and publishing of new designers. Some examples are: Altamira, Dimensão, Loja da Atalaia, Paris Sete, Santos da Casa, No Tejo, Interna, Tom Tom Shop, Arquitectónica or Díade Galeria Arquitetura/Design (in Lisbon) and Sátira, Vantag, DDI, Intramuros, Galeria Minimal, Carvalho Baptista, Bastidor and Arte Casa (in Porto). These companies, also responsible for design's publishing, have developed relevant exhibitions autonomously or associated with public initiatives. One example is the exhibition *10 Autores Portugueses – Design Contemporâneo* promoted by DDI – *Difusão Internacional de Design do Porto*, supported by Secretaria de Estado da Cultura (Secretary of State for Culture), which highlighted the work of Álvaro Siza, Ângelo de Sousa, António Modesto, Daciano da Costa, Souto de Moura, Filipe Alarcão, José Mário Santos, Pedro Mendes, Pedro Ramalho and Pedro Silva Dias.

The Ministry of Culture, created with the socialist electoral victory, founded in 1995 the IAC – Instituto de Arte Contemporânea, which promotes the dissemination of visual arts, design and architecture abroad. In the design field, the Ministry of Culture is associated with the promotion of the first Design Biennial held in Portugal in 1999, *Experimentadesign*, organised by Associação Experimenta, created a year earlier.

Also through IAC, Francisco Capelo design's collection was able to be stored at the Centro Cultural de Belém (CCB), enabling in 1999 the creation of the Design Museum based firstly there and later transferred to Chiado district (downtown Lisbon), giving way to the current MUDE (Museu do Design e da Moda – Coleção Francisco Capelo). MUDE's initial collection consisted of 600 pieces of furniture, industrial, and fashion design almost entirely by international designers, such as Coco Chanel, Verner Panton, Droog Design, Philippe Starck, the Italian radical design and the work of Memphis.

Even if, in several cases, they have established *dialogues* or partnerships with museums, it is not yet perceptible within the Portuguese design exhibitions developed throughout the 20th-century situations where the exhibition *rehearses* the museum.

In the vastness of its production — from industrial design to furniture, from graphic design to ceramics and glass design, from fashion design to footwear design — Portuguese design objects are nevertheless dispersed among several museums, posing a *musealization's problem*, and/or oftentimes confined to private collections¹⁶.

However, the various Portuguese design exhibitions held throughout the 20th century, and particularly in the last three decades of that century, contributed to the exploration of diverse curatorial proposals, different exhibition design solutions, plural visions of design, expanding to para-museological practices and placing them in critical confrontation with, in Peter van Mensch's expression, *the normative museological discourse*.

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¹⁶ On this problematic, see SENRA, 2022.

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