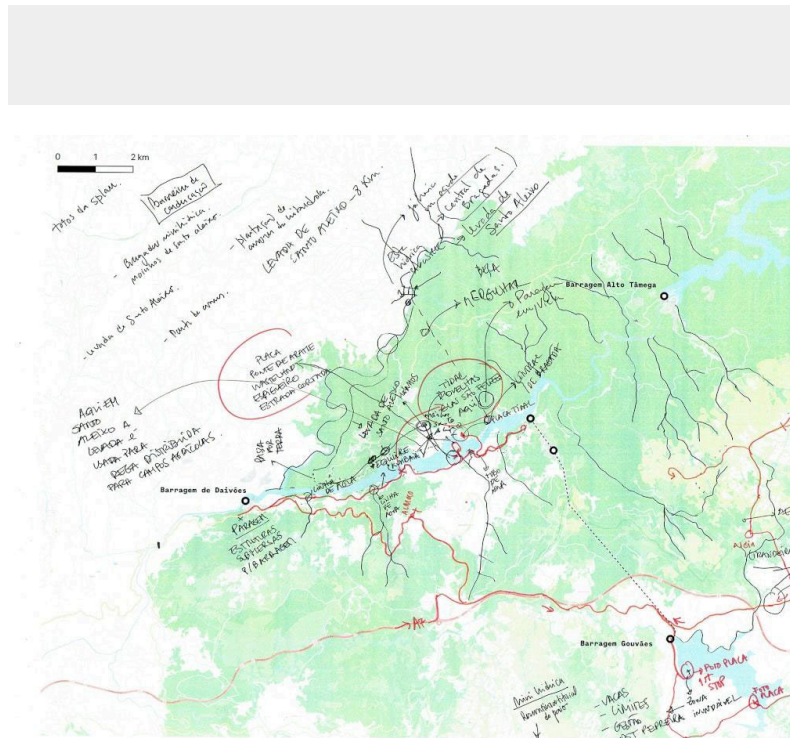




Fieldwork map of the Tâmega's hydro-geography. Drawing, 2023. © Space Transcribers

ART & CULTURE , FEATURED

Interview Andreia Garcia and Ana Neiva e Diogo Aguiar Fertile Futures . Venice Biennale of Architecture

 *Joana Duarte*

Fertile Futures, “a sustainable fertilizer of hope”, on Portuguese Official Representation at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia 2023.

Fertile Futures, curated by Andreia Garcia and the assistant curators Ana Neiva and Diogo Aguiar, is the project to represent Portugal at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia 2023 starting on May 20. Focused on the problem of freshwater scarcity, the Portuguese territory is the background for a global discussion. "Water for it is the most beautiful writer on the way humans and bodies organise themselves," says Andreia Garcia.

We talked to the curator and the assistant curators on the project and adjoining events.

Fertile Futures emerged in connection with the theme proposed by Lesley Lokko, curator of the 18th Venice Biennale of Architecture "The Laboratory of the Future". What are these "Fertile Futures"?

Andrea Garcia – The “Fertile Futures” are a knowledge platform to increase the public discussion about water. Water is the most beautiful writer about the way humans and bodies organize themselves. As Álvaro Dominguez said in the first Assembly of Thought, water has a very important place because it explains how society organizes itself. *Fertile Futures* is, above all, a critical stance that wants to suggest, seek or stimulate ways out of current problems not only about water scarcity, but also water distribution, etc. Our project wants to understand how to build citizenship in times of change, climate change and globalisation.

Why have this discussion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture?

Ana Neiva – For *Fertile Futures*, ‘The Laboratory of the Future’ is an open and collaborative way of doing.

Water scarcity underlines the current emergency, a problem with consequences in Portugal, but with enormous global impact. The bridge with Africa, presented by Lesley Lokko, as a central continent in the discussion of themes such as equity, resources, race, hope and fear is made, in this case, from the questions on water, having a relevant source of knowledge, given the most extreme climatic conditions.

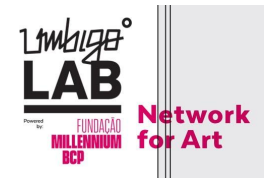
On the other hand, the idea of “Laboratory of the Future” methodologically gives birth to an exploratory programme, based on laboratorial, collaborative and transdisciplinary dynamics at the level of thinking, design and pedagogy.

How can architecture contribute to these “Fertile Futures”?

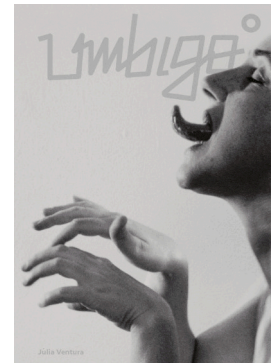
AG – Margarida Waco, in the first Assembly of Thought in Lisbon, made a presentation structured around three questions. The last one was that, but a little bit more extensive – how can architecture shape imaginations beyond capitalism? When the question is asked like this, we speak of principles based on violent strategies triggered above all by extractivism. Certain mobilisations cause bodies to exert forces on other bodies. When we are faced with these issues, we have an urgent need not only to rethink deeply political questions, but also to rethink our society beyond human beings, considering ecosystems that will allow us to realise that the Earth reacts to the way we humans act on it. Architects are the greatest agents on Earth and, for us and this project, the material world of architecture is no longer limited to singularly identified programmes, typologies and archetypes. Architecture must collectively follow the evolution of time, obliged to adapt to a constantly changing world.

What is the impact of architecture in such an important issue as freshwater scarcity?

Diogo Aguiar - The *Fertile Futures* programme advocates the laboratory side of architectural design and the ability of an Architecture exhibition to go beyond the representation of existing buildings, forms, materials or structures, imagining the future and striving for the relevance of Architecture as a discipline to solve complex issues beyond our understanding or control.



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Architecture, often seen as something aesthetic or object-centred, has lost relevance to society and the future. This exhibition seeks the opposite: to associate Architecture with emerging issues or to solve urgent problems. To which, at first glance, it seems alien; but it can be useful, as long as in close collaboration with other disciplinary areas.

Seven teams of young architects and professionals from other fields were called to develop proposals for seven Portuguese hydrogeographies. Why this multidisciplinary approach towards the proposals for the future of these specific territories?

AG – The project starts from the awareness that we are the cause of the conjunctural problems. The answer lies in the awareness that we are also the solution. This is the only way to find feasible and sustainable answers. Only when we work on our collaborative capacities will we have actions with real impact to counteract the damage we cause. If we are committed to contributing to a decarbonised, decolonised and collaborative future, architecture must be part of a horizontal and non-hierarchical approach with cooperation across disciplines. These architectural studios, experts and consultants are chosen to present models for previously identified hydrogeographies. The questions have been adapted and adjusted in the course of the laboratory, the result of successive consultations and conversations between the stakeholders. These consultants and experts come from very different fields, with opposing visions and even political positions. Therefore, the models proposed are often at odds with some of the perspectives or ideologies of some consultants and experts.

Can you reveal some of the contents of the teams' proposals?

AG – I will mention verbs that we have been working on, which may help not to glimpse answers, but rather the positioning of the teams. The *Space Transcribers* are working on the Tâmega basin and they are going to propose a mediation system with different scales. Therefore, they are exploring the mediating capacity of architecture. Dulcinea Santos Studio, which is working on the International Douro, will explore a response with natural systems. Guida Marques is working on the Middle Tagus and the response is based on a principle or a visible process, which calls for the progressive restoration of the landscape. Pedrêz, working on the Alqueva reservoir, explores the theme of soil decontamination. Corpo Atelier is working on the Mira River irrigation perimeter and presents a project that defends the political potential of architecture. Ilhéu Atelier, in Lagoa das Sete Cidades, is investing in the utopian reimagining of the future. Ponto Atelier, working on the Madeiran riversides, makes a critical reflection on the trauma associated with this problem.

What will happen in Venice from May 20?

DA – May 20 begins at breakfast, at Palazzo Franchetti's cafeteria, with the second Assembly of Thought, in Breakfast Talk format, with the whole curatorial and artistic team. This moment is the opening of the exhibition to the public and will allow the sharing of the results of the laboratory process developed over the last four months, involving the international and specialized community on the proposed central theme.

The exhibition *Fertile Futures* will be at Palazzo Franchetti until November 26, while the rest of the project's programme will take place in Portugal: the three remaining Assemblies of Thought will be held in Braga, Faro and Porto Santo and the International Summer Seminar will take place in July, in Fundão.

To conclude the exhibition, the second volume of the bilingual catalogue *Fertile Futures* is planned to be released, with contents produced between May and November, in particular the exhibition installation in Venice, the results of the International Summer Seminar and the issues debated in the Assemblies of Thought, in Portugal, allowing the establishment and diffusion of collaboratively and interdisciplinarily constructed knowledge.

Is *Fertile Futures* building a possibility for the future? What future is that?

AN – Taking the 'architectures of water scarcity' as reservoirs of the future, we achieve an expanded discourse, useful to solve emerging problems.

One can imagine a future where Architecture reclaims a more relevant role in society, working, in cooperation with other disciplines, on urgent problems to mitigate the impact of anthropocentric action on the planet. Learning from Africa and other regions of the globe that have long been dealing with freshwater scarcity is an admittedly decolonised strategy to better structure the future, understanding the planet as a single place; and its inhabitants, human and non-human, as one.

Portuguese Official Representation is based on speculative models for fairer, more inclusive, equitable and diverse futures. These proposals can also create a more fertile tomorrow, focusing on sustainable environmental practices, creativity, generosity, abundance, positivity, productivity, responsibility, diversity of perspectives for a feminine and plural tomorrow.

AG – The hope is that it will be a more decarbonised future and that this project can contribute to a greater awareness of the means that are within our reach, as architects and non-architects, to prepare ourselves for the transformation of the territory and for an increasingly rampant scarcity of resources. A future that will have to involve changes in mindsets and practices.

What do you expect to change after *Fertile Futures* is in Venice?

DA – The exhibition, or a group of architects, from the Hydrogeography Workshops, dealing with issues that are not normally part of their daily lives, wants to raise awareness of the need to work collaboratively and interdisciplinarily to develop strategies that mediate the coexistence between species and measure the impact of our actions on the planet. We want to stimulate the development of alternative ways of doing Architecture, changing the way we see the world and defending the relevance of the discipline for a more just, coherent and environmentally sustainable society.

By putting these concerns into practice for future generations, with the organisation of an International Summer Seminar in Fundão, dedicated to architecture students from a wide geographical spectrum, we want to ensure a hopeful future for the Fertile Futures project beyond the Biennale.

It is also an opportunity to underline the importance of including these themes in the academic curricula of universities. We believe that Architecture has to be much more than just a service at the mercy of large real estate investments.

AG – Taking the two words – future and fertile – we hope that the future will be fairer, but also more fertile. And with a more imaginative, but also more responsible presentation. And more plural. After Fertile Futures passes through all the scheduled places, hopefully more people will join a sustainable fertilizer of hope.



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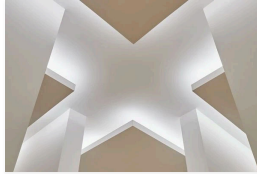
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JOANA DUARTE

Joana Duarte (Lisbon, 1988), architect and curator, lives and works in Lisbon. She concluded her master in architecture at Faculdade de Arquitectura of Universidade de Lisboa in 2011, she attended the Technical University of Eindhoven in the Netherlands and did her professional internship in Shanghai, China. She collaborated with several national and international architects and artists developing a practice between architecture and art. In 2018 she founds her own studio, concludes the postgraduate degree in curatorial studies at Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas of Universidade Nova de Lisboa and starts collaborating with Umbigo magazine.