

18<sup>th</sup> International Docomomo Conference & Students Workshop  
Santiago de Chile, 2024

**M O D E R N**  
**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY**  
**F U T U R E S**

Editor  
**Horacio Torrent**

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### **MODERN FUTURES.**

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Ediciones ARQ

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#### **Printing**

Andros Impresores  
Santiago de Chile, 2024

ISBN: 978-956-6204-22-0

#### **Indexed by: SCOPUS**

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Proceedings of the 18<sup>th</sup> International

Docomomo Conference

10-14 December 2024

Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

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# BEYOND MODERNISM: CURATORIAL CLASHES AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN 1983 PORTUGUESE ARCHITECTURAL EXHIBITIONS

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## ABSTRACT.

The exhibitions “Depois do Modernismo” and “Onze Arquitectos do Porto: Imagens Recentes”, held at Lisbon’s Sociedade Nacional de Belas-Artes in 1983, marked a significant turning point in Portuguese architectural curatorial practices. These exhibitions clashed in their curatorial narratives, shaped future approaches to exhibiting Portuguese architecture, and influenced ongoing architectural discourses.

“Depois do Modernismo”, curated by Luís Serpa, presented a cosmopolitan exploration of Post-Modernism, featuring various art forms. The architecture section, directed by Michel Toussaint, introduced an innovative concept where architects showcased their projects in symbolic ‘little houses’. However, dissent arose among Porto architects who expressed their disagreement with the exhibition’s values, leading to their abstention from participating. In response, they organised a counter-exhibition titled “Onze Arquitectos do Porto: Imagens Recentes”, featuring drawings that emphasised the essential role of drawing in the Porto school’s methodology and highlighted differences between Porto and Lisbon architectural approaches.

The presence of processual drawing continued to be a distinctive element in subsequent group presentations by architects from Porto. Its centrality, showcased in exhibitions like “Architectures à Porto” and “Arquitetura Portuguesa Contemporânea. Anos 60, Anos 80” contrasted with the vibrant expression of communication drawings favoured by Lisbon architects in “Tendências da Arquitectura Portuguesa”. This divergence persisted in subsequent international representations, amplifying the core ideas that emerged in the 1983 events.

Our paper critically reflects on these transformative moments, shedding light on the details of the division between architects from Porto and Lisbon and the curatorial and display options that have had a lasting impact on subsequent Portuguese architecture exhibitions.

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## 1. SPACE TO FEEL: POST-MODERN EXHIBITIONS

The proliferation of architecture-related events, such as exhibitions and publications, has propelled architecture into the public sphere. These platforms not only served to showcase architectural achievements – buildings – but also to reveal their processual dimension, recovering interest in architectural drawings and ephemeral installations while offering opportunities for plural and individual expressions. When expanded into a post-modern sensibility, characterised by a rediscovery of architecture’s “poetic” dimension, the exhibition space became a site for exploring the unreal and the paradoxical.

### 1.1 DEPARTURES FROM MODERNISM

Post-Modernism emerged around 1960, gaining momentum through various exhibitions<sup>1</sup>, notably the Venice Biennale of 1980. Curated by Paolo Portoghesi, “La Presenza del Passato” was the inaugural International Architecture Exhibition, in Venice, and aimed to explore effective ways to engage a wide audience while sparking intellectual discourse.<sup>2</sup>

We will examine three key aspects of the 1980 event, drawing connections to later Portuguese exhibitions, to reflect on the discourses surrounding Post-Modernism, the related innovative display techniques, and the role of drawing in display strategies.

“La Strada Novíssima” section featured twenty façades, constructed within the Arsenale colonnade to delineate an interior street space. Each façade represented the interpretation of twenty invited architects concerning their relationship with the past. Through these façades, none of which depicted existing architecture, visitors could access twenty distinct rooms spanning a 42-square-meter area, where the authors presented their projects, encompassing traditional representational drawings, scale models, and spatial installations.

After Venice, the show travelled to Paris, to the octagonal central room of the Saint-Louis Chapel at the Salpêtrière Hospital. It underwent a content and title revision, becoming “La présence de l’histoire. L’après modernisme”, emphasising the focus on history as a solution for moving beyond Modernism. As revealed by Szacka’s research, several title options were already considered for the Italian exhibition: ‘The Architecture of Postmodern’, ‘Dopo l’architettura moderna’, ‘Postmodern Architecture’, the very simple ‘Postmodern’, ‘La Mostra sul Postmodernismo’, and the more emphatic: ‘POSTMODERN’.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, other events promoted alternative approaches to imaginative and historical perspectives, such as “La Modernité, un projet inachevé: 40 architectes” (1982). Paul Chemetov’s exhibition, which included Álvaro Siza, delved into the ethics of Modernism, addressing social and urban issues. A year later, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, in London, another group exhibition titled “Ten New Buildings”, featured Siza among nine other architects who questioned the radical positions of Rationalists and Post-Modernists, emphasising the importance of acknowledging and referencing the past without excluding Modernism.<sup>4</sup>

1. “The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts” at MoMA (curated by Arthur Drexler) in 1975, “Architettura Razionale” at the XV Milan Triennale in 1973 (curated by Aldo Rossi), and “Roma Interrota” in 1978 (curated by Piero Sartogo), as key events.

2. Cf. Léa-Catherine Szacka *Exhibiting the Postmodern: The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale*. (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2016)

3. Szacka, *Exhibiting the Postmodern: The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale*, 190.

4. Martin Lazenby, “Introduction”. 1983. [u.a.] *Art and Architecture*. London Institute of Contemporary Art. 8.

## 2. PORTUGUESE POST-MODERNISM

The debate on Post-Modernism in Portugal stemmed from the differences between the Porto and Lisbon schools, which emerged from contrasting responses to the legislation of 1957 known as the *Reforma de 57*<sup>5</sup>, separating architecture from Fine Arts schools.

While Lisbon school remained closer to the Beaux-Arts philosophy, largely due to political pressures, the Porto school underwent a transformation under an experimental administration shared by teachers and students. Here, the ethical principles of Modernism were adapted to the practical constraints of the city, leading to a structure more akin to a university system. This antagonism was stressed by two exhibitions occurred in 1983.

### 2.1 CLASHING CURATORIAL OPTIONS

“Depois do Modernismo” (After Modernism) was organised by Luís Serpa (1948-2015). It was held at the Sociedade Nacional de Belas-Artes (SNBA) in Lisbon from January 7th to January 31st, 1983. “Onze Arquitectos do Porto: Imagens Recentes” (Eleven Architects from Porto: Recent Images), was also hosted at the same venue from April 15th to April 30th of the same year.<sup>6</sup>

The first exhibition, titled similarly to the 1980 Venice event, encompassed fashion design, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture “to discuss the problematics of the so-called Modern movement (...) to know whether Portugal has room for forms of artistic expression which can include the breadth and ambiguity of a notion like that of Post-Modernity.”<sup>7</sup> It sought to present diverse and simultaneous perspectives on art aligning with “international and global contexts as opposed to the nationalist views, whether of history or the art made in Portugal”<sup>8</sup>.

The executive and consulting team for the architecture section was led by Michel [Toussaint] Alves Pereira. They aimed at uniting Portuguese architects who, disillusioned with international functionalist puritanism, were exploring new paths and solutions to overcome prevailing sadness, hoping that it could become “a manifesto against gloom”.<sup>9</sup>

According to Toussaint, despite acknowledging the diversity among all the participants, there was a belief in shared directions, which led the curatorial choices. In the catalogue, he asserts: “Against purity, against the moral of cleanliness, against the anonymity they have wanted to impose on us, for the survival of individualities and differences, the various attitudes following the bankruptcy of Modern and Progress appear. Only this can be called Post-Modern.”<sup>10</sup>

Diversity and plurality, along with the ambition of internationalisation<sup>11</sup>, summed up the main intentions of this exhibition. However, the invited architects from Porto declined to participate in the initiative due to a “healthily discordant to the organisers’ approach”.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the group of seven architects – Adalberto Dias, Alcino Soutinho, Alexandre A. Costa, Álvaro Siza, Domingos Tavares, Eduardo Souto de Moura and Sergio Fernandez – submitted a manifesto text accompanied by illustrations of significant twentieth-century Portuguese buildings. The text asserted the

5. Cf. Gonçalo C. Moniz, “O ensino moderno da arquitectura: a reforma de 57 e as Escolas de Belas-Artes em Portugal (1931-69)” (Ph.D. diss., Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia da Universidade de Coimbra, 2011)

6. Promoted by Livraria Leitura it was later presented in Porto, at Cooperativa Árvore (May 6 to 15, 1983) along with a second sector dedicated to “the architectural book in the world.”

7. Luís Serpa. “Apresentação”. “A propósito...”. in *Depois do Modernismo*, ed. Luís Serpa (Coruchéus: Atelier 33, 1983), 9-10.

8. Bruno Marchand, “Depois do Modernismo. A possibilidade de tudo.” 04 May 2024. Testimony by Alexandro Melo. Accessed on <http://arquivolarte.blogspot.com/2009/02/>.

9. Manuel Graça Dias, “O Biombo Neura.” *Jornal de Letras, Artes e Ideias*, (January 1983)

10. Michel Pereira, in *Depois do Modernismo*, ed. Luís Serpa (Coruchéus: Atelier 33, 1983), 28-30.

11. Bruno Marchand, “Depois do Modernismo. A possibilidade de tudo.” *Arquivolarte.blogspot.com*, February 6, 2009. Accessed April 30, 2024. <http://arquivolarte.blogspot.com/2009/02/>. <http://sandravieirajurgens.com/luis-serpa-entrevista-depois-do-Modernismo-galeria-comicos>.

12. José Manuel Fernandes, “A surpresa do Porto - uma arquitectura ausente”. *Jornal de Letras, Artes e Ideias*, (January 1983)

Modern movement had minimal influence on Portuguese architects, who consistently adopted an eclectic approach and integrated local constraints with international influences. Therefore, Post-Modernism was deemed an unsuitable concept: “the evolution of architecture in Portugal presents very specific aspects that we can characterise by the inevitability of eclectic individualism (...) this is why the controversy surrounding what is vaguely referred to as post-modernism cannot cause more anxiety than the desperate conditions of practising the profession in Portugal.”<sup>13</sup>

Following that decision, the Porto architects presented the counter-exhibition titled “Onze Arquitectos do Porto: Imagens Recentes”, at the same venue.

## 2.2 PLURALITY AND DISPLAY STRATEGIES

“La Strada Novíssima” affirmed “the ephemeral representation of architecture as architecture itself”<sup>14</sup>, blurring “the boundaries of the real and the unreal”<sup>15</sup>. Through its expansive scale and display, it aimed to create an illusionary effect, merging content and container. This immersive strategy, quite unprecedented in architecture exhibitions, prioritised the experience of the exhibition space, and one can affirm its impact to subsequent events, notably the architectural section of “Depois do Modernismo,” where similar principles are evident.

In Lisbon, Michel Toussaint proposed individual “little houses” (Fig. 1), that each of the fifty architects could freely manipulate and use to exhibit drawings, texts, photographs, or scale models. Within the symbolic houses, which visibly defined a personal space, the architects explored their surfaces as walls, while interacting with their interiors. Some adhered to conventional approaches, such as organising drawings on the walls, described as “arranged according to the discredited poetics (?) of ‘top-down, bottom-up,’ ‘text blob here, drawing blob there’; sad, demotivating, unloving, uninterested, uncreative, old”<sup>16</sup>. Others, like Vitor Mestre (Fig. 3), introduced new elements, such as a curtain to display drawings from Castro Verde’s G.A.T., while Luiz Cunha framed his perspectives of the “Non-Bureaucratic Plan for the Reconstruction of the City of Angra do Heroísmo” with a classical façade reminiscent of Portoghesi’s show, featuring two columns supporting a pediment.

The counter-exhibition, by Porto architects was a collection of thirty-three panels exclusively dedicated to drawings – from sketches to sections and plans. These panels presented the works of Adalberto Dias, Alcino Soutinho, Álvaro Siza, Domingos Tavares, Eduardo Souto de Moura, Fernando Távora, Jorge Gigante, José Pulido Valente, Nuno Ribeiro Lopes, Pedro Ramalho and Rolando Torgo.

The eleven architects self-organised this exhibition to present ongoing projects emphasising “the process of forming a project and the role of drawing (...) in each individual process”<sup>17</sup>. Nuno Portas, the author of the opening text for the catalogue – “A half dozen questions about a certain architecture, the best, that of Porto” – clarified that the exhibition that was “not intended to be didactic, polemical, or thematic from the outset”, establishing a deliberate departure from the previous show in Lisbon. “It appears that what brought

13. Serpa, *Depois do Modernismo*, 115-128.

14. Germano Celant, ““Strada Novíssima” in “The Presence of the Past”.” *Artforum* 19, no.4 (December 1980): 84-85.

15. Szacka, *Exhibiting the Postmodern: The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale*, 22.

16. Manuel Graça Dias, “O Biombo Neura,” 1983.

17. Nuno Portas. “Meia dúzia de questões sobre uma certa arquitectura, a melhor, a do Porto.” in *Onze Arquitectos do Porto. Imagens Recentes*, Porto: Leitura, 1983.

these gentlemen to present their works in a gestational phase or, at least, unrealised and uninhabited, was simply the fact that they worked in Porto and considered themselves symptoms - more than representatives - of a cultural activity of professionals who, despite ranging in age from 25 to 60 years old, are part of a group centred on the architecture department of ESBAP".<sup>18</sup>

Nuno Portas also examined shared characteristics among the works that could unveil "a set of attitudes, a distinct northern condition from that of other sectors or trends in architecture in Portugal".<sup>19</sup>

For Portas, the Porto school diverged from existing academic models and resisted the adoption of international codes. Instead, it drew inspiration "from the site, existing morphology, and local tradition (...) related] to tradition not at the level of surface and cosmetics but at a deeper, though less apparent level of morphology". Additionally, he identified a notable emphasis on the importance of drawing, seen as a tool to acknowledge pre-existing reality and to envision the architectural object within the project: "drawing as a place of invention, much more suggestive and globalising than the common dualism of plan + facade study that prevailed for many years".<sup>20</sup>

The consistent organisation of panels (Fig. 4) highlighted the coherence among the exhibited works: each trio of panels represented a distinct project. Measuring 1x1m, these panels contained a 50x50cm drawing encased within a large white frame.<sup>21</sup>

While this "celebration of drawing" was intentional and acknowledged, as highlighted by Pedreirinho – "what you can feel here is precisely the drawing as an element of creation, which has to do with the very practice of the profession of architects"<sup>22</sup> –, it was also questioned for its difficult communication with the public and its excessive autonomy. Portas pointed out its "gestural or pictorial sensuality that seeks the book or the exhibition panel instead of remaining as a discipline of space representation and construction capable of enabling communication in the design process"<sup>23</sup>, while José Pulido Valente, one of the participants, coincidentally born in Lisbon, expressed his disbelief in exclusively focusing on drawings, arguing that "an exhibition (...) should be for communicating to those not in the profession, and it should not be closed off only to specialists. With only drawings, this exhibition is akin to a collection of specialised texts on law, economics, sociology (for example) that the uninitiated cannot access".<sup>24</sup> For that reason, Pulido Valente presented a sample of three of his projects through axonometries.

Processual drawing, fundamental to the recognition, exploration, and contemplation of reality, served as a central tool in the Porto School of Architecture methodology. However, Lisbon architects have approached drawing differently, incorporating colour and three-dimensional representations such as axonometrics and perspectives. Figures such as Luiz Cunha or Tomás Taveira were particularly adept at illustration and comic-style representation, demonstrating architecture's artistic nature and serving as a personal expression of the author.

The dichotomy between Porto and Lisbon architectural approaches persisted in subsequent presentations of Portuguese architecture. Initiatives

18. Portas, "Meia dúzia de questões sobre uma certa arquitectura, a melhor, a do Porto.", 1983.

19. Portas, "Meia dúzia de questões sobre uma certa arquitectura, a melhor, a do Porto.", 1983.

20. Portas, "Meia dúzia de questões sobre uma certa arquitectura, a melhor, a do Porto.", 1983.

21. The frames were designed and produced by Armando Alves, a painter and graphic designer who also served as a professor at ESBAP.

22. José Manuel Pedreirinho. "O Diálogo Norte / Sul da arquitectura Portuguesa". *Jornal de Letras, Artes e Ideias*, (May 1983), 31.

23. Portas, "Meia dúzia de questões sobre uma certa arquitectura, a melhor, a do Porto.", 1983.

24. Valente, Pulido In *Onze Arquitectos do Porto. Imagens Recentes*, Porto: Leitura, 1983.

like “Architectures à Porto” (Clermont-Ferrand, 1986) and “Tendências da Arquitectura Portuguesa” (Barcelona, 1986; Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Buenos Aires, 1987; Lisbon, 1989; Strasbourg, Macau, and Bombay, 1990; New Delhi and Beijing, 1991; Tokyo, 1992), launched in 1986, alongside “Arquitectura Portuguesa Contemporânea. Anos 60, Anos 80” at Casa de Serralves, or “Points de Repère. Architectures du Portugal” at Europália, Brussels, both held in 1991, expanded on the fundamental ideas developed in the contrasting events of 1983 in a more extensive and discursive manner.

### 3. EXPANDING DRAWING IN ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITIONS

The emergence of the architectural drawing market coincided with the ascent of Post-Modernism. In Portugal, following its central role in discussions at the II National Conference of Architecture in 1981, where it was emphasized that “the drawing must be recognised as the architect’s privileged field of activity and their primary mode of intervention”<sup>25</sup>.

The prominent role of drawing in architecture exhibitions, particularly within the art gallery circuit<sup>26</sup> and demonstrated in solo presentations by architects like Álvaro Siza<sup>27</sup> and Manuel Vicente<sup>28</sup>, remained also a distinguishing factor in group exhibitions between Porto and Lisbon architects in the 1980s. This difference was evident in exhibitions such as “Arquitectura Portuguesa Contemporânea. Anos 60, Anos 80” at Casa de Serralves (1991) which contrasted with the display strategies employed by Carlos S. Duarte in the itinerant exhibition “Tendências da Arquitectura Portuguesa” (1987-1992).

In the Serralves exhibition, curated by Nuno Portas and Manuel Mendes, square boards<sup>29</sup> had up to two-thirds of their height dedicated to drawings (Fig. 3). Photographs, if available, were displayed on the lower stripe.

In contrast, the A0 panels of Carlos S. Duarte aimed for graphic coherence throughout (Fig. 4), showcasing photographs and technical drawings. The inclusion of artistic drawings<sup>30</sup> was introduced later in the itinerant exhibition as supplementary material, displayed separately.

Portas and Mendes’ exhibition primarily reflected the theoretical framework of the “Escola do Porto”, focusing on showcasing a quite large selection of projects, through original drawings, that highlighted “the internal process and of the representation techniques of the authors”<sup>31</sup>.

On the contrary, Duarte’s selection showcased five distinct personalities, with a considerable array of their projects, to “illustrate the main trends that intersect in the field of architectural production and the controversy that accompanies it”<sup>32</sup>. While initially seeming Lisbon-centric, the inclusion of internationally lesser-known architects like Tomás Taveira, Luís Cunha, and even Manuel Vicente, who was based in Macau, alongside figures like Siza, an already acknowledged and appealing name, could have been instrumental, to convey the idea of a Post-Modern ambience in Portugal. However, these curatorial options can also be interpreted as a will to assert *individuality*, a Post-Modern attitude regardless.

Álvaro Siza’s international recognition, evidenced by his international solo exhibitions since the mid-1970s, triggered a resurgence of group

25. AA.VV. 1981. Os Arquitectos e o Ordenamento do Território – Documentos do 2º Congresso da AAP. Lisboa: Associação dos Arquitectos Portugueses.

26. In the 1980s, private galleries in Portugal, notably Luís Serpa’s Galeria Cómicos, hosted numerous solo exhibitions featuring Lisbon architects. These exhibitions highlighting their drawings and artistic expressions...

27. “Álvaro Siza, Arkitekt i Porto”. Copenhagen and Aarhus, 1975-76; “Álvaro Siza”. Barcelona, 1975; “Álvaro Siza, Architecto 1954-1979”, Milan, 1979.

28. “O Exercício da Cidade. Arquitectura em Macau em 1976/79”, Ar.co, Lisbon 1980.

29. The boards were designed by José Gigante and João Álvaro Rocha.

30. Graça Dias, Manuel. Interview by the author. April 7, 2017.

31. Mendes, Manuel. Portas, Nuno. “Nota Introdutória”. Mendes, Manuel. Portas, Nuno, 1991. Arquitectura Portuguesa Contemporânea, anos sessenta – anos oitenta. Porto: Fundação de Serralves.

32. Duarte, Carlos S. (ed.). Tendências da Arquitectura Portuguesa. Lisboa: Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, 1987.

exhibitions on Portuguese architecture, centred on discussions on Post-Modernism and Modernist revisionism. In addition to the previous considerations, it is essential to consider Siza's assessment on "drawing as the desire for intelligence"<sup>33</sup>, particularly evident in his methodology strongly based on sketches and processual drawings. This perspective also played a defining role in his solo exhibitions, influencing not only the selection of projects but also the emphasis on the display of artistic drawings.

To conclude, one can revisit the question posed by Nuno Portas in 1983: "Can architectural drawing serve to democratize architecture rather than mystify it?"<sup>34</sup>. The 1980s saw a shift towards more curated selections and narratives, alongside the internationalisation of Portuguese architecture, aided by the removal of borders among CEE members in 1986. Despite advancements in exhibition formats and curatorial strategies during this period, the centrality and fetishization of drawing persist in architectural exhibitions today. There remains a pressing need to transcend disciplinary boundaries, engaging the public and affirming architecture's cultural value in society. ■

33. Siza, Álvaro In *Onze Arquitectos do Porto. Imagens Recentes*, Porto: Leitura, 1983.

34. Portas, "Meia dúzia de questões sobre uma certa arquitectura, a melhor, a do Porto.", 1983.

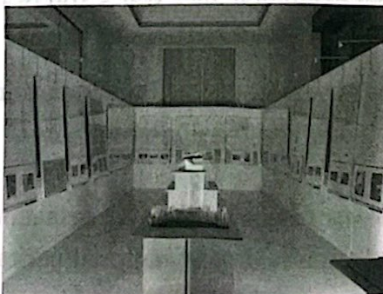
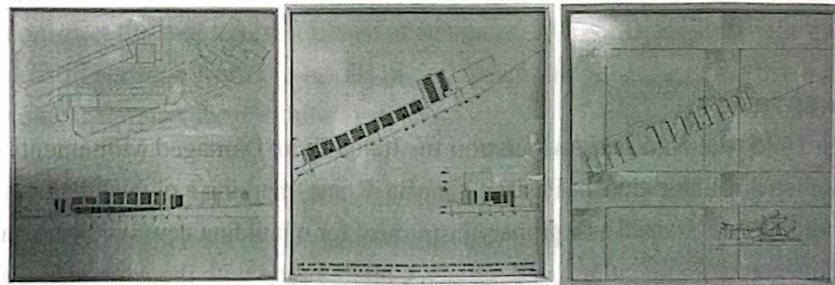
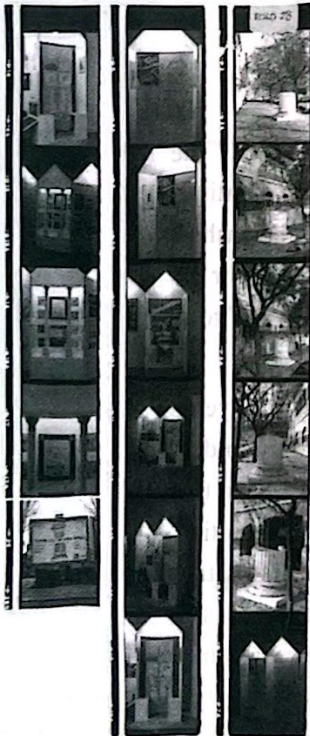


Figure 1. "Depois do Modernismo" views: interior stands and broken column that announces the exhibition, SNBA, 1983 © Victor Mestre, 1983.

Figure 2. "Onze Architects do Porto". Drawings included in Domingos Tavares panels: project for collective housing in Braga © Domingos Tavares.

Figure 3. "Arquitetura Portuguesa Contemporânea. Anos 60, Anos 80", Casa de Serralves, Porto, 1991 © Fundação de Serralves.

Figure 4. "Tendências da Arquitectura Portuguesa", SESC Pompeia, São Paulo, 1987 © Manuel Graça Dias, 1987.

## BIOGRAPHY

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