



Q AND AS

LISBON TRIENNALE / SLIDES



London based writer and critic, **Beatrice Galilee** curator of this year's third Lisbon Architecture Triennale, *Close, Closer*, in Portugal.

The festival, which began in September, runs for months and includes a myriad of diverse exhibitions, installations and events taking place across Lisbon. Intentionally leaving out the built form entirely, the triennale delves deeper into the discourse surrounding contemporary architecture today. In a time of economic only economical, but also of identity in Portugal, it positions architecture as a mediator between different realities, difficulties and possibilities.



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Triennale

In the first of a series of interviews with key individuals involved with the triennale, we caught up with Galilee to discuss what architecture means today, moving forward and the nation's next generation of architects.

The title to this year triennial is: Close, Closer. How does this title refocus the debate of architecture both locally within Lisbon and on a global scale?

The title is not really designed as an indication for anything in particular. It's more about the idea that we're approaching something that we really don't have the answers for yet. It's an idea that reflects momentum and potential, architecture and intimacy, architecture and people, architecture and conversations, architecture with the public. It's just about kind of creating a sense of roominess and intimacy between people. The event is not a conclusion; it's something that is going towards architecture.

On this matter, what is the specific relation to Lisbon?

I think it's a program that's designed for Lisbon – and if you look into the program carefully you will understand that. For example, The Real and Other Fictions is an exhibition that is based on the 400-year-old history of the building that is set into. It actually gives a program for the city, and every single aspect of it is rooted on the History of Portugal and Lisbon. But it's also designed to push forward particular issues of the Portuguese culture today. There are dinners, in which people can eat together and each of those dinners is hosted by a different figure in the Portuguese cultural landscape. Those dinners are designed to have particular topics and discussions; and there's also a 'Parliament,' inside of the exhibition, which was also designed to frame discussions and to push forward conversations about architecture in Portugal today. We also have an 'Embassy' in there, which is designed so that different associations around Portugal can come in and occupy the space. They can invite people into their embassy, they can hold meetings in there, they can hold public debates in there, and they can hold public events in there.



Future Perfect model at the Lisbon Triennale

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So, The Real and Other Fictions is a very special exhibition that can only happen in this space.

You have chosen to largely exclude the built-form of architectural practice from this year's event. It's an interesting move. What motivated you to embark in this direction and what as a consequence are your hopes and ambitions for the long-term impact of the triennale?

I hope that the triennale raises the debate about what architecture is and expand people's understanding of the discipline.

Architecture is a discipline, which can be understood and can be practiced in different ways. It's not something which is an end product; it's a process based on a human need and a human outcome. I like the story about the family who had to walk across a field in order to get to the other side of the farm. They had to walk in a certain way, which they had to cut out on the ground. Then there was a small stream, which they had to cross, and so they had to build a bridge. The architectural gesture is the fact that they had to get to the other side; they wore down the grass in order to go in a certain way, which created a path where afterwards they had to design a bridge to cross the river. All of these items are related to the process of architecture that is about a very elemental human need and a solution to that need. But architecture can also influence the need and anticipate the need. So, I think architectural thinking and practice is something, which is just not simply black or white, it's not something that you should be able to answer very quickly because it can expand to mean very different things. The more closed off you are about what architecture is, the less generous it will be to you.

In the last triennale there was a general criticism that there was too much architecture and too much Portuguese architecture. For this festival did you feel the need to go in an opposite direction?

I'm not oppositional and we're not against anything. What I'm interested in is the next generation of architects and using the opportunity of the triennale to support young architects, to invest in them and not to promote the work of people who are already very well exposed, for whom an architectural exhibition is a kind of laurel on their head and not something which is actually

substantial. That's why we made the Début Award and that's why we're trying to use the triennale to be productive. You can go deeper and understand it as a critical position on contemporary architecture practice, demonstrating some kind of paralysis because there are so many different positions, all co-existing. We don't have to choose between commissioning a famous architect or a young architect. This is a totally different situation – we don't have to make a decision about that, no one is making decisions like that. What we can make a decision about is how do we want Lisbon to be perceived! How do we want the triennial to be perceived? It just feels like we're doing something, which is challenging people, which is easy to criticize as being too radical or something. But I actually think it's not radical at all – I think it's quite easy to understand. There's an exhibition about imaginary future cities, which imagines the technologies that are now in laboratories affecting the city. You can walk through a forest and see what it would be like if we have a relationship with the digital structures that are driving the city or what would happen if we could hack into the walls of our city. These are like dreaming ideas, which are presented in a really accessible way for the general public. You can go to New Publics and be like: "What's going on in this crazy place?" But this is a platform for the city, that we're bringing to Praça da Figueira, which is a place that is not really used very well. It's obviously a free public program.

What do you consider are some of the key highlights of the triennale?

Everybody should try and go to experience the Marshmallow Laser Feast sound experience where you put the headphones on and then you go through a wall of light that attracts your movement, and the light moves according to your presence. And when you touch the light you hear something. This an incredible experience that I would recommend to everybody to go and see because it's one of those things that is just happening here. There's no opportunity for someone to go to the website and put some headphones, you have to go there, touch it and feel it. Then, you should go to those things that are designed just to be here, because they're not going to be repeated somewhere else.

Close, Closer runs from 12 September to 15 December. The Lisbon Architecture Triennale is a non-profit association whose mission is to research, foster and promote architectural thinking and practice.

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