



LISBON ARCHITECTURE TRIENNALE

Various venues

'Dear Eduardo Souto de Moura, Why are you in Milan, with your best friend Álvaro [Siza], when you should be supporting your friends from Lisbon Architecture Triennale?' The letter was the first contribution to Portuguese collective Friendly Fire's fanzine that used the visiting public of the Lisbon Architecture Triennale as content providers. It mocked the city's elite architects who, it was alleged, were boycotting the event because they hadn't been invited to participate.

Flagship architecture events tend to capitalize on home-grown talent – but this triennial turned its back on such an approach. 'This isn't a show where you learn something about architecture in Portugal, it's a show about experiencing architecture in different ways; as intangible, mercurial and indistinct,' declared British chief curator Beatrice Galilee. This meant no buildings. For some, that was a step too far.

Positioned in a faltering Eurozone country where graduate unemployment stands at 40 percent and shuttered shops line every street, Galilee used the opportunity of the triennial (albeit on a stringent budget) to reconsider not only how architecture should be represented, but also how it should be practiced. Under the banner 'Close, Closer', Lisbon was turned into a testing ground for an emerging generation of activists tackling urban, social and political issues in ways that are tactical rather than physical. The event was spread across four main exhibition sites, one of which, the Civic Stage, hosted lectures that would usually be confined to a conference hall, on a large, tilted wooden disc in the city square which anyone could apply to use. Across the city, a sprawl of 100 or so 'Associated Projects' took shape.

The strongest of the main events was 'The Real and Other Fictions', curated by Portuguese architect and curator Mariana Pestana in the spectacular 17th-century Pombal Palace. The exhibition text told of

the fascinating events that occurred during the site's occupation by the Embassy of Spain, the Legation of Germany, a radical anarcho-syndicalist group at the beginning of the 20th century, and the Portuguese Association of Landscape Architects in the 1980s. 'How should we display the immaterial, social and performative qualities concerning the use of space?' asked Pestana. Her answer was to commission interventions that address the history of the palace.

In the room where the rules governing the Portuguese Association of Landscape Architects were formulated, architecture studio Zuloark is campaigning for a Universal Declaration of Urban Rights and, through a process of public debate, trying to reach a consensus about the construction and use of public space. Next door, in the smallest room of the palace, texts by writer-in-residence Maria Fusco are read by story-tellers to one person at a time. Fusco wrote them in several of the palace rooms, in order, she said at the opening, to build a collection of texts that 'hopefully function as lenses to help you re-look at the space.'

But it was Alex Schweder's *Slowly Ceiling* (2013) that best exemplified the premise of Pestana's project. Referring to the arrest and exile of nobleman Jácome Ratton in 1810 under the suspicion of being a Jacobin, visitors could sit on one of two sofas, unaware that the walls around them would slowly inflate, tipping the sofas, filling the space and forcing visitors to scramble out.

The fictional theme is continued across town with 'Future Perfect', curated by Liam Young at the Electricity Museum. Through films, models and interactive installations, the exhibition encouraged visitors to explore the consequences of today's emerging biological and technological research, so we can envision the type of future we do or don't want to build: 'The future is not something that washes over us like water, it is a place we must actively shape and define,' says Young in his introduction to the show. It was an idea too big for the triennial's limited funds, but the short film *Chupan Chupai* (2013) by UK studio Factory Fifteen – portraying a future India regulated by a supercomputer – demonstrated Young's sentiment well: we follow kids as they learn to hack the system, and get lost in a jungle-like power-grid. Hacking was also the subject of

Dutch designer Bart Hess's *The Garment District* (2013). He imagined 'youth tribes', *au fait* with a landscape of facial recognition and surveillance, which celebrate the glitches of corrupt files by turning them into a new form of ornamental clothing. The idea was demonstrated through a performance piece, comprising a female dipped into a layer of wax, which crystallized in abstract folds as she emerged.

At the MUDE Design and Fashion Museum, the 'Institute Effect' invited a group of 12 pioneering international institutions – such as New York's Storefront for Art and Architecture, and Delft-based Design as Politics – to take turns in hosting a programme of events. Elsewhere, the opening days were spent trying to catch speeches, stories, campaigns, civic actions, experiments, lectures, workshops and plays at sites across the city, inevitably arriving either too early for, or at the debris of, an activity. It made it clear that the audience is not just the fleeting journalist; with so much in-progress, it was easy to see why day-trippers might go home feeling empty-handed. But the hope was to nurture and inspire a new culture of design and architecture in Lisbon, through those practicing in the field. Portuguese architecture practice Artéria's message was perhaps the most direct: as part of the 'New Public's' programme, the studio moved a few streets down from its mid-floor office to a derelict shop on street-level, having secured sponsorship to renovate and occupy it. The studio was campaigning for local architects – the majority of whom leave the country to try and find jobs – to stay and focus their efforts on problems in their city. Artéria also wanted practices to follow suit and 'change their view', by taking residence in Lisbon's disused storefronts so they could make themselves physically present to passers-by, and open up conversations between architects and non-architects. It cemented the ethos of this triennale, as Galilee writes in the exhibition notes, to present architecture 'not to be mediated, but [to be] the act of mediation itself.'

ANNA BATES

1
'The Real and Other Fictions',
exhibition view, 2013,
part of the
Lisbon Architecture
Triennale

2
Bart Hess
Digital Artefacts, 2013,
digital photograph
from 'Future Perfect',
part of the Lisbon
Architecture Triennale

3
Cynthia Marcelle
Traveller Swallowed
by the Space, 2013,
installation view

4
Allan McCollum
The Event: Petrified
Lightning from Central
Florida (with
Supplemental Didactics)
(detail),
1997–8, mixed
media, dimensions
variable

