

Stroom

ENG

Ângela
Ferreira

*Revolutionary
Traces*

Ângela Ferreira

Revolutionary Traces

Buildings can be read als political texts and that is what I try to do.
- Ângela Ferreira

In the exhibition *Revolutionary Traces* two new sculptures of Ângela Ferreira link the work of architect Álvaro Siza Vieira in the Schilderswijk in The Hague with Bairro da Bouça in Porto. Both housing projects were realized under revolutionary circumstances, in a time when experiment, guts and collective creativity formed the key elements.

In the Schilderswijk it was the campaign 'Stadsvernieuwing als kulturele aktiviteit' (Urban renewal as cultural activity) that councillor for housing and urban development Adri Duivesteijn started around 1985 to bring more architectural diversity and quality to urban renewal. Duivesteijn knew the work of Siza from a visit to Porto (April 1984), where Siza as a member of the SAAL-brigades (Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local - Local Ambulatory Support Service, 1974-1976) realised some special social housing projects together with inhabitants, amongst which Bairro da Bouça.

Under the name of SAAL and on the order of Nuno Portas, state secretary for the Ministry

Ângela Ferreira - *Revolutionary Traces*

7 December 2014 - 15 March 2015
Opening: Saturday 6 December, 17 hrs by Adri Duivesteijn
Preceded at 16 hrs by an introductory lecture by Nelson Mota



Álvaro Siza and
Adri Duivesteijn
in Porto, 25 April
1984
Photo: Jaap
Huurman

of Housing and Spatial Planning, a revolutionary housing and urban development program began, right after the April 25 Revolution in Portugal. 'Brigades' of architects, engineers, social workers, lawyers, sociologists and technical experts worked with communities to solve their housing problems, a pressing issue of the time. Many people were living in cramped and squalid conditions in illegally built houses and terraces. Residents protested en masse against the housing policy and use occupations to demand the right to have a say in their own neighbourhoods. As such, the resident's participation became crucial to the SAAL process.

Besides the magnificent architecture, it was the resident's involvement in the building of the houses that spoke to Duivesteijn when he visited Bouça together with Siza. He found it very inspiring. 'Suddenly there was life, people walked around or sat outside, children ran up the stairs, laundry flapped, people spoke to us, invited us in.' Siza later commented that he was struck by the fact that Duivesteijn could see through the incompleteness and understand exactly what it was all about. On the plane home, Duivesteijn decided to give Siza a commission.

30 years later, Ângela Ferreira looks back, through the eyes of the present, to the process and the visible results of the time. This has been done in Porto and The Hague. As part of the exhibition *The SAAL Process*:

Architecture and Participation 1974 – 1976
in the Serralves Museum of Contemporary
Art, she has made a sculpture *SAAL Brigades*
based on Siza's architecture for Bairro da
Bouça and the SAAL-process.

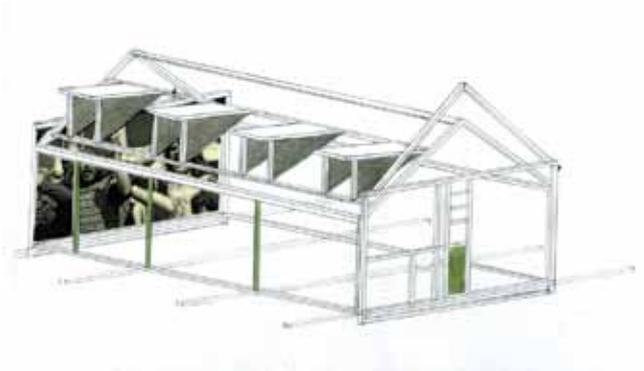
Siza once said: Architects don't invent anything, they transform reality. In a similar way, the sculptures of Ângela Ferreira are not a representation of reality; they are a transformation of it. Like Siza, Ferreira studies, copies and disassembles existing elements, reconfiguring them to enable new readings of current and historical realities. And hopefully provides a new view on to the future. In short: Forward, and not forgetting!¹

¹ Adri Duivesteijn closes with this socialist motto his introduction to the process with Siza in: Dorien Boasson, *Visie op de Stad. Alvaro Siza in de Schilderswijk Den Haag*, 1988

SAAL

Buildings and structures have played a major role in my work. I use them as a starting point for projects all the time. The way I 'read' buildings is crucial to the critical approach in my work. Buildings can be read as political texts and this is what I try to do. Various factors and issues which buildings encompass are meaningful as a basic premise for making contemporary art: they unequivocally belong to a place and time (their foundations are dug into the soil in specific geographic site) and yet they formally refer to strains of thought and design which originate in various parts of the globe; they are anthropological, sociological, political and aesthetic; they occupy space in the realm of popular culture and yet they are not necessarily conceived as such. They sometimes stand for the paramount conflicts which are still being played out today. I have used them as metaphors for containers of history (particularly in the case of African buildings like *Maison Tropicale*, 2007).

The story of the SAAL Brigades has been in my consciousness for a very long time. I bought the book *Livro Branco do SAAL* in the early 1990s at the Porto University Architectural School for 1000 escudos (at the time 5 euros). This book holds the minutes of all the meetings, testifying to the incredible experimental political and architectural process that took place at that time. Its existence was all the more evocative as the players worked hard to gather and preserve their documentation in an attempt avoid the process being wiped erased from memory. I still see SAAL as a model for resolving one of the more fascinating and



Revolutionary Traces, The Hague, sketch Ângela Ferreira

long lasting questions in my own artistic practice: the endless attempt to marry a meaningful political practice with contemporary investigative art and the effort to avoid rhetoric and pamphleteering; the communication of complex ideas whilst not surrendering to popular demands of taste and fashion. In short, how to think about contemporary art and revolution. I love the consultation processes, the experiments with auto-construction, the emphasis on design, the open and aggressive political agenda, and I love to look at the resulting buildings!

Finally, I was also curious to uncover the success of the SAAL project in other countries by tracing some of the architectural careers that ensued. The story of Adri Duivesteyn's visit to Porto to understand how the SAAL brigades operated attested to an international solidarity and political like mindedness which is a very evocative metaphor for trust and cooperation. I read the work that Álvaro Siza Vieira developed for



SAAL Brigades, Porto, sketch Ângela Ferreira

Schilderswijk as a further sign of the belief in good participative work combined with aesthetic rigour. At a time when participation is again being reconsidered as a way forward in so many fields, the architecture becomes a fitting starting point for another performative sculpture.

Ângela Ferreira
Lisboa, November 2014

Exhibition

The exhibition comprises two parts - The Hague (upstairs) and Porto (downstairs) - connected by the two Ângela Ferreira sculptures.

Sculptures Ângela Ferreira

The two sculptures are based on the row of duplex houses on the Jacob Catsstraat, designed by Siza and drawn up by Geurst & Schulze architects from The Hague. One of the sculptures serves as a stage for a performance during the exhibition opening. The performance comprises the reading of a manifesto written by the São Victor Brigade in 1976. The manifesto has been included in full on page 19 of this guide. The manifesto makes one recall the left radicalism of those

Housing block
Jacob Catsstraat,
November 2014
Photo: Christian
van der Kooy



times, especially since the final line is a Che Guevara quote: "Quality is respect for the people." The performance film is projected on the sculpture.

Drawings are displayed around the sculptures, showing how Ângela Ferreira works, both for the Porto and the The Hague sculpture. These illuminate how Ferreira transforms the actual world into a new type of reality. She seeks a specific element that touches upon a building's core, which she then, as a kind of 'pars pro toto', uses as leading principle. In this case, the stairs form the element that plays a crucial and image-determining role in both Porto and The Hague, as well as the participation philosophy that forms the basis for both projects.

Schilderswijk neighbourhood, The Hague

On a long wall in the upstairs space, the process in the Schilderswijk has been visualised using photographs, drawings, documents, films, models and publications. Below, you will find a description of the most vital moments and themes, illustrated by several documents. The numbers on the wall refer to the numbers below.

1. Demolition and reconstruction

In 1980, Adri Duivesteijn is about to publish his photographic diary on the Schilderswijk. As neighbourhood resident and local councillor for the Dutch Labour Party, he fights to improve the Schilderswijk. To support his political plea, he starts taking pictures of the impoverished, boarded-up and polluted streets. When he becomes alderman for spatial planning & urban renewal in late 1980, he pauses the publication of the diary to spend all his energy on a radical reorganisation of urban renewal.



Schilderswijk in
1980
Photo: Adri
Duivesteijn

2. International attention for architecture in Portugal

In the late 1970s, early 1980s, international architecture magazines paid a lot of attention to Portuguese architecture. The Porto School, the SAAL Process and Álvaro Siza were the particular focus of many articles in the *Casabella*, *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, and in 1976, Lotus International publishes the São Victor Brigade's SAAL manifesto. Portugal features in two issues of the Dutch magazine *Wonen/TABK* in 1983 as well. Adri Duivesteijn brings this *Wonen/TABK* as an architecture guide during his visit to the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the April 25 Revolution in Portugal's.

3. 10th anniversary of Portugal's Carnation Revolution

On 25th April 1984, the tenth anniversary of the April 1974 Revolution was celebrated in Portugal,

marking the overthrow of Salazar's fascist regime. Adri Duivesteijn, the then Labour Party councillor for housing and urban development in The Hague, was invited to attend the celebration. His architecture consultant, Joop Bolster, encouraged him to meet some of the people who had contributed to the changes of that time. One of them was the architect Álvaro Siza Vieira. After a few days of waiting, they finally meet and Siza shows him around in Porto. They end the tour in Bairro da Bouça.

4. Campaign 'Stadsvernieuwing als Kulturele Activiteit'

Inspired by what he sees in Bairro da Bouça, Adri Duivesteijn decides to offer Siza an assignment in the Schilderswijk, within the context of his campaign 'Stadsvernieuwing als Kulturele Activiteit' (Urban Renewal as a Cultural Activity). The campaign's goal is to bring more architectural diversity and quality to urban renewal, to give the residents a vote in these renewal processes, and taking the old neighbourhood structures as starting point for change. Culture (not to be confused with art), is key in accomplishing all of this. Urban Renewal should be a Cultural Activity, in which neighbourhood, buildings, shared history, and diverse cultural backgrounds and mentalities are all natural constituents. With his campaign, Duivesteijn is de facto criticising himself and the city council's way of accomplishing urban renewal. The campaign gets its own, graffiti-like logo designed by Guus Rijven, and includes festivals, debates, exhibitions, symposia, theatre shows and a number of extraordinary construction projects, including several in the Schilderswijk neighbourhood.

5. Álvaro Siza in the Schilderswijk

Siza's methods fit seamlessly into Duivensteijn's ideas. Through all the boarded-up misery, he sees a beautiful neighbourhood with elegant long streets and a lively community. He opens stakeholders' eyes to the Schilderswijk's qualities – architecturally and socially –, making them receptive to the idea of using the existing situation as a proposition for development. He even refused to demolish any buildings, even though the city deemed some locations beyond saving. Siza drew up the urban design plans for 'deelgebied 5' and the apartment building complex on the Parallelweg road, de Punt Komma

6. Resident participation

Siza visits as many residents as possible to inquire after their lives, lifestyles, and the difficulties they are faced with. Communicating through an interpreter soon reaps its rewards. The interpreter, a Portuguese taxi driver, must fully understand the ideas before translating them to the residents. Therefore, Siza has to communicate in clear and concrete terms. The floor plans for the Punt Komma houses can be tested in real size in the Spatial Development Laboratory in the Visafslag, designed by Sjoerd Schamhart. Residents are invited to inspect the house display and comment on it. The floor plans are discussed and adjusted in conversations with Siza. There is even a short documentary to inform residents that are unable to visit. The film is shown in community centre De Hoefeiser.

7. Conflict as opportunity

Throughout his SAAL years, Álvaro Siza developed his own realistic view of participation. For Siza, participation means accepting numerous and inevitable con-



Siza with Schilderswijk residents in a livingroom of Ruimtelijk Ontwikkelings Laboratorium (Spatial Development Laboratory), 1986
Photo: Fred van der Burg

flicts. Thus not designing what the inhabitants wish for. This asks something specific both of residents and of the architect. SAAL also taught him that architecture is political and that it can make a difference as means of expression. The discussion about the sliding doors and the so-called Haagse Portiek illustrate that. Siza believes in an architecture that creates conditions, not in an architecture that suppresses. Safety is not achieved by building fences, but by putting in windows and through (shared) ownership. That is where the idea of the open Haagse Portiek comes from: it offers all residents their own front door and prevents issues surrounding semi-public entrance areas. Siza manages to convince the residents, and thereby the public housing association, with his proposal. The sliding doors are another source of controversy. They increase the layout possibilities and lifestyle options, and offer more space and freedom



Álvaro Siza visits one of 'his' houses in the Schilderswijk, 1993
 Photo: Jeroen Geurst

(and thus equality) to Muslim women. The latter leads also to some resistance, and raises quite some questions about building for other cultures.

8. Vision for the City

1988 sees the publication of the booklet *Visie op de Stad* (Vision for the City), in which several stakeholders describe the entire process of the Punt Komma: alderman, architect, residents, community workers, housing association Gravenhage (now called Haag Wonen). It is a textbook example of involved and content-driven accounting for a process that, in many ways, was quite experimental.

9. Involvement and distance

After 1988, the second phase of the project was realised as well. Another apartment complex, terraced

houses and duplex buildings arise on the other side of the Jacob van Campenplein square. The Geurst & Schulze firm from The Hague is closely involved in the process. For this second part, Siza received the 1993 Berlage Prize, to which he responded with both pleasure and the appropriate reserve. The second phase's planning process was not as intensive or participatory as the first. Other people came to work at the municipality, the chairman was replaced, and the revolutionary, experimental élan of the first phase gave way to more emphasis on efficiency and cost control.

10. Architect's don't invent anything, they transform reality

For the 1996 Architecture Week, Geurst & Schulze put this Siza quote on the facade of the De Volharding building as a tribute. The quote exemplifies Siza's methods, in which he does not only cite other buildings, but also takes reality as a starting point for his designs. He, for example, seemingly effortlessly combines the styles of the Amsterdam School and modernist architecture in the residence in the Van der Venne park. And the shape of the front facades of the duplex houses is based on a Indonesian rice barn. At Geurst & Schulze, Siza sees a post card picturing such a barn, sent by an employee as holiday greetings. Siza implements the shape, thereby attempting to create a connection to the Dutch colonial past.

Bairro da Bouça and Bairro São Victor, Porto

Besides the sculpture, the downstairs space houses a film by Catarina Alves Costa (daughter of Alexandre Alves Costa, one of the prominent members of SAAL). In it we witness how the residents of Porto take to the streets to demand better housing in the 1970s. The documentary shows the despair but, at the same time, the enormous zeal and hope that accompanied the foundation of SAAL.

Catarina Alves Costa joined Álvaro Siza when he drove to The Netherlands in 1985 with her father and Siza's daughter, all cramped into a Renault 4. Drove all the way to the Netherlands with hardly a dime to spend. Siza spoke at a symposium in The Hague and was paid in cash, allowing the group to stop over in Paris on the return journey to have an ice cream.

The Line of Action of the Technicians as Technicians

It seems appropriate to give some information on the way the Brigade as a technical group intends to work within the present political context.

The Brigade does not adopt simplistic positions, such as: learn with the people or teach them.

It intervenes with its expertise, accepting and criticizing the circumstances of its formation, and with total adherence to an objective: putting control over decayed areas in the hands of the people who live there, meaning that these areas should be expropriated and recovered, a control which, right from the start, must be necessarily widened to the city itself and beyond.

(The fact that the Associations went beyond the objectives which gave rise to the SAAL Process is strictly tied to the dynamics of the Portuguese revolutionary process of which it is at one and the same time a driving force and reflex action.)

The Brigade believes that its expertise and its ideas, within the concrete limits of the reconstruction of the habitat, with a dialectic relationship with the present ideas of the population it works for, will form the basis of a physical world created for and by a society that want to be classless.

The Brigade refuses to take the road of imitation and ambiguity because it is restrictive and demagogical.

The Brigade does not believe, nor does it admit, that the urgency of the problems could constitute a limiting factor to quality and poetry.
(Poetry seen as a total adhesion to and expression of the political process in force, in all its richness and complexity, a richness and complexity whose roots are to be found only in a collective and irreversible popular movement.)

The Brigade tries not to confuse objectives and methods. Together with the tenants associations it established the priorities for each event, correcting them if necessary and adopting a position of permanent criticism.

In this light, every decision must be taken as part of a dynamic process, the adoption of an adequate methodology being indispensable.

Once the bureaucratic and technocratic procedures have been superseded, the concept of the design changes; it is a concept, however, that has nothing to do with improvisation or the force stick.

Rigour is not a limiting factor to the dynamic of the process.

Rigour must be strictly tied to the real possibility of progress, maturity and the capacity to respond to the process and always present.

Rigour must be directly proportional to this capacity to respond.

Rigour does not limit the imagination.

Rigour does not limit the collective creativity.

Rigour is the ability to respond to a dynamic process.

“Quality is respect for the ‘people’ ” (Che Guevara)

Housing project
by Álvaro Siza,
Bairro São
Victor, Porto,
November 2014
Photo: Francien
van Westrenen

Brigada São Victor, *The proletarian “island” as an element of the urban tissue*, initially published in *Lotus International* (Milan), no. 13, 1976.

* Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local – Ambulante
Service for Local Support



Colophon

Revolutionary Traces Ángela Ferreira

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Catalogue *Revolutionary Traces*
The exhibition is accompanied
by a catalogue, for sale in the
bookstore of Stroom Den Haag.
Price: 7,50 euro

Stroom School

Parallel to the exhibition there
will be an in-depth program
of lectures and workshops.
See insert or website for full
program.

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and that is what I try to do.'***

- Ângela Ferreira, 2014

Den Haag