MAISON TROPICALE
ÂNGELA FERREIRA

curated by Jürgen Bock

Portuguese Pavilion
Fondaco Marcello, San Marco 3415 (Calle dei Garzoni), Veneza
www.iartes.pt/venezia2007

Official opening: 8 June 2007, 6pm

Press and professional previews:
6 June – 9 June 2007, 10am – 8pm

Exhibition: 10 June – 21 November 2007
11am – 7pm (closed on Mondays)

Commissioned by Portuguese Ministry of Culture / Institute of the Arts
ANGELA FERREIRA REPRESENTS PORTUGAL AT THE 2007 VENICE BIENNALE

Angela Ferreira is the artist representing Portugal at the 52nd International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, to be held from 10 June to 21 November 2007. The official Portuguese representation, organized and produced by the Institute of the Arts, is curated by Jürgen Bock.

The Portuguese exhibition is to be held at the Fondaco Marcello, a high-profile venue located on the banks of the Grand Canal, between the Accademia and Rialto bridges.

Angela Ferreira (b. Maputo, 1958) has shown regularly since 1990. Driven by political issues, Ferreira scrutinizes the use of theories – in particular art historical theories – and their relationship with and impact on contemporary art, calling for art's inherent communicative potential to negotiate complex subject matter.

Ferreira subtly stimulates the viewer to articulate questions in their encounter with her objects, which take the shape of skillfully executed and aesthetically appealing modernist sculptures, often combined with texts, photographs and videos. The questions instigated interrogate what we have come to consider as ‘given’ in art history; however, if we consider history is a construct, one might ask: ‘what history, whose history and history to what purpose?’ Venice – a city with its own unique track record of more than a century of biennales, with its national presentations of art in a wide range of ‘national’ modern buildings and its never-ending negotiations with (post) modernity – is a perfect platform for Ferreira to tackle these issues.

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High resolution copies of the images in this press release and further images can be downloaded from the Instituto das Artes site: http://www.artes.pt/venezia2007/, with the exception of the Bernard Renoux photograph which can be obtained from http://www.renoux-photo.com
ÂNGEla FErrEira’S iNViSiBlE CONStruCtiONS

Driven by political issues, Ângela Ferreira scrutinizes the use of theories – in particular art historical theories – and their relationship with and impact on contemporary art, calling on art’s inherent and unique communicative potential to negotiate complex subject matter. Ferreira subtly stimulates viewers to articulate questions in their encounters with her objects, which take the shape of skilfully executed and aesthetically appealing modernist sculptures, often combined in installations with texts, photographs and videos. The questions instigated throw doubt on what we have come to consider as ‘givens’ in art history. In her proposition of art history as a construct, one might ask, as Douglas Crimp once did: ‘which history, whose history and history to what purpose?’ Venice – a city with its own unique track record of more than a century of biennales, with its national presentations of art and its never-ending negotiations with (post) modernism – is a perfect platform for Ferreira to tackle these questions.

Born in the Portuguese colony of Mozambique in 1958, Ângela Ferreira studied in apartheid South Africa and has lived in Portugal and South Africa since the early 1990s. Her ‘in between’ status – inherent to the identity of many Portuguese – drives her intense exploration of different universes in centres and peripheries, highlighting the importance of perspective.

Ângela Ferreira's oeuvre can be situated conceptually between the failure of modernism in the so-called centres, and the conflicting impact of colonizers attempting to implement modernism across Africa, and in any other colony worldwide. However, the utopian goal of emancipation of mankind, combined with art’s potential as a critical tool, which was an essential drive of the avant-garde as it manifested itself in the centres, seemed to not apply in colonized territories.

The end of the avant-garde and its inherent qualities, its history and the impact of that history are now also discussed in these so-called peripheries and the centre has lost its prerogative to proclaim the political significance of modernism when it comes to notions of utopia and emancipation.

Paraphrasing a contemporary art theorist, Ângela Ferreira's practice not only survives the proclaimed end of the avant-garde but also evokes again the issue of emancipation and utopian ideals by reformulating the critique of utopias as a critique on utopias. Her work reveals the artistic freedom promised by modernism as deceptive in the centres and as a false autonomy in the periphery, because of the lack of political latitude.

Grand narratives appear to us now as countless, smaller fragments. On the one hand, we sometimes yearn for the well-known comfortable methods of classifying the historical avant-garde, the never-ending string of neatly identifiable styles and methodologies in modern art and ‘International Style’ architecture. On the other hand, Ângela Ferreira’s work underlines the possibilities that have opened up through the tremendous changes that these narratives are undergoing. In dismantling the often dogmatic, basic strategies of ‘given’ notions, her work offers a social, political and critical approach to the outcomes of modernism, to the old centres of its creation, and their remote consequences. In applying the modernist methodology of profound analysis to modernism itself, she proposes this method as a ‘local’ alternative for dealing with modernism, rather than simply simulating it. Ângela Ferreira’s concerns are materialized in ‘sculptures organized in installations’, which are not subjugated by the political. The critical proposition of her objects is not upfront, but simmers subtly below the surface of her beautiful sculptures, offering a space between the ‘object and the political’, a space for the viewer to occupy. Ângela Ferreira does not seek to teach us anything, but to stimulate our own political imaginary and critical comprehension.

Jürgen Bock

Text published in the Catalogue of the participating countries at the 52nd International Art Exhibition – Biennale di Venezia
Maison Tropicale

Angela Ferreira’s Maison Tropicale reflects on colonial history and its contemporary, post- and neo-colonial resonances. Amidst the territorial reorganisation undertaken by the colonial powers in Africa after World War II and following a public tender process, the French Overseas Ministry, through collaboration with the French designer Jean Prouvé, saw the possibility to further develop modernist ideas of conceiving a series of aesthetically sophisticated homes, that could be mass-produced and that would give people greater access to well-designed, high quality architecture based on prefabricated aluminium modules. Prouvé’s ideas never took hold in Europe, but the possibility to install a large number of his houses in the African colonies led to the development of his Tropical House. Of the thousands of units originally envisaged, only three prototypes ultimately left Prouvé’s workshop. In 1949, the first Tropical House was transported by plane to Niger and subsequently installed in the capital, Niamey. Two other houses were transported to the Congo and installed in Brazzaville in 1951. With the (re)discovery of Prouvé’s ‘work’ in the 1990s, the houses also incited new interest and became part of a process of fetishisation of Prouvé’s productions by the design world. The three Tropical Houses were dismantled and transported to France where they were restored and subsequently presented there and in the United States, in a new context.

This is what we know about Prouvé’s Tropical House, and it is at this point that the story of Angela Ferreira’s Maison Tropicale begins. The installation at the Portuguese Pavilion in Venice presents us with the displacement of these houses, no longer located in France, the United States, Niger or the Congo, transforming them into ‘containers of history’, in transit between the worlds of the colonisers and the colonised, and – because the artist revives Prouvé’s link with Africa – between the decolonised and post-modern worlds with their realities of post- and/or neo-colonialism. Angela Ferreira recreates the places where Prouvé’s houses were installed, highlighting their absence and the traces left behind and evoking the structures themselves through the sculptural objects produced by the artist’s modular form of architecture that result from the accumulation of objects in a claustrophobic space and that remain permanently adrift.

J.B.
ÂNGELA FERREIRA


Ângela Ferreira is a lecturer at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon.

JÜRGEN BOCK

Born in Wuppertal (Germany) in 1962. Has lived and worked in Lisbon since 1993.

An independent curator, Jürgen Bock has been responsible, amongst other projects, for the programme of the 1st Project Room at the Centro Cultural de Belém (2000-2001), representing works by Eleanor Antin, Nathan Coley, Harun Farocki, Renée Green, Nuno Ribeiro, Allan Sekula and Heimo Zobernig, for the 2003 Maia Biennale and for the German Pavilion at the New Delhi Triennial/India in 2005, with the artist Andreas Siekmann.

He edited the book From Work to Text – Dialogues on Practice and Criticism, with texts by various authors (CCB, Lisbon, 2002), and organised the publication in Portugal of TITANIC’s wake, by Allan Sekula (Portuguese version, Maumaus, Lisbon, 2003) and Negotiations in the Contact Zone, by Renée Green (Assirio & Alvim, Lisbon, 2003).

Jürgen Bock is director of the Maumaus School of Visual Arts, in Lisbon, and teaches on the Masters Course in Contemporary Art Practice, at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Porto.
Die Vlermuis Huis / The Bat House
(after the house *Die Es* designed and built by Gabriël Fagan in Camps Bay, Cape Town)
2006
Private collection, Lisbon
Installation view [*'(Re)volver', Plataforma Revólver, Lisbon, 2006]*
Photo: Ângela Ferreira

In 1966, Gabriël Fagan constructed a minimalist modernist building with a sculptural rooftop in Camps Bay, Cape Town. In Ângela Ferreira’s sculpture, Fagan’s building has been appropriated and has materialized in a skeleton-like structure, which, upside down, has become part of the roof structure of the exhibition space. The focus in the space is now the sculptural rooftop, elegantly floating a few centimetres above the gallery floor, literally underlining, in its wave-like appearance, the structure which holds and links it to the gallery roof. The sculptural functional roof in South Africa turns into the unused, abstract base of the architecture-evoking sculpture in Lisbon, generating thoughts not only about the intertwined relationship between architecture and sculpture, but also about the mutual involvement of African and European culture, and the centre and the periphery. *Die Vlermuis Huis / The Bat House* is not about the crossing of architecture into sculpture, but about the acknowledgement of a dependency and an inversion. J.B.
Ângela Ferreira – SELECTED WORKS

Random Walk
2005
Courtesy of the artist / Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon
Photo: Ângela Ferreira

The sculpture Random Walk takes the shape of temporary scaffolding set up within the existing gallery’s main exhibition space. Conceptually, this piece is based on the economic theory with the same name, which refers to the unpredictability of the economic market. The installation is contextualised by a series of photographs, which highlight the fragility and instability of African currencies compared to European currencies. The installation enables the viewer to leave the conventional viewing space of the gallery floor and offers an alternative architectural random walk in space. J.B.
Hotel da Praia Grande (The State of Things)
2003
c-print, colour, 124 x 153 cm
Courtesy of the artist / Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon

A notion of History and its links with a range of other histories (political, art, cinema and architecture) are evoked in this photograph, which shows the artist leaning out of a pool in front of an abandoned, modernist Hotel on the coast of Portugal close to Lisbon. The title of the photograph and the performative act of ‘remaking’ a gesture that has become one of the most iconic of the 1974 Revolution (the distribution of carnations) evokes another event, which took place at this Hotel during the depression between the Revolution and 1986, when Portugal entered the European Economic Community. In 1981, the director Wim Wenders filmed his melancholic movie The State of Things, a self-referential film on the working conditions of non-commercial filmmakers. The plot of Wenders’ film is based on the story of a film crew stranded in Portugal during a remake of a Science Fiction movie. They have to interrupt their filming due to lack of funds from Hollywood. In Wenders’ movie the plot and the real circumstances of making a film are intertwined (Wenders’ crew stayed in the hotel which was used as the stage set for the film). Ângela Ferreira’s photograph links these events to the myth of a melancholic Portuguese society waiting again and again for progress and departure, both essential drivers in modernist thinking. J.B.
An unrealised project by the architect Pancho Guedes, who, like Ângela Ferreira lives and works between two cultures, inspired this installation. For the group exhibition ‘More Works about Buildings and Food’ (Hangar K7, Oeiras, 2000), Ângela Ferreira broadened her exploration of modernist discourse by adding Guedes’s plan for a circus architecture to the exhibition architecture designed by Pedro Gadanho. Her Zip Zap Circus School model used the same construction materials as those used for the exhibition architecture. The Oeiras Zip Zap Circus School, considered by the artist as a prototype, became a continuation of the ‘white cube’ exhibition architecture, whilst at the same time alluding to received notions of ‘African architecture’.

In 2001, for the exhibition In the Meantime, at De Appel in Amsterdam, Ângela Ferreira again used the Zip Zap Circus School architecture as a vehicle for her exploration of notions of modernity, underscoring the dichotomy between European and African interpretations of architecture. She presented the model of the circus school in the same materials used by Mies van der Rohe for his 1912 Ellenwoude model, thus connecting the discourse of Mies with that of Guedes. A photograph of Mies’s model and a reproduction of Guedes’s plan for the circus school referred to both ‘originals’, as well as their opposed – if not conflicting – philosophies.

In downtown Cape Town, on the ‘non-site’ of an ambitious, yet failed inner-city motorway programme in the 1960s, Ângela Ferreira presented Zip Zap Circus School as a temporary public sculpture. Here, there was no pre-existing exhibition or building whose spatial limitations could influence or interfere with the possible siting of her project. Viewed from one angle, each of the three components of the model conveyed the illusion that the site was occupied by a complete building. However, from different viewpoints, each section appeared to be cut in half, revealing three stage-like ‘platforms’, which the artist offered to students for performances during the installation. Ângela Ferreira’s installation in Cape Town in 2002 was again linked to Mies van der Rohe’s model for the Ellenwoude museum/house in Wassenaar (NL). The circus school architecture project is still to be completed. Mies’s technique of using a full-scale architectural model is here appropriated for a utopian installation, a possible future home for a community project. J.B.
Case Study House Program was an experimental architectural programme in and around Los Angeles in the 1950s and 1960s, in which American architects experimented with new materials and modular metal-framed construction. One of the essential modernist ideas in this project was to bring the garden into the home, the Case Study House #21 by the architect Pierre Koenig from 1951 being a perfect example of this new garden/house relationship proposition.

In Ângela Ferreira’s installation with the same title, the viewer’s full attention is turned from the exhibition building (the Serralves Museum in Porto) to the garden. Ferreira covered the interior of the Serralves Villa with canvas stretched on a wooden structure, introducing a Case Study House layout with a technique that evokes the trial architecture used by Mies van der Rohe for his unbuilt Kröller-Müller Villa in Wassenaar (NL) in 1912.

Some furniture is used to re-introduce a certain ‘privacy’ in the public museum, which uses a former private villa for its exhibitions. On a modernist side table, a small, framed photograph ‘intimately’ shows a pistol, contextualising – together with the heightened view of the garden – the sound element of the installation: a reading of an adaptation of a text taken from one of the most fascist Portuguese publications on colonial history (A Derrocada do Império Vátua e Mouzinho de Albuquerque by Francisco Toscano and Julião Quintinha, 1930), describing the suicide of Mouzinho de Albuquerque, the ‘conqueror’ of Mozambique, who was unable to adapt to Portuguese life after coming back from Africa. In Ângela Ferreira’s adapted text, the garden of Albuquerque’s death has been replaced by the garden of Serralves, not only tainting the Museum’s garden with this episode from Portugal’s colonial history, but also the American architectural dream with its special references to gardens. J.B.
The installation is based on a three-dimensional transfer of cartographic projections (Robinson and Gnomic projection) forming two sculptural objects, which serve at the same time as screens for two video projections of images of a modernist house in Maputo. On one screen, the image projected is that of a 're-filming' of a black and white photograph of the house, taken just after it was built in the 1950s. The second image consists of a focused highlighting of details of the house in a colour photograph taken at the time when the installation was produced. J.B.
Sites and Services consists of four semi-abstract sculptures, concrete assemblages with steel nets and plastic tubes that simultaneously reference modernist artistic practice and industrial building processes, shown alongside 12 colour photographs, in which we can recognise the materials and the shapes used in the sculptures. The photographs show an enormous area of land on the outskirts of Cape Town, equipped with rudimentary infrastructures and prepared for the construction of houses, established under the aegis of a government programme called Sites and Services. The aim of this programme was to respond to the urgent need for housing and to equip development sites with basic services – electricity, water and sewage systems – in order to house the great waves of migrants, who, violating the ruling apartheid legislation, moved from the countryside into the main urban areas in search for work.

In the installation, Ângela Ferreira is interested in the discourses that articulate minimal art and those that articulate political and global art. The outline and documentation of this specific government programme evoke the formal arrangement of objects within the context of minimal art. The use of building materials in her sculptures is, in turn, reminiscent of modernist practice in general. Ferreira’s deconstructivist practice here becomes a metaphor for the analytical deconstruction of modern art theory. The artist appropriates modernist methods in trying to stimulate awareness of how cultural systems negotiate the concepts of ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’, and the complexities of the ‘original’ and the simulacrum. In Sites and Services Ângela Ferreira is neither interested in documenting just for the sake of documenting, nor in the formal classical exercise of assemblage by using these practices as a means of offering an interface between the political and the aesthetic. The political references in the photographs, along with the formal method of art for art’s sake used by the artist, create new routes of engagement with the audience. J.B.
PORTUGUESE PAVILION – FONDACO MARCELLO

Fondaco Marcello is an exhibition venue located in an historic building in Venice, built in the sixteenth/seventeenth century, which originally served as a warehouse (‘Fondaco’), as its open space interior reveals. It has a total area of 360 m², and the renovation work carried out in 2004/2005 preserved the original brick façades and the spatial characteristics of its interior.

The Fondaco Marcello stands on the banks of the Grand Canal, close to Palazzo Grassi and between Accademia and Rialto bridges, opposite of the San Tomà vaporetto stop.

Portuguese Pavilion – Fondaco Marcello
San Marco 3415 (Calle dei Garzoni), 30124 Venice

The Pavilion can be reached by
– vaporetto 1, Sant’ Angelo
– vaporetto 82, San Samuele
– traghetto from San Tomà to Sant’Angelo
– direct water taxi landing at Pavilion
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VENUE

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