

Press release / communiqué

For immediate release

THE CCA PRESENTS THE SAAL PROCESS: HOUSING IN PORTUGAL 1974–1976.
An exhibition documenting the pioneering experiment that empowered architects and citizens to create housing with a place in the city.

Photographer: Alexandre Alves Costa: View of popular protest for house occupation rights. Ca. 1975.
Photograph courtesy of Alexandre Alves Costa © Alexandre Alves Costa

Montreal, 7 May 2015 – The Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) presents **The SAAL Process: Housing in Portugal 1974–76** from 12 May until 4 October 2015. It is the first major exhibition documenting SAAL, a pioneering political and architectural experiment designed to address extreme housing shortages and degrading living conditions. Named the *Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local* (SAAL), meaning *Local Ambulatory Support Service*, this government initiative deployed architects across Portugal to develop housing solutions that gave the underprivileged a place in the city. Its ambitious and idealistic character reflected the revolutionary spirit following the 1974 coup that ended the authoritarian Estado Novo regime. The newly created democratic government guaranteed financial support to enable a bottom-up social process joining architects with neighbourhood associations and citizens. The architects led technical teams (known as brigades) that designed projects *with* the residents rather than *for* them. SAAL resulted in 170 projects involving more than 40,000 families during its short period of only 26 months.

Forty years after its existence, SAAL remains relevant for expanding the social and political role of the architect, for addressing housing on the scale of the neighbourhood, and for inviting the participation of the buildings' occupants at the beginning of the process. Architects such as **Gonçalo Byrne, Artur Rosa, Álvaro Siza, Fernando Távora** and **Manuel Vicente** played a crucial role in dialogue with the population, developing new models for social housing that reconsidered the status of underprivileged neighbourhoods in the urban areas of Lisbon, Setúbal and Porto. Their work gained international attention at the time and had a deep impact on subsequent projects throughout Europe.

The SAAL Process is curated by Delfim Sardo and is organized by the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, in collaboration with the CCA. The exhibition presents ten specific projects through architectural plans and models, archival documents, recordings and films, as well as contemporary photographs by André Cepeda, José Pedro Cortes, and Daniel Malhão.

CCA Director Mirko Zardini stated, "This exhibition reflects the CCA's growing international network and the resulting opportunities to bring such influential material to North America for the first time. *The SAAL Process* highlights the complex role of an architect, particularly the benefits of hands-on social involvement and political leadership, which is an important lesson to share with a younger generation of architects. In this sense *SAAL* extends the CCA's series of exhibitions that explore a range of contemporary issues in architecture with a specific focus on urban, social, and environmental concerns."

EXHIBITION DESCRIPTION

The ten influential SAAL housing projects presented in the exhibition reflect the diversity of the participatory procedures with residents, and attest to the range of solutions that the architects tried to implement. The revolutionary character of this pioneering process is introduced in the first gallery with historical protest banners hand-painted on fabric or cardboard, featuring slogans such as "Stop Evictions" and "Houses Yes, Shacks No."

The exhibition is organized with the central exhibition galleries serving as an axis to orient the visitor and provide context for the specific projects represented on either side. They feature a chronology of main events between 1974 and '76 that illustrates this frantic time in Portugal when housing was just one of many issues the country was tackling alongside education, colonialism, and changing political and economic models. Vintage posters, photographs, news clippings, textual documents and ephemera, as well as a documentary film, capture the energy and upheaval of this period. The exhibition opens with this historic contextualizing of the SAAL process and the concept of an expanded role of the architect during this revolutionary period. For the architects coordinating the SAAL brigades (a title which purposely bears political resonance) the desire for political participation combined with almost total commitment spawned new discussions on the practice and teaching of architecture, disciplinary autonomy and social responsibility.

The second central gallery introduces SAAL in more detail, outlining the complexity of the process in which each project reflected the varied circumstances and concerns found in the different regions of the country. The main centres of activity were Porto, Lisbon, Setúbal and Algarve. In the northern city of Porto, most projects were in the historical centre and defined by the so-called “ilhas” (slums) – long-established and highly unsanitary working-class neighbourhoods. Here the SAAL interventions allowed for an architectural and civic discussion on “the right to the city” for needy populations. In Lisbon, where the SAAL interventions were much larger in scale, most of the projects favored a singular typology and were centered on the discussions on urban density and how to “make a city” in urban non-sites on the periphery of the capital. In Setúbal, to the south of Lisbon, the SAAL process completely changed the city, producing important changes in the town’s urban planning. And in Algarve, located in the extreme south of Portugal, a large number of SAAL interventions were centered on the participation process and role of self-construction with less weight placed on the architectural issues.

To one side of the central orientation are the galleries dedicated to four SAAL/North projects of Porto: Leal, São Victor, Antas and Miragaia. Porto’s Leal neighbourhood pioneered community association, with resident organization even predating the 1974 revolution. Architect Sérgio Fernandez’s project for Leal was constructed in 1976 and is represented in the exhibition through design drawings, vintage models and a recently-built scale model.

The brigade of Álvaro Siza Vieira carried out two projects, including the featured group of 2 houses built for the São Victor Neighbourhood. His design represents an ethically and politically thought out architectural practice, and maintained the urban fabric of the “ilhas” by integrating new construction in the historic city. It was an important case study that led to Siza Vieira being invited to design projects throughout Europe during the following decade. In addition to a scale model, vintage construction photographs, original drawings and presentation panels, the project is captured in contemporary photographs by André Cepeda that highlight the lasting strength of the architectural thinking.

Pedro Ramalho’s project for the Antas neighbourhood addressed a difficult terrain and incorporated a vernacular character that the residents further appropriated and transformed over time. The site model shows how the original proposal stands in contrast to the urban scale of subsequent construction.

The final Porto project represented is Fernando Távora’s design for Miragaia’s vacant riverside zone. Despite the fact that it was not completed, it is a seminal project reflecting Távora’s knowledge of and sensitivity to both the physical terrain and the social landscape of Porto, presenting a nuanced view of life in an urban space.

The galleries on the opposite side of the central axis are dedicated to SAAL projects in the south of Portugal: Casal das Figueiras in Setúbal; Meia-Praia-Apeadeiro in Algarve; and Quinta de Bacalhau-Monte Coxo, Quinta das Fonsecas-Quinta da Calçada, Curraleira-Embrechados, and Quinta da Bela Flor in Lisbon.

Setúbal's Casal das Figueiras neighbourhood was designed for a fishing community living on an extremely steep slope, with the added challenge of reconciling the community's desire for traditional typology of single-family housing with the need to make a large urban gesture. Architect Gonçalo Byrne solved this with two types of housing and a striking manner of building at low cost on a 36 percent slope. The architect's own slides in the exhibition tell the story of this project, accompanied by contemporary photographs by Daniel Malhão that show the project's longevity.

In Algarve the participatory process of SAAL was met with enthusiasm, and the self-building issues found greater permeability. Architect José Veloso's work in Meia-Praia became iconic due to António da Cunha Telles' 1976 documentary film *Continuar a Viver ou Os Índio da Meia-Para* (Carrying on Living or The Meia-Para Indians). The documentary is projected in the exhibition alongside other video footage, a site model, and contemporary photographs by Pedro Cortes that show the continued use of these homes.

In Lisbon, architect Manuel Vicente developed an ambitious project of housing blocks with 384 homes for the Quinta do Bacalhau-Monte Coxo neighbourhood. Although it was not carried out in full, the intention was to bring the city to the outlying shanty town areas. Vicente's design assigned importance to the façades and access to internal patios that promote community links and qualify the public space.

Quinta das Fonsecas-Quinta da Calçada was similarly scaled and situated in the growing urban sprawl of Lisbon. Although only a small part of the design was realized, it reflects architect Raúl Hestnes Ferreira's clear concern about the modulation of the land, the inclusion of social facilities for the community, as well as the design of the galleries turned towards the communal areas. The design's urbanist thinking and quality is still visible today, as seen in contemporary photographs by José Pedro Cortes, despite being besieged by a tangle of major road networks.

Architects José António Paradela and Luís Gravata Filipe designed a major project intended to resettle 864 families in Lisbon's Curraleira-Embrechados neighbourhood, although only a small part was actually completed. The operation was a catalyst for community involvement still active today. The exhibition includes panels produced by the brigade for an exhibition in 1976, and a full-scale model that reveals the important reconciliation of high density with low building height.

The exhibition concludes by contextualizing the political and social context in which the SAAL process came to an end in 1976. Architect and artist Artur Rosa's project for Quinta da Bela Flor was terminated prematurely, a hard blow to the local brigade and community. It was the subject of subsequent demonstrations, performances and exhibitions. The poetic intensity of Artur Rosa's own performance is captured here in documentary photographs that echo the public mourning of the end of the SAAL process.

EXHIBITION CURATOR

Delfim Sardo (born 1962 in Aveiro, Portugal) is a curator and university lecturer. He is a professor of the College of Arts and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Coimbra. He is also the Chair of the International Association of Art Critics in Portugal. He is the founder and director of Pangloss magazine. Since 1990, he has dedicated himself to curating contemporary art, as well as to writing essays for art publications on art and architecture. He was a consultant of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (1997–2003). He was Commissioner of the Portuguese Representation to the 48th Venice Biennale and was later appointed Director of the Exhibition Centre of Centro Cultural de Belém (2003–2006), in Lisbon. He was the Triennial General Commissioner of the 2010 Lisbon Architecture and was co-commissioner of the Portuguese Representation to the Venice Architecture Biennale that same year.

EXHIBITION DESIGN

The CCA curatorial team worked with Amsterdam-based graphic designer Marc Hollenstein who conceived the graphic design of the installations. His recent and ongoing projects include the visual identity and publications of Kunstverein, Amsterdam, and Grazer Kunstverein. In the field of architecture he has realized projects for Swiss Architecture Museum, Basel, and Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, among others.

RELATED PROGRAMS

The CCA hosts a curator talk with Delfim Sardo in the exhibition galleries on Wednesday **13 May at 6 pm** (in French) and **at 7 pm** (in English). Free admission. Reservation required: 514 939-7026. On Thursday **14 May at 6 pm**, a conversation entitled “SAAL: Architecture or Revolution” between Nuno Portas, Portuguese architect, urbanist and key political figure of the SAAL process and Nuno Grande, researcher on Portas’s academic, architectural and political career. Presented in French. Free admission.

Nuno Portas is Emeritus Professor at the Faculty of Architecture of Oporto, where he founded and directed the Master on Urban Planning and Design of the University of Oporto. He has been a guest lecturer at different Universities in Europe (Paris VIII, Paris XII, Ferrara, Politecnico di Milano) and Latin-America (UF.Rio de Janeiro, U.São Paulo) and a researcher of the National Laboratory of Civil Engineering (LNEC), from 1963 to 1981, where he founded the Department of Architecture, Housing and Urbanism. After 1983, he has followed his researches at the Studies Center on Architecture and Urbanism (CEAU) of the University of Oporto. Nuno Portas was Secretary of State for Housing and Urbanism of the first three governments established after the 1974 Portuguese Revolution.

Nuno Grande is Professor at the Department of Architecture of the University of Coimbra (DARQ/FCTUC) since 1993. He is a researcher at the Social Studies Centre (CES), University of Coimbra. He has been a guest Lecturer at the Faculty of Architecture of Oporto since 2006, at the Urbanistic Master and PhD courses. As a curator he organized exhibitions on



Portuguese Architecture at: Porto 2001, European Capital of Culture; 2007 Lisbon Architectural Triennale; 2007 São Paulo Architectural Biennale; Guimarães 2012, European Capital of Culture; and forthcoming, at La Cité de L'Architecture et du Patrimoine, in Paris (2016).

ABOUT THE SERRALVES MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

The Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art is the foremost museum for contemporary art in Portugal, and one of Europe's most renowned institutions for art and culture. Uniquely sited on the grounds of the Serralves Foundation, which also comprises a Park and the Serralves Villa, a landmark art déco building, the Museum designed by Álvaro Siza Vieira opened in 1999. Through its exhibitions, collection, publications, performing arts, and public programmes, the Museum fosters the understanding and appreciation of contemporary art and culture in Portugal and around the world.

ABOUT THE CCA

In July 2014, Álvaro Siza Vieira decided to donate a large part of his architectural archive to the CCA in order to foster discussion and dialogue in a research-oriented context. He also donated specific project archives to the Fundação Gulbenkian and Fundação de Serralves in Portugal. The CCA is collaborating with these institutions on consistent cataloguing, research and related programming in relation to Siza Vieira and his work. *The SAAL Process* is the first example of this international collaboration among the institutions.

The CCA is an international research centre and museum founded in 1979 on the conviction that architecture is a public concern. Based on its extensive collection, the CCA is a leading voice in advancing knowledge, promoting public understanding, and widening thought and debate on architecture, its history, theory, practice and role in society today. The CCA offers a unique environment dedicated to the study and presentation of architectural thought and practice, where the work of **Álvaro Siza Vieira** can now be studied in the context of the other existing international archives of **Peter Eisenman, Ábalos & Herreros, Arthur Erickson, Foreign Office Architects, Gordon-Matta Clark, Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, John Hejduk, Pierre Jeanneret, Cedric Price, Victor Prus, Aldo Rossi,** and **James Stirling**.

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Source:

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