



Porfirio Pardal Monteiro, Diário de Notícias Building, Lisbon, Portugal, 1936. © Mário Novais, PMA archive.

Porfírio Pardal Monteiro and the Global Design

BY JOÃO PARDAL MONTEIRO

The search for the concept and the practise of a “total project” or “global project” in architecture, in the sense of the project that integrates various artistic and technical disciplines and which reflects itself as a coherent and constructed whole, are the guiding principles to explore the relationship of architecture with works of art and with other diversified technical fields, in reference to the “total work of art” concept.

The architectural concept that Porfírio Pardal Monteiro (1897–1957) will come to defend, revolves around the integration of the various fields of engineering and the integration of the plastic arts, assuming that architecture ceases to exist without the interaction of those two domains. A third domain can be added to these two, which is that of industrial (or product) and furniture design.

The search for the concept and the practise of overall design or overall design in architecture, in the sense of design incorporating various artistic disciplines and techniques, and which is reflected in a coherent building, is a long story, featuring Porfírio Pardal Monteiro (1897–1957), which dates back to 1919, at the beginning of his career. An architect of the modernist generation, Pardal Monteiro was among the most active between the 1920s and 1940s, not limiting his actions to the design and execution of construction projects, but also teaching and searching for the principles for understanding, rationalizing concepts and for ways of thinking about architecture.

For the architect, design is a global study of the object to be built, including the entirety of its integrated construction and artistic components. So, Pardal Monteiro explored the relationship between architecture and works of art, furniture and the various technical engineering specialties, using as reference the concept of an overall construction. When we look across Pardal Monteiro’s work within the political and social context, we find that, although he has a reference guideline in the way of thinking about architecture, which always accompanies him, he has made design choices and explored fairly different paths and languages over the years.

However, when we organize his works by type, we are driven by interpretation. In educational and cultural projects, we find as design principles the classical spirit and a certain desire for monumentality, together with an idea of functionalism. At the other end of this spectrum, the building designs linked to the automotive or the manufacturing sector are an expression of great rationality, in the concept underlying the type of use, which leads us to think about the concept of the workshop as machine, which is highly modern.

Pardal Monteiro tried and applied different languages, depending on the type of intervention concerned including, of course, designs of a clear monumental tendency which were highly convenient for the prevailing ideology. The

concept of architecture that Pardal Monteiro came to advocate revolves around the integration of the various branches of engineering specialties, and the integration of the arts, even assuming it cannot “exist” without a strong interconnection with these two areas. To these two fields of knowledge we can add a third, that of object design and furniture.

Born in 1897 in Pêro-Pinheiro, Sintra, into a family involved in the marble and stonework industry, Porfírio Pardal Monteiro received informal training in the field of construction and in its scope. From a very early stage, he was able to come into close contact with construction materials, techniques and processes, and to benefit from the interaction with the architects that made use, very often, of his father’s company’s services. Later, in an academic context, at the School of Fine Arts, he had the opportunity to interact with the masters of the generation who had seen the turn of the century, namely with Ventura Terra (1866–1919) and José Luís Monteiro (1848–1942).

At the end of the 19th century, Portuguese architecture was highly influenced by a revivalism and an eclecticism of romantic inspiration. During this period, many of the buildings emerging in the avenues of Lisbon showed a major investment in façade design, which valued the classical component, the *beaux-arts*.

His early works are quite varied, the palace in *Alto de Santo Amaro*, and simultaneously the *Caixa Geral de Depósitos* [Portuguese state-owned bank] branches and Lisbon’s Adventist temple, all strongly influenced by the more classical language of the *beaux-arts*. In 1920, he designed the Rau building, a residential building on *República Avenue* and it was with this construction project, tenuously more polished than his previous ones, that he won his first *Valmor Award*, the highest accolade for Lisbon architecture.

In 1923, Porfírio, commissioned by the *Caixa Geral de Depósitos*, undertook his first trip abroad to study banking facilities and bank equipment. Pardal Monteiro travelled

quite considerably, for personal enjoyment, and due to his professional consciousness, where each new construction project justified a trip to see the best of what was around, to technically evaluate and criticize the solutions, often traveling out of pure curiosity and the constant need to be up-to-date. In 1923, in Italy he dove into the universe of classical culture, visiting the cities of Florence, Rome, Naples, Pompeii, Pisa and Geneva¹.

In 1924, still influenced by the classics, he designed, among other projects, the Project for Lisbon's Olympic Stadium, which was never built. In 1925, he visited the *Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris — an absolutely decisive event, which imposed a new direction on his architectural line. At the exhibition he found, in tandem with Mallet-Stevens' *Art Déco*, the modernists, Le Corbusier with the *Esprit Nouveau* pavilion and Konstantin Melnikov's Russian pavilion, all of them with a new, completely polished image.

He continued to make frequent trips, and established personal relationships with Auguste Perret (1874-1954) in Paris, where in 1930 the magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (AA) was launched, which brought together the architects of the new generation and for which Pardal Monteiro became Portugal's correspondent. His friendship with Pierre Vago (1910-2002), chief editor of AA since its inception, as well as founder in 1932 of *Réunions Internationales d'Architectes* (International Meetings of Architects – RIA), the current International Union of Architects (UIA), was an important link to Europe and to the internationalization of the architect². Also during this time, he established a friendship with Alfred Agache (1875-1959), with whom Duarte Pacheco (1900-1943) established contact through Porfirio.³ When this city planner travelled to Portugal, his workplace was in the Porfirio's studio⁴, on official missions, for the awarding of scholarships or participation in congresses, he made countless trips to European cities between 1923 and 1948. We highlight Porfirio Pardal Monteiro's trip to London where, in September 1946, with Vago, Sir Patrick Abercrombie (1879-1957), E. Goldfinger and Perret, what is to this day still the most important organization for architects worldwide — the International Union of Architects (UIA), was created at the Royal Institute of British Architects. In 1953, he was tasked with the responsibility of organizing the *Congress of the International Union of Architects in Lisbon*. In 1939-45, during the Nazi occupation, to avoid censorship or closure of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (AA) the magazine was based in Portugal, in Porfirio's atelier.

From 1927 onward, Pardal Monteiro met Engineer Duarte Pacheco and began his extensive career in public works, with the projects for the *Instituto Superior Técnico* (IST, 1929), and Statistics Portugal Building (INE, 1931), among others. From 1933, Salazar launched his "Economic Reconstitution Plan", and Duarte Pacheco, in the role of Minister of Public Works and Communications, was at the centre of the complete reorganization of the territory and its public equipment, resulting in great public exposure for this architect.

When we are presented with a cross-section of Pardal Monteiro's work, we note that while there is a reference line and an architectural way of thinking that always accom-

panied him, he makes design options and explores different paths and languages throughout the years. The image of the IST, for example, is completely different from that of *Ford Lusitana's* pavilion (1929) or the Ritz Hotel (1956). A Vitruvian rationality dictates a composition around a central axis and a dominant symmetry, this is present both at the IST and INE, and in the University City. In all these cases we find an avenue of great visual effect. The final design of Lisbon's University City, concluded in the post-war period, is subjected to an update to its architectural language, causing it to move away from the IST, and to move aesthetically closer to the National Library (1961), which was created during this time period as if it were part of the same set of buildings. In this same classical spirit, marked by a desire for monumentality, together with an idea of functionalism, the main building of the National Laboratory of Civil Engineering (1949) was designed, a structure linked to science and research. But, the harbour stations at *Rocha do Conde de Óbidos* (1934) and *Alcântara*, adopted a more cosmopolitan, less overwhelming scale and a more humanist character. Here we are presented with buildings that are intended for the purposes of commercial and tourist activities. In religious architecture – the design for the Olivais seminary and the Church of Our Lady of Fatima (1938) – Pardal Monteiro opted for solutions with an architectural language that came about as a result of the IST and the INE: buildings consisting of a main volume with two sections of interrupted symmetry. The hotels are always subject to a composition that focuses on functionality and modernity. Porfirio sought specialists in the technical areas of ventilation, air-conditioning and acoustics among others, in order to solve the technical problems in an innovative way. It all clearly translates into a pure modernist aesthetic, supported by a building structurally based on nothing but reinforced concrete.

Like other architects of his generation, on his study trips abroad, where he came into contact with the most diverse influences⁵, Porfirio Pardal Monteiro was committed to investing in an innovative image, and increasingly became an advocate for the importance of functionality in architectural options. This interest and commitment that Pardal Monteiro gave to functionality and the technical quality of the architecture resulted in special attention being given to the specialties of several engineering branches, and he increasingly incorporated these in his projects, taking into account their needs and specificities right from the inception of the architectural object. Finally, the designs for industrial buildings are created in a perfectly rationalist manner, with the entire distribution determining the program and allowing monumentality, patent in other buildings by the architect, to be transformed into highly modern monumentality in the language of the building as machine intended for these functions.

Around this time, and given that the Portuguese artistic milieu was not very large, architects and artists articulated themselves episodically at common activities, such as the *Salon des Indépendants*, in 1930. This initiative, which was carried out at the National Society of Fine Arts, brought together various artists from all areas, from painters and sculptors to photographers and designers, and also

01 Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, *Instituto Superior Técnico* central pavilion, Lisbon, Portugal, 1929. © Mário Novais, PMA archive.

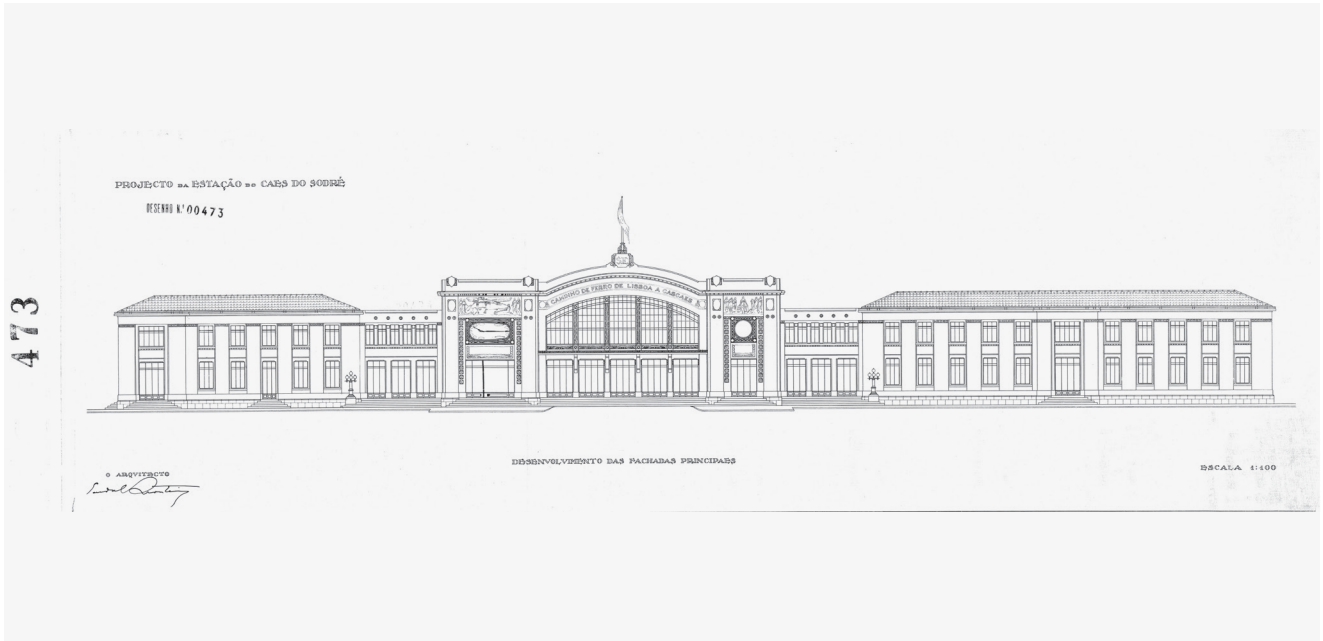


02 Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, Felix Ribeiro Lopes building, Lisbon, Portugal, 1929. © Mário Novais, PMA archive.



03 Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, *Alcântara* maritime station, Lisbon, Portugal, 1945-1948. © Arquivo Nacional de Fotografia.

04 Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, *Cais do Sodré* station, Lisbon, Portugal, 1926, façades. © CP archive.



05 Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, *Sociedade Ford Lusitana*, Lisbon, Portugal, 1929. © Mário Novais, PMA archive.



06 Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, Ritz Hotel, Lisbon, Portugal, 1956. © SIPA archive.



07 Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, *Instituto Superior Técnico* central pavilion, Lisbon, Portugal, 1929. © Mário Novais, PMA archive.



08 Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, *Statistics Portugal* building (INE), Lisbon, Portugal, 1931, directorate office. © Mário Novais, PMA archive.



architects who presented their work there. The exhibition was an outstanding event at the time, as an affirmation of modernity in Portugal⁵, and was a good demonstration of the affinities and interconnections between the artists who saw themselves reflected in this aesthetic currents. However, Pardal Monteiro would go on to forge professional connections and joint work practises, far beyond personal relationships and the mere exchange of opinions. His relationship with Almada Negreiros (1893–1970) would become the most important and best expression of a way of working that took into account the intervention of the artist from the beginning of the process. It is around these two areas – the incorporation of the specialties of some engineering branches, and the inclusion of the fine arts – that Porfírio Pardal Monteiro went on to defend his architectural design, stating at different times that it cannot go without a strong interconnection with these two fields. To these two fields we can add a third, that of object design and furniture.

This concept of architecture was, as can be understood from his words, very connected with a modern approach, since it was in modern times that the number and complexity of technical features increased exponentially. But this complexity makes the architect's role much more demanding, where he is no longer the person responsible for the outer surface, and becomes, in his own word, the author of an "overall conception":

Only in Portugal have we linked Architecture to the idea of the facade, the skin, the outer surface of the built part. This is a mistake that many people make in our country, almost always due to ignorance and sometimes because of convenience.

Architectural work is the complete conception of the problem, it is the set, the imagined construction, designed, in short, from a whole just as in a partition, a musical composition, it adheres to an idea, one of harmony, susceptible of attaining a result that will provoke emotion. And it is this emotional result achieved at the expense of the power of imagination that makes architecture first among the fine arts⁶.

This concern with functionality and technical quality is present from the beginning of his professional career. His interest for new materials and construction techniques that the 1920s and 1930s placed at the disposal of architecture, and his fascination with the possibilities for attaining levels of comfort and efficiency for the buildings, which matched the modernity of the century, led him to foster a relationship based on respect and cooperation, which was naturally driven by his position as a lecturer at the IST. At the same time, his way of thinking about art in architecture prompted him to develop a way of working with artists based on a collaboration rationale in which the architect allowed and valued their autonomy as creators. The works of art produced based on this model inhabit architecture as its natural abode.

The personal relationship that he established with artists, including with his employees, is not a cause but rather a corollary, an inevitable result, of this model of deep professional understanding. His understanding of architecture is closely linked to his relationship with fine artists, and it is not conceived without the furniture design forming an integral part thereof. In fact, this concept is very close to the one developed by modernist architects, his contemporaries. All the furniture that he designs is related to the architecture and in some cases with lines that are more radically modernist.

In 1957, at the height of his life, he passed away and it was his team of young architects who concluded his extensive work in progress, University City, the National Library and the Tivoli and Ritz hotels in Lisbon notable among them. A constantly growing body of work, drastically interrupted, during an important phase of aesthetic maturation.

Notes

- 1 Ana Tostões, *Pardal Monteiro. Fotobiografias Século XX*, Lisboa, Círculo de Leitores, 2009, 73.
- 2 *Idem.*, 74.
- 3 Ana Assis Pacheco, *Porfírio Pardal Monteiro /1897–1957. A Obra do Arquitecto*, Lisboa, [s.n.], 1998, 75.
- 4 João Vieira Caldas, *Porfírio Pardal Monteiro – Arquitecto*, Lisboa, Associação dos Arquitectos Portugueses, 1997, 64.
- 5 Madalena Matos, Tânia Ramos, "Lúcio Costa, Raul Lino e Carlos Ramos. *Convergências e Divergências de Percursos*", *Artitextos*, Lisboa, Centro Editorial da Faculdade de Arquitectura, n. 4, 2007, 87.
- 6 Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, *Discurso proferido por ocasião da sessão de homenagem* [Typed document from the PMA Estate], 1938, 13.

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