

Modern Architecture in Africa: Angola and Mozambique

Edited by Ana Tostões
 Publisher: Caleidoscópico
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The book *Modern Architecture in Africa: Angola and Mozambique*, edited by Ana Tostões, adds an important piece to the puzzle of Africa's 20th century architectural history. The book offers a wealth of information on the great architectural achievements in Lusophone Africa during the years between World War 2 and Independence in 1975.

The work is built up around the results of a documentation project on Modern Architecture in Angola and Mozambique. In the book, there is a selection of 25 case studies of individual buildings in Luanda, Lobito, Huambo in Angola, and Maputo, Quelimane, Beira, Chimoyo, and Porto Amélia in Mozambique, as well as one case study on the residential neighborhood of Prenda in Luanda. These cases were studied by various scholars and students of the team through archival research and meticulously redrawn through desktop and field studies by students under the guidance of Vincenzo Riso. Redrawing, as Riso offers, is more than just recording technicalities; the redrawing goes "(...)" through the knowledge of the correspondent design process "(...)" (p. 20) whilst remembering "(...)" that every architectural culture has always adopted its own communication codes, both at the level of interpersonal relationships and at the level of representational and symbolic values." (p. 18). The crisp "computerized" drawings in the book however come close to a true neutral representation.

Further exchange on the "reuse" of the Modern, through identification, documentation and preservation, took place during a workshop conducted by Maria Manuel Oliveira in Maputo in 2012. This workshop

focused on the analytical methodologies and heritage issues in Africa.

The documentation of the cases has been complemented by an annotated and illustrated chronology of the study period (1942–1975) by Ana Tostões and Zara Ferreira, a section with twenty biographies of the key architects by Jessica Bonito and Elisiário Miranda and an invaluable bibliography.

The editorial chapter "Looking both Sides — A Lab on Architecture between Globalism and Localism" is to be seen as the concluding analysis of the work executed by the team set into the broader political and cultural context of its time.

The book is, as stated above, an important contribution to the groundwork that is currently being undertaken to unveil the rich history of modern architecture in Africa. The notion "modern architecture" in this perspective is to be read as "architecture of the Modern Movement of European origin in Africa"; other modern architecture(s) of different origin do not form part of this study.

At the same moment that this work has seen the light, a book on another piece of the puzzle was published by Maristella Casciato and Tom Avermaete: *Casablanca Chandigarh — a Report on Modernization*² which builds up in a similar rich and layered fashion as Tostões' publication, but this time on the British and French axes crossing paths in Africa and India.

An even broader picture, bringing together modern projects in Africa originated from the Global North — Germany, France, Italy, Poland, the United Kingdom, Portugal, the United States of America and others — has been on display at the Triennial of Milan last year³ and covered by the publication *Africa Big Change Big Chance*, edited by Benno Albrecht.

All these works together initiate a mind map of the Modern Movement in Africa within the world, one that consists of long haul connections of individuals — architects, planners, politicians, artists, administrators and other heroes — that have stood at the base of the most unexpected but often incredibly rich monuments of 20th century architecture in Africa.

Modern Architecture in Africa: Angola and Mozambique arguably touches upon possibly the richest collection of post-war modern architecture on the African continent, and Tostões' editorial essay "Looking both Sides — A Lab on Architecture between Globalism and Localism" touches upon a number of crucial issues.

The first, and possibly prickliest issue is the undeniable link between the architecture of

the Modern Movement and colonialism. Luis Lage and Júlio Carrilho, eminent scholars at the University of Maputo, write in their preface "More than a View" about the unfinished business in the former Portuguese colonies. After all, it is just 40 years since Mozambique and Angola gained independence, and the ensuing civil wars and meddling of Cold War interests has been concluded only a few decades ago.

Tostões states that there existed an intrinsic paradox between "(...) Modern Movement architecture [that] contains within the pulsion of an ideological statement of freedom and democratic principles" (p. 65), and the colonial state, which is in principle based on oppression. Yet this paradox was not as such seen as a problem in its time, as the majority of African countries that gained independence between the middle 1950s and early 1960s, seamlessly adopted Modern Movement architecture for the realization of their planning and building projects. However, the situation in the Portuguese colonies in Africa differed considerably from the former colonies, protectorates and mandate territories ruled by the French and the British. Firstly, because they gained independence only in 1975, around the time of the demise of the Modern Movement, and secondly because the Modern Movement was a deliberate reaction to, and escape from, the totalitarian Estado Novo regime of Salazar in the motherland.

Hence, again, it was not so much a perceived paradox between colonial oppression and the democratic intentions of the Modern Movement, but a combination of an internal Portuguese political striving and the global development in the field of architectural principles that defined the position of Modern Movement architecture in Angola and Mozambique.

As Tostões puts it "(...) the African colonies in the southern hemisphere were geographically remote from the repressive control of the metropolis, on the other hand, these territories also constituted a new world, in which the size and need for development promoted a wide range of experimentation and innovation in the field [of] planning and construction. Finally, the lexicon of the architecture of the Modern Movement spurred a creative response and especially suited to respond to the climate and tropical environment" (p. 80). In this statement, Tostões touches upon the second and third crucial issues on the adventures of the Modern Movement in Africa: Africa as a laboratory of the Modern Movement and the issue of Tropicalism.

That Africa was a laboratory or playground of the Modern Movement is a commonly understood and agreed fact, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew already spoke of the freedom of the architect in Africa in 1956, for them it was a “breath of fresh air” after working in the “claustrophobic culture” of England.⁴

The issue of Tropicalism in relation to the architectural development of the 20th century is an important angle which was introduced by Alexander Tzonis in his book *Tropical Architecture: Critical Regionalism in the Age of Globalization* in 2001⁵. Tzonis proposes a lateral development and cross-fertilization in modern architecture along the Equator, independent from the domination of the Global North. In Tzonis’ book, this development excludes Africa, for the time being, because Tostões convincingly shows the importance of the relationship between Brazil and Lusophone Africa. Similar relationships, often hinged on personal careers, existed between Brazil and Algeria, through Oscar Niemeyer, between India and Tanzania, through Anthony Almeida and between Ghana and Chandigarh, through Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew.

An eye opener in this respect is Tostões report on the 1st International Congress of African Culture that was held in Salisbury (Harare) in 1961, attended by great names such as William Fagg, Udo Kultermann and Tristan Tzara. This must have been an amazing gathering at that point in time, the first of its kind, in the midst of the great wave of independence yet still within the firm bounds of colonial Africa, as the conference was dominated by the Global North and by African countries that had to wait many years to become independent (Mozambique, 1975, and Zimbabwe, 1980). Next to the organizer of the conference, the Briton Frank McEwen, who was a great promoter of African Art, it was Pancho Guedes⁶ who stole the show in Salisbury.

And it is with Pancho Guedes that we come to possibly the greatest representative of the Modern Movement in Africa. If any architect of European descent may claim that he has been able to escape from the Eurocentric focus that dominated the architectural scene in Africa throughout the whole 20th century, it is Pancho Guedes. As Tostões states, it was Guedes’ creative and intellectual geniality that stood at the base of both a remarkable and highly original opus within the Modern Movement and a sharp critical position within the theoretical deadlock the architectural debate had landed in during the post-war years. Both opus and critical position are truly influenced by African thought and practise, not in the least through the work and thinking of the famous Mozambican artist Malangatana

Ngwenya (1936–2011). Udo Kultermann initially thought little of modern architecture in Portuguese Africa, and he disqualified the work of Pancho Guedes as “(...) a ridiculously exaggerated form of the European Jugendstil”, but in his later work he rehabilitated Guedes and extensively quoted him in his views on the future development of African identity in Modern Architecture. Guedes was connected to Team 10 and met with the Smithsons and Aldo Van Eyck. Inspiration of Structuralist architecture in the Netherlands, as known, is to be found in the Maghreb, or even in the Dogon Valley in Mali, but also the resemblance between the 1958 Pyramidal Kindergarten in Maputo by Pancho Guedes and the 1960 Orphanage in Amsterdam by Aldo van Eyck cannot be coincidental.

In addition to Pancho Guedes, a range of other great architects are included in *Modern Architecture in Africa: Angola and Mozambique*. Vasco Vieira da Costa designed and realized a number of fantastically original buildings in Angola that introduced both new typologies and early examples of Brutalism. Alberto Soeiro’s TAP Montepio building from 1955 is an artistic tour de force and one of the earliest examples of the specifically Maputo typology of multi-purpose tower blocks with a public commercial plinth, offices, apartments and roof garden.

A most interesting example of Corbusian’ urban design is the Prenda Neighborhood Unit in Luanda by Fernão Simões de Carvalho from 1963. Urban planning and design in Portuguese Africa is possibly a further topic by the authors...

The making of Prenda by Simões and his team is comparable to the history of Carrières Centrales in Casablanca by Michel Ecochard and his Corbusian team consisting of Candilis, Woods and others⁸, and it would be interesting to not only compare the original plans and execution but also the appropriation and (informal) adaptations that consecutively took place in both neighborhoods.

The contemporary use and economic value of buildings of the Modern Movement in Africa is crucial for the fourth and last main issue tackled in Tostões’ “Looking both sides — A Lab on Architecture between Globalism and Localism”.

Tostões states that the buildings of the Modern Movement have so far proven to be robust and resilient through time, which is probably more due to the lack of means to replace old buildings than with being well-adapted to the local climate as suggested by the author. But be it as it may, in the current economic boom in Africa, many great monuments of the Modern Movement are endangered. For Vieira’s Municipal Market of Kinaxixe in Luanda it is already too late, which is a great loss.

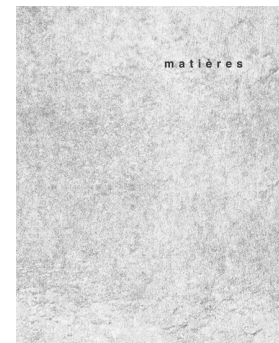
Certainly, listing these buildings would be the ideal situation, but in order to achieve that, the local awareness of the value of this architecture needs to be enhanced. Everything turns on “ownership”, and as the Eritrean architect Naigzy Gebremedhin stated in the case of the Italian Modernist heritage of Asmara: the citizen of Asmara had no argument with the buildings, as they had built them with their own hands.⁹

Dr. Antoni Folkers

Notes

- 1 With the exception of São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau
- 2 Tom Avermaete and Maristella Casciato, *Casablanca Chandigarh — a Report on Modernization*, Chicago Park Books, 2014.
- 3 And consecutively exhibited at the architectural school La Cambre in Brussels.
- 4 Maxwell Fry and Jane, Drew *Tropical Architecture in the Humid Zone*, London, B.T. Batsford, 1956, p. 19–20.
- 5 Alexander Tzonis (et al.), *Tropical Architecture: Critical Regionalism in the Age of Globalization*, Chichester, Wiley-Academy, 2001.
- 6 Amâncio d’Alpoim Miranda Guedes.
- 7 Udo Kultermann, *New Architecture in Africa*, New York, Universe Books, 1963, p. 20.
- 8 See Avermaete, 2014.
- 9 Naigzy Gebremedhin, “Africa’s Secret Modernist City”, *African Perspectives*, Delft University of Technology, 2007.

Research project website eww.ist.utl.pt



Matières No. 11
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Whether it is an analysis of the “displacement” in the work of the Smithsons in the 1960s, a reflection on the role attributed to

the Pop Art duet Venturi / Scott Brown, a look at the influence of the postmodern spirit of the Venice Biennale of 1980, a speculation on the role of the central core in the transition of the open plan to the flexible plan, the review of the different moments that have marked the Swedish architecture of the first half of the 20th century, an investigation of the relationship between architecture and natural forms in the contemporary context, or even questioning the complex relationships between organicism and picturesque both detected in several current works, all the contributions presented in this eleventh issue of *Matières* are interested in the concept of transition. Transition: therefore, this term refers to a specific moment where a drawing, a text, a reference or a significant event, generates an inflection in the work of an artist or of an architect, an inflection that is characterized by the emergence, not necessarily yet fully certified, of new linguistic, stylistic (or other) principles, that are going to be affirmed afterwards.

Translated publisher's notes.



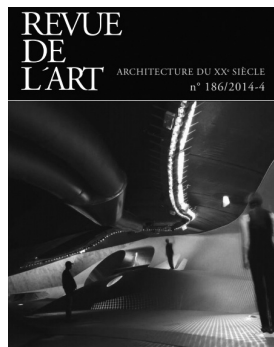
Robert Mallet-Stevens
Agir pour l'Architecture Modern

Edited by Richard Klein
 Publisher: Éditions du Patrimoine/ Centre des Monuments Nationaux
 ISBN: 978-2-7577-0289-5
 Language: French
 Year: 2014

Robert Mallet-Stevens (1886–1945) was one of the main protagonists of the renovation of architecture and the decorative arts in France. Author of major buildings such as Villa Noailles in Hyères, Villa Cavrois in Croix and the houses in the street named after him in Paris, he was also an inexhaustible host of the modern scene. This book offers a new perspective on Mallet-Stevens emphasizing the plurality of his activities. The image of the dandy has indeed overshadowed the worker figure: Mallet-Stevens writes a lot, re-

news architecture through drawings, designs film sets and multiple storefronts; he exhibits ephemeral buildings regularly, he teaches and, in the UAM (Union des Artistes Modernes), Mallet-Stevens aims to democratize modern decorative arts. This study regains his stature as a creator and does not neglect any of his contributions.

Translated publisher's notes.



Revue de l'Art — No. 186/2014–4
Architecture du XXe Siècle
(Architecture of the 20th Century)

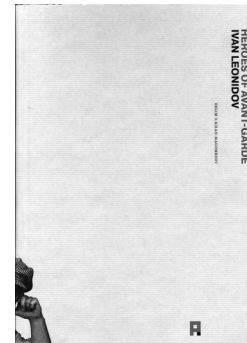
Edited by Richard Klein and Bernard Toulier
 Publisher: Ophrys
 ISBN: 978-2-7080-1407-7
 Language: French
 Year: 2014

This issue of *Revue de l'Art* is, for the first time, exclusively devoted to the architecture of the 20th century, taking a closer look at the modern architectural legacy. This array of articles aims to stimulate the debate and reflection on modernity, attracting the public's attention to the importance of rapid political change that protects buildings and urban ensembles of interest as “archaeological sets”, preventing them from vanishing. The aesthetic, social and technical contributions of the architecture of the 20th century are still substantially unknown or at least undervalued, so it is of utmost importance to promote the value of this heritage for its preservation and also to encourage the complementarity between the architecture's documentary evidence and physical reality.

Furthermore, the editors Richard Klein and Bernard Toulier draw our attention to the very notion of heritage, still tied to the aesthetic values of the traditional monument, which has been claiming to readjust its outlines since the full renovation of urbanism and architectural forms, particularly after the second half of the 20th century. The relevance of the art history approach and methods to learn contemporary architecture is also questioned, in order to open perspectives on the subject. Architecture,

history and heritage are, therefore, the key concepts epitomized in this edition of *Revue de l'Art*.

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Ivan Leonidov
Heroes of Avant-garde

Edited by Selim O. Khan-Magomedov
 Publisher: Sergey Gordeev, Russian Avant-Garde Foundation
 ISBN: 978-5-91566-045-7
 Language: English/Russian
 Year: 2011

This monograph, edited by S. O. Khan-Magomedov, an architectural academic, is devoted to the life and art of Ivan Leonidov (1902-1959), a Russian architect who was a representative of the Russian avant-garde and Constructivism, an expert of “paper” architecture.

The book describes the creative work of Leonidov who was one of the most influential Soviet architects of the early 20th century who, as the leader of the young galaxy of Constructivists, made an enormous contribution to forming the architectural artistic Avant-garde.

From the publisher.