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CONTRADICTIONS OF THE ESTADO NOVO IN THE MODERNISATION OF PORTUGAL: DESIGN AND DESIGNERS IN THE 1940'S AND 50'S

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ABSTRACT

The period of Portuguese history known as the Estado Novo (1933-1974) presents a series of contradictions as regards the directives issued, possibly resulting from a lack of political cohesion. Considering the dichotomy between modernization and tradition that existed between the 1940s and '50s, and the obvious validity of the government's actions, this paper aims to demonstrate the contradictory attitudes towards the modernization of the country via different routes, highlighting the role of 'designers' as silent interlocutors and agents of change in this process. Various documents are analysed, some published under the auspices of the Estado Novo, others in the public sphere, in order to reveal the various partnerships that were in operation and the contrasting attitudes towards the government at the time. Other activities taking place in the period are also analysed, both those arising from state initiatives and others that were antithetical to it. The paper reveals the need to break with the political power in order to promote artistic and cultural interests, and describes initiatives designed to promote industry in the country, some launched by the Estado Novo, others by companies. It focuses upon the teaching of art, which later gave rise to the teaching of design, and on the presence of other institutions and organizations that contributed to the modernization of Portugal, in some cases by mounting exhibitions in Portugal and abroad, as well as other artistic activities such as graphic design, product design and interior decoration, referring to the respective designers, artefacts and spaces.

The aim is to contribute to the knowledge of the history of design in Portugal in the period considered, thereby furthering future research.

Keywords

Estado Novo, History of Design, Portuguese Designers, Modernization, Industry

INTRODUCTION

Given Portugal's integration into the European context and the period covered by this article, it is pertinent to attempt to demonstrate the variants and conditions that arose in the context of Portuguese fascism. Portugal is usually considered to be a peripheral country, because of its geographic location and technological underdevelopment, particularly compared to the levels of industrialization in other countries. Although its geographic location actually allowed it to achieve a certain status globally during the period of the Discoveries (16th to 18th centuries), it subsequently suffered noticeable decline, with a general lack of dynamism and weak investment in innovation, which prevented it from keeping up with the discoveries and inventions that occurred internationally.

Imbued with this spirit, the regime known as the Estado Novo, which came to power in 1933, further contaminated the political and economic situation that it had inherited by cultivating a backward-looking philosophy of 'being Portuguese', which led to further stagnation and cultural decline. However, while this attitude took root amongst politicians and some ordinary Portuguese, there also seems to have existed another force that operated against this inertia and stagnation. Awareness of the situation gradually developed in two different domains. Though the political power initially seemed to want to counter this inactivity, it ended up perpetuating the passivity with its nostalgia for past glory. However, on another front, there was also a sense in the public sphere that a more operative change was required than could be enunciated by the Portuguese government. This article traces the various forms of operationalization manifested by different participants in the 1940s and '50s by examining the different activities that developed out of the awareness of the political and economic problems afflicting the country. With relation to the markets, Portuguese companies tried to boost their value and importance in the national context by reinforcing their international status wherever possible. Connected to this question, the different actors operating in the field of design, though they were not yet called 'designers', struggled to find a means of subsistence by remaining dynamic in their activity so as to guarantee their presence in national and sometimes international contexts.

The paper focuses upon the 1940s and '50s, as these decades are considered to be the antecedents, promoters and forerunners of the understanding and valuing of design in Portugal. Diachronically, these periods consistently illustrate the scenario of development as regards the initiatives taken both by the *Estado Novo* and by various other bodies, whether connected to the regime or not, as well as by

others that were trying to survive in the national panorama, like companies, or the artists/designers themselves, who followed their creative instinct as a form of subsistence in this scenario, maintaining varying degrees of proximity to the political power.

1940s: CONSOLIDATION OF THE RUSTIC STYLE AND "GOOD TASTE"

In an attempt to consolidate everything that it represented, the Estado Novo, in the 1940s, made a considerable effort to implement its policies in two distinct areas. On the one hand, it disseminated the notion of a modernized country, while at the same time actually distancing itself from that idea by cultivating a sense of continuity with the past. Awareness of the importance of national identity was expressed particularly by focusing on the glorious moments of Portuguese history, and using the heroes and important figures to nourish the political imaginary¹. Portugal's neutrality in the 2nd World War emphasised the glorification of these great historical deeds. The Portuguese World Exhibition (1940) was oriented around this idea², not only because of the theme chosen, but also because it served as an instrument of political propaganda. Various artists and architects were involved in the construction of the pavilions, decoration of interiors and communication of the event. The result of this exhibition reveals the sobriety imposed by the programme of the *Estado Novo* together with a whole historical iconography, which was subtly offset by means of 'modernizing' elements created aesthetically by architects and artists. In parallel, public taste was disciplined, both through the bolder solutions of the pavilions and their interior decoration, and by the miscegenation of history, memory, traditions or even modernizations that the regime sought to keep alive³. This image of the nation is present in a special edition of the Spanish magazine Fotos ([1940]) in homage to Portugal, edited by a Spaniard and a Portuguese. This publication shows how the State publicized its actions. On the level of industry, photographs reveal industrial poverty, as in the case of one illustrating an article entitled "La industria de los lanifícios de Portugal" ('The wool industry of Portugal'), which depicts only sheep, with a marked absence of industrial machinery. The same thing occurs in another article about "Mundet & Cia. Lda. Seixal Portugal" where almost half the article is devoted to the social actions of the founder, showing photographs of crèches that he founded for children. The magazine mentions other subjects, such as the number of buildings constructed for various purposes, the building of roads, the publicity of tourist areas and the Portuguese World Exhibition, with the rest of the photographs and some articles illustrating traditions and historical buildings. However, in the article about the Porto Industrial Association, which seems to cover the whole industrial output existing in the period (Fig. 1), the role of artists or designers, in designing the various pieces in the examples used, is by no means clear.



Fig. 1. Interior of room with showcases displaying products of the Porto Industrial Association

All the objects found on the 1st floor of this institution seem to be exhaustively listed, making a total of 86 types of articles. They include:

(...) pottery, porcelain and electrical items (...) bicycle tyres and retreated tyres, soaps, perfumes; tinned sardines and tuna (...), glassware and crystals, ovenware; chromed articles; silverware and filigree; rubber articles; stationery and office materials; bookbinding; lithography; metallic taps; (...) pruning shears in malleable iron; aluminium tableware; (...) metal household utensils; (...) iron and steel tubes for furniture (...). All furniture and silk adornments are produced by Portuguese industry" (Fotos, 1940, [s.p.]).

This list suggests that, despite the range of examples, the industry in question must have been somewhat small, without the kind of national and international projection that might be expected. Perhaps because of this, we do not know who designed these artefacts or their packaging; indeed, it is possible that the workers themselves might have been responsible for it, responding to the demands of the company in which they worked. In this period, artists that worked in the manufacturing sector were not very highly valued, which is perhaps why they tended to comply with the solicitations of the regime. But while the marriage between the political power and artists was solid at the start of the period, by the mid-1940s, the first signs were felt of a rupture that gradually affected not only the dictatorship but also the public sphere.

This is perceptible in an anonymous campaign poster entitled "Artists! Intellectuals" (1945), which announces a series of cultural initiatives and denounces the disaffection of artists towards the political power: "A whole work of renovation and revelation of values which artists have taken advantage of, including some that today proclaim themselves enemies of the *Estado Novo*" (Barbosa, 2014, p. 254).

According to Carneiro (2001), similar symptoms were being manifested in actions promoted by the political opposition which gradually gained strength and supporters, ultimately leading to the Revolution of 1974. In this system, which was becoming increasingly unstable, we can see that the policies of the state continued to carry out political propaganda through various channels. The magazine *Panorama*⁴ (1941-1974) was a case in point. As a publication overseen by the regime, it not only promoted art

and tourism, but also divulged the exhibitions organized by the Secretariat for National Propaganda (SPN) (1933-1944) and later by the National Secretariat for Information, Popular Culture and Tourism of Portugal (1944-1974). This magazine also published articles that could serve the interests of the *Estado Novo*'s promotional campaigns. An article entitled "Campanha do bom gôsto" ("Campaign for good taste"), which was ultimately about design⁵, discussed the importance of design, showing as an example two photographs of a command table inside one of the rooms of the Northern Broadcasting Corporation, which had been designed and executed by the Technical Department of the National Broadcasting Corporation (Fig. 2), while the other showed one of the rooms in the Cancer Institute (Fig. 2a).



Fig. 2

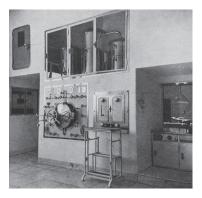


Fig. 2a

At first sight, these pictures appear to transmit the idea of spaces containing advanced equipment using cutting-edge technology, demonstrating innovation through design, and showing that Portugal was a modern country by divulging different types of pieces with an unconventional appearance. The text reinforces the importance of design in the form of prose "Good taste is an art. This does not mean that it has to be more expensive. It can be found anywhere. It is a pity that it is so rare" (SPN, 1941, p. 22). This article reveals the way the discipline was understood in the period, and also reflects the awareness of the importance that the regime gave to design as a way of promoting the country culturally and economically, including in the way pieces were displayed.

"Good taste is imposed even in technical areas. (...) Experience teaches scientists, engineers, architects, builders, that the artistically and scientifically correct solutions are always the simplest, the most elegant, the most attractive. (...) From year to year, they have grown simpler: pieces that were initially placed in a random fashion have become more symmetrical; later, signs of logical and aesthetic considerations began to appear; finally, with their reduced size and sober harmonious lines, we could see these were decent, pleasant, appetizing things" (1941, p. 22).

The same article claims that, of the various exhibitions organized, from one of them "there resulted a curious teaching, which makes us think of the advantage of creating a kind of museum, where various developed kinds of apparatus, instruments, machines, household utensils, tools, etc are on permanent display" (1941, p. 22). There is a concern with valuing industrial articles that could also form part of museological initiatives. But the industry was scanty and the means to divulge what was being done in the country centred on other actions. In truth, some exhibitions and other events were veritable campaigns that counted on the participation of well-known artists. The article "14 anos de política do espírito: apontamentos para uma exposição" ("14 years of politics of spirit: notes for an exhibition") illustrate the situation with regard to an exhibition directed by António Ferro and decorated by Tomás de Melo and Manuel Lapa (1914-1979). However, gradually, artists began to distance themselves from the regime, or at least had a less representative presence. The exit of Bernardo Margues from Panorama in 1950 is proof of this disagreement. The magazine continued to communicate the image of the country through the same themes that had existed in previous issues. The particular attention given to folklore, and to the traditional decoration imposed on many artists in programmes reveal the lack of freedom as regards interior decoration and the possibility of creating and integrating modern furniture. In this chaotic context of contradictions, the 1940s was a period in which little value was given to industrialization⁶, though interest in it declined only in the "Fair of Portuguese Industries" (1949) with the participation of Bernardo Marques.

In parallel, the companies remained loyal to the message of the *Estado Novo*, perhaps as a preventive measure and in order to please the political power, because they were conceptually in agreement, or simply because the country reflected a lack of modernity. Portuguese Shell's publication concerning the dissemination of tourist information in Porto is a case in point: there is a mismatch between the title of one article "The modern city" and the illustration - a photograph of the Clerics' Tower (Shell Portuguesa, 1944, p. 14-15) (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Double page spread from the Shell catalogue

However, Portugal was trying to modernize and there were indications of this. The appearance of new advertising agencies and ateliers, such as Publicidade Clímaco in 1941 and the advertising agency APA, is proof of an economy and society in transformation. Publicity was now becoming increasingly important, and in 1944 there was a first (failed) attempt to set up the first Advertising Club⁷.

THE 1950s: GENTLE CHANGE AND THE INTRODUCTION OF DESIGN AS A CONCEPT

Whether aware of the changes taking place or indifferent to them, the *Estado Novo* continued with its various initiatives in the 1950s; indeed they became increasingly visible in this decade because of the increased representativity and associated themes⁸. This dynamism also resulted from the entry onto the Portuguese market of multinational companies, whose marketing strategies generated introspection and reflection about the reality of the Portuguese context. On this level, some brands clearly distanced themselves from the aesthetic concepts of the regime, as happened with a series of posters created by Sena da Silva (1926-2001) for Autosil (1951-1954). Despite this mixture of image identity, and the indecision on the part of the regime in creating a more modern image of the country, the concerns about Portugal's presence in the world market and the government's investment in industry during the 1950s inadvertently helped to bring about significant changes in this decade.

"The country entered a phase of self-sustained economic growth; its industry grew exponentially; the relative importance of agriculture fell drastically and definitively, and the population began to flee en masse from the fields towards the cities. (...) Though Portugal ceased to be an "essentially agricultural" country from the 1950s onwards, most of the changes that took place had to do with measures of agrarian policy – the same is not true for industrial policy" (Rosas, 1994, p. 440-441).

These changes were ultimately reflected in the area of design; however, the exercise was not easy given the ideological weight affecting the mentalities of the period. That is to say, while innovations began to be felt, introduced into the country by 'designers', the regime continued largely attached to its ideology, despite its investment and interest in industry, and was therefore divided between historical iconography and traditions. For example, the publication *Le Portugal*, edited by Ogrizek (1950), though published by a French publisher, had in fact been produced under the auspices of the SNI. It presents illustrations of three international authors and four Portuguese artists⁹. Although the cover is in line with the publisher's programme, the flyleaf shows a graphic design by Paulo Ferreira which is in keeping with the aesthetics of the *Estado Novo*, namely a square filled with images such as fish and hearts and the word 'love', inspired by the popular decorative glazed tiles (Fig. 4).

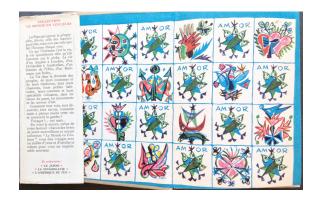


Fig. 4. Paulo Ferreira's illustration for the publication Le Portugal (1950).

Inside there are various illustrations with different graphic expressions. None of these transmit the idea of a technologically advanced country, but rather focus on rural situations, folklore and traditional crafts, alongside pictures of iconic historical buildings. If this was the image that the regime wished to transmit internationally, it was perhaps conditioned by the absence of alternatives that could show a more industrialized country. As a result, there was inevitably some contamination from other sources, with the dissemination of the same 'models' by companies and entrepreneurs. The women's magazine *Modas e Bordados: vida feminina* (1955) ("Fashions and embroidery: female life") serves as an example of the conceptual continuity with regard to the political power. In issue no. 2275, there is a section entitled "The Portuguese world", which contains two articles. The first of these is about a restaurant in S.Paulo called "Aqui é Portugal" ("Here is Portugal"), whose decoration evokes the aesthetics practised by the regime (Fig. 5).

There are regional motifs everywhere, fresh, striking, singing. The fireplace, lamps, plates, glasses and tankards, terrines, tables, chairs, walls, display cases, mats, music, the waiters in their Ribatejo costumes, everything (...). This is a place where you can find floral prints, stripes, rustic-style chairs, pots of basil in the window and above all the "heart" of the Portuguese people (Santos, 1955, p. 8).

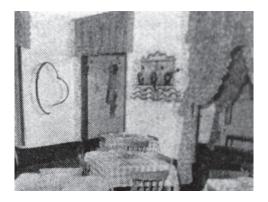


Fig. 5. Interior of the restaurant "Aqui é Portugal" in S. Paulo.

In reality, the spirit was tamed and this was reflected in the most diverse situations, both internationally and nationally. There was an insistence on expository themes relating to traditions, and in the next article in the same magazine, there is a reference to an exhibition in Estoril entitled "Apareceram os mais belos trajos regionais" ("The most beautiful regional costumes have appeared"). The fair organized by the president of the town council, continued to give priority to themes of this kind, which were also divulged through other channels overseen by the regime, as can be seen in the following text.

"Two kinds of feeling have been evoked by the beautiful event: Portuguese visitors feel pride in the wealth of costumes on view, some they will have scarcely been aware of, while, abroad, there is admiration for the beauty of our regional costumes. Thus, its benefits were significant" (Félix, 1955, p. 24).

A similar situation occurred with the special issue of the newspaper *Diário da Manhã* (1955) dedicated to the visit of the President of Brazil. This publication essentially sought to divulge the initiatives of the *Estado Novo*. In this propaganda exercise, there is only one page dedicated to the lithographic industry (Fig. 6) and one article on the Portuguese economy.



Fig. 6: Interior of the printing room at the National Lithography, consisting of three workshops located in Porto.

While the first only showed three photographs with a small paragraph of context, the second has two images of workers, old buildings and just one factory seen from the outside, some ports, and constructions of paths and dams, and also a set of tables. In all cases, the country's scanty industrial development is clear, even though the printing industry was actually the one that most closely kept up with the technological developments entering the country from outside. Perhaps for these reasons, the aesthetic of artefacts related to graphic design accompanied international production. Despite this, in the publication as a whole, there is innovation on the level of urban planning and the consequent construction of buildings involving architects determined to imprint a more modern configuration upon the cities. This change brought implications for design via the creation of objects that escaped the canon of the regime, and by the divulgation of projects through specialist magazines like *Arquitectura* (1927-1984).

The valuing of this discipline ultimately extended to design. In fact, it was in this publication that we find the first use of the word "designers" — in an article about exhibition contexts by Carlos Ribeiro (n. 1917), Fred Kradolfer, Roberto Araújo and Tomás de Melo (Tom) entitled "What has been done is due to the selfteaching of artists, painters or designers" (Arquitetura, 1952, p. 10-13) — which suggests that the terms 'design' and 'designers' were already part of the lexicon by this time. Despite a certain confusion in the article with other design-related terms, it seems that the words 'design' and 'designer' may have been in oral use as early as the 1940s. However, they were only applied in contexts referring to the professional activity in the 1970s, usually beneath a signature. This is what happened with posters, which coexisted with "other terms for 'design' the poster such as: 'arranjo gráfico' ('graphic arrangement'), 'desenho' ('drawing', 'design'), 'design gráfico' ('graphic design') and 'grafismo' ('graphism')" (Barbosa, 2011, p. 476), revealing that the terms 'design' and 'designer' could still be replaced by other words. According to Vítor Manaças (1934) with regard to the work he undertook for the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (FCG), at first "they didn't allow us to use it. (...) but there came a time when there was that intention". However, there was still some discomfort at the use of the words 'design' or 'designer', as Manaças points out: "cut that out! You can't use that! (...) From a certain moment on, I think that it wasn't even me, it was Américo Silva that started to use it. We have to begin to use it. And so we did" (Barbosa, 2009).

The importance given to the discipline of design was visible in the first manifestations of interest in a kind of teaching removed from the political power. Given the instability experienced, many artistic domains, as well as the graphic arts and industrial arts, needed concrete initiatives in order to develop in a healthy fashion, and once more found in the protagonists the only interlocutors able (given their experience in the area of design) to provide any training. Between 1952-1954, in the António Arroio School, Frederico George initiated "the first (unofficial) experiment in teaching design in Portugal", trying to make students and colleagues aware of design, for the first time in Portugal, "in an assimilation that is empirically reinforced by everyday professional activity", as students, he had Daciano da Costa (1930-2005) in the António Arroio School and Sena da Silva in the Lisbon College of Fine Art (ESBAL) (Santos, 1995, vol. III, p. 486)¹⁰.

In the private domain of industry, artists and architects began to find a space in which to put their ideas into practice. This dynamic was instituted naturally by Fernando Seixas at MIT (later called Metalúrgica da Longra), who entered into contact with Frederico George and Daciano da Costa for the execution of joint projects that took shape the following decade (Almeida, 2009). Simultaneously, commercial premises functioned as worldly alternative spaces on the margins of the large institutions, where they could have greater proximity with the public. In reality, the use of these places for exhibitions mirrored initiatives taken in the 1920s, which also attempted to reach the public using different channels. However, the worldly spirit that was experienced in that decade was absent in the 1950s¹¹, and the exhibition sites selected had a commercial interest as well as a cultural one. Hence, the commercial spaces¹² and cultural spaces such as the National Society of Fine Arts (SNBA) acquired a new function, which, in addition to commercialization¹³ and divulgation, now sought to value the culture of design and influence society with new proposals for objects.

The Estado Novo, which was now more distant, though still operative on the level of industry, sought to survive in a Europe that was economically dynamic. The first Development Plan ("Plano de Fomento", 1953-1958) gave rise to a greater visibility on the level of exhibitions, resulting in the construction of a new pavilion at the Lisbon Industries Fair (FIL) in 1956, designed by Keil do Amaral. This allowed architects, artists and decorators to be present in the preparation of stands for the exhibitions organized and for the divulgation of the graphic and industrial artefacts included in them. It also functioned as a platform for the dissemination of these authors' work through collaboration with the respective entities that did commissions and were present at these events. Designers gradually developed firmer links with companies and entrepreneurs, a connection that was reinforced by another government action. Near the end of this decade, the regime advanced with the second Development Plan (1959-1964)

"(...) the manufacturing industry was selected as the priority sector (metallurgy, oil refining, fertilizers, chemicals...). For the first time, a policy of industrialization was unambiguously assumed, with the concomitant subordination of agriculture, which would see the positive effects of industrialization" (Souto, 2014).

The *Estado Novo* thus began to be increasingly concerned with industrial development, laying the ground for the affirmation of Portuguese design, which gradually took shape in the following decade.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has sought to analyse in general terms how publications such as independent magazines or newspapers tried to manifest the idea of industrial modernization over the course of two decades, while at the same time remaining largely dissociated from reality, perhaps influenced by the lack of coherent industry. While possibly reflecting some pseudo-industrial innovation, they essentially reproduced themes kept alive by the political power out of fear of reprisal. If on the one hand, the rules were dictated, on the other, there were reactions to the *Estado Novo* such as the distancing of artists from the regime, and a concomitant approximation to companies which were trying to subsist in an inconsistent market. Certain of the importance of artists, the companies gradually achieved more representativity. The situation inadvertently helped revalue not only the companies but also the artefacts produced in the industrial context, though still only on an occasional basis. Despite everything, artists and designers had practically no presence in industry until the end of the 1950s. Those that appeared in the period, with the *Estado Novo* as intermediary, were more involved with interior decoration for events or spaces, and documents related to such situations than in the creation of objects for industry. This was because of the industrial insufficiency experienced by the country at the time, which affected the companies themselves, and because of the distancing of artists from the government.

If in the early phase, the regime gradually and unconsciously fell victim to its own initiatives, having slowly succumbed to the asphyxiating conceptual and aesthetic model proposed and the policies in force, it was only at the end of the 1950s that it became possible to initiate a process of industrial consolidation that would enable the affirmation and valuing of design in subsequent decades.

Notes:

¹ See Mattoso (2003).

² As can be seen in the official programme of the exhibition. "(...) to make known, in general terms, the way the Portuguese in 1940 conceived and carried out the celebration of eight centuries of historical existence of the nation. (...) three dominant facts were commemorated: the foundation of nationality (1140); the high-point of the Empire (1540); the restoration of independence after the collapse of the sixty-year dualist monarchy (1640)" (SPN, 1940, [s.p.]).

³ The campaigns for 'good taste' are examples of this.

⁴ Under the graphic direction of Bernardo Marques (1899-1962) from 1941. In some of the issues, it is possible to find on the covers authors such as Bernardo Marques, Almada Negreiros (1893-1970), Alberto Cardoso (1914-1977), Paulo Ferreira (1911-1999), Ofélia Marques (1902-1952), Francisco Smith (1881-1961), Roberto Araújo (1911-1969), Tomás de Melo (1906-1990) and Eduardo Anahory (1917-, on the inside, with illustrations by Ofélia Marques, Paulo Ferreira, Sara Afonso (1899-1983), Bernardo Marques, Mily Possoz (1889-1968), Raul Lino (1872-), Carlos Botelho (1899-1982), Emmerico Nunes (1888-), Maria Keil (1914-2012), Mário Eloy (1900-1951), Fred Kradolfer (1903-1968), Tomás de Melo, Roberto Araújo, Frederico George (1915-1994), Estrela Faria (1910-1976) and Jorge Barradas (1894-1971) and photographs by Tomás de Melo.

⁵ Although the term was not used in this period, which is here called "technical". On the use of different terms for 'design' and 'designer', see Barbosa and Calvera e Branco (2010).

⁶ Despite this, the 1930s reflects this interest more consistently with a series of exhibition initiatives on the subject of industrial exhibitions held in the Edward VII Park (1930, 1932, 1933).

⁷ This only occurred in 1968 (called the Clube dos Publicitários) and disappeared in 1974. Of the various participants, the presence of Carlos Rocha stands out (Letra ETP) (Marketing & Publicidade, 1986, p. 35).

⁸ The 1950 and 1951 editions of the Portuguese Industries Fair, plus others, which totalled around forty nine exhibitions vs. seventeen in the previous decade.

⁹ Carlos Botelho, Paulo Ferreira, Manuel Lapa and Bernardo Marques.

¹⁰ For more details of this matter, see the article "As primeiras experiências de ensino do Design" Souto (2009).

¹¹ Given the restrictions on freedom of expression, there was no place for provocations or worldly initiatives of the kind that occurred in the 1920s.

¹² Such as the Casa Jalco, a Casa Alcobia and Galeria Pórtico.

¹³ A concern arising from the pieces that were placed in their commercial space and destined for sale.

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