



VISUAL

The Photographer Never Turns a Blind Eye

Ivana Barbarito

1

BIOGRAPHY

Ivana Barbarito, curious, observer of reality, passionate about hand drawing, researcher of the poetry of everyday life, architect, photographer. She was born and studied in Bari. The landscape and the yellow light of the South still influence her way of looking at the world. Since the beginning of her architectural studies, she has been interested in photography as a tool for observing and analysing reality. She has attended different workshops with Italian photographers – Gianni Berengo Gardin, Guido Guidi, Giovanni Chiaramonte – to deepen her reflection on the representation of architecture and the natural and human landscape.

In 2003, she took part, with Alessandra Chemollo, in the photographic campaign on the complete works of Fernando Távora and Eduardo Souto de Moura in view of the relevant monographs published by Electa and edited by Antonio Esposito and Giovanni Leoni. From this experience she began to collaborate, as a photographer, with several architecture magazines (Casabella, D'A, Domus, Architettura and Vida) and at the same time developed personal research on her vision of landscape.

In 2006, in Venice, she collaborated on FSE (European Social Fund) photography courses at the IUAV on the theme "La visione. La fotografia tra percezione e rappresentazione" (Photography between perception and representation). After moving to Paris, she tackled small-scale projects in Italy and France, from their spatial organisation to the design and realisation of custom-made furniture.

In 2011, with Benjamin Bancel, he set up the BarbaritoBancel studio where different life paths and complementary outlooks are united by the common desire to renew with each project the pleasure for architecture, for the reflection of spaces designed by light, for design, teamwork, meeting with clients and craftsmen, experimenting with new techniques and materials. A continuous transformation in search of its own balance between rigour, imagination, sensitivity, method, discussion, listening – and many designs.



<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2611-0075/19741> | ISSN 2611-0075
Copyright © 2022 Ivana Barbarito



2

I will just talk about my experience during the months in Portugal with Antonio, Giovanni and Alessandra. I will start with a photo that I find very amusing, partly because it was inspired by a phrase of Alessandra's – 'the photographer never turns a blind eye' – and partly because it describes the situation I found myself in.

The thing I had been asked to do, going to Portugal, was to look, to see.

I was a photographer by passion, I did photography, I had already worked a little with Giovanni Chiaramonte. I knew, from classes at university, the Portuguese school, Fernando Távora, but I didn't speak a word of Portuguese. I met Alessandra at the airport on her way to Portugal, so it was mostly an adventure, a journey. A journey as an instrument of knowledge, guided by chance. When I arrived in Portugal, there was Alessandra working for Electa¹ and there was me, who was in charge of the images for the IUAV Diathea.

I was only asked to see and report what I saw.

At the beginning I was only moved by enthusiasm, then the problem arose, the anxiety came to be complete in the work to allow the people who had to use the diathea to find the fundamental elements of architecture. Things got a bit complicated, but we put a number of tools in place. The first was that each time, before we went to photograph an architecture, we somehow studied the project – the drawings, the site, the writings.

Then we had a great fortune, that of being able to spend time with Távora and with Souto de Moura.

¹ reference to the two volumes: Antonio Esposito and Giovanni Leoni, *Eduardo Souto Moura* (Milan: Electa, 2003); Antonio Esposito and Giovanni Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera Completa* (Milan: Electa, 2005), whose photographs are by Alessandra Chemollo.



3 |



4 |



5 |

In the preparation of today's meeting there was really an act of memory and I remember very well the meetings with Souto de Moura in which he would bring up drawings, explain, talk to us about the relationship with the client, everything was very clear.

We also spent a lot of time at Távora's, but I don't have the same kind of memory. At Távora's we talked about everything, not about design. We talked about life, about past episodes, anecdotes, we talked about many things but not necessarily about the project. So we would leave, or at least I would leave Távora's studio, not with an idea of a project but with a state of mind, almost a feeling, I would say, of 'portliness'. A very beautiful thing indeed, only that in practical terms this desire to tell everything didn't seem to help me with the question of how to photograph his projects.

Fortunately, I was not alone.

One of my first tasks as a 20-year-old with performance anxiety was to follow the photographer, Alessandra.

In the beginning, particularly in the *Quinta*, in order not to make a mistake, in order to get everything done, I told myself: 'I follow her, I don't miss anything, she has the route in her head'. So if she was in one place I was not very far away and the photographs show that. But maybe the message and the description are different even if we were in the same spot.

There was another issue.

I was already photographing, but at my own pace. In this three-month experience, the rhythms of my work changed. We had a schedule, we had to photograph every day and it was not a question of "today I am tired of seeing, today I don't feel like it", it was a rhythm that was very difficult at the beginning but which, from a certain point of view, allowed me to move from seeing to feeling.

There is a sentence with which Távora presents his Cedar School: "Architecture appears to me today as a great force, born of the earth and man, linked by a thousand threads to the changes of reality, a force capable of making a powerful contribution to the happiness of the environment in which it is born".² In the *Quinta* project, as in the project for his house in Guimarães³, the question I feel strongly about is: what are we being asked to see?

In the end, you realise that the themes are naturalness and beauty.



² See also: Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*, 319.

³ Fernando Távora, *Casa a Covilhã, Fermentões*, Guimarães, 1973-1976. See also: Esposito, Leoni, *Fernando Távora. Opera completa*, 202-205.



7 |



8 |



9 |

The photographer has a privileged role because he is there to interpret and narrate, to let himself be touched by the emotion he is living in that moment. In Távora, in my opinion, it is not just about design, but the feeling that he communicates to us is that he comes to represent the invisible threads that changed the everyday life of the people living in the spaces. Those threads were, in some way, that whole that Távora told us about in his office, that he gave himself very clearly.

The *Quinta* is a representation of this.

There is the description of the place but there is also the description of that whole life, that search for the whole that Távora put into each of his projects. The feeling you had was an evidence. That place was like that and could not be different. You had the feeling that things had always been there. A feeling, very strong, of a beauty that enriches you, makes you more noble.

And then Alessandra asked me a question: "what did you learn from this experience?". And, also linking to what Roberto said, as a photographer and architect

I learnt this idea of seeing combined with the idea of listening.

A search for evidence, but evidence that is a rightness, that touches the emotion, given by listening to the place in its light, by listening to the history and the people who live it but, above all, to their desires about this place.

I think that Távora, in his works, achieves this fullness of life.

I also learnt how photography can be a tool for revealing the invisible threads of life and can therefore be an upstream instrument capable of giving directions to the designer, as in an orchestra where many instruments ultimately create a unique melody.

