

Through Walls and Windows: Irene Buarque's Work in the 1970s

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In December 1978, Brazilian artist Irene Buarque¹ presented her exhibition *Leitura e Contraleitura de um Espaço Limite: Janela* (Reading and Counter-Reading of a Space Limit: The Window) at Quadrum Gallery, in Lisbon. As suggested by the title, the show brought together a series of artworks that explored the window, physically as well as metaphorically, as an architectural feature capable to synthesise different cultural and formal markers and to problematise the relationship between interior and exterior space. Most importantly, Buarque's combined use of photography, printmaking, artists' books and objects demonstrated that the spatial and cultural interrogations that traversed her work did not require a medium-specific practice. On the contrary, they encouraged the artist to continuously explore new possibilities in terms of materials and techniques. At the same time, though, the strongly abstract and geometrical language that the artworks on display foregrounded hinted at the genealogy of Buarque's practice – and in particular to its rootedness in the São Paulo artistic scene of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

What happened between the artist's formative years in Brazil and her 1978 exhibition in Lisbon? And how did it inform the conceptual, political and formal developments of her work? Having migrated to Lisbon in the early 1970s thanks to a scholarship awarded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Buarque was a relevant actor of the Portuguese experimental art scene of that decade. Indeed, differently from other Brazilian artists who, during the final phase of the Estado Novo dictatorship in Portugal (1933–1974), passed by Lisbon en route to other destinations, especially during World War II, or lived there for a limited period of time – like Amélia Toledo (Alves and Lamoni 2020) in the mid-1960s or Evany Fanzeres in the early 1970s – Buarque remained, making the Portuguese capital her home.

Drawing from the artist's experience of migration, this text aims at exploring the relationship between the artworks that she created in São Paulo in the early 1970s and those produced in Lisbon between 1973 and the end of the decade, while simultaneously attempting to map the transnational connections and the ruptures associated with her transits between Portugal and Brazil. Considering that the synchronic investigation on space, form and colour characterising her early work – as referred to by Walter Zanini, art critic and director of the Museum of Contemporary Art at the University of São Paulo, in 1971 (Zanini 1971) – actually became a key feature traversing the artist's practice in the following years, space and architecture are envisioned here as a potential bridge between different geographical and cultural areas.

Furthermore, these elements will be addressed as a locus of connection with the contemporary practices of other artists in Portugal and Brazil, and as a privileged site for Buarque to shape her singular discourse on belonging. In the artist's trajectory, in fact, belonging seems to correspond, first and foremost, to an embodied experience of space and place. In this sense, it is also gendered, affectively produced and – as it connects Brazil to Portugal – strongly marked by a common colonial history. To a certain extent, these colonial ties often seem to translate, in Buarque's practice, in the exploration of the ambiguities that circulating between these two countries entails – that is, in the tensions between inextricable similarities and differences, cultural as well as political and historical.

Indeed, as a female Portuguese-speaking artist in Portugal in the early 1970s, Buarque was not a complete foreigner, nor was she a Portuguese national. By opening a space in which the links and breaks that constituted the in-betweenness of her position as a Brazilian migrant could be addressed, made visible and somehow sutured, the artist critically acknowledged the complexities of her multiple attachments. At the same time, it is precisely the articulation of this space – as a kind of 'third space'² – that allowed Buarque to weave the transnational network of relations that made, and are still making, her home, in Portugal, Brazil, and beyond. It is also the construction of this ambiguous, uncertain and at times imaginary space that this essay seeks to explore.

From São Paulo to Lisbon

In 1971, the Ars Mobile Gallery in São Paulo, Brazil, organised the first solo exhibition of Irene Buarque. The show presented a sequence of 26 geometrical

abstract paintings and three serigraphs produced since 1968, most of them circular in shape, with diameters between 61 and 120 cm. The clear and sharp compositions of the artworks, based on intersecting triangles, explored a set of intense chromatic variations (Figure 7.1). Contrasting with their rigorous structure, the titles of the pieces – such as *Rolling Stock*, *Watermelon-Melody*, *Aqua-Limo-Semi-Sol* (*Water-Limo-Semi-Sun*), *Tátil*, *Vibra-Verde* (Tactile, Vibrate-Green) and *Marrom-Bom-Tom* (Brown-Bon-Ton)³ – added a poetic, playful and sensory dimension, evoking pop culture.

Writing for the catalogue of the exhibition, Walter Zanini identified in Buarque's geometrical abstraction 'two congenital areas with identical strength of concentration and activity in the affirmation of the image': 'the organization of space' and 'the expression of colour and its spectral effects' (Zanini 1971).⁴ Although noticing the palpable relations that the artist's paintings established



Figure 7.1 Irene Buarque, *Sujeito III* (Subject III), 1971. 120 cm (diameter), acrylic on platex. The artist's collection. © Irene Buarque.

with different international artists, Zanini also pointed out the personal quality of a 'language in progress', recognising, as previously mentioned, a synchronic exploration of spatial, formal and chromatic values (1971).

Immersed in São Paulo's composite cultural environment, marked, among others, by the strong legacy of Concretism and by the artistic dynamics associated with the Biennial since the early 1950s, Buarque studied Fine Arts in the city, at the Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado, between 1964 and 1967. As her pictorial practice developed, from the mid-1960s, she became part of a small group of young artists⁵ who took up abstraction as a field of new experimentation. In fact, as observed by art critic Aracy Amaral in 1972, after many years in which the Brazilian artistic scene was dominated by figurative currents – and, we should add, by a strong proximity between art and politics as a response to the oppressive military regime inaugurated by the 1964 coup⁶ – geometric abstraction re-emerged in São Paulo, as exemplified by the work of Irene Buarque and Massuo Nakakubo (Amaral 1971: 1). Indeed, developing at the same time as new conceptual tendencies began to gain momentum – in events such as Salão da Bússola in Rio de Janeiro, in 1969, and *Do Corpo à Terra*, organised by Frederico Moraes in Belo Horizonte in 1970 – Buarque's research took a radically different path.

Although establishing a clear dialogue with the theories that framed Brazilian concrete abstraction – strongly informed by international references, such as Soviet Suprematism and Constructivism, De Stijl, Bauhaus and Ulm School – and its quest for 'pure visibility', the paintings and serigraphs that the artist produced in the late 1960s and early 1970s also incorporated a three-dimensional potential. This feature, to a certain extent, revisited and created articulations with the experimental work that artists like Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark and Lygia Pape produced in the late 1950s in Rio de Janeiro, infusing abstraction with a three-dimensional, and even spatial, dimension.⁷ Definitely, for Buarque, three-dimensionality was part of a pictorial experimentation focused on form, space and colour that followed an earlier 'cubist phase' (Buarque 1971a). As she stated in an interview in 1971, her paintings included 'three-dimensional concerns': 'I try to contain the volume in the surface and maintain a dynamic that circulates outside the frame' (Buarque 1971b).

Not surprisingly, the artist often referenced architecture as an influence for her geometrical work, an interest that, in some way, she had the opportunity to explore while collaborating with artist Maria Bonomi, as her assistant, in the scope of a set of scenography projects in the late 1960s. Traversed by spatial preoccupations, Buarque's paintings and serigraphs also connected, through

their titles, with diverse contemporary phenomena, from the language games of concrete poetry⁸ – i.e. in *GirasSol-a-Sol* (SunFlower-to-Sun) and *TriCôr-Círculo* (TriColour-Circle) – to references to North American culture in English titles like *DROPS I* and *DROPS II* and *High Wall*.⁹ In this sense, Zanini's use of the term 'hard edges' (Zanini 1971), in his 1971 text, to describe contrasts between coloured triangles in Buarque's circularly shaped canvas, was possibly meant to suggest a resonance with 'hard edge' geometric abstraction produced in the United States and beyond. In fact, Buarque considered the work of Japanese artist Kumi Sugai, exhibited at the São Paulo Biennial in 1963 and 1965, as an important reference, along with the work of Brazilian artists Alfredo Volpi, Maria Bonomi and Amélia Toledo (Buarque 1971a). As for her use of colour, she acknowledged that Portuguese émigré artist Fernando Lemos was an influence for her practice (Buarque 1971a).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, and complementarily to her work as an artist, Buarque attended different courses, and it was in this context that, in 1970, she met Lemos, who had migrated to Brazil in 1952. Furthermore, in 1971 the renowned Portuguese art critic and historian José-Augusto França travelled to Brazil, invited by Lemos, to teach an art history course at Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis de Chateaubriand. Buarque attended the course and, at Lemos's suggestion, decided to apply for an international scholarship provided by the Portuguese Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to pursue her work in Lisbon. Thus, the encounter with Lemos and França turned out to be of particular importance in Buarque's trajectory. As she would later recall, Lemos was 'responsible' (Buarque and Santos 2005) for her migration to Portugal in 1973. Leaving Brazil during the most oppressive phase of the dictatorship, Buarque arrived in Lisbon in March 1973, after spending two months in Paris. Even though Portugal was living the final phase of an extremely long dictatorship, as Lemos pointed out: '[it] was in Europe, after all' (Buarque and Santos 2005).

Confronting Walls

Benefiting from the dynamics of social, cultural and political opening that characterised the previous decade, the atmosphere in Portugal at the beginning of the 1970s was of relative optimism – an optimism implied in the expression 'Primavera Marcelista' (Marcelist Spring), which refers to the initial years of Marcelo Caetano's government, after replacing António Oliveira Salazar in 1968.

In fact, between 1968 and 1970, Caetano introduced a supposedly more moderate politics in the long Portuguese Dictatorship (1926–1974), while dealing with a context of increasing dissatisfaction triggered by the Colonial War in Mozambique, Angola and Guiné Bissau (1961–1974).

Sustained by economic growth, but also by greater social stability, as well as by a more open dialogue with Europe, it was precisely this optimism that was key to the subtle emergence of an art market, as testified by the opening, from the mid-1960s, of several art galleries in Lisbon and Porto. This development complemented the fundamental initiatives of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, which, since 1956, had widely contributed to the consolidation of the arts in Portugal through the organisation of exhibitions, the acquisition of artworks and the attribution of scholarships to many artists, who, as a result, had the opportunity to expand their experiences in an international circuit. Often referred to as the 'Anos de Ruptura' (Rupture Years) (Rodrigues 1994), the 1960s had corresponded indeed to a phase of renewal in the arts in Portugal, as a young generation of artists, distancing their production from the animated debates on neorealism/surrealism or figuration/abstraction of the previous decades, explored a new set of possibilities, as testified by the multidirectional experimentalisms that – in many cases in dialogue with experiences of migration (mainly to Paris and London) – made the Portuguese artistic context considerably more complex and rich.

On her arrival in Lisbon, Buarque's intention, as a Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian fellow, was to develop a 'literary research' (Buarque 1973) on the signification of the circular form in both painting and scenography. Her programme – which also included the improvement of her skills in the field of printmaking, with a specific focus on serigraphy – was closely connected to her own use of the circle, and of circularly shaped canvas, in her artistic practice. When she met José-Augusto França at the beginning of her stay in Lisbon, though, he examined Buarque's curriculum and slides of her work and advised her to give priority to her studies in the area of scenography. In fact, França, who was the artist's main contact in the country, surprisingly told her that, regarding painting, she 'had nothing to learn in Portugal' (Buarque and Santos 2005).

Following the art critic's suggestion, Buarque enrolled in the Conservatório Nacional (National Conservatory), attending scenography and art history courses. Thus, she did not immediately connect with Portuguese artists who were experimenting with a 'new abstraction' (Rodrigues 1994) – geometrical, object-based and op – since the mid-1960s, such as Eduardo Nery, Artur Rosa, Jorge Pinheiro, António Palolo and also, to some extent, Alice Jorge. But, whereas

Buarque did not mention any of these artists in her quarterly reports addressed to the Gulbenkian Foundation, she was possibly aware of the work of some of them.

While she was not immediately 'impressed'¹⁰ by the work of young Portuguese painters, and developed her practice in a certain isolation, Buarque delved enthusiastically into Portuguese culture through music, literature, architecture and theatre. She travelled around the country, read Portuguese concrete poetry, practiced woodcut engraving and serigraphy with printmaker Ilda Reis and visited art galleries as well as the Clube de Gravura (Printmaking Club) (Buarque 1973). In the fall of 1973, she took part in a printmaking exhibition at Galeria Grafil,¹¹ a space that she later frequented to study lithographic printing techniques. As for theatre, besides attending the courses at the Conservatory – where she also assisted to Peter Brook's interventions in February 1974 – she went to see many shows, including *A Grande Imprecação contra a Muralha da Cidade* (Great Denunciation by the City Wall) by Tankred Dorst (1961), directed by Mário Barradas and with costumes by Christian Ratz (Buarque 1973).

Premiered in Lisbon, at the German Institute, in January 1974, a few months before the Carnation Revolution that took place on 25 April and that finally put an end to the Portuguese dictatorship, Dorst's play articulated a harsh critique of political power, materialised by the city walls. As observed by writer Ernesto Sampaio: 'in the context of the movements against the colonial war, and of the workers' and students' turmoil happening at the time, the show acquired, as stated by Curt Meyer-Clason in his *Memories*, "a disturbing premonitory sense of the 25th of April"' (Sampaio 2020: 93). In fact, resonating with the longing for the end of the dictatorship in Portugal, the show was a great success and thus was extended for three more weeks (Zurbach 2007: 40). Furthermore, thanks to the fact that it took place at the German Institute, censorship – which was still an expressive obstacle in Portugal at that time – could be avoided (Zurbach 2007).

Interestingly, the image of the city wall, politically charged in Dorst's play, was also at the centre of Buarque's first solo exhibition in Lisbon, in August 1975, at the Gulbenkian Foundation – and later titled *As Muralhas de Lisboa* (Lisbon City Walls)¹² (Figure 7.2). Installed in the garden of the Foundation, the artist's sequence of circularly shaped acrylic paintings was displayed on the ground, as a crescent. In these artworks, painted on wood chipboard, and with a diameter of 110 cm, a central band folding geometrically in various ways divided the space into three, differently coloured, sections (Figure 7.3).

The title of the pieces, along with a photograph of the circular walls of the city of Arraiolos – located in the rural Alentejo region in Portugal – published in the



Figure 7.2 Irene Buarque, *As Muralhas (The City Walls)*, 1975. Front view of the installation in the gardens of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, in Lisbon. 110 cm each (diameter), acrylic on platex. © Irene Buarque.



Figure 7.3 Irene Buarque, *As Muralhas (The City Walls)*, 1975. Side view of the installation in the gardens of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, in Lisbon. 110 cm each (diameter), acrylic on platex. © Irene Buarque.

catalogue, seemed to suggest that these geometric compositions, apparently abstract, may in fact allude to city walls. Furthermore, the exhibition's catalogue also included a passage from the book *Sombras de Reis Barbudos* (1972) (Shadows of Bearded Kings) by author José J. Veiga, often considered as an allegory of the Brazilian military dictatorship (Gomes 2005). Indeed, the fragment of text selected by the artist described a dystopian place, possibly a city, in which new walls appeared overnight, separating what was once united, cutting through the streets and 'covering up the views' (Buarque 1975). Initially troubled by the walls' presence, the people grew increasingly accustomed to it, while 'life was getting harder and harder for everyone' (1975).

Buarque thus presented a series of abstract compositions that could not avoid establishing some resonances with the Carnation Revolution of the previous year. *As Muralhas de Lisboa* (Lisbon City Walls), in fact, symbolically deconstructed walls – architectural structures of containment – releasing their fragments onto the green lawn of the Gulbenkian Foundation's gardens. At the same time, the installation created an understated connection between the overthrow of the dictatorship in Portugal and the persistence of the military regime in Brazil. In this sense, the artwork could be read as condensing traces of the artist's experience in both Brazil and Portugal – not only because of the process of cultural crosspollination that her artistic practice went through, but also regarding the possibility to give voice to everyday life under conditions of political oppression and to the struggles for liberation. Effectively, informed by her transnational experience, Buarque found herself in a position that allowed her to gain a wider perspective, enabling her to recognise the proximities and distances between the political circumstances in both countries.

In parallel, it is equally significant that Buarque considered this presentation not a painting exhibition, but an installation. This important shift shows her concern not only with the articulation between the pieces and the features of the space that she selected to present them, but also with the place created by such an articulation. In fact, taking into consideration the display of the paintings as a crescent, and their scale, the work consisted, somehow, in a receptacle – or even in a scenography that called for a certain performativity on the part of the viewer. In this perspective, the installation connected with some post-minimalist or conceptual productions, as the paintings were but one of the elements of a more extended work that configured a relation between the pieces, the presentation space and the viewers' perceptive and bodily experience.

Furthermore, besides creating a physical and relational space, this installation soon became a means that allowed Buarque to connect and bond with the local artistic scene. As a vehicle of new encounters, it led to a series of friendships and collaborations that would constitute part of the artist's affective transnational network, weaving the map of her belonging in Portugal.

It was, actually, in the scope of this exhibition that Buarque first met José Ernesto de Sousa, a key figure of the Portuguese artistic scene in the 1970s. While Buarque's installation was in the garden, the works of Portuguese artists Eduardo Batarda and Fernando Calhau – who, at the time, were also Gulbenkian fellows – were on display inside the building. After visiting the exhibitions of these two artists, Ernesto de Sousa saw Buarque's installation – which he then considered 'a breeze of fresh air' (Alves et al. 2019). The encounter with Ernesto de Sousa had indeed a significant impact on Buarque's artistic trajectory in Portugal. In fact, it was after this contact that she possibly became more aware of the experimental production that was being developed by different Portuguese artists. As she recalls, she first saw Helena Almeida, Ana Vieira, Artur Rosa, Eduardo Nery and João Vieira – artists whom she would later meet and collaborate with – in June 1974. On that occasion, she decided to go with a friend to the Belém neighbourhood in Lisbon to watch a group of 48 artists collectively paint a mural celebrating the 10 June Portuguese national holiday (Alves et al. 2019).

Along with Ernesto de Sousa, another important contact established by Buarque at that time was Monteiro Gil, whom she had met at the National Conservatory. Gil was one of the owners of the Galeria Grafil in Lisbon where Buarque practiced printmaking. But Grafil was also a crucial place for the artist to expand her network of friendships. Most importantly, it was the seed that would later lead her, Monteiro Gil and Ernesto de Sousa, together with artists Helena Almeida, José Carvalho, José Conduto, António Palolo, Fernanda Pissarro, Maria Rolão and Marília Viegas, to create the Cooperativa Diferença in 1979. This cooperative and gallery, still functioning today, was not only dedicated to teaching art and to championing the work of artists living in Portugal, but also to creating and promoting transnational dialogues and exchanges with artists based in other countries.

Opening Windows

After 1975, Irene Buarque continued to explore Lisbon, walking around different neighbourhoods. She also began to take photographs of diverse aspects and

details of the city that caught her eye, as she was particularly sensitive to the contrasts that this experience established with her previous references to the city of São Paulo. Some of these walks took place during the weekends with Portuguese architect Nuno Teotónio Pereira, whom Buarque had met through mutual friends while she was preparing her exhibition at the Gulbenkian Foundation (Alves et al. 2019). In fact, as recalled by Buarque, the architect – who would later become her husband – had ended up helping her with the definition of the installation and designed the structure that kept the paintings in the correct position (Alves et al. 2019).

City pavements, tiles and various ornamental pieces incorporated in buildings drove her attention. But the window, an architectural element with multiple meanings – not only social and economic, but also cultural – became the specific object of a research that she began developing in 1976. Initially looking at the geometric qualities of the window – usually a rectangle – Buarque soon became aware of its symbolic potential. If the city walls were subtly related to the dictatorship and its overthrow in *As Muralhas de Lisboa*, the window could possibly materialise the sense of freedom and opening of the post-revolutionary years, unfolding it in different directions.

The window – a well-known metaphor for painting – also connected Buarque's work with the practice of other artists in Portugal who resorted to this architectural element in various ways, and with different purposes, since the late 1960s. For some female artists in particular, such as Helena Almeida or Ana Vieira, the appropriation of the window, a sign alluding to oppressive seclusion but also to a possible liberation, was a strategic way to reclaim agency as women and citizens of a country in a rapid transformation. In Almeida's well-known piece *Tela Habitada* (Inhabited Canvas) (1976), for instance, the act of passing through the canvas, or window, interweaves the artist's interest in the borders of representation with the evocation of the struggle for liberation of oppressed subjects and groups, most likely women.

Vieira, on the other hand, resorted to the window in a more direct form in her acrylic boxes *Caixa-Objectos* (Box-Objects) (1972–1974). In *Figura à Janela* (Figure at the Window) (1973), for example, the silhouette of a woman or man stands behind a window. If the transparency of the acrylic box makes it possible for the viewer to walk around and observe it from different angles, the human figure is trapped inside, thus indicating that the window can paradoxically open up the field of vision for some and be part of a confinement device for others. Clearly, the gendered construction of domesticity in Portugal,¹³ as well the

country's cultural isolation during the dictatorship, were both important referents here. These were remarkable artistic and political gestures considering the fact that the relations between art and feminism in the 1970s in Portugal were quite ambiguous, contradictory and often understated.

In dialogue with the work of Helena Almeida and Ana Vieira, Irene Buarque's interest in the window encompasses the domestic sphere but, ultimately, it shapes a broader and more intersectional approach. Indeed, the artist is not only interested in the window as a metaphorical element – thus as a device that alludes to both isolation and liberation – but also as an architectural feature that strongly connects space, history and locational identity. In this sense, if the use of the window as a sign is connected to the reclaiming of agency, and more particularly of female agency, for Buarque this process of reclaiming is also strongly linked to the acknowledgement of the in-betweenness of her position – an embodied in-betweenness that architecture formally translates into space and place.

Interestingly, the artist set herself to explore the window from multiple perspectives, while at the same time resorting to a variety of media, from photographs to objects and artist's books. Initiated in 1976, Buarque's research on windows developed over the next two years and beyond, culminating in the installation *Leitura e Contra-Leitura de um Espaço Limite: Janela* (Reading and Counter-Reading of a Space Limit: The Window) at Quadrum Gallery, in Lisbon, in December 1978 (Figure 7.4). According to the artist's description, this research included five phases: a photographic survey of the window envisaged as a painting (figurative, abstract, pop etc.); the structure of the window as an object with formal and symbolic features; formal projects of windows produced in different materials such as paper, sand, glass and stickers; the window as a geometric form with reference to the tensions between inside and outside, full and empty; the 'window-reflection' and its transformation in articulation with light and its projections.¹⁴

Although the idea of the window envisaged as painting determined the first phase of Buarque's research, it is nevertheless significant to approach that photographic corpus of work as a catalogue, an inventory or even a collection of architectural elements – a compilation of images that, to some extent, testified to the features of a city that, particularly after the revolution, was under transformation. This interest in architecture was also nourished by the artist's proximity to Nuno Teotónio Pereira – with whom she collaborated, as a photographer, in the scope of producing a survey on collective housing in Lisbon, developed between 1978 and 1979.¹⁵



Figure 7.4 Irene Buarque at her exhibition *Leitura e Contra-Leitura de um Espaço Limite: Janela* (Reading and Counter-Reading of a Space Limit: The Window), Galeria Quadrum, Lisbon, 1978. Photograph by Nuno Teotónio Pereira. © Irene Buarque.

For Teotónio Pereira, as he stated in a letter supporting Buarque's request for a second Gulbenkian scholarship, in 1978, her photographs captured 'the environmental qualities' (Pereira 1978) of those architectures, as the photographic record should not be limited to their physical dimension. Regarding Buarque's connection to architecture, it is actually quite telling that, in the same letter, Teotónio Pereira pointed out the artist's 'perception, and translation in painting, of constructed space and of the architectural elements that define that space' (1978), and referred to her as a painter who 'poetically interprets architectural space' (1978).

The first results of Buarque's research on windows appeared in June 1977 in *Colóquio-Artes* – an art journal published by the Gulbenkian Foundation and directed by José-Augusto França – where Buarque had the opportunity to publish a sequence of photographs. Titled *Os Defenestrados* (The Defenestred), this edited work established a dialogue between Buarque's images and a text by Alexandre O'Neill, a well-known poet and a friend of the artist, who was very

enthusiastic about her windows project. In his introductory text, José-Augusto França – who selected the photographs to be published – considered that the windows constituted ‘an improbable game of plastic signs, elements of a language that it would be possible to codify and then read in its multiple senses’ (França 1977: 24). On the other hand, O’Neill’s poetic prose played with the ambiguities embodied by this architectural element, both spatial – inside/outside, far/close – and as a device framing the field of vision – looking at / being looked at. To a certain extent, these readings served the artist’s purpose of multiplying to exhaustion the viewpoints, forms and materials through which the window could be addressed, insofar as they produced two very distinct interpretations that used language instead of the image or the object.

Subsequently, Buarque’s images of windows were exhibited on several occasions,¹⁶ as a sequence of photographs as well as in artist’s books. In order to expand her technical skills in this area, and specifically to learn how to control the revelation process, in 1977 she decided to take a photography course at Ar.Co – Centro de Arte e Comunicação Visual (Centre for Art and Visual Communication) – an independent school that had been created in 1973. In the following year, Ernesto de Sousa invited Buarque to take part in a cycle of solo exhibitions at Quadrum Gallery – one of the main centres consecrated to artistic experimentation in Lisbon in the 1970s – which also included artists Leonel Moura, Mário Varela and José Conduto. It was also in 1978 that Quadrum hosted performances by Ulrike Rosenbach and Gina Pane and an installation by Ana Vieira that played with the borders of domestic space and the tensions between women’s confinement and the possibility of its transgression through imagination.

In line with this approach, Buarque’s exhibition, *Leitura e Contra-Leitura de um Espaço Limite: Janela*, was once more conceived as an installation, thus accentuating its spatial dimension. The installation explored the idea of the window as a threshold or a liminal space by constructing an environment through the combination of heterogeneous objects and images of windows. Photographs of the exhibition show that, on one side of the gallery, rectangular ozalite prints hanging from metallic devices, and touching the ground, presented a series of geometric structures resembling windows (Figure 7.5). On the other side, a long, unfolded, ozalite roll displayed a deconstruction of the geometric frame of the window. In other parts of the gallery, artists’ books were exhibited inside and outside display cases, photographs and prints of windows or of window-shaped objects made by the artists with materials like wood and sand were either

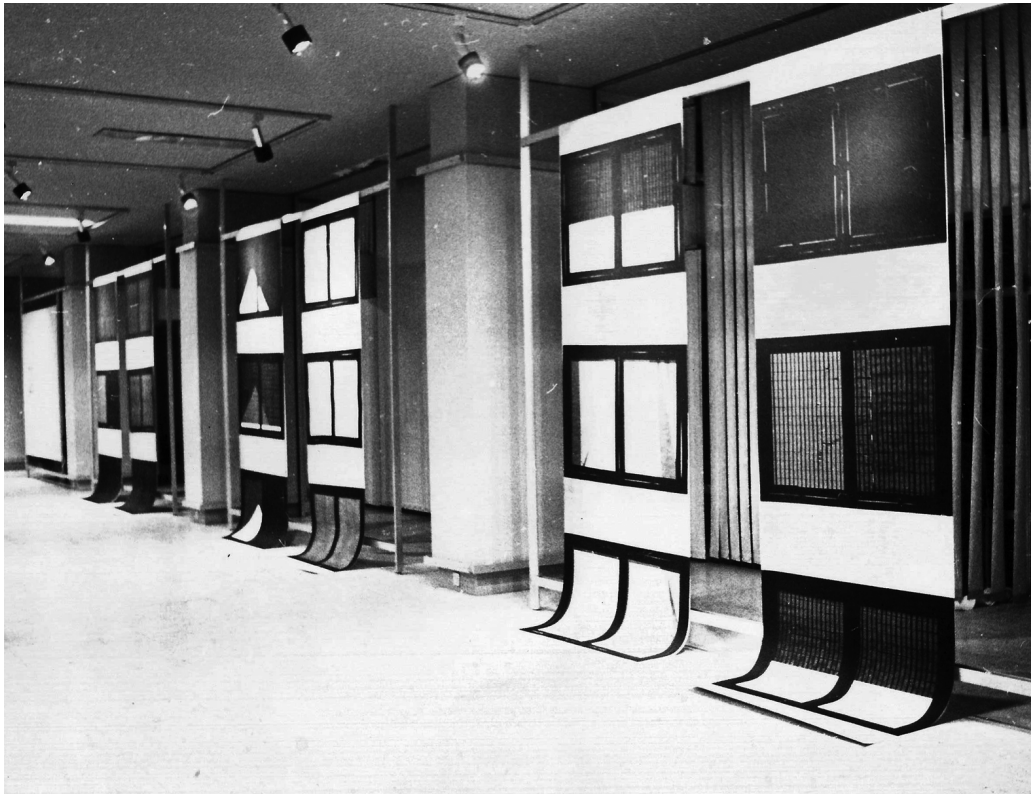


Figure 7.5 View of Irene Buarque's exhibition *Leitura e Contra-Leitura de um Espaço Limite: Janela* (Reading and Counter-Reading of a Space Limit: The Window), Galeria Quadrum, Lisbon, 1978. Detail: Ozalite prints (dark blue on white), 100 × 400 cm. © Irene Buarque.

hung on the walls, located on the ground or on a base, or hanging from a metallic structure.¹⁷

In a text published in the exhibition catalogue, Buarque defined the window space as 'internal-external, interior-exterior, continuous, ambiguous, dynamic, relating the inside to the outside and the outside to the inside, now defining, now confusing one with the other, in parallel with the interior "inside-outside" of people' (Buarque 1978). This spatial fluidity and the impossibility of fixing a definite meaning for this liminal space translated in the artist's repetitive use of the gerundive in her text, indicating continuity in time rather than finiteness: 'the window as an extension of people; a situation, a function, a wait, a reflecting, an [act of] reflecting ... referring ... cutting out ... breathing ... remembering ... reliving ... resisting ... repressing ... resting ... spattering ... re-closing and re-opening with the personal "decorated" or "simple" of each interior' (Buarque 1978).

While Buarque's approach of the window was essentially multifocused, it also opened a significant space of connection – as the city wall had previously done in *As Muralhas de Lisboa* – in which her cultural and political experiences in both Brazil and Portugal could be articulated. As previously mentioned, the language of architecture was one of the main elements performing this connective function. In the artist's collection of photographs taken in Portugal, in fact, some windows bore striking similarities with those of colonial buildings in Brazil. Underlining a common history of colonisation, these reverberations also emphasised the circulation of cultural forms between the metropolis and its colonies, as well as the processes of transformation, re-signification and transgression often involved in such transits.

As observed by architect Alexandre Alves Costa, the very existence of Portuguese heritage depends on the possibility of 'finding the common denominators that allow us to rigorously consider that heritage as a whole' (Costa 2007: 27). Although Buarque's research was not directly concerned with the question of heritage, her portraits of Portuguese windows seemed to implicitly suggest the existence of a common matrix between Portuguese and Brazilian vernacular architecture that had to be critically addressed. In this sense, it is not surprising that in 1979 the artist travelled back to Brazil to photograph local windows for an artist's book that was to be edited in São Paulo¹⁸ – thus proposing a sort of reverse perspective on the same subject by adopting the point of view of Brazilian architecture. In this trip to Brazil, she was accompanied by Nuno Teotónio Pereira, who, as written by Ana Vaz Milheiro, visited the historical cities, privileging 'the search for colonial marks' (Milheiro 2012: 18).

Most importantly, the window symbolically served the purpose of opposing a conception of space and location as univocal and self-contained. Using transparency and opening to connect the here and there, the window possibly became a challenging metaphor for the artist not only to envision reality and experience, but also to think about the hybridity of her own artistic practice and the specific language that her experience of migration contributed to shaping through encounters as well as divergences. As a vanishing point, in fact, the window bridges the gap between the inside and the outside, the place left and the place found, by drawing a line of continuity across what is generally considered as fractured. In this sense, it is not a coincidence, perhaps, that Buarque's research on windows roughly corresponded, in chronological terms, to the government of General Geisel in Brazil (1974–1979), which introduced a gradual process of political opening towards democracy – a sort of window through which another future could be imagined.

Over the following decades, Irene Buarque's emphasis on transnational connectedness, and the reclaiming of her agency as a migrant female artist – between Portugal and Brazil – materialised by the image of the window, had a series of implications involving not only her artistic practice but also her attitude concerning collaboration and her role in championing the work of other artists. On the one hand, her work, possibly considered difficult to classify because of its specific in-betweenness, was left out of canonical art historical narratives in both Portugal and Brazil. Significantly, no museum retrospective of her extensive production has been organised to date in either country. Nor was her work included in the panoramic show dedicated to art in Portugal in the 1970s, entitled *Anos 70, Atravessar Fronteiras* (1970s, Crossing Borders) – held at the Gulbenkian Foundation in 2010. Ironically, though, the exhibition title would have been perfectly suited to Buarque's practice.

On the other hand, the artist gained a certain recognition for her activity in support of other artists, and for the promotion of artistic creation at large. In this sense, it is unavoidable to point out her commitment to the *Cooperativa Diferença* – a place collectively run and a reference in the Portuguese artistic context since its creation in 1979. Through her pivotal function at *Diferença*, Buarque had the chance to strengthen her collaborative ways of working, sharing her transnational attachments with a community of artists in Portugal and abroad, finally showing that belonging is more a matter of connection than of rootedness.

Finally, the artist's practice itself can perhaps be read according to the powerful metaphor that it constructed in the mid-1970s – that of the window. Buarque's work, in this sense, becomes a window through which art historical narratives developed in Portugal come out of their isolation to envision their transnational extensions and crossings as core elements of transformation. As a figure of connectedness, the window signals the urgency for art historical writing to unearth the transits, circulations, in-between and marginal practices that, because of their reluctance to fit in canonical discourses – and because of canonical discourses' inner structures of exclusion – have been devoid of historical representation. Perhaps, with the work of Buarque, we can imagine that these transnational itineraries have been traditionally approached as walls, when they are windows after all.

We are extremely grateful to Irene Buarque for her generosity and collaboration. Our conversations with her, along with the access to her fellowship dossiers at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, were key elements in the research that led to this text.

Notes

- 1 See the artist's website: www.irenebuarque.com
- 2 We refer here to Homi Bhabha's conceptualisation of a 'third space'. Referring to Guyanese writer Wilson Harris, Bhabha writes 'He sees it as accompanying the "assimilation of contraries" and creating that occult instability which presages powerful cultural changes. It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance.' (Bhabha 1994: 38).
- 3 The exhibition catalogue does not indicate any specific date for these works.
- 4 Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by the authors.
- 5 As Zanini wrote in the same exhibition catalogue '[she] is one of the not many of the generation under 30 to ensure the continuity of an art of pure visuality in our environment' (Zanini 1971).
- 6 Carried out by armed forces, the 1964 coup led to the collapse of the administration of João Goulart – that had been democratically elected in 1961 – and to the instauration of a military dictatorship that lasted until 1985.
- 7 This spatial dimension became evident in the Neoconcrete Manifesto – published in the *Jornal do Brasil*, as a supplement to the *I Exposição de Arte Neoconcreta* (I Neoconcrete Art Exhibition) that took place at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro in December 1959.
- 8 In the 1960s, Buarque had the occasion to take part in the informal gatherings organised by concrete poets Augusto and Haroldo de Campos in São Paulo (Alves et al. 2019).
- 9 The exhibition catalogue does not indicate any specific date for these works.
- 10 In the first of the artist's quarterly reports addressed to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, dated from 26 June 1973, Irene Buarque wrote 'painting is the only sector with which I still have not had a contact that impressed me as a contemporary work (or proposal)'. Irene Buarque's fellowship dossier, 1973, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Archives.
- 11 More specifically, she took part in the exhibition *13+1 Novos Gravadores*.
- 12 The artist posteriorly attributed this title to the exhibition. In the 1975 exhibition catalogue, the show was simply titled 'Irene Buarque' and the paintings 'Muralhas' (City Walls).
- 13 The Estado Novo regime promoted an ideal of femininity based on traditional roles such as mother and housewife.
- 14 We are paraphrasing here the artist's description (Buarque 1978).
- 15 Titled *Evolução das Formas de Habitação Plurifamiliar na Cidade de Lisboa* (Evolution of Collective Housing Forms in the City of Lisbon), and supported by the Gulbenkian Foundation, this research aimed at mapping and registering collective housing structures in Lisbon – many of them on the verge of ruin and destruction – spanning

from the Middle Ages to the 1930s. This survey would finally be published as a book in 2017. (See Buarque and Pereira 2017.)

- 16 One of these occasions was the exhibition *11 Artisti Portoghesi d'Oggi* (11 Portuguese Artists of Today), which took place at the Laboratorio Teoria e Pratica della Comunicazione in Milan, in January 1978. The exhibition, organised by Leonel Moura and Ernesto de Sousa, mainly presented photography-based artworks by Helena Almeida, Irene Buarque, Fernando Calhau, Alberto Carneiro, José Conduto, Leonel Moura, Julião Sarmiento, Ângelo de Sousa, Ernesto de Sousa, Mário Varela and Ana Vieira. Buarque exhibited five photography notebooks titled *Do Discurso das Janelas à Janela como Pintura* (From the Windows Discourse to the Window as Painting).
- 17 Photographs of the exhibition are available at <http://quadrumarquivoparalelo.blogspot.com/search/label/1978>.
- 18 This information appears in a chronology published in *Do Discurso: Da Janela, Irene Buarque*, Escolha do Crítico / Ernesto de Sousa, exhibition catalogue, Lisboa, Centro Nacional de Cultura, 9–16 July 1981. Meanwhile, the artist remembers that in 1980 she did a small edition with photographs of Brazilian windows. Email exchange with the artist, 25 May 2020.

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