

## **VISUALIZING PORTUGAL:**

### **Pedro Cid's Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World Fair through Photography**

**Antonio S. Río Vázquez**

Universidade da Coruña / University of A Coruña, Spain

**Silvia Blanco Agüeira**

CESUGA University College Dublin, Ireland

#### **Abstract**

*Expo 58, the Brussels Worlds Fair in 1958 was described as a vanity trade fair in which every building claimed for the attention of the public. This was a logical approach because of the nature of these exhibitions: large-scale promotional events looking for a massive public interest. Therefore, the first World's Fair since 1939 revealed uninhibited structures like the strangely menacing Atomium, the huge steel dragonfly of the French pavilion, the folding tent designed for the Philips Pavilion, or the Civil Engineering Arrow conceived by Belgian engineers. Nevertheless, despite of these spectacular spaces, unique facades and tensile structures, some other nations decided in favour of a much smaller scale.*

*Portugal was one of those countries which embraced the world of modern technology and architecture by featuring a pavilion designed by architect Pedro Cid. Unlike in the more symbolic displays, the country was represented by an advanced exercise of pure form. Two photographers specialized in the art of capturing images, Horácio and Mário Novais, were committed to illustrate and document the architectural project. This paper seeks to analyze the importance of photography in creating an abstraction of reality with its own identity, created partially by the close connection between architects and photographers. Pursuing these objectives, the images of the Portuguese pavilion are compared to the Yugoslavian, Swiss, German and British. Positioned directly across from the Portuguese pavilion, these mentioned buildings also revealed a crystalline approach to form. All of them had a refined architectural style, shared a large green area and were placed very close to each other. However, the views shown are very different. Photography is therefore an essential tool in the construction of Modernity.*

**Keywords:** Architecture, Photography, Portugal, Novais, Pastor.

#### **Introduction**

The first major World's Fair after World War II was widely criticized by its contemporaries. Many European intellectuals, and well regarded architects like Bruno Zevi, Manfredo Tafuri or Miguel Fisac described it as a vanity fair, in which each building claimed for the attention of the public (Crowley, 2012). This was obviously a logical consequence of the nature of these kinds of exhibitions: large-scale promotional events seeking a massive public interest. At the

beginning, World Expositions were focused on technological inventions<sup>1</sup> and on promoting the imperialist success. Since the twentieth century their character evolved becoming hubs of culture seeking interaction and exchange. To build the image of a country becomes extremely important and the pavilions and its photographs will play an exceptional role in this.

Considering the above-mentioned, it is logical the interest of Expo58 in finding the most spectacular design and the most impressive image. A proof of this is the group of striking photographs that reflected both the construction and the finished state of the French pavilion. The Belgian government did not want to fall behind and designed a horizontal cantilevered structure promoting the country's victory over nature. The extraordinary mass of reinforced concrete, achieved by the leading engineering companies in Belgium, was called "The Civil Engineering Arrow" because it was connected to the pavilion by a footbridge. (Blanco, 2013). Belgium and France tried to strengthen their national character through powerful forms and iconic architecture able to enthrall visitors and attract them into their respective pavilions. The aim was to build a world for the modern man, believing in the future progress of society. There was indeed an implied message of optimism. Simon Engel's colorful shots show spectators enjoying the facilities in a clear and bright approach. Even those moments of wonder, happiness, admiration and surprise among schoolchildren and well-dressed visitors were perfectly captured by Henri Cartier Bresson in his famous black and white photographs (Galassi, 2010).

It is an evidence that most of the photographs that documented the Expo hosted in Brussels belonged to the world of the black and white. The human figure was transformed into a key element in the composition, sharing space with innovative architecture which covered a broad spectrum of contents, perspectives and themes. In the work of the Dutch photographer Dolf Kruger, the contours of operators arise from foggy backgrounds to reach prominent

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<sup>1</sup> The 'first World Expo' was held in The Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London, in 1851, under the title "Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations". One of the first prefabricated structures ever made housed machinery, manufactured goods, curiosities and art objects from all over the world. Since 1928, the *Bureau International des Expositions* (BIE) supervises these public exhibitions.

places in the visual space of the observer. Even in the work of the Dutch photographer Hans de Boer, who showed the Philips Pavilion under construction, the scale of the visitors was key to emphasize the mathematical inspiration of the geometrical sculpture designed by Le Corbusier. In this way, outstanding contemporary professionals became worldwide regarded because of their work with the pavilions erected in Heysel<sup>2</sup>. Their work did not only document a specific event organized during the Cold War, but also, gave a personal view of buildings and spaces, whose special features were always carefully highlighted. The resulting aesthetics, named after the exhibition as the "Brussels Style" (Dufek, 2009) and further discussed in detail, introduced a fascinating dialogue between architecture, applied arts and decorative elements.



**Figure 1.** Horácio Novais. Exposição Universal de Bruxelas, 1958. Pavilhão de Portugal. Vista exterior. 1958. (Col. Estúdio Horácio Novais. FCG-Biblioteca de Arte)

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<sup>2</sup> The General Exhibition of first category of Brussels was held from 17 April to 19 October 1958 in Heysel Park, in a two square kilometers site near the downtown.

## **A clearing in the woods**

The Brussels World's Fair was eclipsed by the cross fire between the US and the USSR. These nation's representative buildings occupied the most prominent places of the Belgian park, turned into a large political checkerboard (Devos et al, 2006). In a more remote area, located on the southwest side of the enclosure, other countries like Germany, Yugoslavia, UK, Spain, Switzerland and Portugal were placed. Each of these buildings was shown on emblematic photographs which aimed to call for everybody's attention whilst displaying the Nation's current stage of progress. Consequently, Photography became the main tool used to create symbols which not only overflowed the project's site but also the timeline of the exhibition. Photographers were not commissioned an easy task. They had to add a photo report to the building becoming this a project on its own. Each country counted on its most distinguished professionals with extensive experience in the field of the Architectural Photography. For instance, Francesc Catalá-Roca and Nicolas Muller photographed the Spanish Pavilion and actively participated in its artistic development (Cánovas, 2004).

The Portuguese building was sited on a large plot of land of over seven thousand square meters. Close to a densely wooded hill, a clearing in the woods had to be created for walking, resting and contemplating. This path also connected the Portuguese Pavilion with the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Federal Republic of Germany ones. All of these countries did not focus on creating revolutionary buildings by using luxurious materials, but opted to show a high level of sophistication in their architecture, proving a great commitment to Modernity.

The Yugoslavian Pavilion is surprisingly a big unknown. Unfortunately the photographs showing the complex process of design and construction do not have a high quality. Of the finished building, only a colorful set of images that attempt to describe the visual values of architecture is mentioned<sup>3</sup> (Galjer, 2009). However, the reluctance of the political authorities to leave a valuable

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<sup>3</sup> The lawyer, artist and photographer Miloš Pavlović (Belgrade, 1910 / Geneva, 1985) is supposed to be the photographer of these images in color.

graphic testimony to future generations has encouraged the oblivion of this project, whose memory has considerably been watered down. Something similar happened to the Swiss Pavilion, located on a sloped area in front of the Yugoslavian and Portuguese ones. Barely acceptable pictures of it have survived. According to a modular strategy, Switzerland purported to show the complexity of its politics with a volumetrically conceived mosaic. Forty two hexagonal elements were juxtaposed to maximize the use of the site and again, not many images of them are kept. Slightly further south, one of the buildings belonging to the United Kingdom pavilion generated a handful of colorful and pop photographs. In this case, the British used humor and irony to strengthen the relationship between their country and Europe. To find pictures of interiors, mosaics and murals becomes a challenging task. It's easier to find shots from the German pavilion, very close to the Portuguese one, for whom photography became an indispensable tool in order to advertise Architecture.

Accordingly, the report of the German pavilion aimed to make the gas chambers be forgotten by showing Germany's pretty face. Heinrich Heidersberger was commissioned to obviate the effects of the World War II. By portraying Egon Eiermann and Sep Ruf's project, Heidersberger was able to capture the lightness of facades and structure. Through this famous series of photographs, footbridges, water surfaces, furniture and interior spaces acquired a new dimension. This type of austere architecture becomes an icon gracefully captured by the camera.

Portugal employed an architectural language based on simple lines, harmonious proportions and a sophisticated feel to lead people's attention away from the political circumstances of the country. Curtain walls, fretwork blocks, steel and glass were beautifully shown in another example of technology at the service of human progress.

Under the general direction of José Penalva Franco Frazão (Earl of Penha Garcia), and Jorge Asegurado and Mário Neves as commissioners, the Portuguese committee decided to document the pavilion through photographs



taken by well regarded professionals. The brothers Horácio and Mário Novais were then appointed for this task.



**Figure 2.** Horácio Novais. Exposição Universal de Bruxelas, 1958. Vista nocturna: Poente. 1958. (Col. Estúdio Horácio Novais. FCG-Biblioteca de Arte)

### **The image of the pavilion: the work of Novais Brothers**

The illustration of architectural projects was not new for the Novais brothers, photographers with a considerable experience acquired in previous expos. To give an example, the International Exhibition in Paris in 1937, the New York of 1939, the Portuguese World Exhibition held in Lisbon in 1940 or the Portuguese Art Exhibition held in London between 1955 and 1956.

The Novais brothers belonged to a family with a long history in the world of photography. His father, Júlio Novais (1867-1925) and his uncles António (1855-1940) and Eduardo Novais (1857-1951) were photographers laboring with diverse topics and in different ateliers who had achieved recognition in their careers. Júlio was a portraitist who participated in the Universal Exhibition in

Paris in 1900 and António worked for newspapers like *Ilustração Portuguesa*, *Ocidente*, *Brazil-Portugal*, *A Época*, *A Nação*, and eventually became the photographer of the *Real Casa Portuguesa*. Inevitably, the family atmosphere led the three sons of Júlio: Horácio, Mário and the youngest, Lucília Amélia (1896-1961), to share the same profession<sup>4</sup>.

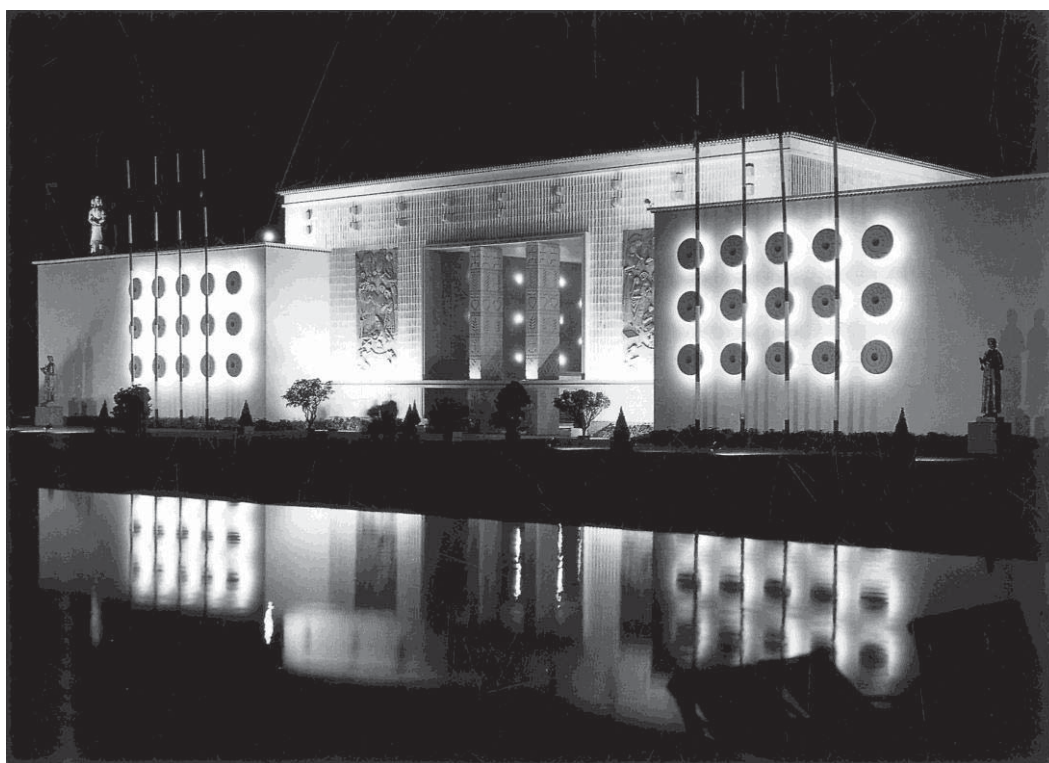
The eldest son, Mário Novais, born in Lisbon in 1899, was early initiated in the photographic techniques by his uncle Eduardo. After working in other ateliers as a portraitist, began to collaborate with his brother Horácio between 1925 and 1927. Horácio was also born in Lisbon, in 1910. In the early thirties, engaged into photojournalism, making reports for various newspapers and also working as press correspondent between 1931 and 1932 for Madrid newspaper *Ahora*. Although they never set up a partnership, the concerns and interests of the two brothers were very similar: the decorative arts, the reproduction of works of art, advertisement and industrial photography, and of course, portraying architectural models and buildings. They both loved to participate in the buzzing cultural and artistic atmosphere of the Capital. However, whilst Mário continued to portrait moving into industrial photography, and finally specializing in reproducing artwork, Horácio achieved recognition working as director of photography in film productions, collaborating in several movies. Nevertheless they were more commonalities than differences, especially regarding the in official commissions, in which the work of the two brothers was intertwined and mutually supportive.

The two brothers were linked to the *Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional* (SPN), created in 1933 by the government of Salazar, whose purpose was to spread the ideology of the *Estado Novo* and promote National culture and Arts. Years later, in 1945, the SPN was replaced by the *Secretariado Nacional de Informação, Cultura Popular e Turismo* (SNI) led by António Ferro who trusted Mário Novais as the photographer in charge of the Portuguese Pavilion report at the Exhibition in Paris in 1937.

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<sup>4</sup> For a complete genealogy of Novais family see the exhibition catalog *António Novaes 1903-1911*, edited by the Câmara Municipal de Lisboa in 1996.

In the following years, the collaborations between the two brothers occurred while working for the SPN and SNI. Such cooperation was consolidated in 1940, with the omnipresence of the two brothers Novais covering the Portuguese World Exhibition and the commemorations of the Centenaries. This tight working relationship between Mario and Horácio with the Regime should only be understood as the logical consequence of the two well regarded and widely recognized professional careers.



**Figure 3.** Mário Novais. Exposição do Mundo Português 1940. Pavilhão das Artes e Industrias e Espelho de Água. Secção da Vida Popular. 1940. (Col. Estúdio Mário Novais. FCG-Biblioteca de Arte)

Paying attention to the images withdrawn from this exhibition we can understand how this commission is certainly a clear precedent of the one in Brussels by seeing many of the features that will remain in the photographs taken in 1958. Mário Novais proves himself as an exceptional photographer, dominating the techniques effectively and feeling extremely comfortable with the process of abstraction of reality. In the usual way, he works only in black and white, playing with natural and artificial lighting and using the contrast as the



fundamental element of the composition. As already discussed (Rodrigues, 1998), Mario is keen in displaying curves against straight lines in favour of a dynamic composition dyed with the ink of the Modernism. Working with different scales resolves into a challenge as "The Containers" (pavilions and contiguous buildings) are as crucial as the artistic exhibition. Some of the most attractive views are born of this intimate relationship between large and small scale, where both are equally important. Novais plays beautifully with buildings, objects of art and exhibition stalls creating images filled with solemnity and monumentality so typical in Modernism. This is a working routine in 1940 but also 18 years later.

Another characteristic of the Portuguese World Exhibition set previously is the absence of the human figure. Light, space and objects are the only subjects in the image, even in those shots of exteriors or in the more festive images like the one of the night lit by fireworks. This approach is repeated in Brussels, and will also be chosen by other countries, originating two types of images: the ones of empty spaces shot in black and white versus the *pop* pictures showing colorful crowds of people. Mário Novais will stick to the first choice in both commissions, showing the architecture isolated, while his brother was required to capture all the formal events. This decision contrasts with the snapshots taken by Mário of the Portuguese Villages for the 1940 exhibition, where the man and his actions are the focus, becoming another element more within the whole group. Those presumably traditional and simple snapshots are taken so precisely that when viewed altogether the rest of the images in the exhibition, the trusting viewers become wary about what is on show and a mutual understanding takes place between them and the photographer.

In Brussels Horácio Novais displays three main series arranged similarly to the ones in the Portuguese World Exhibition. Firstly, night shots of the pavilion where it is featured as a great box of light clear and open. Secondly, the pavilion's architecture and the context of the building, (the site and the materials used) and finally, the internal exhibition space, where small subjects and details are vital. We can understand that there are three ways in which Portugal wanted to be seen abroad: Firstly, as a free and open minded country in contrast with the internal political situation. (Spain, in a similar position, also

invested in an avant-garde pavilion filled with art and culture), secondly, as a country that invests in contemporary architecture and thirdly as a country rich in art and culture.



**Figure 4.** Horácio Novais. Exposição Universal de Bruxelas, 1958. Interior do pavilhão. 1958. (Col. Estúdio Horácio Novais. FCG-Biblioteca de Arte)

Meanwhile, it seems that the photographer wants to back up with his pictures of the architectural project Pedro Cid's concept ideas. To start with, he seeks the integration of the pavilion with the surrounding park keeping the largest possible area of garden. Then, uses a light structure, sitting on the ground without modifying it and finally, chooses a volume simple in shape and transparent in opacity so no obstacles can interrupt the views of the park. To sum up, we can say that this is the example of an ephemeral type of architecture, not only for its provisional character, but also for its austerity. This architecture represents a country so the advertising aspect of it should be avoided. This typology seeks to communicate clearly the overriding theme by relying on a short general route which does not force the visitor to walk a labyrinth to see the whole exhibition, and aims to employ building technologies, detailing and finishes that imply the

idea of prefabrication. This way, Photography becomes an essential tool to fully document the architectural work. The photographer focuses on the container as much as on the content of the exhibition, avoiding competition between these elements and aiming for the integration of both within the project.

This respect and recognition towards architectural photography by the Novais brothers, (who use the same sincerity and appreciation as working with artworks) is also acknowledged in the commissions for other architects such as in views of the *Salón Central Eborense* (1945), the *Alvalade* (1952) and *Europa Cinemas* (1958) in Lisbon, and in various images of buildings and models by architects like Cristino da Silva, Raul Lino, Jorge Segurado, Cassiano Branco, Carlos Ramos, Pardal Monteiro or Keil do Amaral. They are images that, because of their particular style, (previously discussed when analyzing the 1940 exhibition) bring us closer to that great Modern Architecture carefully designed and of which in most cases, only several black and white photographs are proof of. Due to their talent and expertise and all the commissions received from very different architects, the Novais brothers became exceptionally accurate at documenting Portuguese Modern architecture in the 20th century. The value of their work transcends the Photography domain as their images are the only legacy of a particular Architectural landmark, (not always linked to the great International exhibitions) which after its disappearance can be analyzed and study today.

Mário Novais died in Lisbon in 1967 and his brother Horácio in the same city in 1988. Since 1985, his photographic legacy, (about 100,000 negatives) was purchased and accounted in detail by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and entrusted into its archive of Art where all the images were catalogued to ease public consultation. Nowadays, a large volume of albums containing the Novais brothers' work is accessible via *Flickr* under Creative Commons. This is definitely an easy way to reach a fundamental collection to understand the History of Art in Portugal, the history of Architecture in the twentieth century and in particular Architecture in the International exhibitions. Rediscovering the history of the Brussels' pavilion and other previous similar events in a visual way has shown us

a very personal and different approach towards Photography in Architecture and how it was used to create an image for the Nation.

### **The photography inside the pavilion: the work of Artur Pastor**

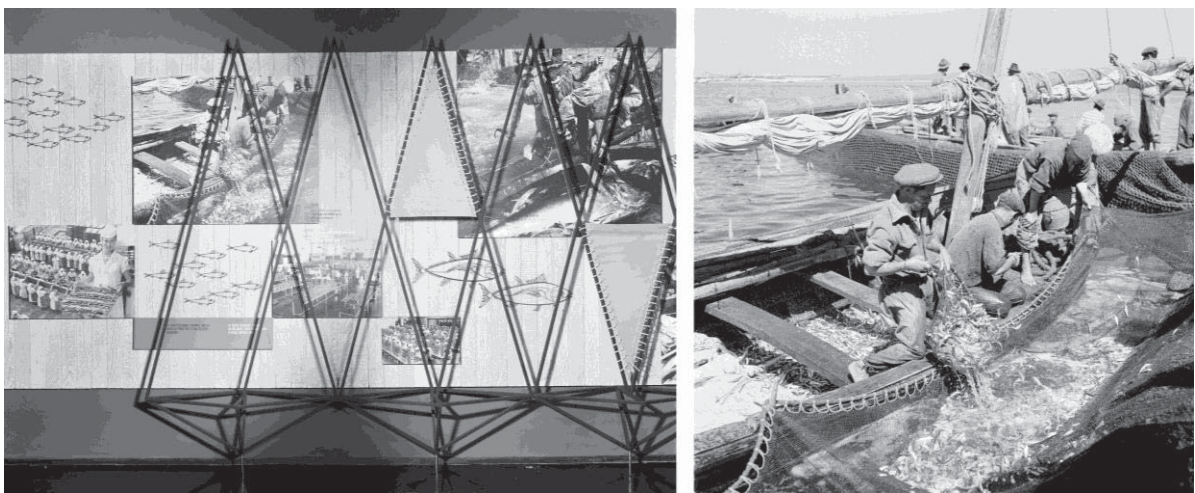
Looking at the photographs of the interior of the exhibition building in Brussels, in particular those of the area devoted to seamen, we find a metal structure that resembles a fishing net, ( amongst other references to this theme ) and displays several images in black and white that seek the attention of the visitors. Reviewing the catalog of the contents of the pavilion we notice the appearance of the following accredited photographers: Horácio and Mário Novais, Artur Pastor and the Laboratório Industrial Santos de Almeida. Who could be the maker of those images that were so interesting to the official photographer? Like a visual *matryoshka*, photographs are being photographed to strengthen and round out the perception presented by the nation.

When these images were found, the son of Artur Pastor was contacted. He confirmed the authenticity of the images by providing some of the original photographs. They were an essential contribution to the graphic design within the pavilion and they allowed us to enjoy the work of Pastor even more.

Artur Pastor (Alter do Chão, 1922 - Lisbon, 1999) was a 36 years old photographer when he was commissioned to work in Brussels. He trained as an Agricultural overseer in Évora and when counting twenty years of age began his self-taught career in Photography. He was mainly interested in fishing and agricultural topics and he will keep this interest throughout his life. During the fifties he started to work as a photographer for the General Direction of Agricultural Services carrying out reports of different themes in different locations.

This new type of work became well regarded very rapidly as Artur Pastor had a great sensitivity and talent in portraying the mundane. The land and its inhabitants were captured in everyday scenes with great dignity and majesty. In 1953 the Portuguese government invites Pastor to work in the National Tourism

Exhibition held in Foz Palace, in Lisbon. This exhibition was sponsored by the SNI, hence it aims to display Portugal's economic and cultural power especially in front of a foreign crowd. Striking photographs of Artur Pastor, taken in various locations of Portugal, focus on diverse activities within different social and economical stratum. Prior to this event, Pastor had worked in some international exhibitions as the XIII International Exhibition of Photography in Madrid (1946), VI and VII International Exhibition of Photographic Art in Barcelona (1947-1948) and the XXIII International Photography Exhibition in Zaragoza (1947). In addition to this, he also sent his work to overseas events.



**Figure 5.** Horácio Novais. Exposição Universal de Bruxelas, 1958. Interior do pavilhão. (Col. Estúdio Horácio Novais. FCG-Biblioteca de Arte) and Artur Pastor. Algarve, Lagos (Unpublished - Family of Artur Pastor)

The work of Pastor is deservedly appreciated not only because it captures Portugal and Portuguese people, but also because of its artistic value. It brings us closer to the Portuguese land and their people telling us everyday stories. Special attention is given to the Built Heritage in the celebrated and well documented book *Arquitetura Popular em Portugal*, (published in 1961 by the *Sindicato Nacional dos Arquitectos*). The presence of Pastor's work in the Portuguese pavilion in Brussels contributes beautifully to the conception of Portugal, approaching its people nobly and honestly, in contrast to the pristine and embellished style of Novais. Artur Pastor's photographs show accurately modern architecture of Pedro Cid as well as the land and the peasants. These



two very different themes are carefully and naturally<sup>5</sup> integrated into the building exhibition.

## Conclusions

In its beginnings, Photography was considered a fraudulent and disconcerting tool. Its full potential was still unknown and many questions were raised about its benefits. Less than a century later, Photography was fully incorporated into communication strategies according to new aesthetic trends. Portugal was not immune to this new revolution and the photographs taken by the Novais brothers are a clear proof. Each image contributed to document Modernity and to send a carefully studied message to the viewer who became closer to the photographer. In this paper, special attention has been put into the photographic process (how and why certain pictures were taken, who their target audience was and how the images were brought into the public domain) and not so much into the object being photographed.

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Centro Português de Fotografia (Oporto)  
Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian - Biblioteca de Arte (Lisbon)

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<sup>5</sup> The relationship between Pastor and the universal exhibition did not end in Brussels. When he was 76 years old visited the World Fair of 1998, (held in Lisbon under the title of "Oceans: A Heritage for the Future" and the last of the twentieth century) where he worked on an extensive photo essay of the Expo. His intention was to publish it in a book but, unfortunately, this affair was interrupted by his death just over a year later.

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## Author identification

**Antonio S. Río Vázquez** is Architect by School of Architecture of A Coruña, Master in Urban Planning and PhD from the University of A Coruña. Professor in the Department of Composition at the University of A Coruña. Visiting Professor at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen (United Kingdom) and Universidade do Minho, Guimarães (Portugal). Researcher on the project *Photography and Modern Architecture in Spain, 1925-1965*. Member of the Research Group on History of Architecture at the University of A Coruña, the results of his research have served as an input to national and international seminars and conferences and have been published in books and journals.

**Silvia Blanco Agüeira** received her Degree in Architecture (2004) and PhD (2009) from the School of Architecture of the University of A Coruña. Since 2011 she has been a lecturer in Architecture at CESUGA. Author of numerous articles, papers and communications at seminars and international conferences, she has also produced a range of texts for the digital media. Researcher on the project *Photography and Modern Architecture in Spain, 1925-1965*, the photography has become a key element in all her scientific production, as an essential tool for the construction of a genealogy of twentieth-century architectural thought.