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Caroline Naphegyi and Sam Baron propose a cross-border dialogue for the French program of Porto Design Biennial

Turning the focus into the usefulness of design practice, revealing its ability to question reality, challenge complexity and propose concepts and adaptations for a closer and fairer world: such is the curatorial proposal of the pair Caroline Naphegyi and Sam Baron for the Porto Design Biennale 2021. The curators will be leading the guest country program, France, developed in partnership with the Institut français du Portugal and the French Embassy in Portugal. Articulated with the general theme proposed by Alastair Fuad-Luke (Alter-Realities: Designing the Present), the program aims to be a space for an open dialogue between the Portuguese and French artistic communities, the citizens of Porto and Matosinhos and all visitors to the PDB. Connecting and being connected, sharing and exchanging, listening and communicating will be the poles that both intend to unite through what they believe is the ability of design to create an inclusive language.

Curators, researchers and creators, Caroline Naphegyi and Sam Baron have developed extensive work in creating bridges between design and other artistic and academic disciplines. Caroline Naphegyi was, among others, the curator of the Lille Metropole 2020 – World Design Capital program, part of the Lille 2004 – European Capital of Culture programming team and chaired the French cultural and multidisciplinary center, Laboratory, which combines the work of artists and scientists. She is also the founder of Tomorrowland and NGO Design for change. Sam Baron is particularly interested in the reinterpretation of traditional construction methods, working as an independent designer, as a consultant in multinational companies and in the design direction of the international research center Fabrica. In 2010, he was appointed by Philippe Starck as one of the ten most important designers for the next decade. For Porto Design Biennale, Caroline Naphegyi and Sam Baron developed a program that points to action and intervention in the territory, which will convene, through a process inspired by the model of the exquisite corpse, French and Portuguese thinkers, designers, architects and design critics.

According to Christian Tison, Advisor for Cooperation and Cultural Action at the French Embassy in Portugal, Director of the Institut français du Portugal, “the French participation in the Porto and Matosinhos Design Biennale is at the heart of our strategy to valorize this sector in Portugal and to initiate a dialogue between the actors of both countries, within the framework of a policy of long-term productive collaboration.” “In the face of the Covid pandemic and other potential future crises, designers are precious allies for collective reflection in order to invent life alternatives and uses adapted to new situations”, he concludes.

The 2021 edition of Porto Design Biennale (PDB) is promoted by the Porto and Matosinhos municipalities and organized by esad—idea, Research in Design and Art, and will take place in both cities between June 2th and July 25th. The great challenge of the event for this year is to call on society, academia, industry, institutions and cultural agents for a dynamic reflection on the construction of a “glocalized” future.

Curatorial text Caroline Naphegyi and Sam Baron

Porto Design Biennale invite France for its second edition in 2021. In order to better design the future, Alastair Fuad-Luke (GB), the general curator of the Biennale, questions the present to conceive a desirable alter-reality around four major challenges: «alter-scapes, alter-production, alter-care and alter-livelihoods».

Developed by the Lille Metropolis as part of the World Design Capital 2020, the POC program - Proof Of Concepts - is one of the sources of inspiration of the biennale mentioned by the general curator. The aim of the program was to collectively prototyping the development of the French metropolis territory, inventing new ways of living in the world – plainer, more sustainable, saving usage of natural resources – thus designing a fairer world.

Contemporary design is no longer limited to a system of desirable functional objects. Rather, it adopts a critical stance on the world we live in. It therefore seems important to us, in an uncertain moment such as the one in which we are evolving, to favor a design of use (design d’usage) adapted to a territory and facilitate the involvement of the citizens and visitors of the biennale in the implementation of these alter-realities.

In this spirit, rather than curating an exhibition on the French design scene and its possible relations with the Portuguese industry, we have chosen to put into action, to activate (in the activist sense), a group of situations in dialog with the stakeholders of the biennale.

To do so, and in order to show the capacity of design to gather, question and summon the imaginary, we are soliciting a reaction from French and Portuguese thinkers, designers, architects and design critics, through an element: a box made up of heterogeneous elements collected in Porto and intended to stimulate the curiosity, reflection and creativity of the contributors.

The design process — implemented so as to resemble an exquisite corpse —, the research material, the preliminary reflections and contributions of each of the actors involved in the process will be revealed at the time of the biennale. Design as practice, language and communication system will shape these actions — resulting from the analysis of the different contributions —, be it a radio broadcast, a meeting point in town, a letter or object received by post, or visual elements (“guerrilla” posters, ground markings, installations...). All of these allow the public, whether local residents or foreign visitors, to take part, in their own way, in these proposals of alter-realities at the crossroads of Portuguese and French cultures.