

SCOPIO NEWSPAPER

VISUAL SPACES OF CHANGE
QUINTA DA CONCEIÇÃO
by Sérgio Rolando
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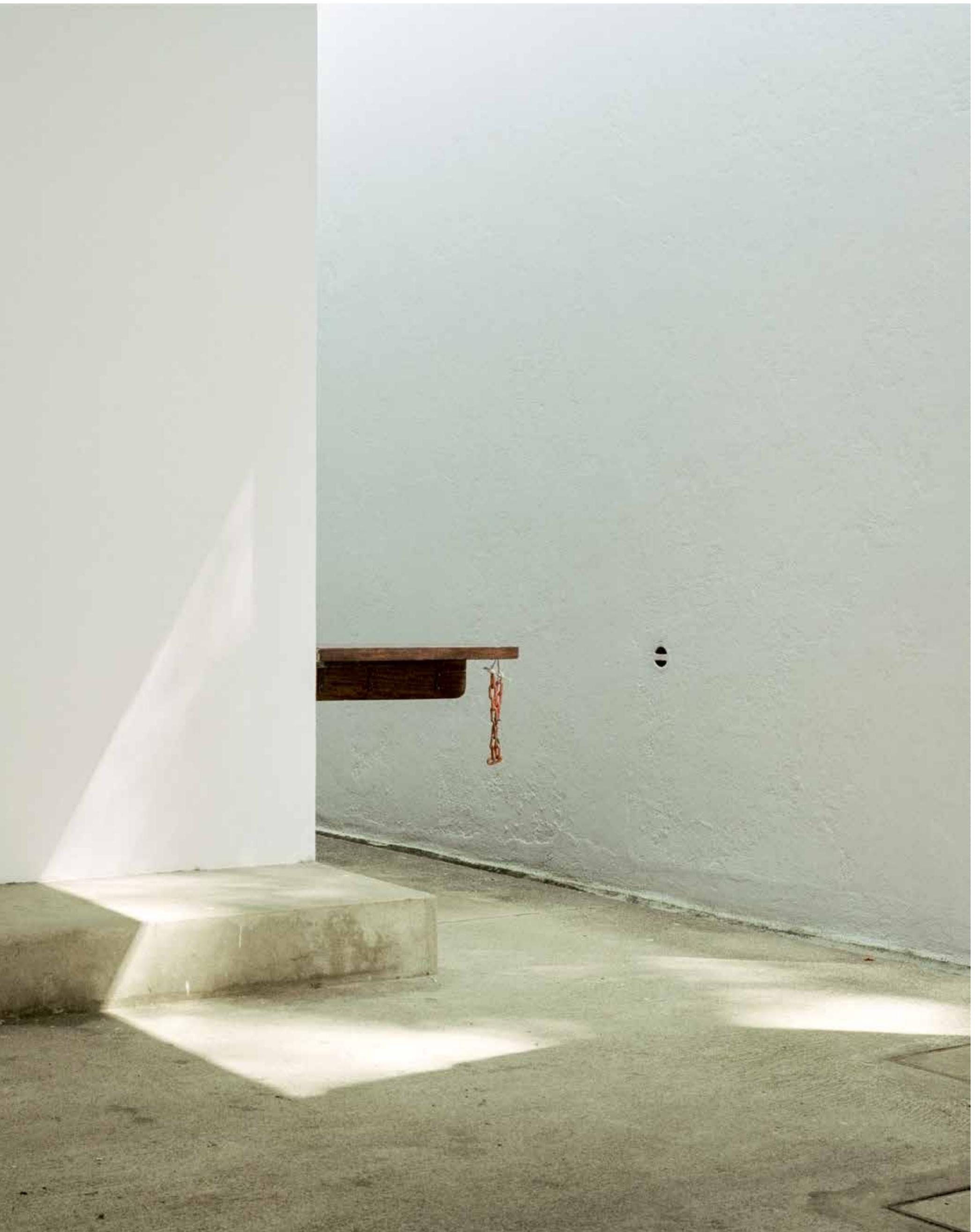




























PISCINA DA QUINTA DA CONCEIÇÃO PHOTOGRAPHED BY SÉRGIO ROLANDO: THE RELATIONSHIP THAT THE DESIGN ESTABLISHES WITH THE PARK'S NATURAL LANDSCAPE

BY PEDRO LEÃO NETO

Photographed by Sérgio Rolando, the Piscina da Quinta da Conceição is an architectural work designed for a well-known public park located in the borough of Leça da Palmeira and inaugurated in 1965.

This design's origin is to be found in the master plan conceived for the Quinta da Conceição in 1957, which, among other programs, envisioned the construction of a swimming pool to be located at one of the highest points on the terrain where an irrigation basin had once existed. Architect Fernando Távora, responsible for this master plan, invited his student, Álvaro Siza Vieira, to participate in the ante-project for the swimming pool, and it is remarkable how Siza Vieira, from the outset, embarked on a self-guided exploration of the path to guide him in drawing up the project. In other words, Siza Vieira began to establish his own style with the Piscina da Quinta da Conceição - as he would do with the neighbouring designs of the Casa de Chá da Boa Nova and the Piscinas das Marés - notable for their unique synthesis of the modern and the Portuguese vernacular, with their legacy being one of the most important for the renewal of 20th century Portuguese architecture.

For this photographic project, Sérgio Rolando has opted for developing a visual narrative of a keenly personal nature, one in which we are brought face-to-face with a strong documentary and artistic component, attentive to the genius loci of the territory and its topography featuring steep slopes and extraordinary vegetation, and to the relationship that the design establishes with the park's natural landscape.

It is through the poetics and conceptual logic of his photographic project that Sérgio is able to address important questions on his personal relationship with the site and to create a visual narrative from this singular vision where his fascination with nature, light and space of the park is quite evident. It is a remarkable *promenade architecturale* that explores and accompanies the exterior of the building in different settings of the vegetation and topography of the terrain, one which, despite not including images of the interior space and the swimming pools per se, is able to create a visual narrative that (re)discovers and reveals new spatial poetics with great depth, sensitivity and understanding with respect to the architecture of this swimming pool complex and its relationship with the park's natural surroundings.

Thus, Sérgio's photographic project takes us on an interesting journey in which he unfolds a poetic chain of images where the work of Siza Vieira is present and establishes different dialogues with the natural surroundings in such a way that the long white-washed walls emerge in the visual narrative as "organic" constituents that possess an abstract and poetic nature and highlight the magical silence, slowness and concentration of those spaces where time seems to standstill. Sérgio's photography, where time and light are the core elements through which he is able to represent the character of the different spaces in a distinctive way, reminds us of Luigi Ghirri, who in his conversation with Arturo Carlo Quintavalle¹ commented that one of the problems with the representation of space in photography is the fact that quite often one tends to focus on the formal question, overlooking how space is intimately connected to light and the perception of time. Sérgio has not forgotten the teachings of this great master of Italian photography, who has influenced many generations of photographers both in his native Italy and beyond.

¹ "Il problema della rappresentazione dello spazio è sempre stato all'interno della fotografia un problema esclusivamente formale, mentre a mio parere è anche un problema che si lega al concetto di tempo. Fotografare una piazza all'imbrunire è diverso che fotografarla con la luce giusta per mettere in evidenza la struttura architettonica della piazza stessa. Adoperare la luce per cancellare alcune cose oppure operare all'incontrario, adoperare la nebbia non solo come una suggestione "coloristica", sentimentale, ma come elemento che disegna il paesaggio" em *Viaggio dentro le parole, conversazione con Arturo Carlo Quintavalle* (<http://www.cieloterradesign.com/luigi-ghirri-mostra-triennale>).

Sérgio also reveals throughout his visual narrative a particular perspective that is not only close to what we call an architectural gaze, but is also akin to the far-reaching perspective described by Byung-Chul Han, and citing Adorno, in his book “The Scent of Time”². In Sérgio’s case, the far-reaching perspective is an architectural contemplation, that is to say, a sensitive impulse, where there exists a significant spatial reflection in the direction of a green space and an exceptional work of architecture.

This inception of the project thus helps to contextualize and situate the work within the park, and it calls on us to intuit the strong individuality and internal privacy of this architecture, as well as how on the one hand it distinguishes itself from the Quinta through its volumetries and white walls and how, on the other hand, it creates a singular *genius loci* resulting from the unique moments of symbiosis or complementarity with the park’s natural elements and its silence.

Many of Sérgio’s images (re)cut and capture the time and light of the spaces in extraordinary fashion, enabling us to come to know the charms of these places through an exquisite 2-dimensional surface that we call photography. It is the “mental model”, as Stephen Shore explains³, which leads Sérgio to make decisions on the level of representation (type of frame, light, focus, etc.) that he believes will be the most appropriate to allow the formal characteristics of his images to express what he thinks and feels about these spaces of architecture and the surrounding nature, given how it is this creative interaction between the mind, reality and operative decisions that make photography a surprising artistic medium and process

We believe that Sérgio uses photography, as Susan Sontag would say⁴, as a source of knowledge that helps us to (re)discover reality and recreate the place of that territory of the Piscina da Quinta da Conceição. It is a vantage point that strives to reflect simultaneously upon the experience of place and the architecture itself, as well as to question and understand the reality of that territory in a powerful and singular way.

Thus, we conclude by saying that although Sérgio is not an architect, his perspective derives from a process of grasping onto a very spatial realness able to reveal to us not only the architectural logic and exterior beauty of the site but also its poetic quality and *genius loci*.

2 “O olhar de longo alcance (...) é sempre aquele em que o impulso na direção do objeto se encontra detido e submetido à reflexão. A contemplação isenta de violência, da qual procede o gozo da verdade, está submetida à condição de aquele que contempla não se assimilar ao objecto” T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflexione naus dem beschadigten Leben, Gesam-melte Schriften*, op. cit., vol. 4, p.98. in *Byung-Chul Han, O Aroma do Tempo – Um Ensaio Filosófico sobre a Arte da Demora*, Relógio D’Água, 2016 ISBN 978-989-641-587-7, p. 96.

3 Shore, S 2007, *The Nature of Photographs*, Phaidon Press, New York.; Shore writes about perception using three levels: The Physical level, The Depictive Level and The Mental Level “You see a mental image – a mental construction – when you read this page, or look at a photograph, or see anything else in the world. Your focus even shifts when reading this picture by Paul Caponigro. But your eyes don’t actually refocus (since you are only looking at a Klat page). It is your mind that changes focus within your mental image of the picture, with all the attendant sensations of refocusing your eyes. It is your mental focus that is shifting. ... Pictures exist on a mental level that may be coincident with the depictive level – what the picture is showing – but not mirror it. The mental level elaborates, refines, and embellishes our perceptions of the depictive level. The mental level of a photograph provides a framework for the mental image we construct of (and for) the picture.” (page 97).

5 Sontag, Susan, 1977, ON PHOTOGRAPHY, Penguin Books, London; Susan Sontag explains in *The Image-World* (pg. 153 – 180) that photography is more about the acquisition of knowledge than the actual experience it portrays.

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EDITORIAL

BY MARIA NETO & PEDRO LEÃO NETO

In this number of scopio newspaper journal # 4 May 2021, we present the photography project “Piscina da Quinta da Conceição” of Sérgio Rolando, focused on an architectural work designed for a well-known public park located in the borough of Leça da Palmeira and inaugurated in 1965.

Following the curatorial work of Visual Spaces of Change Sérgio Rolando rehearsed a documentary and artistic photography methodology that had architecture as its subject and artistic matter. Sérgio's photography project combined diverse artistic strategies having as reference the work of selected authors coming from documentary and / or artistic universe who have architecture as its subject, thus moving away from traditional mainstream architectural magazines. Besides this documentary and artistic background focused on architecture, this photography work presents novel visual information not usually seen in the traditional scientific and monographic studies over these matters.

This photography project integrates the set of case studies coming from Contemporary Documentary Photography on Portuguese Architecture in Visual Spaces of Change, which is the present major theme of this Public Funded research (FCT) coordinated in FAUP by AAI group of R&D Centre CEAU.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Continuo.

How long does it take to represent a place?

Silence, the remembrance of essential things and the attraction to an emptiness, suspended in time and space. The natural surroundings, nostalgic and poetic, summon contemplation and dilute the frontier of the interior with the exterior, suggesting repetition and an intimate relationship with detail.

Sérgio Rolando

BIO

Sérgio Rolando

Lives in Porto, where he works as a photographer and as a lecturer. He has studied photography in IPF, holds a degree in Audio-visual Communication and a MA in Documental Photography and Cinema at ESMAE. He held a research scholarship from Pépinières Européennes pour jeunes artistes (2003), ESMAE (2011) and Camões Institute (2015/2016). He exhibits on a regular basis and has a great deal of published work.

ABOUT

scopionewspaper is an Architecture, Art & Image Research publication with a special interest in Photography as an instrument of inquiry and expression. This publication is structured around major themes as other publications of scopio Editions and these can integrate diverse related projects.

We are mostly interested in publishing work that explores the grammar and syntax of photography to build exploratory and critical visual constructs about architecture that stand by themselves. Thus the written text in the publication complements the visual essays and they both create synergies securing that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

scopionewspaper wants to disseminate several works and authors who use photography as an instrument to communicate in a critical, exploratory and innovative way diverse themes and who have a comprehensive understanding of architecture as a practice and discipline able to integrate the dimensions of art, sociology, history, politics, construction and the like. We are also interested in photographers and researchers whose work explores the material processes of creating, managing and interpreting sets of documents. This means we are interested in material processes where photography is explored as a significant research tool for critical and innovative views on architecture and urban transformation in their expanded fields.

scopionewspaper has as technological support for its dissemination and communication the scopio News Editorial area at scopio network platform. We want to achieve greater democratisation and diffusion of the AAI universes by making these themes close to a wider audience, while ensuring the integrity and quality of information, analysis and criticism that characterise the scopio editorial group. scopio news is one of several scopio initiatives with the aim to open the university to civil society, integrating and involving the community in the various practices and events linked to the AAI.



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