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79 The competition for the Bastille Opera

The Portuguese proposals by Raúl Hestnes Ferreira, Alfredo Matos Ferreira and Manuel Graça Dias

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ABSTRACT

On March 8, 1982, François Mitterrand launched his Grands Travaux policy, including the “realization of a modern and popular opera house on the site of the old Bastille station”. An international call was launched from November 1982 to January 1983, and even though 1650 candidates registered only 775 projects were received.

In a consolidated urban sector, the proposed plot had its challenges as it was relatively narrow but generous in size. An extensive program was carried out, and the building would necessarily be complex. – The renovation of the Bastille square was included in the project due to its symbolic significance and the need to create a monument worthy of the bicentenary celebration.

Portugal participated in this competition/call with only six competitors. The aim of this article is to analyze and compare three Portuguese proposals submitted by Raúl Hestnes Ferreira (1931-2018), Alfredo Matos Ferreira (1928-2015), and Manuel Graça Dias (1953-2019) and their views on the program. The collections of these three architects may be found at the Marques da Silva Foundation in Porto.

Literature suggest that Opera did not fulfil the President's aspirations, having been labelled as unloved in the Grands Travaux.

Keywords: Bastille Opera, Raúl Hestnes Ferreira, Alfredo Matos Ferreira, Manuel Graça Dias

Introduction

The qualification of urban equipment in France occurred in several stages and at different times, but there is an essential milestone: the development of a national architecture plan, coordinated by François Mitterrand, who presided over the country from 1981 to 1995. During this period, the government started to promote international architecture competitions for large equipment. The initiative became a success story, a landmark in the history of public architecture competitions.

The paper aims to understand how Portuguese architects were enticed to submit their proposals to this international competition.

2. The competition for the Bastille Opera

In a presidential press release dated March 8, 1982, François Mitterrand launched his Grands Travaux policy, including the “building of a modern and popular opera house on the site of the old Bastille station”. The Association for *l’Etude et la Réalisation du Nouvel Opéra de la Bastille* (APERNOB), also called *Mission Opéra Bastille* (MOB) was created to develop the technical and cultural project for the new building and then manage the organization of ‘an international architecture competition. It also prefigures the *Établissement Public de l’Opéra Bastille* (EPOB), an adjudicating entity part of the Ministry of Culture, responsible for supervising the execution of the works. An international call for candidates was launched, and from November 1982 to January 1983, a total of 1,650 applications were received. In the end, seven hundred and fifty-six projects were received, including about 2,300 plans. Table 1 presents the number of projects submitted and selected by each continent, highlighting Europe as the continent with the highest participation. To ensure fair selection submitted projects were anonymous, and a number replaced the contestant’s name.

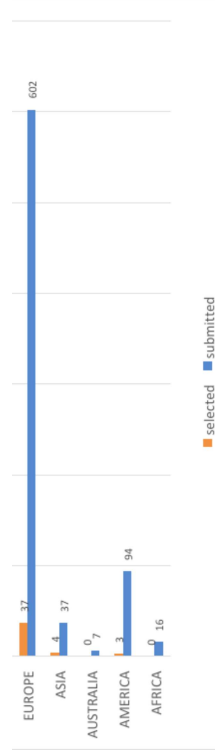


Table 1 – Projects submitted and select from all continents.
Source: Own creation based on the list of received projects (FRAN_ANX_011872.pdf)

2.1 The preceding facts

When François Mitterrand became president of the French Republic in 1981, he outlined a new architectural strategy for the promotion and construction of new

monuments for Paris to symbolize France’s role in art, politics and economics in the late 20th century. His aim was to follow the strategy of the former President, Giscard d’Estaing, who had promoted the construction of the George Pompidou Centre.

These *Grand Travaux*, a significant operation of architecture and urbanism, estimated at almost 2.5 billion euros, were strongly oriented towards culture, one of the strengths of the socialist party, inducing Paris’ revitalization.

This plan, which was a massive exercise in urban planning, started in 1982 and proposed the construction of eight great monuments that in a period of two decades would transform the capital. These included: the Orsay Museum, the La Défense Arch, and the Parque de La Villette, commenced by Giscard d’Estaing along with the Louvre Pyramid, the Arab World Institute, the Opera Bastille, the Ministry of Finance building, and the National Library of France. Mitterrand called these projects “historical axis”, as some monuments are aligned starting from the Louvre and ending at the la Défense Arch.

The previous experience with the George Pompidou Center had shown that through competitions, it was possible to revolutionize architecture and attract the best architects to develop the city to its architectural potential.

2.2 The constraints

The construction project for the Bastille Opera was very different from all previous construction projects for opera houses as it was not about replacing a destroyed theater, but rather anticipating the needs of the opera in the 20th and 21st centuries.



Fig. 1 – Paramount Bastille cinema and the old Bastille station just before its demolition, fall 1984. Source: (© Hubert Vermeret, 1984)

The Verneret photograph (Fig.1), taken in 1984, illustrates the need to demolish the Paramount Bastille and the railway station. The reduced dimensions of the Bastille Square was reason for hesitation, but the land was already under urban surveillance by APUR¹. For this reason, the Bastille Opera project represented an asset to rebalance and revitalize the eastern sector of the Parisian city, and hence why Jacques Chirac donated part of the land to the State. For urbanist Gérard Charlet, head of APUR at the time, the Bastille Square was a place that had never been planned, it had designed itself with history, since the Gallo-Roman times, a “*Carrefour toujours informe que l'on tentait d'équilibrer en le meublant d'éléphants et de génies volants.*”² The square's advantages were numerous: geographic centrality, accessibility by public transport, a cross position with significant city roads, and contact point between the different areas.

2.3 The brief

Rolf Liebermann's former assistant and director, Michael Dittmann, develop all the specifications. It was an ambitious project: a large stage for 2,700 spectators, 16 side stages, an auditorium, a studio, an amphitheater, and space for workshops, studios, rehearsal rooms, and administrative offices.

The competition's general rules recommended the design of three graphic boards (A, B, and C) executed in black and white, in a 90 cm x 130 cm format, and had to include four represented elements according to specific provisions. At the top of panel A, a perspective view of the building and its surroundings on a pre-designed floor plan background, and at the bottom, a master plan against a predefined floor plan background. Competitors were expected to show the treatment given to the building's surroundings and their insertion into the site. Then, at the top of panel B, a plan of the building and its immediate surroundings at the level of scenic areas, rooms, and receptions was also requested in a pre-drawn background. Finally, at the bottom of panel C, a longitudinal section in the large room's perspective was requested. Therefore, the plans, sections, and facades necessary to understand the project were represented in the spaces of the panels.

The contest content was made available to each designer in six folders. The first contained the contest rules, the second general lines and objectives, and the third provided information on the program, the fourth referred to the technical annexes, the five were the cartographic and photographic archives, and the last had the answers to common questions.

1. APUR or in French L'APUR, or Atelier Parisien de l'Urbanisme, is the urban planning agency for Paris. It was created in 1967 and offered a permanent team of professionals dedicated to the French capital. Bringing together 27 partners, the agency documents, analyses and develops prospective study site on various scales including social development, for the city and the greater metropolitan area of Paris. Documents, analyzes and imagines urban and social developments relating to the city and also the greater metropolitan area of Paris.

2. in *Le monde*, 13 de July 1989

2.4 The Portuguese Architects

At the time of the competition, Portugal economic context could be characterized by a serious deterioration in its external accounts, consequently increasing its deficit (which rose from 5% of GDP in the 1980, to 11.5% in 81 and 13.2% in 1982). The external debt then grew significantly, and Portugal had great difficulty in financing itself in the international financial markets so that in 1983 the Portuguese government turned to the IMF. The measures taken by the Government in agreement with the IMF were based on the devaluation of the escudo (12% in June plus a sliding devaluation of 1% per month); reduction of import duties from 30% to 10% in the 1984 State Budget; a drastic increase in prices of essential goods and the reduction of subsidies for these products; freezing public investment; falling real wages in the civil service and freezing workers' admissions; raising taxes and imposing a special income tax.

The measures then adopted led to a fall in economic activity, a significant decrease in income for most Portuguese people, a multitude of bankruptcies, and a brutal increase in unemployment. It was the time characterized by overdue salaries and protests across the country with black flags.

Among the seven hundred and fifty-six projects submitted, six hundred and two were from European countries, including six Portuguese teams. From these, only thirty-eight proposals from Europe were selected. Table 2 displays the number of projects submitted and selected by each European country.

In addition to the three architects under analysis in this paper, António Maria Lobo de Vasconcelos Corte-Real (No.1416), Luís Manuel Lourenço Serro (No. 0807), and Manuel Roquette de Mello Campello (No.1537) all from the Lisbon area also participated.

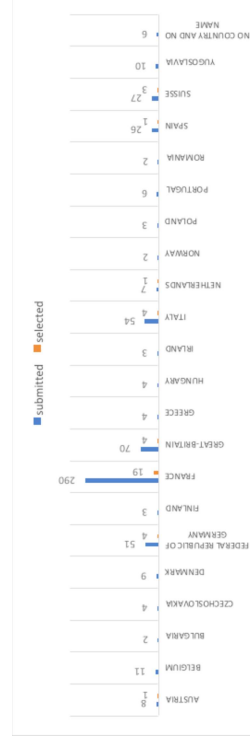


Table 2 – Projects from Europe
Source: Own creation based on the list of received projects (FRAN_ANX_011872.pdf)

The longitudinal section shows the relationship between the large auditorium and the building. (Fig. 3) Due to the building's complexity and the need to include all the spaces specified in the competition program, Hestnes Ferreira chose to create several spaces in the basement in order to keep both the square and statue visible in the city skyline. (Fig. 4)

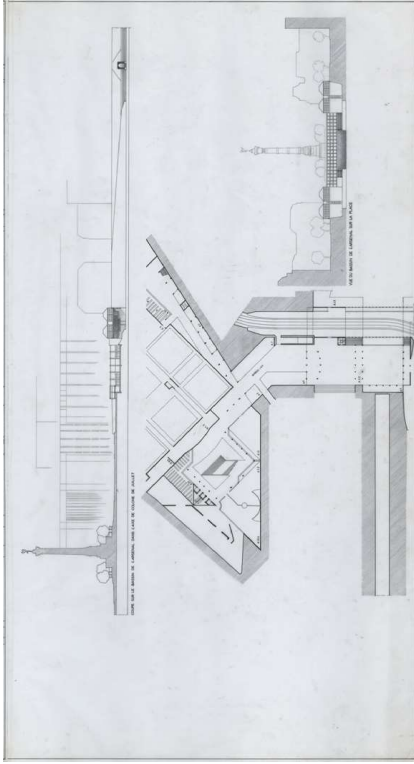


Fig. 4 – Part of the graphic board the proposal.
Source: (FIMS_RHF_0155-pd085.jpg - edit by the author)

Hestnes Ferreira conditioned his design to the use of simple shapes (such as squares, triangles, and circles). His project portrayed the simplicity and clarity of the shapes and the relationships he establishes between them as well as the ability to hierarchize spaces.

The strategy of the project coupled with the implemented architectural language determine Hestnes Ferreira's approach. (Fig. 5)

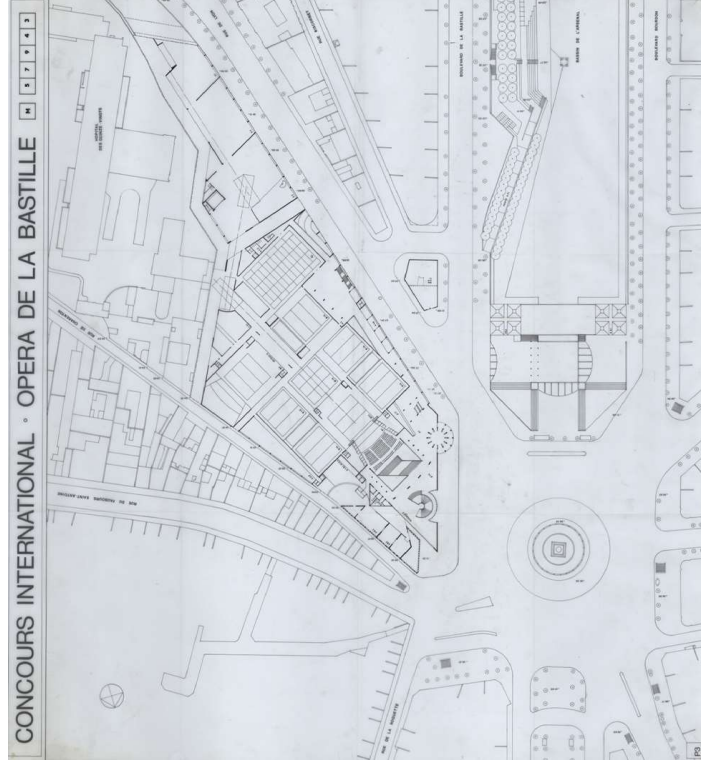


Fig. 5 – Part of the graphic board for the proposal.
Source: (FIMS_RHF_0155-pd084.jpg - edit by the author)

2.4.2 Alfredo Matos Ferreira

Alfredo Matos Ferreira (1928-2015) graduated from the School of Fine Arts of Porto and worked with Alberto Neves, António Menéres, Alvaro Siza, Luís Bofelho Dias, and Joaquim Sampaio, friends of the "room 35" at Praça da Liberdade. He collaborated with Arménio Losa between 1971 and 1972, and had a partnership with Fernando Távora in a professional practice between 1972 and 1982. His professional career spanned over 50 years, during which he developed his professional practice with Fernando Távora, on national territory, in public projects resulting from competitions or invitations and private orders.

Matos Ferreira was an essential author, but little is known of his architectural practice during the second half of the 20th century. It was precisely after leaving Fernando Távora's office that Matos Ferreira decided to apply for this call in response to a lack of work in Portugal. Matos Ferreira's proposal (No.0335) corresponds to a compact mass which dilutes and softens the area within the plot with pilotis.

The regular matrix of the façades where the structure stands out is in opposition to the more irregular plan but a consequence of the plot's shape. The competition rules and the program specifications imposed several very tight spaces and specific conditions, which were somewhat restrictive for architects.

In terms of solution, Alfredo Matos Ferreira and Raúl Hestines Ferreira located the main auditorium at the lot's limit, closest to Bastille Square. (Fig.6). The complexity and technical spaces, rooms for testing, management, and storage of the organization diagram forced all teams to have extremely exaggerated volumes.

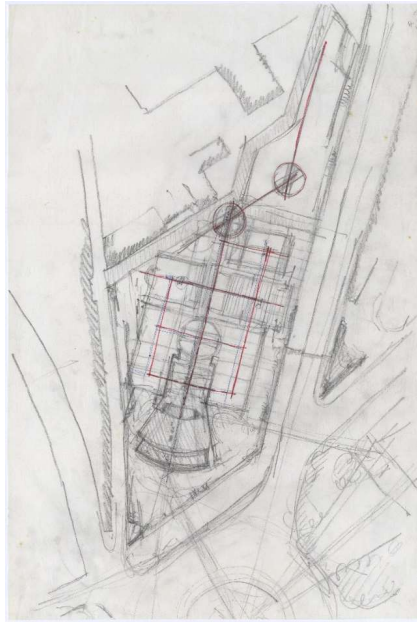


Fig. 6 - Plan

Source: (FIMS_AMF_0064-pd003.jpg)

The program required an auditorium able to seat two thousand seven hundred people and an additional flexible auditorium with fifteen hundred seats. Matos Ferreira proposes a very transparent facade facing Rue de Lyon; the main access point is also made through the square, as shown in the Section image (Fig. 6), a working sketch, part of the forty-one designed pieces and, two folders of written pieces that encompasses this project.

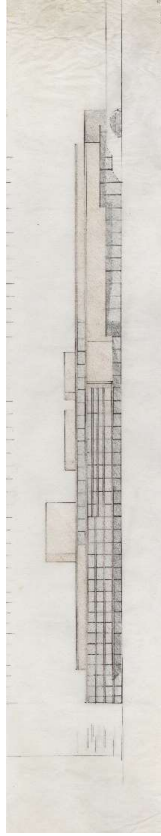


Fig. 7 - Section

Source: (FIMS_AMF_0064-pd076.jpg)

The longitudinal section and plan section of the central auditorium illustrates Matos Ferreira's solution. (Fig.7)

The objective of the project was, without a doubt, to create a large auditorium with a fixed number of seats as well as great detail both in visual and acoustic quality.

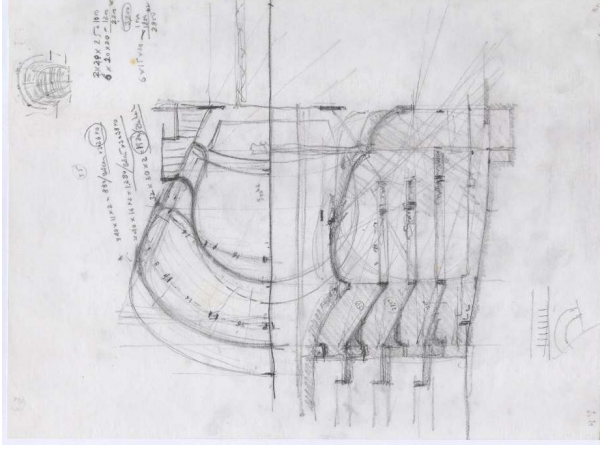


Fig. 8 - Longitudinal section and plan section
Source: (FIMS_AMF_0064-pd052.jpg)

2.4.3 Manuel Graça Dias

Manuel Graça Dias (1953-2019) studied architecture at Lisbon's Fine Arts School and began his career in Macau working for Manuel Vicente. He was an assistant teacher at the Faculty of Architecture of Lisbon's Universidade Técnica between 1985 and 1996 and an auxiliary teacher at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto between 1997 and 2015. Graça Dias was also an invited Professor at the Department of Architecture of Lisbon's Universidade Autónoma, since 1998. He lived and worked in Lisbon, where he founded, in 1990, the Contemporânea studio, together with Egas José Vieira.

His legacy as an author of articles and books related to the criticism and promotion of Portuguese architecture is very significant. Having diversified his audio-visual and radio production and written press contribution, he was the presenter of

the *Ver Artes/Arquitectura* program aired on RTP2, one of the national channels (1992/1996).

He collaborated with a Portuguese radio channel, TSF (1995/1999), and a broadsheet newspaper Expresso. He was director of *Jornal Arquitectos* (2009/2012) and director of the Order of Architects (2000/2004).

The difference in generations between Manuel Graça Dias, Raúl Hestnes Ferreira and António Matos Ferreira was apparent in the approach and architectural language proposed by each one of them.

In 1983 a series of events take place in Lisbon between January 7th and 30th, leading to what would be considered as post-modernism. In 1984, Graça Dias (in *Arquitectura*, n°152, p.75) wrote about Jencks, interpreting the relationship of complexity and contradiction in architecture, the post-modern concept. Starting with Manuel Vicente's approach, with whom he had worked with in Macau between 1978 and 1980, writing regularly in the press and working intensively as an architect. (Figueira, 2009, p.275)

Graça Dias' proposal (No.0246) for the Bastille Opera house reflects these concerns and establishes a vital relationship between theory and practice that allows him to configure postmodernism with roots in Portuguese culture. The proposal was developed in collaboration with José Manuel Fernandes, Maria de Lurdes Janeiro and João Vieira Caldas. As was common practice in all Graça Dias' projects, the proposed design, was thoughtful and respected these principles. Seductive shapes promote ambiguous and dazzling spaces, materiality or the use of less noble materials achieve more economical solutions, while cheerful colors are the symbols or meanings according to Jencks, which determine a "double meaning" to postmodern architecture.

Due to the difficulties in accessing this architect's entire collection, the documentation for this propels is not included in this article. The process of transferring this collection to the Marques da Silva Foundation in Porto is still ongoing.

3. Conclusion

In Portugal, international competitions during the 60s and 80s did not have much influence or participation. Following the revolution of April 25, 1974, a turning point in Portuguese history, most Portuguese architects began focusing on responding to the population and setting up decent housing through several state programs. The public tenders and Portugal's economic growth, associated with the country's entry into the EEC, allowed the construction of equipment, infrastructures, and private ordering, resulting in a lot of work for Portuguese architects.

From these three architects from different generations, Raúl Hestnes Ferreira was the only one who already had some experience in international competitions, as well as an international professional practice.

For Alfredo Matos Ferreira this would be the only time he would participate in an international competition but we can see that his professional experience with Fernando Távora allowed him to progress in his career. For Manuel Graça Dias, was his first competition, but his experience in Macau with Manuel Vicente was decisive in the result sent to the competition.

Unfortunately, none of the six Portuguese architects won the competition. The enchantment with Portuguese architecture would only happen years later with Siza Vieira and Eduardo Souto de Moura.

The jury met from June 26 to July 2, 1983 in the corridor of the abandoned Bastille station. It was made up of twenty full members and three deputies, and included several personalities such as Pierre Boulez, Maurice Fleuret, Jean Nouvel, and Alain Sarfati. During the first three days, the judges examined all the projects in small groups. A daily vote each evening made it possible to choose the first selection. All projects obtaining at least four votes out of twenty, that is, fifty-four, were selected. From the fourth day onwards, some requests were written and considered again. The total number was thus raised to sixty-five selected projects, and the jury held a controversial debate. The final decision fell on the President of the Republic, and project No. 222 proposed by Canadian Carlos Ott was the winner.

The project failed due to a lack of political support during the cohabitation period (when power was divided between two opposing political parties). However, the then minister of culture Jack Lang led the project to its completion—the only delay was the construction of the planned modular auditorium. The inauguration is scheduled for 2023.

Within the Grands Travaux, the Bastille opera was the least successful project and the one which least pleased President François Mitterrand.

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87 The great Egyptian Museum

Contemporary Architecture as an Argument for the Repatriation of Collections

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ABSTRACT

The Great Egyptian Museum (GME) can be considered a “pharaonic” architecture located on the outskirts of the Giza Pyramids. The idea of building a Great Museum for Egyptology, which occupies an internal area of 90,000m², derives from discussions started in the mid-1990s. In 2002, the Irish office Heneghan Peng Architects won an international architecture competition that included more than 1,500 proposals from architects around the world. Commonly called as “the fourth pyramid of Giza”, the GME’s construction started in 2005 and now is almost completed. The built of this mega museum structure aims to contribute to Egypt’s unique positioning as a first-class tourist destination considering the globalization processes. Furthermore, the GME must also be considered within a big strategy of building and renovating of nineteen museums in Egypt that includes, for example, the projects of the Nubian Museum in Aswan and the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization. This strategy was undertaken by the worldwide famous archaeologist Zahi Hawass, then Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt. The construction of a mega museum architecture has been mobilized as an important argument for requesting the repatriation of Egyptian collections illegally removed from the country. Since 2010, Egypt has expressed interest in the return (or at least the loan) of some archeological antiques such as the Bust of Nefertiti and the Roseftta’s Stone. Even without being successful in these international negotiations, the architectural design assumes prominence for questioning one of the main arguments used to deny the repatriation requests: the lack of infrastructure for safeguarding and researching collections. The GME suggests the reflection about new challenges between global-local cultures that emerge in contemporaneity.

Keywords: Great Egyptian Museum, contemporary architecture, repatriation, archeological collections.