



FEATURED TEXTS OR PROJECTS

**Photography as a Language:
Between Concept and Expression**

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Abstract

This essay reflects on the contemporary crisis of photography, not as a question of identity but of relevance, within a landscape oversaturated by images and dominated by smartphones and social media. It traces photography's shifting role, from vernacular practices to artistic experimentation, highlighting how democratized technologies and mass production have blurred distinctions between professional and amateur image-making. Against this backdrop, the resurgence of analogue processes, photobooks, and material experimentation underscores photography's enduring value as a medium of reflection rather than redundancy. The argument proposes that photography's future lies in its capacity to balance representation with material presence, editing rigour, and embodied experience, demanding new forms of teaching and critical practice. Photography must thus reclaim its significance through conscious, epistemological image production.

Keywords: Contemporary Photography, Self-portraiture, Appropriation, Narrative Expression, Artistic Autonomy

Biographies

Pedro Leão Neto holds a degree in Architecture from the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto (FAUP, 1992), a Master's degree in Urban Environment Planning and Design (FAUP-FEUP, 1992), a PhD in Planning and Landscape from the University of Manchester (2002), and a postdoctoral qualification from FAUP (2018). He is currently a Professor and Researcher at FAUP, where he leads the courses Photography and Communication in Architectural Design (FCPA I & II) and Photography of Architecture, City, and Territory (FACT). He also serves as the coordinator of the research group Architecture, Art and Image (AAI). He oversees the scpio publications, acting as Editor-in-Chief of the scientific journals Sophia Journal of Architecture, Art and Image and scpio Magazine Architecture, Art and Image. He is involved in several research projects funded through competitive grants and is the Principal Investigator (PI) of Visual Spaces of Change (VSC), funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), as well as Contrast: Multidisciplinary Artistic

Initiatives in Art, Architecture, Design, and Photography (funded by DGartés – Projects for Creation and Publishing). His research focuses on the intersection of Architecture, Art, and Image, particularly in the domain of artistic documentary photography and its relation to architecture. Within this field, he has published around 40 books, with notable works including Another Approach on the Works of Álvaro Siza: Contemporary Documentary Photography on Portuguese Architecture and the CONTRAST series-I, II and III. Additionally, he is the author and co-author of over 100 scientific articles, with a particularly distinguished contribution in the chapter "About Education in Architecture: Towards an Integrative Pedagogy in the Teaching of Communication Strategies for Architectural Design and Photography," published in Towards a New European Bauhaus—Challenges in Design Education: EAAE Annual Conference—Madrid 2022, Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024. He has curated numerous exhibitions and coordinated international competitions and conferences, particularly in photography and architecture. Notably, he is the driving force behind the international conference series Sophia Journal Architecture, Art and Image. It is now in its tenth edition, which brings together dozens of research centres, scholars, and authors from national and international contexts.

Olívia Marques da Silva holds a PhD/MPhil and MA in Photography from the School of Arts and Design at the University of Derby (UdDerby), between 1995 and 2001, United Kingdom (UK) and graduated in Philosophy from FLUP. She was awarded grants from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (FCG) and the Portuguese Photography Centre (CPF) of the Ministry of Culture. She combines her academic activity with artistic expression as a photographer, participating in various solo and group exhibitions and film productions as a photographer. She is an integrated member of ID+|IMAD at ESMAD/IPP. She collaborates with IFUP, CEAU/FAUP, Audiovisual Studies at the University of Santiago de Compostela and eCPR/South Wales University. Member of ELIA (International Association of Art Schools) Her connection to the Polytechnic of Porto began in 1992, where she was department director and coordinator of bachelor's and master's degrees in the areas of Photography, Audiovisual, and Cinema. President of ESMAE's Technical-Scientific Council. She is currently President of ESMAD/IPP. She teaches on the UA's Doctoral Programme in Artistic Creation, on the Masters in Photography and Cinema at ESMAD/IPP and is a member of the Coordinating Board of IPP's Culture Centre.

Essay

It is with great satisfaction that we present this editorial for the third volume of the CONTRAST collection, a collaborative project centred around the universe of Photography, Creation, and Education, intersecting with the multidisciplinary fields of Architecture, Art, and Design¹.

We aim to highlight the richness and importance of this project within the interdisciplinary context of higher education in Photography. Furthermore, we seek to reveal the potential of photography as an interpretative and expressive tool capable of engaging with diverse realities.

The CONTRAST project emerges as a response to the cultural, social, and political transformations of the early 21st century. It is presently focused on fostering a network of artistic collaboration and initiatives between higher education institutions in Portugal, where photography holds a significant presence.

One of CONTRAST's main objectives is thus to promote critical reflection and debate on pressing contemporary issues through photography. In this sense, we are interested in drawing attention to the project's potential to relate the European Green Deal to everyday realities and thus be aligned with the objectives of the New European Bauhaus. By examining themes such as housing, public spaces, and gender issues, CONTRAST offers an essential insight into the complexities of contemporary societies. It helps to revitalise confidence in the future among diverse audiences, especially younger ones. In this scenario, photography is not just a recording tool but an instrument for analysing, problematising and reinventing visible realities, bringing new insights into city space and life.

This interdisciplinary approach forms one of the central pillars of the project, which not only strengthens the teaching of photography across the involved institutions but also broadens the scope of reflection on photographic imagery as a means of understanding and transforming reality. It brings together a diverse range of visual strategies that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, enabling a rich exchange of knowledge and practices. These photographic works capture the identities of a specific time and place², addressing both past and future concerns. The project thus stimulates debate on the role of photography in constructing new imaginaries, bridging disciplines, and fostering synergies between various universities, courses, and local communities.

¹ Funded by DGARTES and led by the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto – CEAU, AAI (FAUP), in joint coordination with the School of Media Arts and Design of the Polytechnic Institute of Porto – ID+, IMAD (ESMAD/P. PORTO), and the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Porto – I2ADS / ID+ (FBAUP), the project involves nine additional higher education institutions – AR.CO, DARQ, DCAM, EA.UCP, ESAP, FBAUL, FEUP, IPT, and UL.CUP.

² Silva, Olívia Marques da. "Olívia Silva". Documentalismo Fotográfico e Território In Neto, Pedro. ed. 2013. Scopio Projects: Topografias a Norte ed. 1, ISBN: 978-989-976-99-39. Matosinhos, Portugal: Cityscopio Associação Cultural. Norte pp.13

It is also essential to mention the internationalisation efforts developed through collaborations with institutions such as the Society for Artistic Research (SAR), which reinforces CONTRAST's commitment to education, research, and the dissemination of interdisciplinary photographic knowledge. Integration with the Research Catalogue (RC) platform enables the multimedia publication and documentation of student and artistic research projects, extending the reach and impact of these photographic endeavours. This digital infrastructure provides students and researchers new tools for exploring and presenting their photographic projects, strengthening the bond between academia and civil society. Structurally, CONTRAST operates on two primary fronts: the online platform and editorial support. The online platform serves as a dynamic space for interaction and dissemination, offering access to photographic projects, videos, and digital books. Its bilingual nature enhances the internationalisation of the project, ensuring a global reach and maximising the impact of the content produced. This platform not only brings together courses and students from participating institutions but also broadens access to the general public, promoting critical dialogue across various disciplinary fields.

The editorial branch is equally essential, producing both physical and digital publications that bring together reflective texts and images on photographic projects in higher education, particularly in the fields of Architecture, Art, and Design. The graphic design of the publication³ creates a strong and innovative identity, integrating diverse contributions into a high-quality layout and exploring the potential of the physical book⁴.

The identity of the CONTRAST project is consolidated annually, valuing students' work and ensuring the project's openness to society and its internationalisation. The curatorial approach utilises all available means to create synergies, adopting a more flexible publication format akin to a contemporary art magazine or book, which strengthens the connection between artistic research and education.

As an interdisciplinary space, the publication brings together various editors and texts on pedagogical strategies and reflective and critical analyses of photographic projects in education and research, filling a gap in the landscape of photography education in Portugal and contributing to the development and dissemination of photographic knowledge. The renewed format of the publication signals our commitment to university extension, ensuring engagement with a broader audience passionate about Photography, Art, Architecture, and Design and promoting a more dynamic dialogue between emerging artists and the broader community, thereby opening the university to society.

³ Né Santelmo and Artur Leão

⁴ Neto, Pedro Leão. Alternative Publications in the Universe of Documentary and Artistic Photography: Architecture, the City and the Territory In Another approach on the works of Álvaro Siza: Contemporary Documentary Photography on Portuguese Architecture. Porto: scopio Editions, 2021. ISBN 978-989- 53268-8-4



Exhibition of the Contrast project at the Portuguese Centre
of Photography (2024)