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abstract

This poster is an account of a research project that has started in the context of a Masters dissertation in Design, at the University of Aveiro, Portugal.

It represents a search for the middle ground between Portuguese graphic design and film history by documenting the changes of Portuguese film posters seen through the lens of design.

The history of Portuguese graphic design is still being written. Despite some efforts – one of the most notable being the thesis of doctor Helena Barbosa about the history of the Portuguese poster from the XIX to the XX century - this is still, in her own words, “a fruitful and beautiful land, without the rest of a horizon” (Barbosa 2011: 530).

key words

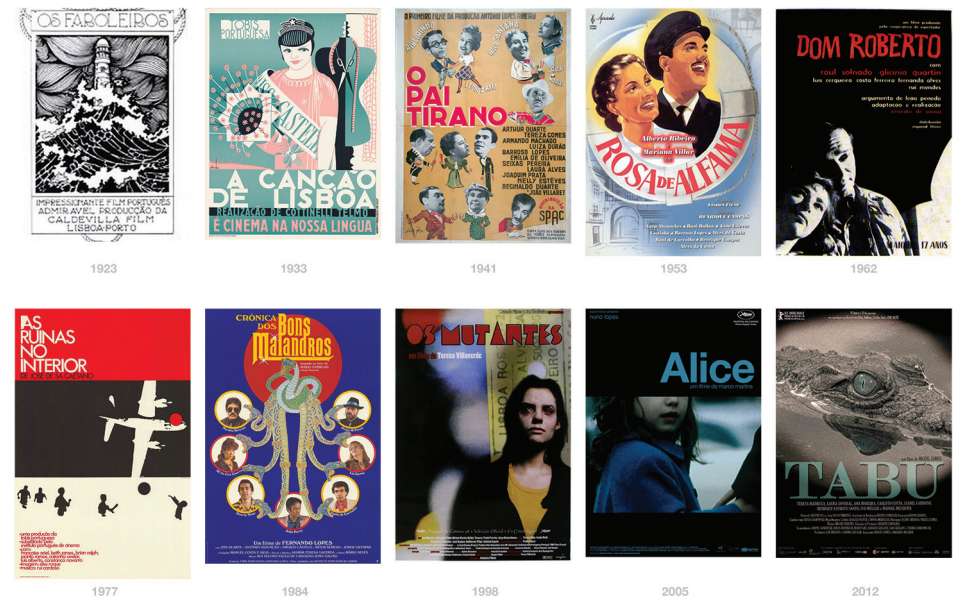
graphic design, film poster, design history, Portugal.

The niche that this research project aims to reclaim and explore is that of the film posters.

By analysing the variants of authorship, programme and technology and understanding how they've shaped a selected sample of posters that showcases the transformations of this artifact through ten decades, new knowledge can be generated, written and, hopefully, shared outside of the academic environment.

100 years of design in the Portuguese film poster: 1912-2012

A research project about the transformations in the posters designed for the Portuguese film industry over one hundred years: its protagonists, institutions, dynamics and other stories.



After an examination of the most relevant publications and academic works that exist in Portugal about the history of Portuguese graphic design and film history, it was concluded that neither one or the other dedicate much attention to film posters.

The only works that do explore this theme consist of a 1989 article about the authorship of Portuguese posters, which served as the introduction for a supplement of an extinct Portuguese film magazine (Matos-Cruz 1989), and three Masters dissertations, all with a very narrow subject matter: one being the posters of the so called “Portuguese Golden Era of film: 1931-1949” (Neto 2007); another focusing on the comparison of Russian film posters (from 1922 to 1931) and Portuguese film posters (1931-1953), with an analysis of the similarities found between them (Rodrigues 2010); and the last one an analysis of the posters used in the filmography of Portuguese director Manoel de Oliveira (Rosas 2014).

There is still a gap in terms of a broader and up-to-date overview of the history of national film posters and, as time progresses, it will get more difficult to collect the scattered information on this matter, to track down the authors and gather the posters and the stories behind them. This is precisely the purpose of the investigation.

Starting in 1912 – which marks the opening of production company *Invicta Films*, in Oporto, and the takeoff of the Portuguese film industry (Baptista 2008: 15) – and expanding over ten decades, until 2012 – year of Miguel Gomes’ *Tabu*, the Portuguese film that earned rave reviews from critics and audiences alike, placing 2nd in *Sight and Sound* Magazine list of the best movies of the year, and winning many awards worldwide (O Som e a Fúria, 2014) –, it is intended to document how this artifact has shifted. These changes, and the whole discipline of design (in practice and in theory), is based, according to the methodological model developed by doctor and designer Francisco Providência, upon three main axis – authorship, programme and technology – and the dynamics and influences established between them (Providência 2012: 86-87).

A rough online search has resulted in a total of nearly 200 posters, which will be reduced to a smaller sample to tell this history, based on the formal composition and its role in understanding the differences in graphic design across the decades, while still paying some attention to the movie itself and to its legacy for the Portuguese film history.

From this sample no more than ten posters will be subjected to an even deeper analysis that could consist in: an *in loco* visualization of the poster; a formal deconstruction of the poster (focusing on imagery, color, typography, composition, relation that it establishes with the film); an exploration of the dynamics and influences between designer and director/production company; the social/cultural contexts at the time of the film’s release and poster’s execution. Some of this underlining knowledge – that cannot be obtained by simply looking at a poster – will come from interviews with designers and other people that are the (hidden) faces of this history.

The next step would be to turn what is, in its essence, an academic research work into a dynamic publication, recurring to strategies of visual communication and visibility (such as cutting, multilayering, textures, colors and shapes). This artifact intends to be accessible to a broader audience - with a scope on designers, filmmakers, collectors, academics and other professionals in the areas of design and cinema – and also bring to day-light the posters that people otherwise could only see, upon request, in the National Library, the Portuguese “Cinematheca” (museum of cinema), some universities, cultural associations and private collections.

While it is still at an early stage – most of the necessary reading is now being concluded – this research project will be developed and concluded by the end of 2014.

It intends to offer a valuable base of knowledge – that can lead, in the future, to the creation of a continuously updated database – and a necessary

middle ground between the Portuguese film history and graphic design history.

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