

## A TRAVELLING THEATRE

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### Abstract

*The VII UIA (Union Internationale des Architectes) Conference took place in the summer of 1961 in London. It was organized by Riba (Royal Institute of British Architects) and under the general name "Architecture and Technology", where the debates focused on new architecture materials and techniques. An international student contest under the theme "A Travelling Theatre" was set up at this conference. In the academic year of 1960/61 the Fine Arts Schools of Porto and Lisbon embraced the UIA proposal by giving some of their 4th year students the chance to develop a project for the mentioned contest. In this period, the Fine Arts School of Oporto headmaster's, the architect Carlos Ramos, was at the same time vice-president of the UIA, since 1959 - he had been elected at the General Assembly that took place in Lisbon, that year. The first prize of the contest was awarded to Spanish student Emilio Perez Piñero. Yet we believe the projects by the architecture students from Porto, the ones we know from the photographs by Teófilo Rego, present solutions, we think deserve a broader approach, so that, the cross-relations among the Carlos Ramos' school, the proposed program for the contest by the UIA, and the relation with the Portuguese social and cultural context, particularly in the Theatre's sphere.*

**Keywords:** Modern architecture, theatre, Escola do Porto, photography.

At the end of the 1960s the *Union Internationale des Architectes* (UIA) opened the international competition *A Traveling Theatre* for architecture students.

The results would be presented during the VI Congress of UIA entitled *Architecture and Technology (New Techniques and New Materials)*. This event took place in London in 1961 and was organized by the members of RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects). The debates focused on the effects of the new materials and techniques on the architectural design. (A. Nicolas, 2007, p. 45).

The Union Internationale des Architectes (UIA) was founded in Lausanne in 1948 as a non-governmental organization, to bring the architects throughout the world together, regardless of their race, ideology or doctrine.<sup>1</sup> The French architect Pierre Vago was the general secretary of UIA at that time (he was in charge of it from 1946 to 1969) that was based in Paris at that time.

UIA's founders were a small number architects who were experts on modern architecture, and which included Auguste Perret, Sir Patrick Abercrombie, Jean Tschumi, Helena Syrkus. According to Aymone Nicolas (2007, p. 14), the UIA was part of a tradition of national and international architect societies (see: the permanent international committee of architects CPIA) or more informal meetings that were organized from 1932 by French journal *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*. Nicolas further argues that the universal ideals and the professional aims defined by the UIA founding members were in line with the unionist spirit that presided over the foundation of both the ONU and UNESCO in 1945.

From the 1957 congress, students of architecture were able to confront their projects thanks to the UIA. Buckminster Fuller fostered the participation of the young students. He "encouraged the UIA to become an experimentation platform of planetary resources that would serve as recipient of the contributions made by all students of architecture coming from the countries represented in UIA". (A.Nicolas, 2007, p. 45). André Gutton made this idea come to life, based on the model of the *concours d'émulation* of the *École Supérieure des Beaux Arts*.

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<sup>1</sup> On his official site, the IUA defines itself as a pluralistic and non-discriminating society: "L'Union Internationale des Architectes, l'UIA, est une organisation non gouvernementale, la fédération mondiale d'organisations nationales d'architectes. Ces organisations sont les membres de l'UIA. L'UIA a pour vocation d'unir les architectes de tous les pays du monde, sans aucune forme de discrimination. Composée de délégués de 27 états, lors de sa création à Lausanne, en Suisse, en 1948, elle rassemble aujourd'hui les organisations professionnelles de 124 pays et territoires et regroupe, à travers-elles, plus d'un million trois cent mille architectes dans le monde." (<http://www.uia-architectes.org/fr/qui-sommes-nous#.U6g5ApRdWSo>)

The UIA's proposal made to students that they present a project for a travelling theatre was apparently being discussed both within the field of architecture, and the field of theatre. These two fields share aims and actions.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, in June 1961, the Association Internationale des Techniciens de Théâtre (A.I.T.T) organized the *International Congress of Theatre technicians* in London, following a set of activities first developed by the Theatre of Nations and with the participation of representatives of twenty eight countries, and which originated the congress that was organized in Paris, in 1959, during which A.I.T.T. was created (J. Mourier, 1988, p. 167).

In the words of Jean Mourier, president of the A.I.T.T. (1988, p. 168), the main goal of the congress, whose subject was "The multipurpose theatre", was to equip both developed countries, and developing countries with a facility that would meet their immediate needs and allow them to take the theatre to a greater number of persons.

The debate at the AITT was primarily related to technical issues, but also to the relationship between theatre and architecture, in order to create solutions that would lead to a wider involvement of the populations in the different countries.

The French architect and stage designer Jacques Bosson presented a conference entitled *Nécessités actuelles du théâtre ambulante* [contemporary needs of the travelling theatre] within the colloquium *Le Lieu Théâtral dans la Société Moderne*, which took place at the cultural center of Royaumont (Asnières-sur-Oise), in 1961. Bosson explained that his idea to create a travelling theatre had arisen from both the "practical need to set up theatres" in older cities, and the need for the theatre to recover its freedom, that is to say, "a theatre that could

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<sup>2</sup> We must refer that a closer proximity existed with different artistic areas during this period, as Aymone Nicolas explains: "L'architecture fut considérée en 1945 par les gouvernements membres des Nations Unies sous son angle économique avec la création d'une commission Habitat auprès du Conseil économique pour l'Europe de l'ONU. Comme les architectes protégeaient de leur côté jalousement leur indépendance, ils furent classés au plan international à côté des associations d'artistes, d'écrivains ou de dramaturges. Pour l'UNESCO, l'UIA était placée au même rang que l'Association internationale des arts plastiques, l'Institut International du théâtre, le Pen club, etc. Autrement dit, les valeurs culturelles et sociales, privilégiées par les architectes eux-mêmes, ne furent pas reconnues par les instances gouvernementales internationales qui cataloguaient plutôt la discipline dans le champ artistique. Ce n'est qu'en 1969, que l'architecture trouva place à l'UNESCO dans la Section des établissements humains aux côtés des services du patrimoine mondial." (A. Nicolas, 2007, p. 47-48).

establish itself in pre-existing facilities without fixed destination, and find its health in mobility, while the structures of the new city were being defined.” (J. Bosson, 1988, p.149)

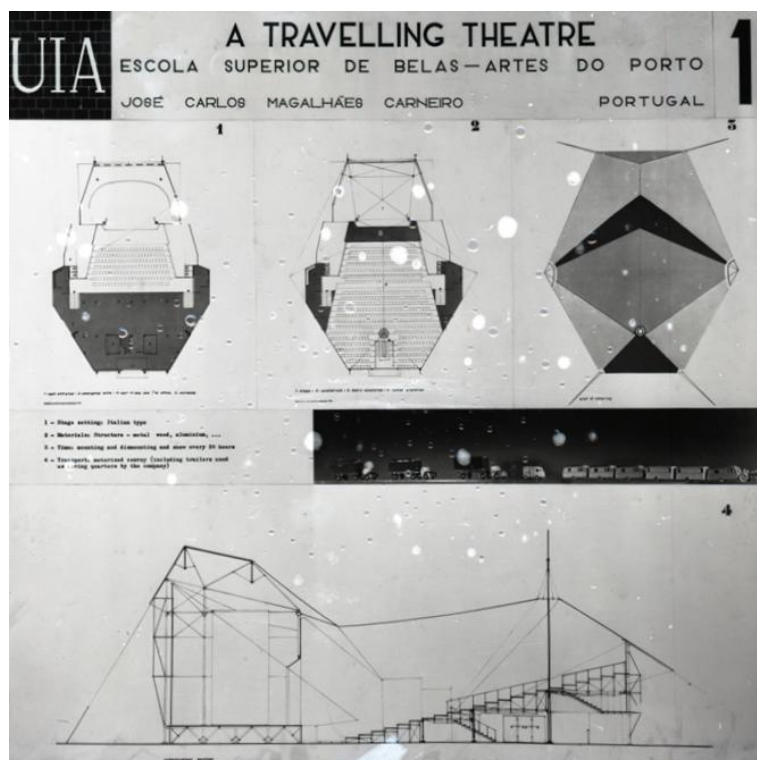
The project that Jacques Bosson presented in 1961 was the same project that he had proposed for the obtaining of his degree at École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts and that he had been advised to withdraw, as the committee did not consider it a subject of architecture.<sup>3</sup> Bosson further argued, that his point of view had eventually won, as the UIA had launched a competition among architecture schools throughout the world on the same subject. Furthermore, the materials and the constructive capacity rendered his idea feasible.

Among the countless schools that entered the competition were the Escola Superior de Belas Artes de Lisboa (ESBAL) e and the Escola Superior de Belas Artes do Porto (ESBAP). In Portugal, special reference should be made to the fundamental contribution of architect Carlos Ramos (1897-1969), together with Pardal Monteiro, to the relations developed between Portugal and the UIA, in particular, the creation of SPUIA (Portuguese section of UIA). In 1950, when Carlos Ramos was elected president of the Portuguese section of UIA, he started to contact a great diversity of architects of different nationalities.<sup>4</sup> The establishment of those relations was advantageous and probably contributed to the recognition of his work and his commitment by his partners. He was, indeed, responsible for the organization of the congress *Arquitectura no Cruzamento de Caminhos* [Architecture at the Crossroads] that took place in Lisbon in 1953. He was further selected as a member of the Executive Commission of the UIA during the same year. Carlos Ramos participated at the congresses that followed. In 1959, he was elected vice - president of the UIA during the general assembly that took place in Lisbon, having ceased functions in 1963. (B. Coutinho, 2001, pp. 201-02)

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<sup>3</sup> This project was published in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (1954, Fev.) nº 52.

<sup>4</sup> According to note 17 of the chronological framework, in the catalogue of the retrospective exhibition that was dedicated by the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian to Carlos Ramos on 1986, from the twenty six architects with whom he had “intense relations”, were, for example, Patrik Abercrombie, Pierre Vago, Jean Tshumi e Helena Sirkus. (P.V. Almeida, O.L. Filgueiras, R. M. Gonçalves, C.M. Ramos, 1986, s.p.)



**Figure 1.** "A Travelling Theatre" design by José Carlos Magalhães Carneiro, 1961. *Photograph of Teófilo Rego (Teófilo Rego Archive, Casa da Imagem, Fundação Manuel Leão).*

Young architects, for instance, Fernandes de Sá, Januário Godinho and Fernando Távora, who had graduated in 1951 from the Escola Superior de Belas Artes do Porto, directed by Carlos Ramos, ranked among the participants in the above mentioned conferences. (C. Moniz, 2011, II, p.255)

It is important to understand that the ESBAP fostered its students and the architects who had graduated there to participate in international meetings that offered an enlarged debate and an opportunity for updating. Accordingly, Fernando Távora, Viana de Lima and João José Tinoco also participated in CIAM 8, which took place in Hoddesdon also in 1951. They also participated in CIAM in the subsequent years (until 1959), and in the congresses of UIA.

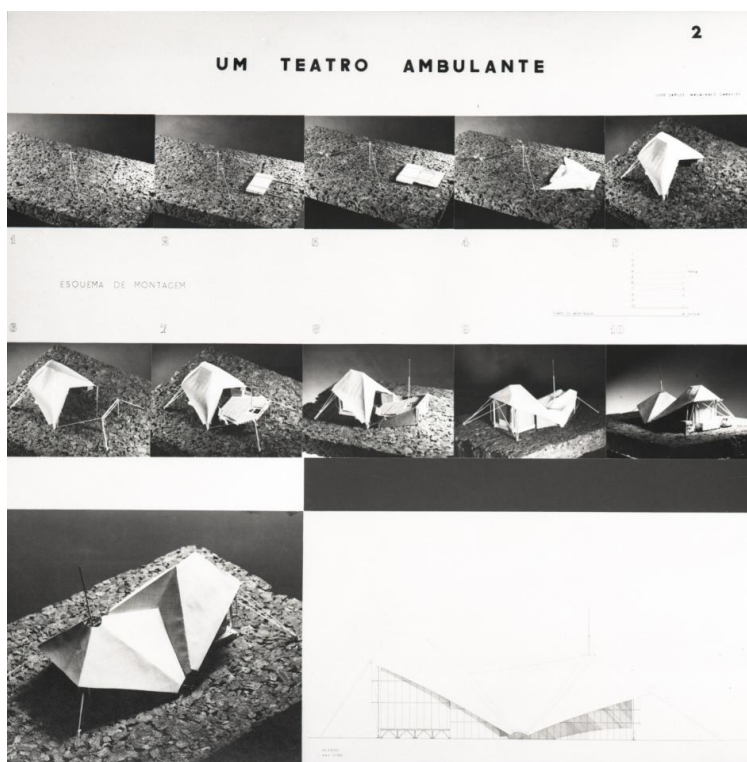
Carlos Ramos' increased activity in UIA coincided with his activity at the Escola de Belas Artes do Porto. During the same period, Ramos taught the course of

Architecture. He became the director of the same course from 1952 to 1967.<sup>5</sup> His leadership of the pedagogical transformation of the Architecture course of ESBAP is well-known. It is also of general knowledge his interest in the promotion of different artistic areas through the organization of colloquia, debates, cinema cycles, and exhibitions of students' and professors' work. Among the latter reference be made to the *Magna exhibitions* – the first of which was held in 1953 – to show the “works of the students who had obtained the best marks during the previous school year, as well as of the professors who were responsible for teaching those specialties.” The official goal was to publicly diffuse “the professional and scholar activities of masters and students.” (Arte Portuguesa, 1953, p. 5). Thus, when the opportunity arose for the architecture students to participate in the UIA Congress from 1961, Carlos Ramos was simultaneously the director of ESBAP and Vice-President of the IUA, which created the ideal conditions for the presentation of proposals.

The 1950s were a rich period in the creation of groups that promoted activities related to architecture, culture and arts. Among those groups were the *Organisation of Modern Architects* ODAM (Organização dos Arquitectos Modernos – 1947-1953) that struggled for the defense of modern architecture, the Cine-Clube do Porto (1945), that provided an opportunity for the city's inhabitants to attend in the Cinema Batalha the experimental projection of films, that were characterized by a more experimental character or were not shown in the commercial circuit, and the TEP (Teatro Experimental do Porto - 1953). The first director of TEP was António Pedro, who diffused the most important modern playwrights (from Synge and Betti to Miller and Ionesco) and returned the classics to their perennial youth (Shakespeare and Bem Jonson, Kleist and our 'Jew'). (L.F. Rebelo, 1988, p.137)

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<sup>5</sup> In 1940, Carlos Ramos became professor of the fourth subject of architecture at Escola de Belas Artes do Porto. He interrupted his activity as professor from 1946 to 1948. He lectured at the ESBAL during the same period, and later, from 1952, when he became director of ESBAP.

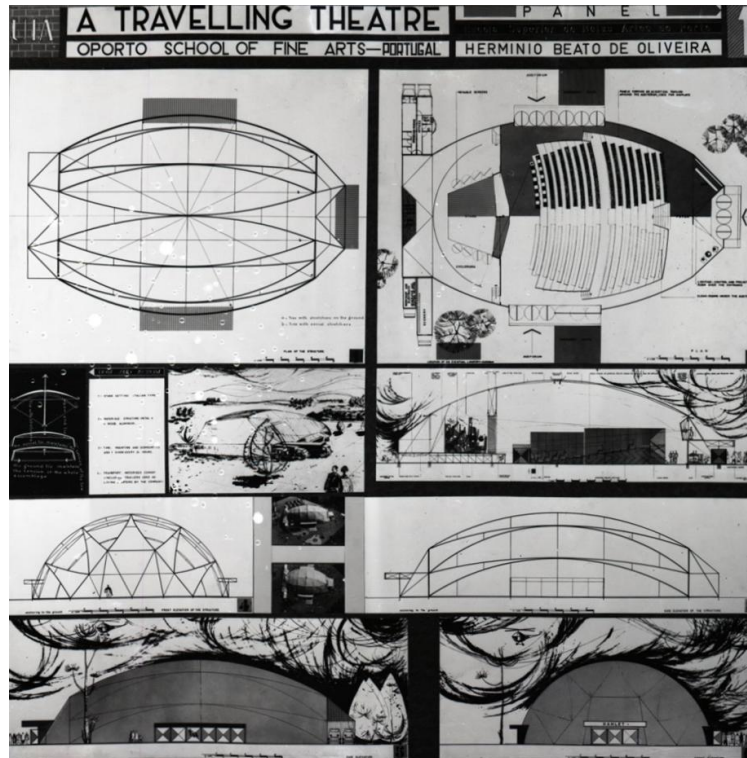


**Figure 2.** “A Travelling Theatre” design by José Carlos Magalhães Carneiro, 1961. *Photograph of Teófilo Rego (Teófilo Rego Archive, Casa da Imagem, Fundação Manuel Leão).*

The ESBAP was linked to the Cine-Club and TEP, not only through the students’ and professors’ participation as spectators, but also through active collaboration in the organization and management of these groups. There existed, thus, a favourable climate that enabled ESBAP members to be fully aware of the needs of these two fields: cinema and theatre. This may partially explain the adequate and creative answer to the unusual competition challenge to project a travelling theatre, that wasn’t a common program.

The existence of travelling theatres has been known in Portugal since before 1961. Duarte Ivo Cruz (1983, p. 222-23) mentions that, in 1936, António Ferro had conceived the initiative of his “Theatre of the people [Teatro do Povo]”, that was directed by Francisco Ribeiro. Ivo Cruz also mentions that “a group of actors and actresses had set off in the passionate adventure to bring their message of art and culture to the whole country”. Further reference be made, on another

level, to the 'Itinerant Company' of Rafael Oliveira<sup>6</sup>, who owned a disassembled theatre, and that was the main protagonist of this type of theatre in Portugal. His company was in activity until 1963.<sup>7</sup> It is not known whether there were any architectural concerns behind the existence of those theatres.



**Figure 3.** "A Travelling Theatre" design by Hermínio Beato de Oliveira, 1961. *Photograph of Teófilo Rego (Teófilo Rego Archive, Casa da Imagem, Fundação Manuel Leão).*

As far as we know, three projects were presented by the Escola Superior de Belas Artes de Lisboa at the competition launched by UIA in 1961. Those projects had been developed as university works, during the academic year of

<sup>6</sup> "In 1918, Silva Vale transferred the leadership of his modest province company to Rafael de Oliveira, who restructured the company so that it turned into the Companhia Rafael de Oliveira, Artistas Associados, in 1933. Oliveira later built his own travelling theatre, which became also known as Companhia do Desmontável [Portable Company]. Rafael de Oliveira was an actor-manager, director, stage designer, actor and associative director, member number 502, from the 17<sup>th</sup> September 1943, of the Sindicato Nacional Artistas Teatrais (Theatre Artists National Union), with he joined on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1943) and holder of the professional certificate number 42, dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> August 1947", at <http://cvc.institutocamoes.pt/pessoas/rafael-de-oliveira.html#.U9P8n-NdWS0>

<sup>7</sup> Photos from the shows of Rafael Oliveira company can be found at <http://opsis.flu.ul.pt/>



1960-1961, in the subject of Architecture Composition that was directed by Professor Luís Cristino da Silva.<sup>8</sup>

Close observation and study of the photographic negatives that are kept in the commercial archive of the photographer Teófilo Rego and which are still unpublished, to our knowledge, has led us to conclude that at least two projects were presented by the ESBAP,<sup>9</sup> designed by José Carlos Magalhães Carneiro<sup>10</sup> and Hermínio Beato de Oliveira.<sup>11</sup> The quantity of registers related to the two projects allows us to understand the commitment and the care they dedicated to this proposal, both as regards the drafts, and the scale models.

José Carlos Magalhães Carneiro opted for the creation of two distinct areas that articulate the stage with a higher ceiling – of Italian design [stage setting-Italian type], with the auditorium, thereby, creating a more dynamic and complex external reading. This option is clearly different from the options that were presented, for instance, by Jacques Bosson, Perez Piñero or Hermínio Beato de Oliveira, who created an unique space in which the stage and the auditorium were organized in articulation with the technical equipment. In the caption of one of the proposal posters, Magalhães Carneiro explained that the materials chosen for the structure were metal, wood and aluminum and that the whole could be assembled in twenty hours by their own company. Concerning the covering of the structures, the mentioned projects opted for canvas that had an obvious affinity with the tents used by the circus.

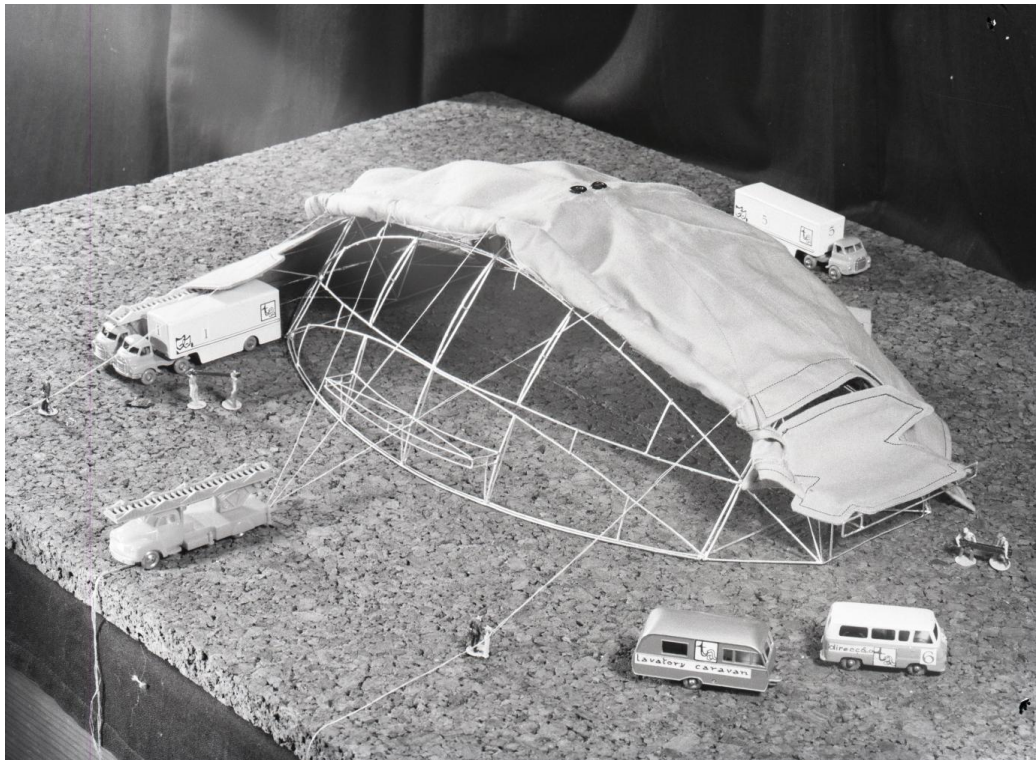
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<sup>8</sup> One project resulted from the collaboration of the students Mário Varandas Monteiro and Maria da Silva Abreu. João Paiva Raposo Almeida and Joel Trindade Santana were the authors of the other projects: "Um teatro ambulante para 500 espectadores" ("A travelling theatre for five hundred spectators") (G.C. Moniz, 2011, II, p.186-88).

<sup>9</sup> Those negatives were discovered during the inventory work that was undertaken within the project *Fotografia, Arquitectura Moderna e a "Escola do Porto": Interpretações em torno do Arquivo Teófilo Rego (Photography, Modern Architecture and the "School of Oporto": Interpretations of the Teófilo Rego Archive)*.

<sup>10</sup> José Carlos de Almeida Magalhães Carneiro initiated his studies of architecture at the ESBAP. In 1973 he earned his degree and presented the CODA (concurso de obtenção de diploma de arquitecto – competition to obtain the diploma of the architect degree at the same institution). In the process, which is available at the Thematic Repository of the Universidade do Porto, one can read that Magalhães Carneiro collaborated with the atelier of the architect João Andresen for two years and was part of the team that founded the architecture atelier Sociedade de Construções William Graham S.A.R.L. The same sources also informs us that Magalhães Carneiro organized an independent atelier with architect João Seródio.

<sup>11</sup> Hermínio Beato de Oliveira, who was born in Arouca, begun his architecture studies at the ESBAP in 1946, and graduated in 1972. He lived and worked in Faro, as a drawing and arts teacher. He was also a writer and poet.



**Figure 4.** "A Travelling Theatre" design by Hermínio Beato de Oliveira, 1961. *Photograph of Teófilo Rego (Teófilo Rego Archive, Casa da Imagem, Fundação Manuel Leão).*

On the other hand, Hermínio Beato de Oliveira opted for the detailed drawing of all the elements. It is, however, his scale model that clearly shows the structural resolution and the process by which, with just a few means – the vehicles used for company transport – the theatre could be rapidly assembled and be ready to welcome the audience in 24 hours. In this project there is also a clear distinction between the stage area, also of Italian design, and the auditorium. The ellipsoidal structure made of metal, wood and aluminum shelters the two functions, and creates an unique volume.

The two architecture students presented proposals that were in line with the central subject of the Congress of UIA – the new techniques and the new materials. The winning project, chosen among the eighty-eight projects that were presented, was the project presented by Emilio Perez Piñero (1935-1972), a fourth year student of the Escuela Superior Técnica de Arquitectura de Madrid. Albeit his premature death, Perez Piñero became a distinguished architect in the

conception of structures. His career started precisely with the success he attained at the London exhibition in 1961.



**Figure 5.** "A Travelling Theatre" design by Hermínio Beato de Oliveira, 1961. *Photograph of Teófilo Rego (Teófilo Rego Archive, Casa da Imagem, Fundação Manuel Leão).*

In addition to the inherent problems posed by the construction of a theatre, those students also had to articulate two fundamental factors in a travelling theatre: the need to use construction materials that made it possible to transport and assemble the theatre easily, and the choice of light and not very bulky elements. Accordingly, the theatre of Perez Piñero, whose structure was set up on top of the same lorry used for its transportation, fulfilled all requirements. Architects Felix Candela, Buckminster Fuller and engineer Ove Arup, who were members of the jury that evaluated the projects, considered that the portable structure that had been developed by Perez Piñero represented a great technical contribution.

After having been recognized by UIA, in 1961, Perez Piñero's project was awarded the golden medal for its contribution to the diffusion of popular theatre

at the VI Bienal de Artes e Arquitectura and at the II Bienal Internacional de Teatro, in São Paulo, in Brazil.<sup>12</sup>

Those awards confirm the international connection between architecture and theatre, as well as the social concerns that were expressed in those two fields: the desire to put technology and culture at the service of the people. However, the travelling theatre, as an architectural program, was unsuccessful in Portugal.

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<sup>12</sup> This data was taken from Fundação Emilio Perez Piñero, <http://www.perezpinero.org/>

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