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THE DRAMATIZATION OF ARCHITECTURE

Bodies in the Drawings of Álvaro Siza¹

João Miguel Couto Duarte

He spends his time moving around inside some of his designs. He comes closer, looks around, and goes in.²

Bodies and Buildings

In a series of drawings for the Museum for Two Picassos, Álvaro Siza (b. 1933) populates the spaces with figures in apparent motion. Located in Madrid, this imaginary pavilion was designed to exhibit Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, painted in 1937 and *La Femme enceinte*, a sculpture created in 1950. Siza was unhappy with the installation of *Guernica* in the Reina Sofia Museum, leading him to imagine a new space for its exhibition. Like the figures in Picasso's art, the figures in Siza's drawings are strange, transfigured bodies that wander through the pavilion galleries displaying unusual gestures. Their expressions reveal astonishment and alienation, and their bodies are positioned to accentuate their singular existences. The pavilion galleries also appear distorted, becoming another body engaged in the movement animating the figures.³

The presence of human figures has long been a constant in Álvaro Siza's design drawings. They are a manifestation of the anthropomorphism that permeates his sculpture, texts, drawings, and built works.⁴ Marco Frascari (1954–2013) strongly believed in imaginatively impressing the attributes of the human body into the design of buildings and into the buildings themselves. With reference to Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), he framed this conviction around the concept of bodies as “imaginative universals.” Frascari writes that “[b]ody-images establish a potential architecture by delineating the relation of the visible and material icons of construction to the immaterial and invisible signs of architecture.”⁵ The figures drawn by Siza operate within this framing. They are drawn simultaneously with the building not afterward as a means of showing scale or to impart a sense of realism. Siza appears to forego an objective relationship with reality. He is not interested in a conventional experience of the world. Passive presence in the space gives way to a poetic confrontation with architecture. The figures he draws – their attitudes and their gestures – are marked by a certain theatricality, as if they were characters in a narrative that unfolds in the architecture being represented. At times, the

architecture itself is transfigured. The drawing occupies a privileged position in Siza's relationship with the world. Siza has long since recognized this. "I do [need the help of drawing] and I use drawing a lot. I think this must be a deficiency of mine,"⁶ he once said, laughing, at a conference in 2016. The relationship between the figures and the building emerges as a kind of dramatization staged by Siza to envision the architecture he is imagining. He creates a representation within a representation, anticipating a theatre of the world. In this dramatization, Siza's understanding of how architecture can be conceived is revealed.

This chapter reflects on Álvaro Siza's dramatization of architecture as revealed in his design drawings and buildings. It examines the characters that move in these drawings, the drama they enliven, and the staging defined in and through those drawings. By focusing on the unbuilt design for the Museum for Two Picassos and the Art Pavilion at Saja Park in Gyeongsangbuk-do, South Korea, which was constructed in 2019 and based on the earlier museum design, this chapter provides insights into how the theatre of human figures in Siza's drawings was realized in built form.

Characters

Human figures are a recurring presence in Álvaro Siza's drawings, which, he acknowledges, are often made for sheer pleasure.⁷ The figures occupy and create architectural space. They forecast a preview of what is to come in the everyday life of the architecture that is being designed. They may walk along a street; ascend stairs or a ramp; gaze into the void; sit by the fire; or smoke while sitting at a window. Some of the bodies seem to withdraw into themselves, perhaps under the weight of their own existence. Others perform what seem to be dance movements. Siza favors the expressiveness of the figures over rigorous anatomical correctness, and faces are rarely shown. Space is represented as if observed by one of the figures. The gaze is of someone who finds themselves contemplating the space and is thus analogous to the gaze of a future dweller when the work is built. Sometimes Siza draws himself inhabiting the space, creating a kind of spontaneous continuity between representation and reality that is common in many of his drawings. Commenting on one of Siza's self-portraits, in which he portrays himself drawing himself, Iain Fraser and Rod Henmi write:

Siza confronts the dilemma of representation: the distance between its objectivity and his subjectivity, the impossibility of his body entering into the drawing. He attempts to erase the drawing's boundaries, etching lines as if he wants to connect those representing his hand to his hand itself, drawing the mirror of himself drawing, spiraling tighter and tighter into a dilemma of limit, of flatland, and of deep-land.⁸

Alongside these drawings, sometimes on the same sheet, other drawings emerge. These drawings contain different figures. They establish a dramatic relationship with the space. They are beings with a fleeting existence and only the dizzying speed with which the drawing was made seems able to register them. Their condition of fantasy beings turns them into characters. The space is invaded by acrobats and horse riders; by winged figures and misshapen beings; by faces and body parts. The ordinariness of the common figures seems insufficiently stimulating for Siza. So, when ordinary figures emerge, they are invested with an unexpected dream-like quality, as they are touched by these new figures with which they share a presence in the drawing (Figure 2.1).



Alg. 90

FIGURE 2.1 Álvaro Siza. Sketch perspective for the Church of Santa Maria, Marco de Canaveses, Portugal, 1990. Pencil on paper, 297 mm × 210 mm. © Álvaro Siza.

Siza is present in some of the drawings, living happily with this bizarre group of imaginal beings. All these figures may be seen as Álvaro Siza himself, at once one and diverse, moving within his drawing and unfolded into multiple characters. In a 2008 interview with Juan Domingo Santos, Siza recalls his first memory of drawing an angel in a design sketch.

I did a lot of drawings with aerial views to come to terms with the territory and study the different scales of the urban fabric before I started on the project. I remember that at one point, after I had done one of the aerial views, I felt like drawing a figure that was watching everything from above.⁹

Siza metamorphosed into an angel. Some of his recurring self-portraits make this all believable.¹⁰ Siza has drawn himself as a Don Quixote-like figure, as a knight, as a dream-like creature. In these figures, there is a kind of transgression in relation to the purpose of a design drawing. The preview of the space's everyday use is replaced by an unexpected appropriation of the architecture, in line with the singularity of the characters that occupy it. The space is observed through their eyes, with the drawing assuming viewpoints that are blocked to the future occupier of the building. Fabio Colonnese writes that in Siza's design drawings:

His graphic expressions are a consequence of his methodological inclusivity. In virtue of both his drawing speed and omnivorous curiosity, Álvaro Siza's sketches from life [...] show a rare combination of architecture pieces, environment elements, animal and human figures."¹¹

These figures appear in Siza's design drawings through a transfiguration that originates in the act of drawing. By placing them in his drawings, Siza returns to the architecture where he first found and drew them. Memory and imagination are united.

Drama

In the Domingo Santos interview, Siza explains the purpose of the human figures in his design drawings and the importance they have for the configuration of architecture.

The inclusion of people in that sort of drawing has nothing to do with the problem of scale, which sometimes is not even real, but it does have to do with the influence of those foreseeable movements by people on the final architectural form. They are drawings that deal with the way things flow until they become architecture. If you look at the sketches, the angles of the architecture are already there in the form of the people who are moving.¹²

These drawings reveal the pivotal importance of the body in creating and understanding architecture. Architecture is transfigured by the same gesture that creates the figures in the drawings, contaminating the configuration of the space through their movement. The same is true of the drawings Siza does only for pleasure. Marco Frascari writes:

Architectural drawing is not limited to envisioning the future construction of a building, but is also an implicit way of thinking about bodies (built and human). This

manner of architectural imaging follows from corporeal experiences constructed and construed in a corpus of body images.¹³

If all the strange beings created by Siza in his design drawings are characters, then the drama playing out in the drawings is the drama of human existence. This drama becomes more significant when one examines the gallery of figures that inhabit the imaginative space of Siza's drawings. Angels and misshaped creatures, monsters and specters, the beautiful and the horrendous, coexist with humans. Despite their grotesque nature, all the creatures he draws are permeated with humanity. The same humanity that transpires in the most intimate of Siza's drawings. Even the conventional figures continue to take part in the drama, their expressive forms confirming that they are more than just extras in the space. They are more than mere references to scale. The design drawings reveal circumstantial fascinations, gestures of astonishment and perdition, moments of love and pleasure. Fleeting and elusive fragments of a larger and more complex narrative are staged, even if only partially glimpsed and elusive. These drawings are allegories of human existence.

In the drama that plays out in Siza's design drawings, the building emerges as a body that fully interacts and is united with the bodies that inhabit it. The existence of architecture is closely interlinked with human existence. Architecture's primordial purpose has always been the creation of a frame for human existence. Siza has said, "[i]t is the job of architecture, today as always, to build places of peace, of stability, of freedom and security; of comfort and intimacy, and conviviality; and of oblivion and the constantly prohibited dream."¹⁴ Through the drawing, he puts his thought into action, focusing on the corporeal qualities of the space. The aim is to search for, perhaps even provoke, tensions between built and human bodies, as Frascari points out.¹⁵ The misshapen human bodies are echoed in an apparent deformation of the architecture. At the same time, and sometimes even in the same drawing, it is the postures and gestures of these figures that echo the architecture surrounding them, succumbing to its presence. Just like the bodies of the figures, the spaces may be lengthened; their proportions distorted; ratios of scale ignored. They are all part of the same drama, in which the architecture emerges as a character (Figure 2.2).

These design drawings are not a simple description of the imagined architecture and when they are translated into technical drawings and models, it is always more than just form and geometry that is defined. Here too Siza's interest in bodies is evident.¹⁶ Siza's design drawings do not differ from those made for pure pleasure. There is a natural continuity between them that comes from the way in which he sees the world. As Fraser and Henmi observe, "[h]is drawing of a commission and his drawing of a travel scene could be interchangeable. They seem to demonstrate not only the same way of drawing but also the same way of looking."¹⁷ All Siza's drawings reflect his understanding of the primary relationship between human bodies and architecture.

Staging

For Marco Frascari, the use of body-images in conceiving architecture makes it possible to imprint a human dimension on the built environment.¹⁸ Frascari identifies the mimes and the dancers as two useful body-images enabling the architect to draw the dramatic potential of architecture.

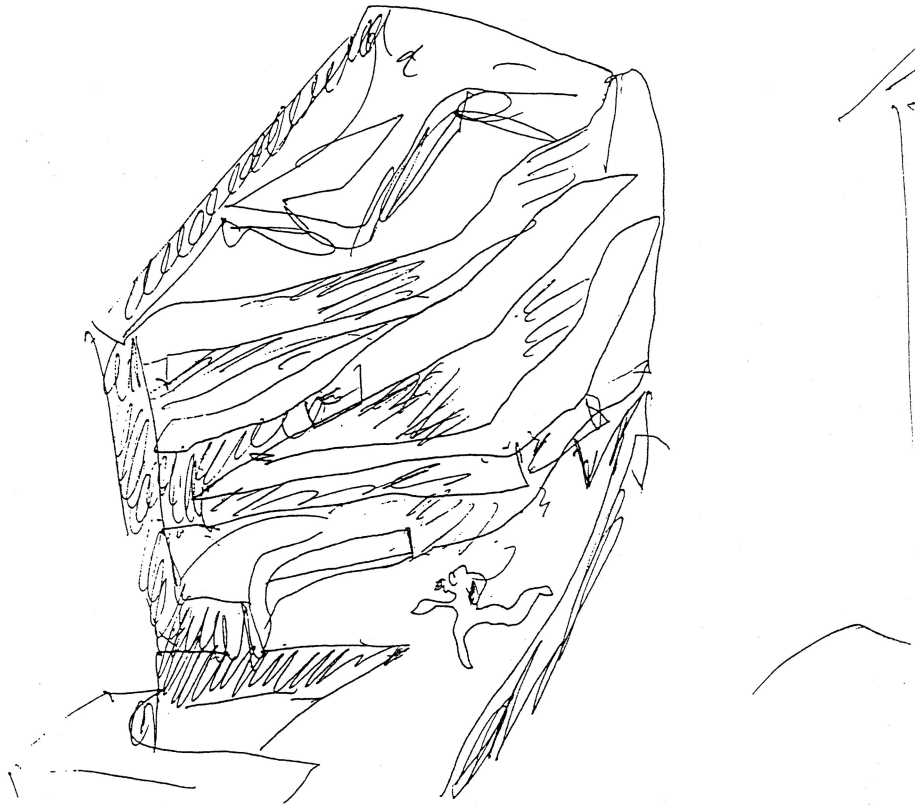


FIGURE 2.2 Álvaro Siza. Sketch perspective for the Iberê Carmargo Museum, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 1998. Ink on paper, 297 mm × 210 mm. © Álvaro Siza.

The mimes, as metonymic figures, carefully evoke the constructive nature of the spatial containers and as dynamic and metaphoric figures, the dancers outline the spatial representation with crossing paths reflecting the disposition of the building. These two types of scale figures transubstantiate the corporeality of time, tempo and weather within an a-temporality of design.¹⁹

The figures Siza includes in his design drawings do not act necessarily as mimes, or as dancers.²⁰ Their relationship with the architecture is neither specifically metonymical nor metaphorical, even if these relationships are suggested by the gestures of some of the figures. However, just like Frascari's mimes and dancers, Siza's figures also mediate between the corporeality of time and the a-temporality of design, embodying the specificity of a particular circumstance while being transubstantiated to other imagined possibilities.

In a 2015 interview with Manuel Graça Dias, Siza explains the human body's importance in his work as an architect. "[T]he human figure is a great help in developing the forms, as it is

at once natural and rational; and contains the movement.”²¹ This affirmation confirms Siza’s belief that architectural form is rooted in predictable human movements.²² To recognize the importance of the body’s movements for the creation of architecture means to incorporate time in the configuration of the space. Given its nature, movement is permeated with time. Siza explores the fact that architecture and movement share the interplay between space and time. In his architecture, time is a presence in the cadence of spaces, the configuration, modeling and interconnection of volumes, and the way they open to the landscape. The succession of spaces appears animated by an internal rhythm, as if the buildings were the result of the movement of a large body that installs itself in a place. For Siza, rhythm is a fundamental element in composing architectural space. He believes “there is a rhythm”²³ in the design process itself. The anthropomorphic, even zoomorphic, nature of Siza’s works gains a new dimension through this incorporation of time through movement. Formal similarities between his buildings, and the faces and bodies of the human and animal figures that populate his architecture, are the most recognizable aspect of the anthropomorphic nature of his designs. A substantial part of the complexity of Siza’s works can be explained by understanding them as the transfiguration of a body that contains movement. Only in the work itself, and in movement, that complexity can be fully appreciated. As Alves Costa points out, “[t]he apparent ‘disorder’ of Siza’s plans, less frightening in section, only finds order in three dimensions with the addition of time – something only made possible by a visit to the built project.”²⁴

In Siza’s drawings, time is suggested through the movement of figures. Even if they appear immobile, it is possible to reveal the presence of time in the rhythm of life that is recognized in their bodies. All the figures embody time, a sign of the humanity that permeates them. The figures incorporate the bodies that Siza encounters in his everyday life, many of which are drawn in mid-movement. The ideal body, defined by geometry, only seems to interest him in isolated cases, and is never adopted directly.²⁵ Like in the case of Frascari’s mimes and dancers, the time present in the movement of Siza’s figures amplifies understanding of the spatial qualities with which they exist. The time of their movements also confirms the empathy Siza finds between human figures and architecture. Time is a crucial instrument for staging the drama that plays out in his design drawings. There are, however, figures that embody a more questioning relationship with time and appear to contravene the more conventional understanding of architecture. Time remains present in their movements, but these movements are less bound to the concrete building within which those figures perform. The movement of these bodies reveals Siza’s approach to architecture and architectural design, where time emerges as a conceptual tool for creating space. These drawings portray architecture in a more idiosyncratic, perhaps more unreal way. They establish themselves in the innermost of Siza’s mind. There is a sense of provocation, a game with Siza himself, involving a constant intertwining of reason and intuition. Siza seems to find freedom in this design fantasy in which the architecture emerges as the defining frame for human existence. In contrast to what happens in many of his drawings, these drawings do not capture an instant of the movement of bodies. The deformation of these bodies and the strangeness of their movements result from a kind of temporal compression into the instant of the drawing. The same can be said of the resulting architecture. Spatial forms incorporate the cadence of time in a mutual reverberation with the bodies that populate the drawings (Figure 2.3). What appears to be a deviation, a kind of fantasy, is in the end the way in which Siza conceptualizes and conceives architecture.²⁶ These bodies are Siza’s architecture.



FIGURE 2.3 Álvaro Siza. Sketch perspective for the Huamao Museum of Art Education, Huamao, China, 2018. Pencil on paper, 297 mm × 210 mm. © Álvaro Siza.

Body-Building

Álvaro Siza proposed his 1992 imaginary Museum for Two Picassos in a border zone between a consolidated area of Madrid and an urban park in the west of the city. From the atrium, the museum bifurcated into two galleries perched over the sloping terrain. Picasso's painting *Guernica*, an evocation of death, was to be placed at the end of one gallery; his sculpture *La Femme enceinte*, an annunciation of life, was to stand at the end of the other. To design the museum, Siza drew on his own childhood memories of reaching the outer limits of the city of Valencia in Spain and being able to embrace an orange grove.²⁷ In some of his texts, he refers to "corridors of thought"²⁸ and "entangled galleries of the memory."²⁹ In the museum drawings, the spaces are staged through the movement of the bodies – all beings are summoned, all gestures and movements are accepted. Drawings are made with urgency. There is no room for realism, no representations of everyday life. The aim was to capture the rhythm of a body rather than to register the configuration of a building. The elaboration of the drawings seems to captivate Siza more than the result that is achieved. They exude an almost childlike fascination for discovery, as if this was his first encounter with design. Siza confessed, "[t]he project was produced in complete freedom and with full enjoyment."³⁰

Siza returned to the design for the Museum for Two Picassos in 2015. The museum was never meant to be built. However, his South Korean patrons decided to build the pavilion after seeing Siza's design in a publication.³¹ What was originally meant to be an imaginary pavilion in Madrid is now the very real Art Pavilion at Saja Park in Gyeongsangbuk-do, South Korea. The Art Pavilion, completed in 2019, was developed in collaboration with the architect Carlos Castanheira (b. 1957). In Castanheira's own words:

There are projects that are born both out of their site and for it.

There are projects that create the site for themselves.

The Art Pavilion modified the hill site and also adapted itself to it.³²

Siza explored the primeval values of architecture, overcoming the barrier that perhaps came from the fact that he was building a design on a mountain in South Korea that originally had been thought of for an urban park in Madrid. The changes to the 1992 design were minimal. The forest covering the hill was integrated into the new pavilion. The pavilion is accessed by means of a semi-buried path. The connection between the two galleries makes a change of course possible, adding complexity to the space. In the place of the works by Picasso, the pavilion showcases two pieces by Siza. A corten steel element hangs from the roof where light comes in from an opening high in the corner at the end of one of the galleries, and a large white marble egg stands on the floor at the end of the other. The confrontation between life and death remains. Siza returned to his lasting passion for sculpture by designing two pieces for a building that is itself an inhabited sculpture. His work as an architect and as a sculptor meet in a gesture of reciprocal hospitality. Siza points out that "[w]hen a sculptor produces an installation, he is working with space, and what he is doing is architecture."³³ The drama staged by Siza in the design drawings has been realized. Time compressed in the drawing comes into its own here, revealing itself in the configuration of galleries and in the cadence of spaces (Figure 2.4). The pavilion is an elongated body that



FIGURE 2.4 João Miguel Couto Duarte. Collage with a sketch perspective by Álvaro Siza for the Museum for two Picassos, in Madrid, Spain, and a photo by Fernando Guerra-FG+SG of the Art Pavilion at Saya Park, in Gyeongsangbuk-do, South Korea, 2021.

peers out from among the trees of the surrounding forest. The crudeness of the exposed concrete gives the building the appearance of having a wrinkled skin, thus accentuating its corporeal nature. It looks as if it could move at any moment. The figures that populate the drawings are now the bodies of those who walk through the pavilion's galleries. Amazement, a desire for transgression and a desire for uncontrolled running are renewed. These yearnings are at all times accommodated by this singular volume, in a kind of game of constant provocation. The architecture and the bodies belong to each other. What appeared to be a fantasy in the form of a drawing turns out to be real. The bodies present in the drawings are us. Architecture as a body has been realized. The drama of the human existence is revealed.

Notes

- 1 The author wishes to thank architect Álvaro Siza for the reproduction of his drawings, and Fernando Guerra|FG+SG for the photography of the Art Pavilion at Siza Park in Gyeongangbuk-do, South Korea. This work is financed through national funding from the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), under Project UIDB/04026/2020.
- 2 Álvaro Siza, *03 Textos*, ed. Carlos Campos Morais (Lisbon: Parceria A. M. Pereira, 2019), 28; translation by the author.
- 3 The Museum for two Picassos was designed in 1992 for the exhibition "Visiones para Madrid: cinco ideas arquitectónicas" [Visions for Madrid: Five Architectural Ideas]. The exhibition was organized as part of Madrid's European Capital of Culture program. Five architects were invited to propose designs for a location in the city chosen by them. The drawings for the museum are now in the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), Montréal, as part of the Álvaro Siza fonds (AP178.S1.1992.PR03).
- 4 Fabio Colonnese, "Architecture as Representation. Notes on Álvaro Siza's anthropomorphism," *Enquiry The ARCC Journal for Architectural Research* 15, no. 1 (2018): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.17831/enq:arcc.v15i1.443>.
- 5 Marco Francari, *Eleven Exercises in the Art of Architectural Drawing: Slow Food for the Architect's Imagination* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 81.
- 6 Álvaro Siza Vieira, interview by Eduarda Lobato de Faria, in *Inside a Creative Mind*, ed. Eduarda Lobato de Faria (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2018), 4:58.
- 7 Álvaro Siza, "The Meaning of Things: A Conversation with Alvaro Siza," interview by Juan Domingo Santos, *El Croquis*, no. 140 (2008): 57.
- 8 Rod Fraser and Iain Henmi, *Envisioning Architecture: An Analysis of Drawing* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1994), 168.
- 9 Siza, "The Meaning of Things," 59. Siza refers to the design for the Quinta da Malagueira social housing project in Évora, Portugal in 1977.
- 10 Antonio Amado Lorenzo, "Los autorretratos de los arquitectos," *EGA Expresión Gráfica Arquitectónica* 22, no. 29 (March 2017): 149, <https://doi.org/10.4995/ega.2017.3353>.
- 11 Colonnese, "Architecture as representation," 9.
- 12 Siza, "The Meaning of Things," 59.
- 13 Francari, *Eleven Exercises*, 81.
- 14 Siza, *01 Textos*, ed. Rita Vanaz (Porto: Civilização Editora, 2009), 164; translation by author.
- 15 Francari, *Eleven Exercises*, 81.
- 16 Colonnese finds in the high level of abstraction of Siza's technical drawings the representation of "the geometric image of the architectural bodies." Colonnese, "Architecture as representation," 10–11.
- 17 Fraser and Henmi, *Envisioning Architecture*, 124.
- 18 Francari, *Eleven Exercises*, 80.
- 19 Francari, *Eleven Exercises*, 82. In addition to the mimes and dancers, Francari also refers to the shadow people. Their condition as "shadows" makes them a counterpoint to taut, normal, vigorous, and healthy bodies. The role of the mimes and dancers in architectural drawings was first addressed by Marco Francari and George Dodds in relation to the drawings of the Italian

- architect, Valeriano Pastor (b. 1927). George Dodds and Marco Frascari, "Miming a Manner of Building: Drawing as a Story in the Work Valeriano Pastor and Carlo Scarpa," in *Constructing Identity: Proceedings of the 86th ACSA Annual Meeting Proceedings, Constructing Identity* (Washington, DC: Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, 1998), 396–402. Frascari would return to the subject matter in "A Tradition of Architectural Figures: A Search for Vita Beata," in *Body and Building: Essays on the Changing Relation of Body and Architecture*, eds. George Dodds, Robert Tavernor, and Joseph Rykwert (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 258–67.
- 20 The figures drawn by Siza also differ from the shadow people, the third group of body-images referred to by Marco Frascari. The expressions of the Siza's figures reflect their existential condition and are not merely a reaction to the constraints of the space they are in, as is the case for the shadow people.
 - 21 Álvaro Siza, "Álvaro Siza: Nadir paralelo ao Tâmega," interview by Manuel Graça Dias, *Jornal Gyptec*, no. 1 (April, 2015): 5; translation by the author. Siza's observation comes after reference to the presence of the human figure in the plan for the Nadir Afonso Contemporary Art Museum in Chaves, Portugal. The museum was completed in 2015.
 - 22 Siza, "The Meaning of Things," 59.
 - 23 Álvaro Siza, "O regresso aos bairros," interview by Valdemar Cruz, in *Retratos de Siza*, by Valdemar Cruz (Coimbra: Lâpis de Memórias, 2017), 230; translation by the author. For Siza, rhythm is an element shared by architecture, cinema, sculpture, music, literature, and poetry, offering beneficial affinity to all the arts.
 - 24 Alexandre Alves Costa, "Scandalous Artisticity," in *Álvaro Siza Modern Redux*, ed. Jorge Figueira (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), 39.
 - 25 The plan for the Church of Saint-Jacques-de-la-Lande in Rennes, France, makes use of idealized anthropomorphic figures. But there is an idea of movement in the rotation of the axis toward the altar in relation to the plan's main axis. The church was completed in 2018.
 - 26 João Miguel Couto Duarte, "The Fantasy of Reality: on the Design Drawings of Álvaro Siza Vieira," in *Intelligence, Creativity and Fantasy*, eds. Maria do Rosário Monteiro, Mário S. Ming Kong, and Maria João Pereira Neto (Leiden: CRC Press, 2020), 142.
 - 27 Álvaro Siza, *Imagining the evident*, eds. Daniela Sá, and João Carmo Simões, trans. from the Portuguese version Tania Gregg with Daniela Sá (Lisbon: Monade, 2021), 28. Originally published as *Immaginare l'Evidenza*, ed. Guido Giangregorio (Bari: Edizioni Laterza, 1998).
 - 28 Siza, *01 Textos*, 273; translation by author.
 - 29 Siza, *03 Textos*, 28; translation by author.
 - 30 Álvaro Siza, "Visiones para Madrid, Madrid, Spain (1992)," in *Álvaro Siza Expor On Display*, eds. Maria Ramos, Paul Buck, and Anthony Rudolf (Porto: Fundação de Serralves, 2005), 140, exhibition catalog.
 - 31 António Choupina, "The Master's Master II," in *Siza – Unseen & Unknown* (Berlin: Tchoban Foundation – Museum für Architekturzeichnung, 2019), 189, exhibition catalog.
 - 32 "Siza Park Art Pavilion," Carlos Castanheira Architects, accessed July 15, 2022, <https://www.carloscastanheira.pt/project/siza-park-art-pavilion/>
 - 33 Siza, "The Meaning of Things," 57.