

DEATH OF A CITY - SYNOPSIS

In the heart of Bairro Alto, right in the centre of Lisbon, the building of an old printing workshop is demolished to make way for a development of luxury apartments.

Seeing this demolition as a perfect image for the death of a certain Lisbon in the wake of the financial crisis and the ensuing real estate and touristic boom, the director proposes to film an urban diary portraying the daily life of the construction site and those who work there.

What starts out as a work-centred film turns out to be the story of the director's relationship with his hometown and with the people who build it, a polyphonic narrative made up of their life stories of labour and immigration, shining a light on the violence and destruction that hide under the progress of our cities.

DEATH OF A CITY – Director's note

"The Death of a City" is a film born out of my relationship with Lisbon, the city where I was born, grew up and live, and my desire to film it on a daily basis, to go out on the street alone with my camera to make a personal and honest film, both concrete and poetic.

Taking as its starting point the demolition of an old printing workshop to make way for a development of luxury apartments in central Lisbon, "The Death of a City" is a film built in layers, like a city, an urban diary in which through the daily life of a construction site I attempt to tell the story of my city in the last ten years.

Much has changed in Lisbon and worldwide during this period. In a literary style heir to Sebald and dos Passos, my voice as a narrator tries to make sense of those changes, intersecting small individual stories with the subjective experience one has of the complexity of movements of the world around us.

My affective relationship with the city cannot be separated from the objective conditions that have shaped it and led to this particular film. As such, certain fundamental questions of contemporaneity are inevitably problematized – migrations, post-colonialism and racism, work and labour relations, the economic crisis, urban life and gentrification.

Inside the construction site, however, the narrator's main function is to enrich and complexify the stories that the workers themselves tell, making "The Death of a City" a choral and polyphonic film, inhabited by dozens of characters and voices in dialogue.

This is, therefore, a film made of people, with concrete names and lives, a complex and dynamic mosaic built from fragments that lead us to different experiences of work, immigration and life.

Above all, it is a film intended to be intimate. The intimacy in the tone of the narration is transposed to the diaristic form of the film, in a daily relationship with Lisbon and the workers, since the construction site, the city and the director are the three vertices of the same triangle.

There are films that can only be made this way, alone, with time and total availability, in a personal and direct relationship with the city and the people. A diary, written or filmed, is a personal and intimate object, even when made to be shared. It demands a daily regularity in the production of words and images that a film crew would never allow.

Questioning and experiencing cities through cinema, on the one hand, and telling the multiple stories that shape them, on the other, have been from the very beginning the main reasons for me wanting to make films. "The Death of a City" is one more step on that path, the most challenging so far.