

# Pedagogy of the Streets: Porto 1977

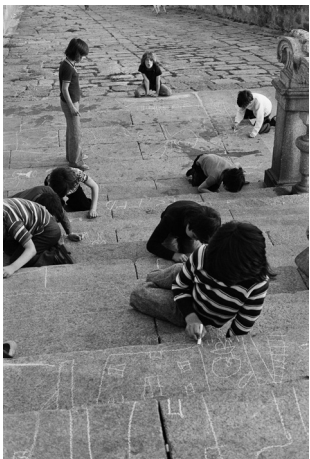
## INTRODUCTION

Lúcia Almeida Matos, Susana Lourenço Marques  
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This exhibition revisits the experimental artistic project conceived and realized by Elvira Leite together with the community of Largo de Pena Ventosa, in Bairro da Sé, one of Porto's historic neighborhoods. The project unfolded from 1976 to 1977, after the local housing support program (SAAL), launched right after the Portuguese political revolution in 1974, was unexpectedly shut down. As Elvira Leite's project developed, the streets became an active meeting point to discuss ideas, plan activities, and learn new skills. Largo da Pena Ventosa was turned into a workshop where children of all ages interacted to give life to a plan that reflected their personal interests. Elvira Leite's initiative was motivated by a sense of frustration, impotence and outrage experienced by the local community when confronted with the unfulfilled promise of better housing conditions.

Although the project dates back to the beginning of Leite's professional career, it is already characterized by what would later become her theory and practice, in one word, her pedagogy. This was nurtured by her sensitivity and intelligence, and firmly rooted in research and education resulting in the development of her own method of teaching. It is a minimally prescriptive pedagogy which welcomes the unpredictable and aims at realizing individual and collective projects.

The exhibition is organized into clusters of photographs made by Leite to document the various phases of the project. They reveal the thought that sustained it and testify to the use of a methodology that she would consolidate throughout a life dedicated to the values of democracy and freedom through a practice oriented to stimulate creative expression. While the images remind us of Helen Levitt's conviction that beauty can be extracted from reality, these photos do not focus on a nostalgic vision of the past, but rather on the discovery of connections and transformations in the present. Showing them seems particularly pertinent today when the street is no longer a place of playful invention and political ownership.



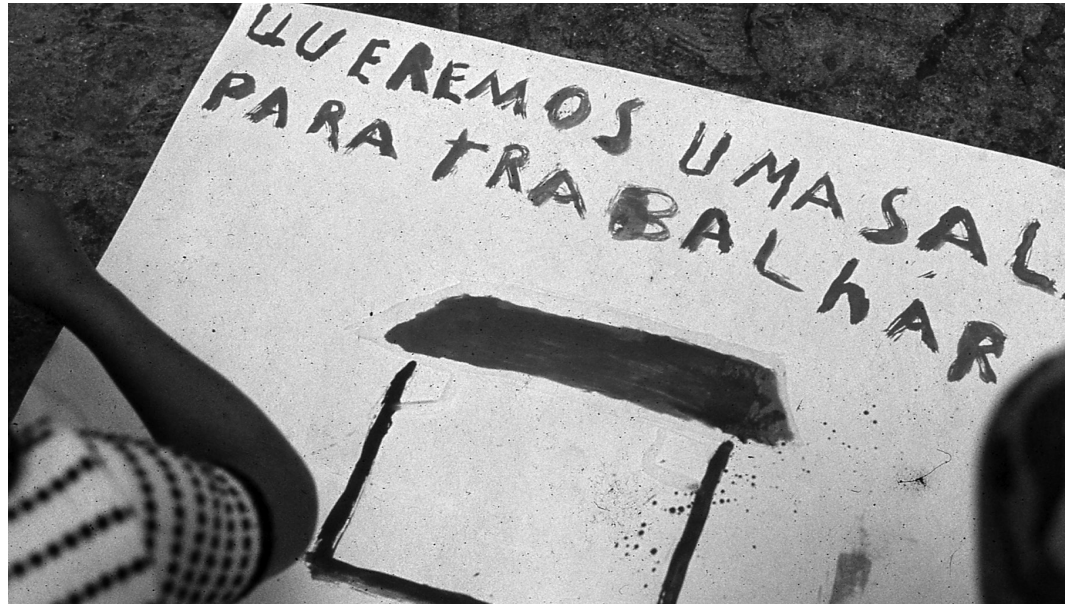
MARIA ELVIRA VIEIRA PEREIRA LEITE was born in Porto, Portugal, in 1936. She graduated with a painting degree from the Escola Superior de Belas Artes do Porto (ESBAP) in 1964. As a student, she was selected to participate in all ESBAP annual exhibitions. She represented Portugal in the VIII São Paulo Biennial in 1965 and was awarded the National Prize for Painting in 1968. Albeit her early artistic success, Leite chose to become a teacher after studying Pedagogic Science at the University of Porto in 1964. After 1976, in addition to her job as a high school teacher, she dedicated herself to the public dissemination of culture. She was a consultant of UNESCO for teaching art in Portuguese-speaking countries; was invited by the Portuguese government to plan and coordinate artistic training for Portuguese emigrant women internationally; and was a fellow of the Gulbenkian Foundation to create art educational materials. After retirement, Leite was a consultant of Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis, of the Regional Traditional Arts Centre and of the Educational Service of the Fundação de Serralves. She has published extensively on the field of art education, usually in collaboration with artists or other educators. In recognition of Leite's outstanding contribution to education she was awarded, in 2004, the Order of Infante D. Henrique by the President of Portugal.

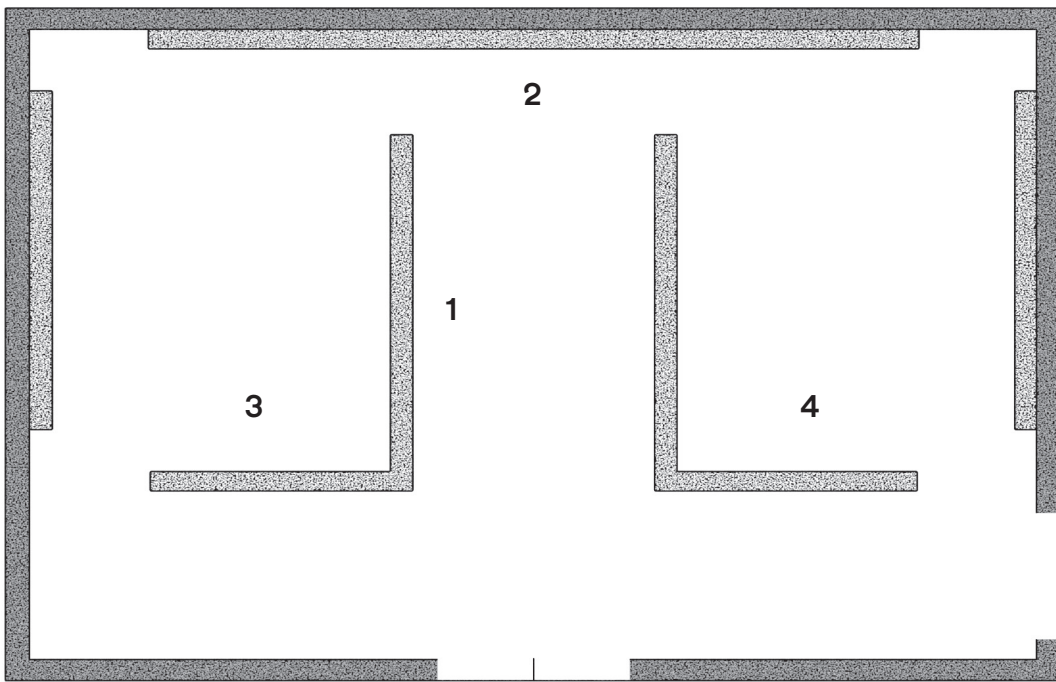
As a child I lived in a house with a huge cultivated garden and a pond. I learned to play with tree branches and fallen leaves; with chickens, ducks, with a hibernating tortoise. I ran, jumped, hid behind the fruit trees, made buildings with pebbles, played house. I was a girl who liked to touch the earth, moisten it and work it with my hands... Education during childhood, of whatever kind, reverberates much later in adulthood.

As a teenager, a very independent, assertive and sensitive mother used to tell me: "When you want to teach something to others, you have to get your hands dirty, and feel the difficulties, the sensations, the problems, and find the best solutions. There are things in life that you only learn by doing."

In the 70s, there was a climate of solidarity in Pena Ventosa. And the gray, rough stones of the walls, the red clay roofs that changed color according to the weather and hours of the day attracted me. The unevenness of the stone pavement, the granite staircases and landings, the fountains where people washed clothes. The square and the narrow streets were spaces of conviviality, places to be.

— Elvira Leite, April 2016





1. Elvira Leite, photographs of Pena Ventosa, Porto, 1976–77, Vintage prints
2. Elvira Leite, photographs of Pena Ventosa, Porto, 1976–77 (reprinted 2016), Giclee print
3. Video essay by Vitor Almeida and Susana Lourenço Marques with Elvira Leite's photographs of Pena Ventosa project, 6"34', 2019
4. Alexandre Alves Costa archive, photographs of SAAL process, 1974–76 (reprinted 2019), Laser prints

PEDAGOGY OF THE STREETS: PORTO 1977 is based on the exhibition QUEM TE ENSINOU? — NINGUÉM, curated by Lúcia Almeida Matos and Susana Lourenço Marques and presented at Faculdade de Belas Artes da Universidade do Porto in 2016. The exhibition is supported by the University of Porto, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and by Baruch College and the Weissman School of Arts and Sciences.



Alexandre Alves Costa archive, photographs of SAAL process, 1974–76 (reprinted 2019), Laser prints