

open design for unplanned narratives: fala atelier's oneiric realms and post-digital representation

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abstract

FALA Atelier, based in Lisbon, Portugal, has established itself over the past decade as a leading practice exploring the relationship between post-digital visual languages and design in architecture. Under the leadership of Filipe Magalhães, Ana Luisa Soares, and Ahmed Belkhodja, the studio's work, documented in international monographs including *2G*, uses collage and photomontage techniques to generate dreamlike representations of domestic space that resist conventional realism. While FALA's aesthetic and representational strategies have been widely discussed, this paper focuses on a less examined aspect of their work: the social and spatial openness inherent in their unbuilt competition proposals.

Through critical analysis of three residential competition projects (n.172, n.46, and n.191), this research investigates how FALA's approach to design and drawing constructs unplanned interior scenarios, spaces that resist prescriptive planning and invite unanticipated patterns of use and occupation. These projects, marked by flexible layouts, ambiguous zoning, and narrative-driven collages, suggest open-ended possibilities for domestic life. Their visual strategies frame interiors not as static backdrops for predefined activities but as speculative environments for emergent social behaviours and collective inhabitation.

By examining FALA's unpublished competition drawings through the lens of open design and unplanned interior life, this paper connects post-digital representational methods with broader spatial practices that foreground adaptability, temporality, and user agency. FALA's work thus contributes to current architectural discourse on how interiors can accommodate, and even encourage, the shifting moral geographies, social dynamics, and unanticipated domestic configurations of contemporary life.

keywords

FALA Atelier; collage; post-digital; oneiric architecture; unplanned

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introduction: the post-digital generation

In the article 'Architecture Enters the Age of Post-Digital Drawing' published in *Metropolis* magazine, Sam Jacob explores the evolving paradigm of architectural representation known as post-digital drawing. He highlights how this kind of architectural representation signifies a shift away from purely photo-realistic digital renderings toward a style that embraces the artifice and representational qualities of drawing itself, often opening up space for ambiguity, unresolved spatial programmes, and indeterminate interior scenarios.¹ The idea of post-digital, as a creative genre, originated in the year 2000 when musician Kim Cascone coined the term to describe a movement of self-taught composers in electronic music who experimented with digital technology failures, using glitches, bugs, and system crashes in their work.²

Concurrently, media artist Ian Andrews expanded the term to post-digital aesthetics, which critiqued the goal of achieving 'perfect' representation, such as photo-realism, with digital technologies in the fields of art.³ Due to the global financial crisis, several factors made designing and working particularly challenging for young architects at the beginning of the 2010s. Among the various consequences, post-digital drawing has emerged as a recognised genre in architectural representation that uses anachronistic tools to resist visual conformity in the face of continued economic and global pressures on emerging architects' creative pursuits.

One significant quality of post-digital drawing in architecture is the balance of new digital technologies with the thoughtful application of mechanical and manual techniques, such as hand drawing. This approach aims to harness the best of both by foregrounding the process of drawing as active and creative constructs of architectural imagination, rather than mere depictions of future realities. Unlike the earlier digital turn, which often emphasised the novelty and power of

digital tools, the post-digital movement adopts a more relaxed manner, incorporating technology without being overwhelmed or defined by it.⁴ The surge of this drawing style reflects a broader critique of the dominance of hyper-realism in digital renderings, which often prioritises visual fidelity over conceptual and contextual richness, frequently neglecting the social unpredictability and unplanned occupation patterns that interiors may host over time. Instead, post-digital drawings celebrate the ordinary, employing flatness, texture overlays, and muted colours to evoke nostalgia and critique the ubiquity of digital techniques in contemporary life.

After an initial moment of perplexity and even distrust from architecture critics, who underestimated the impact this 'retro' visual language could have, the concept of post-digital drawing became an important trend in the emerging generation of architects.⁵ In the 2010s, the online platform KoozArch played a pivotal role in the development of post-digital architecture by creating a space where traditional drawing techniques intersect with digital innovations.⁶ Following the various international designers who popularised its compositional qualities, sub-categories of this visual language began to emerge. Common to these sub-categories was the fusion of conventional techniques of collage-making with sophisticated digital techniques, resulting in intricate and visually arresting compositions that enhance the communication of architectural ideas and concepts. Further, post-digital drawing shared an emphasis on the inclusion of narrative elements and historical art references similar to collage representation techniques that emerged in architectural drawing during the 1970s and 1980s, thereby making room for multiple interpretations of use, social flexibility, and the representation of non-prescriptive interior futures. Several significant sources commonly referenced include Mies van der Rohe's one-point perspectives and the metaphysical paintings of Giorgio de Chirico.⁷

Mario Carpo, in his book *The Second Digital Turn*, critiques contemporary architects' renewed interest in anachronistic techniques, and connects the post-digital phenomenon to postmodernism but highlights a key difference: whereas postmodernists had a programmatic aversion to technology, post-digital architects are indifferent to it.⁸ In his article 'Post-Digital Quitters' he describes:

If we don't care about technology today, it is not because there is no technology out there, but because there is too much of it; it's not because we are bored, it's because we are quitters. And, as always, if architects stop caring about technology, someone else will in their stead.⁹

The issue of reviving a postmodern language, or at least the visual strategies of collage, juxtaposition, and superimposition, has led to the consolidation of post-digital compositional techniques. This has undoubtedly increased the applicability of this new visual language, making its works recognisable and reproducible, and creating an evolving iconography that applies analogue compositional techniques from a generation earlier in new ways. As Pedro Bandeira explains:

One thing is for certain: postmodernism as a structure of thoughts had the virtue of encompassing all the apparent contradictions we are able to recognise in contemporary Architecture.¹⁰

Today, architects utilise post-digital drawings to investigate diverse design possibilities, articulate design concepts to clients or stakeholders, and craft visually engaging presentations and marketing collateral. This technique also serves as a medium for experimenting with different material and colour combinations and evaluating the aesthetic impact of design choices before the commencement of construction. Among the various firms that have adopted a post-digital language, a non-exhaustive list includes Point

Supreme, OFFICE KGDVS, Dogma, Elli Mossayebi, Maio Architects, and Baukuh.¹¹ However, the most important among them is certainly FALA Atelier, which, unlike the others, has translated this language into a working method that is reflected in its realised designs, and more significantly, in its unbuilt projects, where interior indeterminacy, user-driven appropriation, and the spatial conditions for unplanned habitation become central design themes.

the case of fala atelier

FALA Atelier, based in Lisbon, Portugal, has emerged over the past fifteen years as a pioneering force within contemporary architecture, under the leadership of Filipe Magalhães, Ana Luisa Soares, and Ahmed Belkhodja [Fig. 01]. The three architects first met in 2011 while working at Harry Guggler Studio in Basel. Magalhães, originally from Porto, and Soares, from its surrounding suburbs, share Portuguese roots, while Belkhodja is Swiss. Their diverse educational trajectories span architectural schools in Porto, Lausanne, Zurich, Ljubljana, Tokyo, Gothenburg, and Singapore, reflecting a breadth of international influences. Further professional experience in Japan also shaped their design sensibilities: Magalhães worked at SANAA, Soares at Toyo Ito, and Belkhodja at Atelier Bow-Wow.¹² Like many young professionals from Southern Europe, Magalhães and Soares left Portugal in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis in search of better economic opportunities abroad. After securing well-paid and stable positions in Switzerland, they made the deliberate decision to return to Porto at the height of the recession, inviting Belkhodja to join them. Confronted with a saturated local job market and intense competition among the city's many architects, they initially focused on taking on small-scale residential projects as a way to establish their practice.



Figure 01. FALA Atelier's lecture (Filipe Magalhães and Ana Luisa Soares) at 'Reuse the Ruin Summer Workshop' in Florence, 2023, in which they are explaining the references of Japanese architecture in their works. Photograph: Andrea Crudeli, 2023.

Throughout the 2010s, many young architects working in Porto were influenced by the Porto School, contributing to the development of a recognisable and cohesive architectural language within the city.¹³ While FALA Atelier is inevitably connected to this lineage, their work introduces significant departures in both content and approach. Rather than adhering strictly to the school's established dogmas, FALA engages in a critical reinterpretation, offering a retrospective, almost revisionist lens on the Porto School tradition. Their signature 'back-to-the-future' visual language incorporates postmodern strategies, characterised by the juxtaposition and superimposition of historically disassociated compositional elements. This deliberate act of intellectual disobedience has enabled FALA to cultivate an independent architectural voice within the broader context of Portuguese architecture. Tibor Joanelly explains that 'FALA's projects may be characterised by a strong tendency towards autonomy.'¹⁴ Believing architecture is a profession aimed at combining elements, not separating them, FALA uses its distinct visual language to critique the reductive and repetitive appearance of hyper-realistic architectural representation, common to large, global architecture practices.¹⁵ Further, unlike other architectural firms in Europe that use a post-digital visual language solely for its representational dimension, FALA conveys an

abstract compositional quality of drawings in its realised works, aligning its collage images with the final photographs of each project, demonstrating the true novelty of the studio.

This application of FALA Atelier's post-digital technique to drawing in its realised works can also be seen from a political perspective. By predominantly opting to renovate, rather than rebuild, urban projects, the compositional techniques of juxtaposing and superimposing historical elements in drawings carries through to its buildings. This critical approach enables FALA to act in opposition within the building industry, which generally favours the higher profits of new constructions following demolitions.¹⁶ It allows the firm to challenge the status quo of architectural practice by proposing alternatives to new city construction. In doing so, FALA also opens its interiors to processes of spatial indeterminacy, allowing for future unplanned adaptations by users and unforeseen modes of occupancy over time.

Regarding technical drawings, the architects minimally use basic digital tools like Photoshop and AutoCAD, focusing on creating images that resemble handmade representations. This visual strategy reinforces spatial ambiguity and leaves room for multiple interior scenarios to be imagined and enacted by future occupants: in their designs for residential interiors, for instance, they manipulate existing conditions in Photoshop to overlay new material textures, plants, and objects from a singular viewpoint, as 'an accumulation of tropes of good painterly taste.'¹⁷ In this sense, they produce plans and collage one-point perspectives constructed to enhance cosmetic beauty, and emphasise the labour and effort put into each detail.¹⁸ This graphic method corresponds to the specific design choices that find their mirrored representation in the building.

The firm frequently proposes sequences of spaces with different types of furniture in an attempt to demonstrate the transient nature of human

existence compared to architecture. Material surfaces, attached to walls, floors, or ceilings, are designed to be easily removable and replaceable. Inspired by Taro Igarashi's superflat concept and the cult of surfaceness, FALA employs surface play to animate interiors, so that 'the entire structure of FALA's oeuvre is more rhizomic in kind, with like things appearing as different constellations on the surfaces of their design.'¹⁹ This tactic transforms interior renovation strategies into opportunities for frequent authorial gestures. It invites contradiction and imagination, drawing from avant-garde art movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism, the experimental architectural imagery of Italian Radicals like Superstudio and Archizoom, the British group Archigram, and Josef Kaiser's photomontages.

The Italian critic Davide Tommaso Ferrando describes the post-digital drawing style of FALA Atelier as a unique kind of 'illustration' that 'leave[s] a gap between the representation and the represented.'²⁰ Ferrando explains that FALA's 'deliberate staging of project photographs, which meticulously mimic the composition of their drawings to the extent that photos and drawings become indistinguishable, creates an epistemological conundrum where the boundaries between the drawn, the photographed, and the constructed blur.'²¹ Ferrando compares this illustrative approach to the work of David Hockney, and its 'same kind of flatness that [...] is not neutral but instead productive of a particular conception of space.'²²

FALA strongly emphasises the emotional and experiential impact of the interior spaces it designs. There is an overarching intention to abstract the space into a dimension suspended between representation and reality. Rather than focusing solely on a space's function, it aims to create environments that evoke specific feelings and reactions from the occupants. Importantly, FALA's interiors remain open to evolving interpretations of use, resisting fixed programmatic outcomes and enabling unplanned modes of domestic engagement. To achieve this,

it often uses unconventional elements such as curved walls, unexpected spatial configurations, and vibrant materials. These design choices are intended to create a sense of wonder and engagement, making the space not just a backdrop for activities, but also an active participant in the users' experience.

Furthermore, FALA Atelier employs a thoughtful and deliberate outlook in the use of materials and colours. Often repeated in varied sets of symbols and geometric patterns across multiple designs, these elements create a familiar visual language in its interiors. Employing repetition creates a sense of continuity within its designs, where each material and colour choice intentionally contributes to an overall stylistic narrative of their spaces. Beyond aesthetics, these elements are also used to engage with the cultural and historical contexts of the site, ensuring the projects are not only visually striking but also deeply resonant with the meanings and narratives of their locale.

Finally, FALA's stylistic strategy can be defined as 'alter-modern,' according to the definition proposed by the French critic Nicolas Bourriaud.²³ In *The Radicant*, Bourriaud proposes a conceptual alternative to postmodernism he calls alter-modernity.²⁴ This term emphasises translation and creolisation of cultural values to connect them to global networks. All FALA's founding partners have spent time abroad during their education, gaining diverse experiences in a sort of self-imposed exile from their original cultural identity. They accumulated meaningful content, which they brought back and integrated into their own reality upon returning home. Working on the periphery of megacities, their works represent a mediation between local and global influences, promoting an anachronistic form of spatial design that cultivates a new identity as something changeable over time and space. Their alter-modern design strategy aims to explore themes of abstraction as a departure from those of universalisation, realism, and a sameness apparent in current international

commercial design contexts. Consequently, both their completed works and, notably, their unfinished projects can be examined as embodying these principles. In particular, their unbuilt interiors emerge as speculative spaces where unplanned uses, temporal transformations, and occupant-led adaptations are deliberately anticipated as part of the design strategy.

oneiric domesticity

It is not a coincidence that FALA Atelier chose Henri Rousseau's 'The Dream' (1910) as inspiration to produce one of its most popular collages. 'The Dream' explores an oneiric dimension by depicting plants and animals that do not naturally coexist with each other. Blending real elements in imagined ways creates a fantastical environment that is more reminiscent of a dreamscape than a real place. FALA designed 'A very tiny palazzo' [Fig. 02], a compact forty-square-metre residence nestled in a small yet verdant garden in Porto and inserted the palazzo into Rousseau's oneiric imagery of exotic jungle, reclining female figure, and wild animals. This playful transposition also signals FALA's interest in crafting space settings that remain open to interpretative occupation and unforeseen spatial uses, qualities aligned with a conceptual open-design strategy.

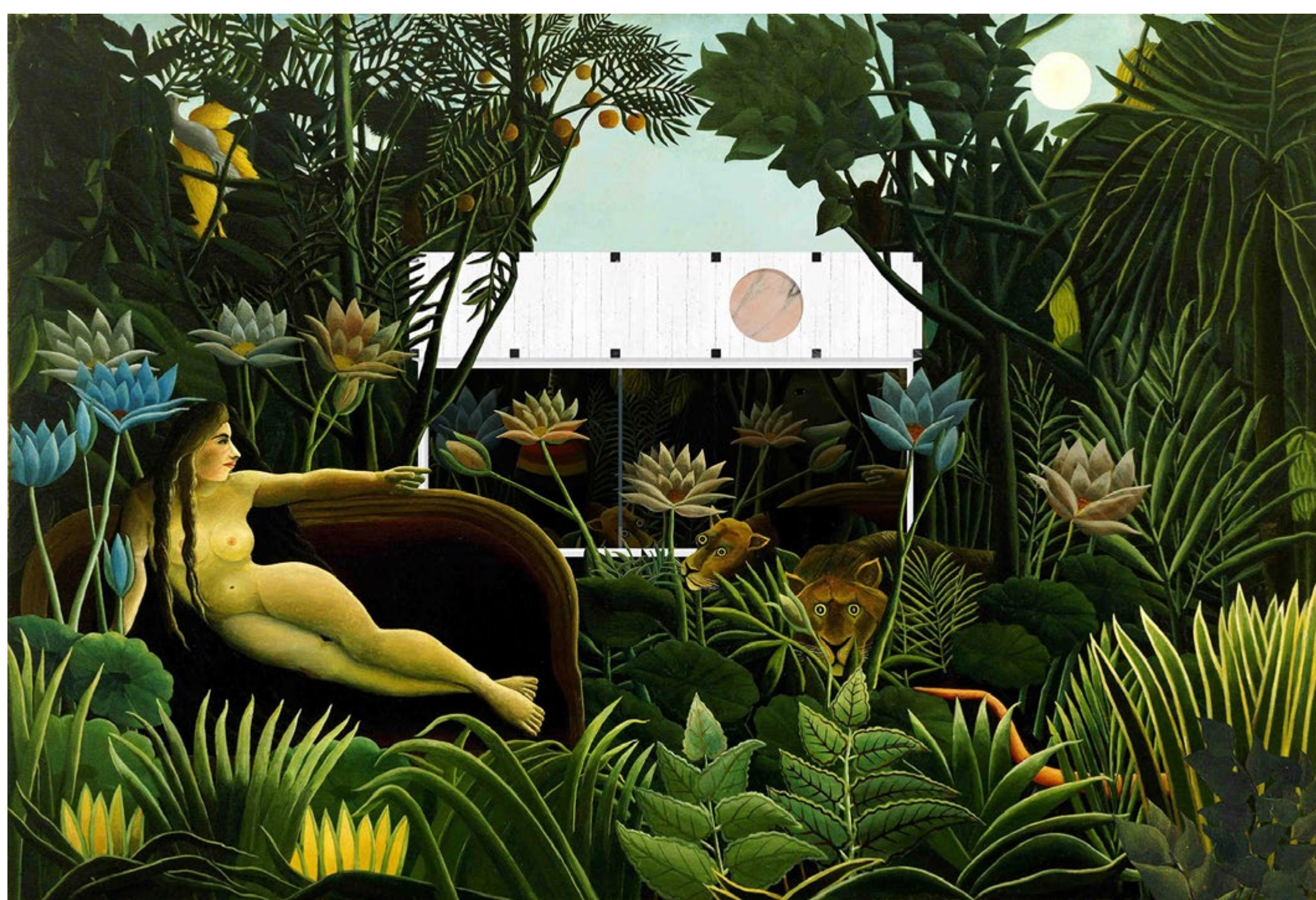


Figure 02.
FALA Atelier. *A very tiny palazzo*, 2022. Image courtesy of FALA Atelier.

According to the psychiatrist John Allan Hobson, dreams are a virtual representation of life that

amalgamate fragments of reality in highly improbable ways.²⁵ In this sense, the term 'dreamscape' can be understood as a surreal environment evocative of the fragmented attributes of dreams. It represents a domain abundant with potential, unbound by the strictures of facts and logic. FALA Atelier's post-digital collages follow these qualities of dreamscapes in drawings by promoting the coexistence of historically distant events, the indefinite contours of shapes, the absence of shadows and gravity, as well as the exaggeration of proportions and competing narratives; such visual ambiguity invites occupants to imagine multiple modes of inhabitation, reinforcing an architectural stance that resists prescriptive spatial planning. Further, by avoiding the allure of hyper-realism in drawing, FALA's post-digital visual language creates a sense of architecture's capacity to change the character and atmospheric properties of a space by altering the props that populate it. This representational technique has been described, thanks to its directness, as 'both a technological movement towards "transparency" and, at the same time, a movement towards more powerful illusion.'²⁶

In its built projects FALA Atelier often creates spaces that evoke a sense of whimsy, fluidity, and surrealism that generates curiosity and wonder. It has clearly declared this intent, for example, in the installation for the *Unfolding Pavilion – Rituals of Solitude* in the seventeenth Venice Architecture Biennale called 'Capsule with Fuzz!'. In this project, FALA embodies an essence of dreamscapes within the built environment by incorporating elements that blur the boundaries between reality and imagination. These elements include the bold use of colour, unconventional geometries, and playful forms that challenge traditional, rectilinear configurations of architecture. FALA Atelier's works also provoke a sense of the uncanny by incorporating surreal elements such as floating structures, unexpected juxtapositions, and whimsical details. These elements disrupt the anticipated perception of space, to disorient

viewers. Further, the emphasis on immersive experience draws occupants into a narrative journey. FALA often introduces elements of ambiguity in its designs: spaces may serve multiple purposes, or their function may not be immediately apparent, encouraging users to engage with the environment in a more imaginative and interpretive manner. This deliberate functional ambiguity fosters unplanned patterns of use over time, positioning interiors as adaptable frameworks responsive to changing social needs.

For FALA, the desire to create dreamlike environments also becomes a pretext for proposing ideal social models. The fact that most of their projects have been clientless, because they have been promoted by investors or developed in competitions, fosters the idea of having an abstract inhabitant and provides more freedom to mitigate the negative consequences of apartment living.²⁷ These clientless contexts have allowed the practice to propose interiors that pre-emptively accommodate unknown users and emergent ways of living, further reinforcing the spatial logic of unplanned interiors. These solutions include designing buildings with integrated communal spaces, encouraging mixed-use developments that combine residential and social functions, and adopting architectural styles that promote visibility and interaction among residents.²⁸

The issue of spatial distribution, particularly concerning the ambiguity of use designations, is central to FALA's exploration of new approaches to social interaction in interior spaces. By deliberately disrupting conventional planning hierarchies, FALA's interiors become experimental terrains for unprescribed occupation and user-driven spatial transformations. As introduced by Robin Evans in his seminal essay, 'Figures, Doors, and Passages', the evolution of connected rooms and the corridor plan in domestic interiors deeply impacted social interactions in households.²⁹ Interestingly, FALA Atelier's projects challenge the traditional distinction established by Evans by creating new,

mixed, and ambiguous spatial organisations. As noted by Joanelly, 'This may be the reason why some of FALA's projects come across as topical declinations of the same program: the separation of auxiliary functions from the main space, the zoning of the plan.'³⁰

Interestingly, FALA's explorations of social ideals in new, blurred distributions of conventional planning emulate the same oneiric qualities of its post-digital drawings. The sense of domestic conviviality, the quality of being friendly and lively that promotes new forms of community engagement in its designs, appears to be motivated by attempts to reshape domestic environments as places of social ideals. The dreamscape qualities of its drawings are further explored as real interior spaces by promoting intimate environments where people can express themselves. Reminiscent of Gaston Bachelard's concept of intimacy in the household, FALA's planning emphasises a deep emotional and imaginative connection between individuals and familiar environments in the home.³¹ Like its post-digital representations, these spaces are not merely functional but instead invite the invocation of memories and emotions, providing an anchor for the creation of a dreamscape setting. At the same time, these interiors remain structurally and programmatically open-ended, anticipating unplanned forms of social engagement and occupation that evolve over time.

unbuilt dreamscapes: projects 172-42-191

Conceiving the profession of an architect as a continuous exercise in discovering the world — and as an ongoing form of self-improvement — FALA participates in competitions to explore new design possibilities. In these speculative contexts, architects have the opportunity to experiment with ideas and spatial strategies that might find limited space in private commissions. Notably, it is in these unbuilt competition projects, which remain on paper and outside the constraints of construction, that one can most clearly observe the themes that frame FALA's unique contribution to interior spatial design:

openness, narrative ambiguity, and unplanned modes of future use. These projects offer FALA the freedom to develop interiors that resist prescriptive planning and allow room for user-driven adaptation and emergent social configurations over time.

For this reason, and through dialogue with the architects, three projects were selected that epitomise how these themes are present within their work and how they have been developed within competition contexts. Conceived as moments of research, the three selected projects all pertain to the same residential typology: a multi-storey building where housing units are arranged pluralistically on the same floor and where several functions — such as vertical circulation, garden spaces, or the roof — are deliberately shared and open-ended. This condominium typology offers a fertile platform to reflect on issues of flexibility, collective habitation, and unplanned interior occupation. In fact, in the spatial organisation FALA proposes for each project, it is possible to find consistent distributive strategies that challenge conventional domestic arrangements and actively promote the creation of new and convivial social spaces with uses that remain indeterminate over time.

FALA does not name its projects with conventional titles but refers to them with numbers as if they were case studies. 172, for instance, is an unbuilt condo [Fig. 03]. The main idea underlying this project is the categorisation of space as parallel sequences of varying images. 172 exemplifies the idea of interior space as a flow, with partitional walls determining the direction of movement, views, and interactions. Rather than prescribing fixed room functions, the project leaves interior use open-ended, allowing for multiple, unplanned scenarios of domestic occupation. The only structural elements of the scene are punctual and highlighted as recognisable pivots; these spatial anchors suggest use possibilities without enforcing them, allowing inhabitants to define and redefine interior functions over time. Just as Kazuo Shinohara would leave a pillar prominently in the middle of a space

to highlight and give it a distinctive quality, FALA does the same with a circular column that bisects the bedrooms, standing between the inhabitants and the outdoor space.³²



Figure 03.

FALA Atelier. *Project n. 172*, 2020. Image courtesy of FALA Atelier.

The post-digital images represent the same space, focusing on a living area, with props changing subtly to animate the scenes. Displaying multiple possibilities of reality, these representations emphasise a light and oneiric sense of occupation. This visual strategy deliberately avoids closure, leaving interior life open to user interpretation and unplanned rearrangements. As Jesús Vassallo explains:

Traditional physical collage techniques expose the disparity of the fragments being put together and thus call attention to the impossibility and precariousness of the ensemble. Because the union is impossible, traditional collage becomes a provocation, a disruption of the real. Digital collage, on the other hand, is often seamless, concealing its own traces and thus merging portions of the real into a plausible alternative.³³



Figure 04.
FALA Atelier. *Project n. 46*, 2018. Image courtesy of FALA Atelier.

An evolution of this idea is apparent in project 46 [Fig. 04], another unbuilt residential competition project located at the city's periphery. Unlike 172, 46 explicitly stages the same interior space to accommodate different, overlapping functions, reinforcing the theme of unplanned and temporally shifting occupations. The various settings suggest a flexibility and again evoke the suggestion of dreamlike realism by compositional effects in the images. The characters are immobile like in a still-life painting, directly superimposed from David Hockney's work. Simple variations in the light, plaster walls, and artefacts create a diverse array of interior representations. Fixed compositional elements highlight a melody of variations that is repeated in the project's spatial planning. The structural pillars, clad in decorative materials, remain unaffected and connect each apartment to the overall architecture. Wet rooms, kitchens, and storage spaces are arranged around a central backbone, which also includes the building's vertical circulation. This arrangement allows for abundant natural light, and for flexibility in apartment layouts over time. Rooms can be opened to neighbours or common areas, or closed off by walls, curtains, or sliding panels: such adaptable partitions further support an interior environment that remains responsive to changing social needs and unanticipated forms of use.

A third project that demonstrates the clarity and consistency of FALA's work is 191 [Fig. 05]. The architectural expression boldly embraces both colour and texture. It is light and integrated and aspires to be a positive architectural addition to its immediate context. Yet, at its core, the project presents an interior environment intentionally open to future reinterpretation and unplanned patterns of occupation. Again, although each drawing adheres to similar compositional principles, the organisation of each is subtly varied, enhancing the spatial diversity within an illusory symmetry that amplifies inhabitants' diverse interactions with the space and the city. Like the two preceding projects, the interior planning of 191 reflects the same repetition and subtle variation of its interior spaces in these drawings. The design adheres to orthodox housing principles, but all traditional programmes can interchange positions, introducing new possibilities for interaction and social engagement for residents. This spatial looseness enables unforeseen domestic arrangements to emerge over time, further challenging fixed notions of residential programming. Bedrooms, or 'private spaces', revolve around the social areas, and all rooms have a permeable relationship with the exterior and the city with generous balconies and glazed panels.

The multitude of solutions for room populations in FALA's designs reflects the engaging manner of dreamscape ideas in drawings. With infinite possibilities for personalisation, this strategy in drawing and planning acknowledges the architect's intervention as limited and controlled up to a point, after which the construction becomes the client's domain. Such an approach explicitly anticipates the unpredictability of interior life, welcoming occupant-driven change, reconfiguration, and uses that cannot be predefined at the design stage. This acceptance of design limits celebrates freedom, allowing spaces to be freely inhabited and personalised. In the first project, the space was inhabited by a few objects that demonstrated their functions. In the second project, static figures illustrated different uses of the spaces. In this third project, FALA fully embraces the dreamlike dimension, no longer showing mere

situations but unfolding events, akin to narrative stories that animate the spaces. These narratives interweave as windows into the rooms, arranged in a matrix, and accompanied by texts, serve as captions that elucidate the various dreams. By embedding these micro-narratives into the design representation, FALA foregrounds the potential for diverse, unplanned domestic scenarios to unfold within the same architectural framework. Here are the stories:

Amélia, a forty-two-year-old primary school teacher, and João, a forty-one-year-old designer, live with their three-year-old cat Tobias. On Saturday mornings, Amélia and João hold drawing classes in the community space on the ground floor, while Tobias enjoys the tranquillity of the third-floor balcony.

Paulo, a thirty-eight-year-old lawyer, and Mariana, a thirty-five-year-old architect, live with their children:

Tiago, seven, and Sofia, four. The household is peaceful when Sofia is not around. Tiago looks forward to summer Sunday lunches on the large balcony next to his mother's plants.

Beatriz (twenty), Catarina (nineteen), and Duarte (twenty-four) are contemporary dance students sharing a T2 apartment on the fifth floor. They have converted part of the living room into Duarte's bedroom. They rehearse on the balcony in summer, making their apartment a popular spot for classmates.

Sara, a fifty-six-year-old nurse, Pedro, a fifty-eight-year-old physiotherapist, and Manuel, an eighty-one-year-old retiree, live together with their ten-year-old cat Botas. Manuel moved in after breaking his leg. Sara created a small living room for Manuel to watch Benfica games, while Botas retreats to the opposite balcony to avoid noise.



Figure 05.

FALA Atelier. Project n. 191, 2022. Image courtesy of FALA Atelier.

Bernardo, a sixty-three-year-old civil engineer, has lost interest in football since his wife's passing but is aware of games due to his neighbour's excitement. He spends Sundays playing sueca and discussing politics and economics with friends.

Miguel, a twenty-eight-year-old cellist, lives with his three-year-old dog Bolinhas. Miguel's disorganisation leaves sheet music scattered, but Bolinhas allows him to study peacefully only when he plays Bach, Bolinhas' favourite composer, adding life to Caminho da Fiteira.³⁴

These stories, like FALA Atelier's post-digital drawings and spatial compositions, effectively reflect the studio's emphasis on flexibility, personalisation, and the creation of oneiric environments that blend function with imagination. Each scene, depicted through narrative, underscores how architectural spaces are not rigid, predetermined structures but rather fluid and transformative realms shaped by their inhabitants over time. FALA's drawings also highlight how architectural design can accommodate unplanned scenarios of use, adapting to shifting needs and occupant improvisation. This capacity for spatial indeterminacy reflects a deeper understanding of the lived realities, emotional dynamics, and evolving patterns of domestic life that emerge after architectural completion. While factors such as budget limitations, building regulations, and the diverse needs of larger communities may pose challenges in translating these imaginative concepts into fully functional, real-world environments, the unbuilt competition projects and their narrative-rich representations offer critical provocations for how interiors might evolve in ways unanticipated at the design stage. Their drawings contribute to contemporary architectural discourse by promoting a vision of adaptable, user-responsive, and socially emergent domestic interiors. They invite a reimagining of domestic space as not only utilitarian or aesthetically pleasing but also open-ended, emotionally resonant, and spatially prepared for unplanned futures, creating richer, more meaningful living experiences.

conclusion

FALA Atelier's work exemplifies a critically engaged and progressive approach within contemporary architectural discourse, positioning post-digital aesthetics not as an end in itself but as a tool for interrogating conventional modes of spatial production, representation, and occupation. By integrating traditional drawing techniques with digital technologies, FALA's visual language systematically challenges the dominance of hyper-realistic visualisation and questions the prevailing market-driven demand for highly polished, fixed images of interior space. This methodology is not merely a formal or stylistic choice; it operates as a conceptual critique of architectural determinism and the homogenisation of spatial experience in contemporary housing developments.

Central to FALA's design philosophy is a sustained engagement with spatial flexibility, temporality, and personalisation, which is particularly evident in its residential projects. The firm's interior configurations resist rigid functional zoning, favouring open-ended layouts that encourage multiple, coexisting forms of occupation and social interaction. Through this approach, FALA deliberately destabilises traditional domestic hierarchies, fostering conditions for emergent, unplanned uses of space. The ambiguity inherent in both its drawings and its spatial planning actively invites occupants to become co-authors in the shaping of interior environments over time, reflecting broader social and demographic shifts towards more fluid modes of dwelling.

Equally significant is FALA Atelier's strategic use of unbuilt competition projects as experimental platforms for spatial speculation. Unconstrained by client demands or regulatory frameworks, these speculative interiors explore alternative domestic futures, ones characterised by user-driven adaptation, social indeterminacy, and the capacity for spaces to accommodate unanticipated patterns of inhabitation. The firm's collage-based post-digital representations, rich in narrative layering and visual provocation, operate not only as communication

tools but also as theoretical constructs that embody architectural openness and the refusal of closure in interior planning. Its projects advocate for an architecture that embraces incompleteness, not as a limitation but as a productive condition for new social forms, emergent spatial behaviours, and a more ethical engagement with the evolving realities of domestic life.

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notes

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