



TERRA CRUA

Curated by Madalena Vidigal

18.06 — 11.10.26

Architecture Centre

MAC/CCB

At a time of mounting pressure on the planet's limits, raw earth is emerging a natural, local, and readily available resource, a testing ground for contemporary architecture. To build with earth is to understand the territory and to reactivate a body of knowledge that links local resources and building culture.

As old as human history itself, this material remains remarkably relevant today because of its ecological and physical properties. Unlike materials subject to irreversible transformation, raw earth remains physically reversible and non-toxic. It requires minimal processing and has low embodied carbon, relying on a deep, continuously reinterpreted understanding of soil properties developed over generations.

The exhibition moves from matter to action: from the physical and mineral complexity of soil to accumulated knowledge, and to practices that reclaim earth as a viable, ethical, and poetic building material. Beginning with the ground beneath our feet, it invites visitors to rediscover raw earth as matter, archive, and agent of contemporary architecture.

Throughout this journey, the properties and evolving performance of raw earth are revealed, highlighting its potential as a circular resource through the *Terras de Lisboa* project—both the material used in the construction of the exhibition and the object of experimental research developed during the artistic residencies of the ateliers DOING.pt and CRU atelier.

Matter

Earth is one of the planet's natural resources: mineral matter and the porous space surrounding it. To understand it is to look at soil as a living, stratified system shaped by slow processes that articulate climate, geology, and time. This condition—poised between finitude and reversibility—makes it particularly relevant at a moment when material circularity has become imperative. As a construction material, its behaviour results from the balance between air, water, particle distribution, and clay content. Millennia of empirical knowledge, combined with contemporary materials technology, now make it possible to build with earth to high levels of performance. Alongside its technical qualities, earth possesses its own expressive and sensory dimension, bringing architecture back into direct relation with matter.

Archive

Earth contains both the geological memory and the building traditions of territories. In Portugal, this relationship developed over centuries and was widely documented throughout the 20th century, revealing forms of adaptation between resources, climate, and ways of inhabiting. From this emerged distinct regional architectural expressions associated with traditions of collective cooperation and forms of technical know-how deeply rooted in place.

Yet this continuity was interrupted. From the second half of the 20th century onwards, the industrialisation of construction progressively replaced systems grounded in local knowledge, weakening the transmission of this know-how. Renewed interest in earthen construction from the 1980s onwards sought to recover and reinterpret that knowledge. The mapping developed within the framework of the exhibition reveals a territory rich in diverse soils, practices, and forms of expertise, alongside persistent challenges and an expanding field of contemporary architecture and scientific research.

Earth may be poured, moulded, or compacted, giving rise to monolithic systems, masonry, or infill solutions. The incorporation of new tools and methodologies expands its field of application, while raising challenges that require earth to remain a situated material, inseparable from the physical and cultural context from which it emerges.

Agent

The use of earth reshapes collaborative processes, bringing architecture, territory, and community into closer relation.

In this sense, the exhibition itself assumed an active role. During its preparation, a Laboratório de Terras (Earth Laboratory) was established—a space for experimentation and production where research, teaching, and building practice intersected. Regularly open to students and guided by the resident ateliers DOING.pt and CRU atelier, it functioned both as a pedagogical and operational device, bringing knowledge closer to its practical application.

The exhibition thus positioned itself as an agent. Beginning with the observation of the *Terras de Lisboa*, where large quantities of soil are excavated through urban construction works, the resident ateliers explored ways in which this material might participate in the making of the city. The *Terras de Lisboa* project proposed mapping, characterising, and transforming these materials into building components, testing their application through prototypes and systems. Inspired by international initiatives yet rooted in the local context, the project explores the reuse of urban soils, bringing architecture once again into closer relation with its territory. The exhibition sought to become a platform for action, creating the conditions for its continuity.

Between matter, archive, and agent, earth emerges as a field of experimentation for contemporary architecture—not as a universal solution, but as an invitation to a situated, conscious, and relational practice, capable of rediscovering in matter the very meaning of construction.

“At the Architecture Centre, the exhibition *Terra Crua* looks at earth not as a nostalgic return, but as a radical proposition for contemporary architecture in Portugal at a time of mounting pressure on the planet’s limits.”

Nuria Enguita

Artistic Director of MAC/CCB

“The exhibition shows how earth can once again bring architecture closer to the territory in which it is built, reflecting on the way we look at this material through its sensory, ethical, and poetic potential.”

Madalena Vidigal

Curator of the exhibition *Terra Crua*

“Raw earth: a resource with the potential to respond to current construction demands, re-adapting ancestral knowledge to new contemporary needs of comfort and sustainability.”

Tânia Teixeira

CRU atelier

PUBLIC PROGRAMME:

20.06 3:30PM*

GUIDED TOUR



with curator Madalena Vidigal and architects Nuno Vasconcelos (DOING.pt) and Tânia Teixeira (CRU atelier)

20.06 5:00PM**

SCREENING OF DOCUMENTARY AND FILM

Paul-Emmanuel Loiret

Cycle Terre (Atelier Gemine, 18', 2023)

De terre et d'eau (Atelier Gemine, 52', 2023)

MAC/CCB Auditorium

26.09 3:00PM*

CONVERSATIONS AROUND EARTH:

“EARTH IN PROJECTION”

Architecture Centre

What is the future of earth-based construction? This conversation explores how the training of new generations, technological development, legislation, and standardisation intersect in the transformation of the sector. Panel to be announced.

26.09 5:00PM**

FILM SCREENING

TOUCHER TERRE (68', 2024)

MAC/CCB Auditorium

10.10 3:00PM*

CONVERSATIONS AROUND EARTH:

“EARTH IN CONTINUITY”

Architecture Centre

What legacies do we inherit from earth-based architecture and construction, and how do they shape the way we build and think about this material today? This conversation revisits the technical, cultural, and community-based legacies that have enabled the persistence and renewal of earth-building knowledge. Panel to be announced.

* Free entry, subject to prior registration

** Free entry, subject to venue capacity

MORE INFORMATION:

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