

2020 Spotlight Award

fala atelier



Recent completed projects by fala atelier. Bottom right photo by Ivo Tavares. All other photos by fala atelier. Courtesy fala atelier.

Since 2009, Rice Design Alliance supports and recognizes the work of exceptionally gifted national and international architects in the early stages of their professional career through the Spotlight Award.

fala atelier, the 2020 Spotlight Award awardee, is an architecture practice based in Porto, Portugal. Founded in 2013, the office is led by Filipe Magalhães, Ana Luisa Soares, and Ahmed Belkhodja. The studio prides itself in taking lightness and joy seriously. “Our projects often happen within very limited means and imperfect conditions,” Belkhodja said. “A certain breed of optimism is necessary in such context, and a certain kind of resilient lightness, too. We are thrilled and honored to see these aspects getting international attention.”

In February 2020, fala travelled to Houston to present a lecture titled “Gloriously Repeating” at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Their presentation was split in two sections: The first part reviewed individual commissions while the second sought to unite them into the larger project of the office, which included finding a common representational style, as the language of architecture is important to fala. The office found early popularity through their collages, but the presentation made it clear that the architects are committed to making buildings, as evidenced by the many efforts that they shared.

fala’s approach is in part a response to the economic climate in which they practice. Porto has an intense drive towards both preservation and redevelopment, which means that street façades are maintained, and more creative work happens with interiors and rear elevations. As designer Jonathan Wilkinson assessed when reviewing fala’s lecture for *Cite Digital*, rather than a Portuguese office, “it might be more accurate to see them as a millennial office” as they “are media-savvy; they know the history but aren’t bound by it; they have a desire to build.”

The work of fala atelier shows us that it’s possible to be serious and playful at once—that one can emerge from a mess of constraints with an architecture that’s intellectually ambitious and visually captivating.