

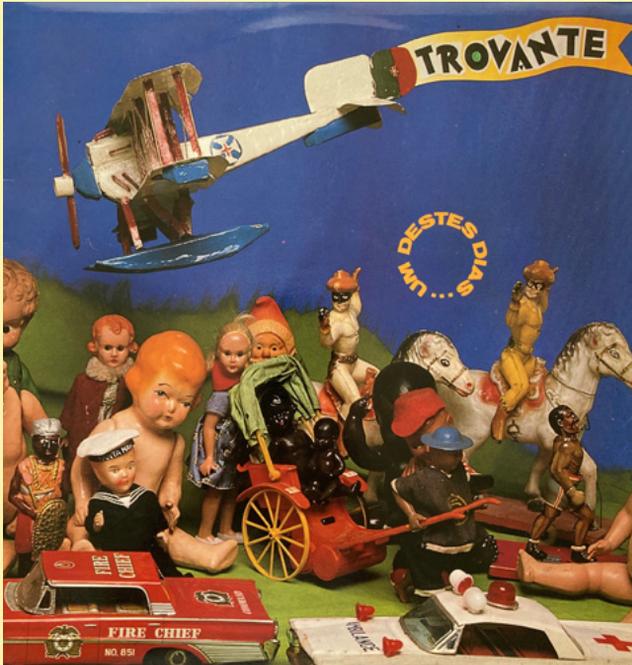
Dancing to someone else's tune. Authorial voice in design, and the case of Fatima Rolo Duarte's record covers

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Cómo citar este artículo:

Duarte, M., 2023. Dancing to someone else's tune. Authorial voice in design, and the case of Fatima Rolo Duarte's record covers. *Inmaterial. Diseño, Arte y Sociedad*. 8 (16),pp. 99-109
DOI 10.46516/inmaterial.v8.190



Abstract:

This visual essay confronts the predominant idea in graphic design history that success in a designer's career is measured by the presence of an authorial voice. This is examined through the work of Fátima Rolo Duarte, the designer at the record label Emi-Valentim de Carvalho.

Keywords:

Design, Authorship, History, Feminism, Women.

Bailando al son de otra persona. La voz del autor en el diseño y el caso de las portadas discográficas de Fátima Rolo Duarte

Resumen:

Este ensayo visual confronta la idea predominante en la historia del diseño gráfico de que el éxito en la carrera de un diseñador se mide por la presencia de la voz del autor. Esto se examina a través del trabajo de Fátima Rolo Duarte, diseñadora del sello discográfico Emi-Valentim de Carvalho.

Palabras clave:

Diseño, autoría, historia, feminismo, mujeres.

There is a predominant idea in design history that success is measured by an identifiable authorial voice, or a wide and varied portfolio of different projects. History's insistent search for a 'signature' in a designer's work has determined that the designer whose work is immediately recognizable, repeating similar styles and visual languages across different projects for different clients, should be considered noteworthy. This persistent, problematic idea excludes an enormous number of designers from the record. Those whose approach to design — either through personal choice or through the attendant requirements of working within an institution — is more chameleonic or conciliatory to different projects or clients' needs, create a collection of work that isn't easily identifiable as that of one designer, but rather the work of many combined voices. After all, as design historian Cheryl Buckley once wrote, 'design is a collective effort'.

While consulting Fonoteca, a Porto-based music record archive, the cover of the 1986 album *Psicopátria* by Porto-based rock band GNR — the bold setting of the band's name over a black and white picture of a boy jumping in the river in Ribeira, Porto — caught my attention. However, the credits only mentioned the author of the photograph, Beatriz Ferreira. Delving deeper, I learned from the band's manager that the designer of the cover had been a woman named Fátima Rolo Duarte.

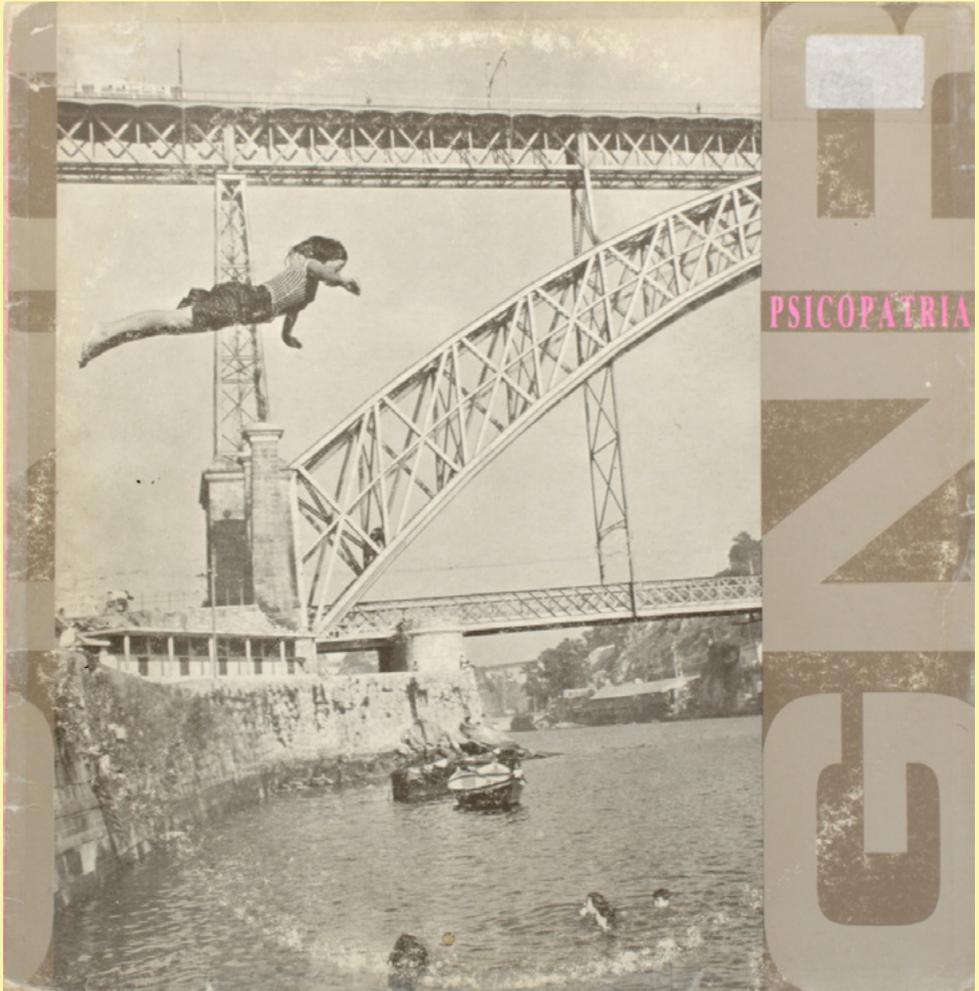
Hers was not a familiar name to me, but even though she might not be included in graphic design history books, her work can be found in most Portuguese houses.

Born in Lisbon in 1958, Duarte took a position as a graphic designer with the music publisher Emi-Valentim de Carvalho in 1983, the biggest music publisher in the country at that time. Many of the records she designed covers for were huge hits, iconic in Portuguese music, and contributed to the visual identity of the artists who are today regarded as intrinsic to the national musical identity.

As an in-house designer, Duarte was responsible for the graphics of hundreds of record covers, for a wide variety of Portuguese musicians: from the superstar crooner Marco Paulo; the very popular 'father of rock' Rui Veloso; the internationally acclaimed fado singer Amália Rodrigues; to António Variações, one of the most culturally significant performing artists after the Carnation Revolution and signifier of the liberalization period, to smaller, alternative bands like Ban. Fátima Rolo Duarte decided that, due to the varied musical styles of the authors that she worked with, each project should be approached independently. In conversation, Fátima mentioned: 'Thus, from Marco Paulo to Vitorino, Amália, GNR, and Toy, I managed to adapt myself to circumstances'. Such versatility would, however, come at a cost to Duarte's recogni-

tion as a designer. This attitude doesn't follow the authorial voice that the history of design looks for in a designer's work. As an in-house designer, it was also necessary for Duarte to navigate difficult waters, reconciling the various needs and desires of both the publisher (her employer) and the musicians, as well as her own sensibility. This is perhaps one of the reasons why this designer, despite having consistently delivered quality record covers with significant cultural importance, is not recognized by the field. Duarte notes that 'It always seemed curious to me that the graphic work was seldom mentioned in music reviews. There was (and there still is) a remarkable graphic ignorance, even within the trade.' The continuous change of skin that this job demanded, coupled with the lack of recognition by her peers and by the music industry, contributed to Duarte's decision to leave this job after almost two decades with Emi-Valentim de Carvalho.

Was it graphic ignorance, as Fátima called it, responsible for overlooking the work of a designer who created so many record covers with such cultural significance? Maybe, but what is more important now is restoring this name to graphic design history, and in doing so acknowledging Duarte's chameleonic efforts as being a strength rather than a weakness. It is only by continuing to question how design history is made, by whom and for what ends, that we can arrive at a more inclusive account of design history.



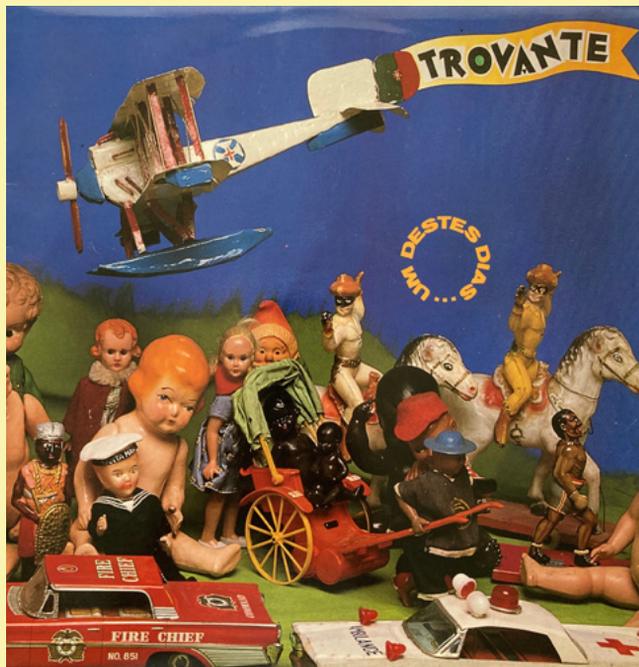
1. GNR, *Psicopátria* (1986). Published by Emi Valentim de Carvalho. Design by Fátima Rolo Duarte



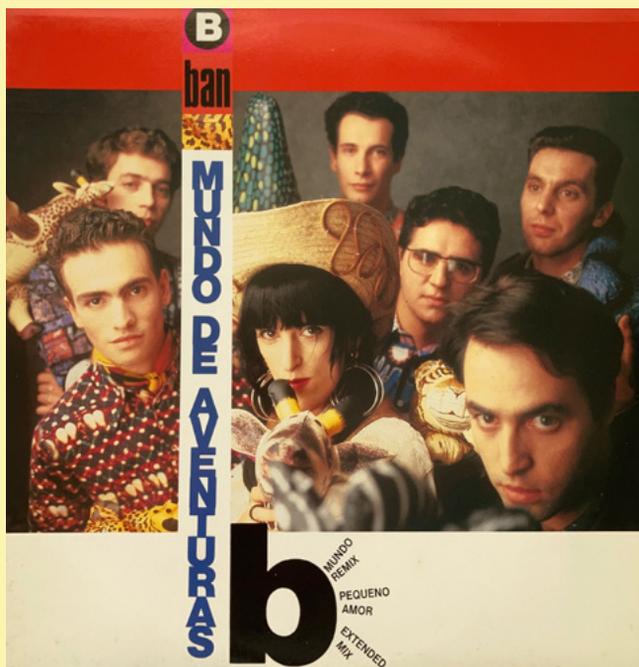
2. Rui Veloso, *Rui Veloso ao Vivo* (1988). Published by Emi Valentim de Carvalho. Design by Fátima Rolo Duarte



3. Colour tests for CD covers. Design by Fátima Rolo Duarte

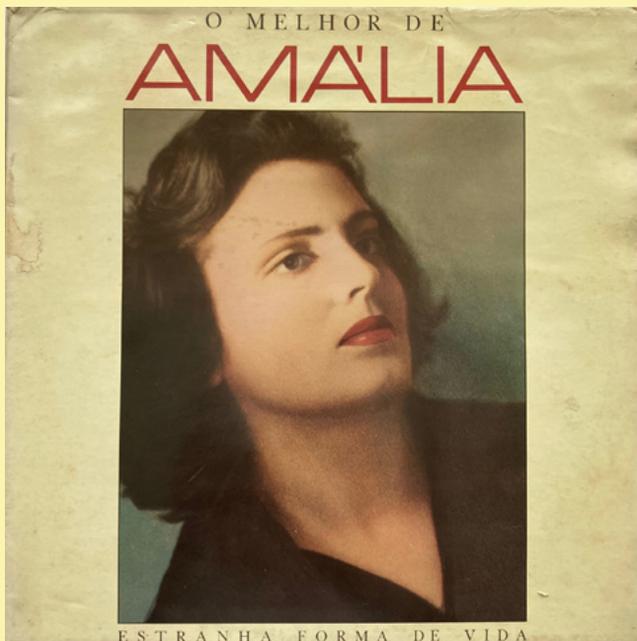


5. Trovante, *Um Destes Dias* (1990). Published by Emi Valentim de Carvalho. Production by Gráfica Monumental. Design by Fátima Rolo Duarte



6. Ban, *Um Mundo de Aventuras* (1991). Published by Emi Valentim de Carvalho. Production by Gráfica Monumental. Design by Fátima Rolo Duarte

7. Amália, *O Melhor De Amália*
 (Estranha Forma De Vida) (1995).
 Published by Emi Valentim de
 Carvalho. Design by Fátima Rolo
 Duarte



8. Ban, *Música Concreta* (1989).
 Published by Emi Valentim de
 Carvalho. Photography by João
 Silveira Ramos. Design by Rui Pregal
 da Cunha, Fátima Rolo Duarte e João
 Silveira Ramos

Isabel Duarte

Isabel Duarte (ella/ella) es diseñadora gráfica e investigadora. Actualmente desarrolla un Doctorado en Historia del Diseño en la Universidad de Brighton, Reino Unido. En 2021, cocomisarió la exposición *Errata: una revisión feminista de la historia del diseño gráfico portugués*. En paralelo, desarrolla el podcast *Errata*, documentando y reflexionando sobre los problemas que enfrentan las diseñadoras en Portugal a través de conversaciones con pensadores, curadores, historiadores y diseñadores sobre sus experiencias. y trabajo (disponible a través de www.errata.design). Como diseñadora, Isabel trabajó en varios proyectos editoriales, como *ArtReview* y *Eye Magazine* y con clientes como Tate Publishing, King's College, ArtQuarterly y la Royal Academy of Arts.

En 2023 comisarió *etceteras: feminist festival of design and publishing* junto con Maya Ober y Nina Paim.

*Isabel Duarte (she/her) is a graphic designer and researcher. She is currently doing a PhD in Design History at the University of Brighton, United Kingdom. In 2021 she cocurated the exhibition **Errata: a feminist revision of Portuguese graphic design history**. In parallel, she develops the *Errata* podcast, documenting and reflecting on issues facing women designers in Portugal through conversations with thinkers, curators, historians and designers about their experiences and work (available through www.errata.design). As a designer, Isabel has worked in several editorial projects, such as **ArtReview** and **Eye Magazine** and with clients such as Tate Publishing, King's College, ArtQuarterly and the Royal Academy of Arts.*

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