The Gulbenkian Hall on Tayeran Square in Baghdad – one of the few venues there where works of Iraqi modern art can be seen today – was devised, designed and built between 1957 and 1962 as a gift of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to the people of Iraq, aimed at supporting the city’s budding modern arts scene with its first purpose-built gallery. Importantly, it was also intended as a demonstration of the foundation’s seriousness of purposes in strengthening the cultural, educational, scientific and public health-related infrastructure of Iraq – a purpose to which the institution decided to commit part of its oil revenues, largely originated in the country, as a quid pro quo. In the tight-rope exercise of ensuring the pursuit (and future) of its economic base-activity with its philanthropism, the Foundation helped establishing the material and intellectual backbone of modern-day Iraq, through very diverse means.

Modern artistic production and its public display facilities played a special role in this dual pursuit – yet other fields of action yielded a more palpable impact in Iraqi society. By 1973, when its oil concessions were nationalised, the foundation had funded and equipped around 120 buildings in Iraq, distributed c. 600 scholarships for graduate and post-graduate training in diverse areas, at home and abroad, and supported requests that ranged from library collections to television equipment. Meanwhile, the foundation’s most demanding direct realisation – and its last – was the al-Shaab Stadium in Baghdad (1957-1966), presented to Iraq for the advancement of its people’s physical education and a significant technical and logistic feat for the Gulbenkian’s in-house design and building service that ran parallel to its showpiece headquarters and museum ensemble in Lisbon.

Focusing on the sports complex and arts centre initiatives as epitomes of post-colonial, soft-power diplomacy processes and products, this presentation examines how the archive of a medium-sized bureaucracy in Portugal can shed light on the unseen history of ostensibly distant objects that, despite circumstances over the past three decades, have entered Iraqi collective memory to become beacons of normality in everyday life. The discussion will draw on extensive research pursued in the Gulbenkian Collections while co-curating the exhibition ‘Art and Architecture between Lisbon and Baghdad’.
Short biography

Ricardo Costa Agarez, Assistant Professor at Évora University (Portugal), is an architect (Dip. 1996) and architectural historian (MPhil 2004, PhD 2013). His research interests lie in the architectural humanities and the cultural studies of architecture; specialised in the history and theory of 19th- and 20th-century cities and buildings, he has written on national and regional identities, dissemination and circulation phenomena, housing and public architecture and the architectural culture in bureaucracy. He is interested in the interaction between formal and informal practices and in the boundaries and exchanges between schooled practitioners and non-professional actors; in the history of everyday architecture and of objects that escape conventional categorisation; and in the contamination processes between ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultural spheres, seen in their broad social context. Dr. Agarez was a full-time practicing architect until 2002. Between 2003 and 2008, he was a guest researcher and manager at SIPA (Information System for Architectural Heritage), the foremost centre for architectural documentation and research in Portugal. His PhD dissertation at University College London, The Bartlett School of Architecture, was awarded the 2013 RIBA President’s Award for Research. The Giles Worsley Fellow of the British School at Rome (British Academy) in 2014, he was FWO Pegasus Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at Ghent University in 2015 and, in 2016-2017, senior postdoctoral researcher at KU Leuven, Department of Architecture. His most recent sole-authored book is *Algarve Building: Modernism, Regionalism and Architecture in the South of Portugal, 1925–1965* (Routledge, 2016). In 2018 he co-curator the exhibition “Art and Architecture Between Lisbon and Baghdad” (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation) and coordinated the multidisciplinary research, exhibition and publication project “Housing: 100 Years of Public Policies in Portugal, 1918-2018”, marking the centenary of public housing policies in the country.