



PAINTING: OBSERVATION FIELD PART II

curated by João Pinharanda

16 DECEMBER - 22 JANUARY 2022

ISABEL MADUREIRA ANDRADE | ANAMARY BILBAO | JOAQUIM BRAVO | HUGO BRAZÃO | PEDRO CALAPEZ | PEDRO CHORÃO | LUÍS PAULO COSTA | MARIA ANA VASCO COSTA | CARLOS NORONHA FEIO | JOSÉ LOUREIRO | JOÃO FERRO MARTINS | JORGE RODRIGUES | ÂNGELO DE SOUSA

The current selection carries on with the pursuits of the first exhibition in June. In fact, both shows were built from a vast (but always necessarily incomplete) “survey” focusing on some artistic production, mostly produced in Lisbon – time constraints did not allow to extend, as desired, this survey to other geographical contexts.

Most of the works here presented were created by artists in their early careers and who are not very well known to wider audiences. Their works stand beside others produced by artists who have had longer careers and can bridge the gap between previous contexts and even suggest links to some of the historic artists who started working in the 1960s and 70s. This inflection is not intended as a historicist, comparative or affiliative effort towards the younger generation. It should also be noted that the dominance of abstract themes in the selection is maintained, but now incorporating some artists who are known for the objectual and/or figurative quality of their work.

It should be vehemently pointed out that this Part II, like the first, does not aim to outline a historical balance or present an emerging conjuncture: this double exhibition is not a manifesto, it does not announce a wave of “new abstraction” and the artists it brings together cannot be situated in any same group. This text should read as completely void of any intention of introducing an autonomous aesthetic project.

Notwithstanding, it is noticeable that, in Portugal, there is currently a strong pictorial production (coming from many horizons and representing many universes) and that this production, revealed in the most recent layers of newly graduated students or those still in training, finds in abstraction (generally non-geometric) a privileged means of expression, although, in a conscious indifference that should be underlined, some of them use symmetry and monochrome as a way of “disciplining” the produced image and others use figurative suggestions in their works.

Despite empirical evidence, this rich context of production has rarely been considered in critical reflection or taken as a whole in curatorial practice. What was intended here was to confirm, in numerous studio visits, the intuition of this abstract and abstracting hegemony and, from there, build an exhibition.

Approaching this observational work without any preconceptions regarding the final result, it was possible to identify a set of strong lines that confirm all the tensions of painting in the contemporary context: the fragile lines that separate the material and physical practice of painting from certain conceptual exercises involved in its realization, the intertwining of geometry and the freedom of surface and of the gesture, of the amalgamation of this freedom and a certain para-figuration. The elements at play in these successive fields are the colour(s); the accumulation or scarcity of matter(s); the gesture or its negation; the absence of a “message” or its rationalized, lyrical, or ironic sublimation; and the formal and decorative traps that permanently surround the works.

Revealing that each artist has their own individual sensibility and that there are no lines of continuity that reveal mutual influences, the ongoing survey provisionally confirms the historical, sociological and anthropological situation of Portuguese visual creation: it is a heteronymic art scene hardly referenced to any historical continuity, with occasional or absent links to previous or contemporary national contexts, and without a direct connection to external contexts, or always assuming them in a mode of miscegenation, contamination and hybridity. These findings determined an exhibition installation dominated by visual criteria (formal/chromatic).

On a chronological perspective, Ângelo de Sousa and Joaquim Bravo, both dead, or Pedro Chorão are here as historical references. All of them, regardless of the critical fame that surrounds them, confirm this thesis of discursive isolation; and neither had any appointed disciples. The dominant monochromes in the works of Luís Paulo Costa, Maria Ana Vasco Costa or Jorge

Rodrigues, as well as the articulation between this chromatic dominance and the line – in the painting of Isabel Madureira – owe little or nothing (or deviate during the course of the process) to the pictorial work of **Ângelo de Sousa**, whose obsessively constructed false monochromatism works as a mutating light in which the precision of the drawing is often disrupted by ironic imbalances.

The articulation between the release of the gesture and the concentration and multiplication of forms from a single matrix in the work by **Joaquim Bravo** can be associated with certain experiences by **José Loureiro**, which were gathered here. But this is a conceptual coincidence, organised on the axis of a sense of irony and self-ridicule that comes from the same libertarian admiration for suprematist radicalism. It would be excessive to classify this relation as anything more than happenstance.

With his relentless practice of refining the real through a work of formal and chromatic deconstruction and reconstruction, **Pedro Chorão** also appears isolated. His work leads into an eminently evocative dimension in which each painting works not only as a divined landscape, but as a secret individual memory. Only Pedro Calapez or Hugo Brazão's spatial experience can come close to the compositional freedom of Chorão's selected work. However, **Pedro Calapez** does not intend to evoke any external reality and his painting derives only from a properly chromatic and textural energy – colour surfaces capable of establishing their own order or disorder and even of releasing themselves from the canvas, presenting as spatial cutouts or autonomous sculptural plans. **Hugo Brazão** flaunts this experience of formal and spatial freedom in a painting where the signs of reality (landscape, body, word, space) that he habitually uses are erased by the powerful scenography of colour.

Considering order, the painting by Isabel Madureira and the "drawings" by Maria Ana Vasco Costa or Jorge Rodrigues can serve as borders. Concerning object or figure, the same can be said of the works by Luís Paulo Costa, Carlo Noronha Feio, AnaMary Bilbao or João Ferro Martins.

On (or within) vibrating monochromatic backgrounds (despite colour's mineral deafness) the lines drawn by **Isabel Madureira** create circumvolutions with a clear choreographic indication that, in their double symmetry, guarantee a movement akin to dance but also the maintenance of a continuous balance of the image. This value of stability is questioned by the abstract atmospheric dimension of the great drawing by **Maria Ana Vasco Costa**, whose vibration causes an irregular displacement of the gaze and the body, and drawings by **Jorge Rodrigues**, in which the changes of colour and light seem to refer to a temporal feature, incorporating the passage of time in a suggestion of landscape (with unstable skies). On the other hand, Maria Ana Vasco Costa's lyrical floor pieces consciously refer to the telluric memory of the Azores, transforming the islands' volcanic landscape into a ceramic glow.

The seemingly abstract discourses identifiable in the works by Luís Paulo Costa or Carlos Noronha Feio, AnaMary Bilbao or Ferro Martins have their roots in reality. Enlarging each image to a size that eliminates all external reference points and makes it impossible to identify the original, **Luís Paulo Costa** then plays with the codes of creation and presentation used by abstract and historical conceptual art, offering his abstract works as a ruse for any gaze dominated by the preconceived codes of modernist culture. On the other hand, Noronha Feio suppresses, progressively deconstructing and erasing the profusely figurative and politically committed works he produced in previous series. His backgrounds have little of the abundant chromatic or material information of the previous compositions and the neon lights act as perennial traces of ephemeral gestures, sources of colour and builders of new meaning for the lost images. Overall, **AnaMary Bilbao** is the artist that more openly uses figurative references, with her dominant landscape and spatial themes. However, hers is a reality in ruins: her photographic images are subject to chemical processes, spontaneous or induced, of degradation and disintegration, in such a way that the works technically copy pictorial processes and poetically approach evocative processes – however, and opposite to Pedro Chorão's nostalgic memory, to Luís Paulo Costa's objective references or Feio's political commentary, AnaMary Bilbao opens the way for a desperate memory. Finally, **João Ferro Martins** is an artist who consistently uses music as a field of experimentation and works, essentially, with the heteroclitic aggregation of objects in ironic and critical assemblages that refer to the technological fetishism and conformism of everyday life. Ferro Martins abstracts these references by presenting two metallic totem poles decorated with circles the size of LPs (which he has also used in many other pieces) painted with enamel paints from the automotive industry.

The "Observation Field" that develops from these two exhibitions is rife with richness and diversity, weight and depth, and includes a wide spectrum of languages (more contradictory than complementary) that range from pure to excessive, from lyricism to irony, from abstract detachment to figurative or narrative evocation. Combined, they open multiple avenues of work and justify the incompleteness suggested by the title of both exhibitions. They call for the continuation of this search.

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João Pinharanda