

Pictorial (Re-) Creations: From the 4th Centenary of India (1898) to Expo'98

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Abstract

This paper aims to map out the artistic output – particularly painting – produced within the context of the great 20th century exhibitions organised to commemorate the Portuguese colonial empire. Chronologically bounded by the 4th centenary of the discovery of the maritime route to India (1898) and Expo'98, this series of transnational events owed much of its success to the creativity and fantasy of the Portuguese artists that participated in it, most of whom had never left the metropole to visit the overseas territories far away. Thus, most of the paintings commissioned were created indirectly from photographic, graphic or literary sources, which served as inspiration for a (re-) creation of a colonial experience that was more idealised than real. For the population of Lisbon and the foreigners that visited it, these pictorial representations generated an unusual image of the overseas possessions, which could be used by the political power as a vehicle of propaganda. Hence, the triangle Creativity-Fantasy-Intelligence became the matrix from which the right-wing dictatorship defined a whole ideological-artistic strand, often very successful and within limits that we know.

Keywords: Art, Colonial Empire, Painting, Exhibitions.

1. The 4th Centenary of the Discovery of the Maritime Route to India

It is a well-known fact that colonialism was a structuring element of Portuguese history, and another well-known fact is that art transcends geography. Hence the contemporary era has witnessed a growing commitment to the holding of exhibitions, which has reconfigured visual culture at a transnational level as was shown in the previous sub-chapter.

The emergence of modern colonialism at the start of the 20th century created a new rhetoric of imperial propaganda that enjoyed its own cartography in exhibition representations by classifying the artistic culture of the mother-country (or administrating power) from a Lusocentric perspective that increasingly became transformed into a pluricontinental, multiracial view albeit one remaining within the limits we now know.

The event that announced the winds of change that the 20th century would bring was the event held in 1898, which commemorated the 4th Centenary of

the Discovery of the Maritime Route to India. The “Pearl of the Orient” described in Camões’ verses was the pretext for the first major national event in terms of imperial commemorations although there had already been other earlier exhibitions such as the 1865 Porto International Exhibition¹ or the 1894 Portuguese Insular and Colonial Exhibition.² Neither had included any colonial artistic representation though.³

Fin-de-siècle Portugal was going through a troubled period (the 1890 *Ultimatum* and the problematic issue of Portuguese interests in Africa, the scepticism of the ruling elites as well as a financial, political and moral crisis). The commemorations had an implicit political dimension and were seen as a bid to restore the nation’s power by reaffirming its imperial greatness. The commemorations officially began on 8 July 1897 with the inauguration of the Lisbon Geographical Society’s (SGL) new headquarters and the Colonial Ethnographic Museum. The SGL organised the event and publicised by royal decree. Its significance was based on evoking both historical and mythic memory as well as the epic figures of the

¹ The *Exposição Internacional do Porto* [Porto International Exhibition] was the first to be held in the Iberian Peninsula. The exhibition was mounted in the Crystal Palace (demolished in 1951) and officially visited by the king, D. Luís. There were 3,139 exhibitors, of whom 499 were French, 265 German, 107 British, 89 Belgian, 62 Brazilian, 24 Spanish and 16 Danish, and there were also representatives from Russia, Holland, Turkey, the United States and Japan. With this event, the Portuguese public had the opportunity to observe foreign products, especially art. France mostly displayed the official painting

of the *Salons*, ranging from Eugène Boudin (1824-1898) to Théodule-Augustin Ribot (1823-1891), and paid tribute to Tomás da Anunciação by awarding him the medal of honour in the Fine Arts section.

² The event commemorated the 5th centenary of the birth of Infante D. Henrique.

³ The commemorative dimension of the Discoveries had been explored from the 300th anniversary of the death of Camões (1880) to the already mentioned birth of Infante D. Henrique (1894).

Discoveries through the first maritime voyage of the Portuguese to India and Vasco da Gama, the navigator responsible for this. Moreover, the support that was most commonly chosen to show the numerous events that took place at the time, as well as the extremely varied means employed, was art.

The diversified programme that had been proposed ended up foundering through a lack of funds and the availability of suitable premises, although a Free Fair and an Exhibition of Traditional Industries and Customs were set up on the land at the top of the Avenida (today the Marquês de Pombal roundabout and surrounding area). The Fair opened with “two artistic stands”, one of which was a 7-metre high elephant inside which objects and themes related to India were exhibited and presented by genuine Indians.

One point of interest is that some typical native huts were erected and a group of Africans who were brought over especially for the celebrations were exhibited in what was certainly the first display of indigenous people from the colonies – they came from Cape Verde, Guinea, Mozambique and Portuguese India, although the latter group arrived so late that they did not take part in the civic procession.

Commemorations were held throughout Portugal, spreading into the provinces to promote a veritable evocation on a national scale in order to perpetuate the cult and projection of the nation’s inclusive and unitary memory.

Despite all this colonial representation, no-one thought to include any display of paintings associated with the publicised theme. There were, of course, other exhibitions of a less popular nature and the one organised by the *Grémio Artístico* [Artistic Guild] is notable as it presented a sampling of contemporary Portuguese art. José Malhoa presided over the jury, which was tasked with selecting and classifying the 246 works exhibited by artists such as Columbano, Roque Gameiro, José Malhoa, Carlos Reis, Veloso Salgado and Sousa Pinto. Not surprisingly, no colonial paintings were included which showed that, between India’s zestful spiciness and the metropole’s insipid blandness, a colonial silence crept in – such silences did not overlap although they did touch.

The first Portuguese colonial exhibitions took place outside the country, that is, in the overseas territories: the first Portuguese colonial exhibition was held in Goa (1860), followed by one in Cape Verde (1881). The first one to be held in the

metropole though was the First Portuguese Colonial Exhibition which took place in Porto in July and August 1934. Following the model of similar exhibitions, and akin to what had happened in Marseille (1922), Antwerp (1930) and Paris (1931), the location chosen divided the event between an enclosed covered space (the Crystal Palace) and the surrounding open-air area which allowed the “parts” of the empire to be shown. The event was intended to be the first major act of colonial propaganda that would put into practice and render the policy underlying the 1930 Colonial Act visible and show off the vast pluricontinental empire. The technical director was Henrique Galvão,⁴ the author of the catchphrase “Portugal is not a small country”. This was printed on a map that would become the exhibition’s main symbol but also the symbol of an era since it was reproduced over and over again and hung on the walls of classrooms all over the country.

The official bulletin of the event was *Ultramar* [Overseas], which was edited by Henrique Galvão who also co-authored the Exhibition’s *Album-Catálogo Oficial* [Official Album-Catalogue]. In the exhibition space indigenous villages from the various colonies were reproduced, a zoo housing exotic animals was set up, replicas of overseas monuments were built, and hundreds of exhibitors from both the metropole and the colonies attested to the empire’s entrepreneurial dynamic.

What is particularly interesting is the Colonial Art Competition that was held as part of the event and which included a section for painting.

As known, the painting that Henrique Galvão considered to be the “First Great Work of Portuguese Colonial Painting” would become a double metaphor for Portuguese colonial painting. First of all, it was never finished (and the intended triptych ended up as a diptych). This shows the vicissitudes of the importance given to art and painting as the standard bearer for colonial representation. The second point concerns the fact that it is a staged image in which the expressionless faces are clearly the result of a staged theatricality that came from the plastic idealisation of an artist who had never travelled to the empire so that the work – even if it had been finished – could never reflect the actual reality born of experience overseas. The artificiality of his painting results in a series of stylised stereotypes that are nothing more than a mythic and pretentiously exotic view of a certain ‘Portugueseness’ in the world.

Related to the above is the information provided in

⁴ A military officer with experience of colonial affairs. He was the director of the Colonial Products Fairs and, in this role, had represented Portugal at the 1931 Paris Colonial Exhibition. Since March of the same year he had edited the review *Portugal Colonial*, and later was responsible for the

colonial section at the 1940 Great Exhibition of the Portuguese World. All of this of course was before he became one of the regime’s most newsworthy dissidents.

numbers 15 and 16 of the review *Ultramar* (Nº15, 1 Set. 1934, p. 7) where the list of exhibited artists and works is published:

- Abel de Moura - *Cabeça Negra* [African Head], *A Porta da Cubata* [The Hut Door];
 - Abeilard de Vasconcelos - *Paisagem de S. Tomé* [São Tomé Landscape];
 - Alberto de Sousa - *Cabeça de Índio* [Head of an Indian], *Coronel Côrte Real* [Colonel Côrte Real], *Dungula-Mulher do Soba de Quipungo* [Dungula – Wife of the Chief of Quipungo], *Sibila* [Sybil];
 - Jorge Barradas - *Lavadeiras do Rio de S. Tomé* [Washerwomen in the São Tomé River], *Habitação de Negros* [African Housing], *Perto do Obó* [Near Obó], *No Mato* [In the Bush] (all from São Tomé);
 - José Luís Brandão de Carvalho - *Bobo Negro* (tipo bijagós) [African Court Jester from Bijagós];
 - Manuel Guimarães. *Negra* [Negro Woman];
 - Maria Amélia Fonseca Roseira - *Vista do Pico de S. Tomé* [View from São Tomé Peak], *Cápsulas de Cacao* [Cacao Pods] (still life);
 - Maria Noémia de Almeida e Vasconcelos - *A Sabina-Angola* [Angolan Savin];
 - Ventura Júnior - *Manipanças* [Fetiches] (still life);
- The following were listed under the category of drawing:
- Alberto de Sousa - *Tipo Indiano* [Indian Figure], *Dungula*, *Sibila* [Sybil], *Tipo Macaista* [Macau Figure], *Congo-Dançarino Tipo Bijagós* [Bijagós Congo-Dancer], *Concerto Macaense* [Macaense Concert], *Tipo Mucancala* [Mucancala Figure], *Tipo Mucancala* (2) [Mucancala Figure 2], *Coronel Côrte Real* [Colonel Côrte Real];
 - Armando Bruno. *Sinfonia Negra* [Black Symphony];
 - Fernando de Oliveira - *Desenho* [Drawing]
 - Maria Noémia de Almeida e Vasconcelos - *Xequê Amand Agi Abdul Reim Hakmi* [sic];
 - Octávio Sérgio. *Raça Fina* (Guiné) [Figure – Guinea], *Soba da Guiné* [Guinean Village Chief]

In addition to the works in this list, there were a pair of canvases by Jorge Barradas and a reproduced image of a panel by Ventura Júnior, which in the end was little for an exhibition that was named the First Portuguese Exhibition of Colonial Art.

What the Porto exhibition unmistakably showed was how it was impossible for there to be any multicultural artistic dialogue between the metropole and the colonies; in fact, the exhibition was based on a monologue of the coloniser's civilisational supremacy that showed an anachronistic and reductive cultural-artistic stance that was, however, in perfect harmony with the whole colonial policy advocated by the government. Above all else, the exhibition laid out the path the *Estado Novo* intended to follow in

relation to painting – colonially-inspired plastic experimentation that would not be based on any actual experience of the overseas territories but rather on the recreation and stylisation of stereotypical elements of what the colonies and their artistic culture were thought to be.

2. Exhibition of the Portuguese World, Lisbon, 1940

To commemorate the double centenary of the Foundation of the Portuguese Nation and the Restoration of Independence (1140 and 1640 respectively), the *Exposição do Mundo Português* [Exhibition of the Portuguese World] was held in Lisbon in 1940. It was concentrated in the area around Belém, the imperial quay from which the first Portuguese navigators had set sail to explore the world.

In the context of art and travel in the Portuguese empire, some emblematic pavilions should be considered. The Pavilion of the Portuguese in the World, designed by Cottinelli Telmo, the chief architect of the whole exhibition, shared the space in the Praça do Império with the Pavilion of Honour designed by Cristino da Silva. Its façade was crowned by a heraldic frieze showing the coats of arms of the Castro, Gama, Albuquerque and Cabral families while inside was a journey via a *mappa mundi* through the history of the Portuguese people in an image of sovereignty that invoked its former dominions. There was also the Pavilion of the Discoveries which recreated several milestones in the 15th and 16th-century voyages, with the most vibrant feature being a huge Sphere of the Discoveries which crowned the architectonic body of the building. Inside the Pavilion there was a huge open circular room whose scenographic effects lit up the routes taken by the caravels. Two other pavilions were the Colonisation Pavilion and the Pavilion of Brazil, the only (former) Portuguese colony with the right to its own building.

However, most of the overseas-related aspects, particularly regarding painting, were to be found in the Colonial Section, one of the thematic sections into which the exhibition was divided. This was set up in the Colonial Garden⁵ and was organised by Henrique Galvão. Inaugurated on 27 June 1940, it was a sort of annexe to the main exhibition covering an area of some 50 000m². Access was via a ramp located in the northeast corner of the exhibition. Here the characteristic architecture of each of the overseas provinces was recreated, and even indigenous villages were installed (as in earlier international and/or colonial exhibitions) to recreate the habitats of the people in Cape Verde, Guinea, São Tomé, Angola, Mozambique and

⁵ Today the *Jardim Agrícola Tropical* [Tropical Agricultural Garden], but previously called the *Jardim do Ultramar*

[Overseas Garden].

Timor.

The entrance led to the Rua da Índia in a composition suggested by Indo-Portuguese architecture. Bordering the street were the Pavilion of Guinea, the Pavilion of the Island Colonies (São Tomé, Cape Verde and Timor) and the Pavilion of Indigenous Art, where the most representative works of African and Oriental art were on show. The largest exhibition areas were the Pavilion of Angola and the Pavilion of Mozambique, but there was also enough space for the Rua de Macau, which recreated a street in this Portuguese city in China and was accessed by way of an arch.⁶ In addition, serving as an observation platform, there was an elephant made by António Pereira da Silva, which was a copy of an anonymous bronze from Indochina.

The Avenue of Colonial Ethnography displayed sculpted reproductions of the most characteristic heads of races and tribes from the empire based on photographic documentation provided by the Institute of Anthropology in Porto.⁷ And surrounding all these buildings was the garden's exuberant African and oriental flora that lent the final exotic touch necessary to recreate Portugal's African and Asian territories.

One thing worth noting is that the Colonial Section counted on the participation of numerous artists who helped to "add colour" to this overseas scenario. They included such names as Fausto Sampaio (referred to in detail in the previous chapter) but also the painter M. A. Amor who exhibited a series of paintings of Goa, Daman, Diu, Chaul, Malacca and Macau in the Pavilion of India. A note appended to the text in the Colonial Section inventory said that the paintings could be bought at the prices published in the catalogue but could only be taken away after the end of the event.

Inside the Pagoda, on the Rua de Macau, there were paintings by the Chinese artist Chiu Shiu Ngong, who had already exhibited at the International Colonial Exhibition of Antwerp (Belgium) in 1930 where he had been awarded a gold medal. In Lisbon, Ngong exhibited forty-two pictures which were on sale at 50 patacas each.

The Colonial Section also enjoyed the collaboration of Maria Adelaide, Mário Reis and Roberto Araújo, painters who undoubtedly helped to crystallise the conservative and conventional taste that put an end to any initial attempt to establish a modern colonial pictorial genre.

Henrique Galvão's idea behind the edification of a Colonial Section was to create a School of Portuguese Colonial Art from this core group of artists whom he had brought together. However, this idea got no further than being an intention, just

like so many others had been in the past and would be in the future. And, in a certain way, this is what Adriano de Gusmão refers to in an article in the newspaper *O Diabo* (16.11.1940: 1) when he says that the paintings on display in the exhibition led him to have certain reservations and the artists had wasted an excellent opportunity to launch themselves into a type of painting that would open up new perspectives for the future. In other words, there was nothing new pictorially and the paintings exhibited were, on the whole, extremely poor. Gusmão discusses the work of some of the artists present, such as Lino António, who painted a mural depicting different types of long-haul vessels that was displayed on the walls of the D. Afonso V room in the Pavilion of the Discoveries. He also mentions the following artists: Jorge Barradas, creator of a frieze drawn in sanguine depicting the leading female figures in the history of Portugal, which decorated the Reception Room in the Pavilion of Honour; Eduardo Malta, who painted a panel in the Pavilion of the Portuguese in the World that depicted a series of religious figures but which "had no value at all"; Manuel Lima, the author of a panel for the Oceania Room; Almada Negreiros, who exhibited several paintings and especially a modern *Camões* that made Gusmão indignant as he considered it an "insult" to the memory of such a great poet. The disappointment caused by the 'colonial' paintings exhibited also extended to the *Exhibition Guide* itself, which was poor and not very informative. It did not name the artists whose paintings decorated the various pavilions, indicating how little importance was given to such an easily understood form of visual art.

What is also important to mention is that on the occasion of the *Festivities Commemorating the Double Centenary of the Foundation of Portugal and the Restoration of Independence*, an "Art Exhibition" was held in the Vasco da Gama Institute in Nova Goa from 5 to 15 October 1940. This was one of the few (if not the only) satellite events organised outside the Metropole when the exhibition was on in Belém. This exhibition decentralisation sought "to stimulate the artistic vocation of the children of India",⁸ the Indo-Portuguese artists. The pictorial sections in the Nova Goa event were for oils, watercolours, pastels and works done in crayon, but other arts such as sculpture, photography, jewellery, bookbinding, and printed and painted textiles were represented as well.

3. EXPO'98

If the 1934 exhibition in Porto and the 1940 one in Lisbon showed how the empire was projected from

⁶ Still present today in the *Jardim Agrícola Tropical*.

⁷ The Institute still retains this documentation today.

⁸ *Programa da Exposição de Arte*, Instituto Vasco da Gama, Nova Goa, Tipografia Rangel, 1940, p. 3.

the inside, it was the exhibitions held in the overseas territories that showed how the empire was viewed from the outside.⁹ However, these two complementary views were brought together by the 1998 World Exhibition, officially named the *1998 International Exhibition of Lisbon*, held at a time when the empire had already vanished. Almost fifty years after the 1940 event organised by the Estado Novo, on the banks of the same river that had watched the 16th-century caravels set sail although further upstream from Belém, Lisbon celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Portuguese Discoveries on a global scale but reconfigured in the light of postcolonial studies. The theme was “The Oceans: a heritage for the future”, and in different ways, the colonial past continued to be present in the postcolonial context but now revisited in the light of late 20th-century multiculturalism.

Within the mythic opulence of the revisited empire and on the threshold of the new millennium, international expositions functioned as a means to spread and mediate culture and art – a worthy objective they still maintain today. Expo’98 was undoubtedly a great moment to disseminate knowledge about Portugal internationally, highlighting its glorious past with its navigators and viceroys as well as its extremely modern present and future.

As far as the arts, and painting in particular, are concerned, the 1998 event led to pictorial miscegenation that had been impossible to achieve up until then in Lisbon, the capital of the Discoveries, not because no occasion to do so had presented itself but because the context had not been propitious. But neither in fact did the context of Expo’98 manage to update the epic of the Discoveries through another epic – the oceans and cultural encounters. Even so, the results exceeded those of earlier experiences.¹⁰

As for the former Portuguese colonies, they decided to exhibit indigenous art in their pavilions and show no record of the colonial “era”, thereby adopting a simultaneously anti-colonialist position and independentist. They refrained from denouncing the obstructive nature of the power exercised while under Portugal’s imperial yoke, preferring instead to highlight a form of art that was the legacy of the tribes who had first inhabited the territory.

For the population of the metropolis (and the

foreigners that visited it), these pictorial representations generated an unusual image of the overseas possessions, which could be used by the political power as a vehicle of propaganda. Decorating these realities, the art of indigenous cultures (referred to as savage and/or primitive) or distant ancient civilisations served above all to emphasise the superiority of the metropole in relation to the overseas territories and to assuage the curiosity shown by western culture for faraway possessions. But, more than just “showing” the exotic and the foreign, it had to “appear to be” as T. Vijayaraghavacharya, commissioner of the India Section at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition, said: “What the public wants to see of India is what *appears to be* Indian, more than what *is* Indian”.¹¹ It was the invention of a condition that rarely corresponded to reality, the myth of the West in the face of almost unknown and consequently undervalued cultures.

In conclusion, there was no actual need to make national artists travel to the colonies. To create a convincing image all it took was their creativity and imagination to idealise and stylise a pictorial representation that not only suggested but also influenced and determined the view that was held of the Portuguese colonial empire. The *Estado Novo* was intelligent in that it appropriated these representations and used them as a vehicle for propaganda, thus helping to legitimate the image of the great overseas empire.

Hence, the triangle Creativity-Fantasy-Intelligence became the matrix from which the right-wing dictatorship defined a whole ideological-artistic strand, often very successfully.

Acknowledgement

This chapter had the support of CHAM (NOVA FCSH/UAC), through the strategic project sponsored by FCT (UID/HIS/04666/2019).

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⁹ Thematically, this topic is related to the trips made by the Heads of State to the overseas territories so will be dealt with in the following sub-chapter.

¹⁰ It is interesting to mention here the *XVII Exposição Europeia de Arte, Ciência e Cultura*, held in Lisbon in 1983, subordinated to the theme *Os descobrimentos Portugueses e a Europa do Renascimento* [The Portuguese Discoveries and Renaissance Europe] which only included

history painting whose themes were based on the Portuguese Discoveries. Once again the opportunity for a more wide-ranging show that included painting in a colonial context was lost.

¹¹ T. Vijayaraghavacharya, cited by Filipa L. Vicente “Exposições coloniais na Índia Portuguesa e na Índia Britânica (séculos XIX e XX), *Revista Oriente*, N.º 8, Lisboa, Fundação Oriente, p. 80.

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Accepted Manuscript