

João Pinharanda, 1999

**INTERVIEW WITH ANA VIEIRA.
THE THEATRE OF PAINTING**

“Ana Vieira’s first ‘spatial cut-outs’ evoke the emptiness of the object rather than its shadow at the same time, they encourage the active visual and physical involvement of the spectator (moving in space) in the reconstruction of the image. Subsequently, her ‘environments’, using daily or synthetic (symbolic) objects, invoke the real space of (domestic) architecture, rendering it abstract and loading it with erudite, symbolic, political or (individual and poetic) subjective references. The realist elements of the pieces (tables, chairs, windows, doors, sounds) are decontextualized or construct their own contexts (for example, *Santa Paz doméstica, domesticada*) before becoming completely abstracted (in her ‘mental and emotional’ architectural plans) or in her projects which intervene in the urban or natural landscape (of which *only Constelação Peixes* was realized).

These works together provoke voyeurism and confirm the frustration of the voyeur. Her work is about taking things apart, clarifying the image - not only on the level of perception but also symbolically - and its mechanisms - its visual and also ideological reception. It is work which produces unstable results, without fixed images or solid ground, since its objective is precisely the deconstruction of materials rather than their construction. The possible unity of this work resides in the poetic unity of her process. But even here we read it as a reflection of the restless personality of the artist, moving like a vague being through the dramatic space of her scenarios. *Corredor* can be seen as the most representative work of this reality: we enter it, we are hemmed in by narrow walls. It is more like a tunnel than a corridor, a false illuminated labyrinth from which we emerge free of a strange oppression to face the oppression of the disjointed and impossible scenario that follows. The spectator is summoned to look but prevented from touching, which turns him or her into a being invited to feel and compelled to think.

Arte Ibérica - You have referred to the initial influence, in your work of the Portuguese artists, Lourdes de Castro and Noronha da Costa and of the international artist, Michelangelo Pistoletto. The works of these artists could lead us to a discussion of the deconstruction of painting or, more generically, of the representative tradition of the Renaissance. I refer to the elements these artists play with: the pairs shadow/light, volume/silhouette, transparency/lack of focus, image/reflection, for example. To what extent do each of these artists and each of these elements connect with your work? To what extent has this initial influence been diluted?

Ana Vieira - They were certainly important in that they deconstructed the cult of meaning, of form and message, still so associated with painting, sculpture and other art forms. They tackled new concepts of representation, image and the relationship between spectator and image. At the same time, for me theatre was one of the most unifying art forms. It is a kind of magical box of alchemy: of time, space, presence, the act of passing through (transmutation or transfiguration), ritual, archetype and excess. Subsequently, it was architecture that led me to the perception of space behind the body and the path.

A.I - Your works always create environments. The spectator is thus always placed within the work, or the work is surrounded by a circumnavigable space. Emerging at the

end of the 1960s, does this solution fit into the context of the rejection of painting? What relationship do you have with this “medium” (which you so often cite or use as a complement to the very works which reject it)? Seen in this way, is your work poetic or ironic, is it about integration or alienation?

A.V - In the 1960s, we saw the separating of artistic genres (painting, sculpture, dance, theatre) and the fusion of the same in new globalizing forms. Clearly in Portugal we learnt of this movement, and that those who took it on board did so because they identified with the need for new means of expression. That was what happened to me. I made painting into a spectacle by taking it into space. Once the illusion was dismantled, I expanded perception: the mutation of the image through the displacement of the observer and the observed; through duality, through transparency as the threshold to the act of passing through, a membrane that separates, unites and detaches interior and exterior.

A.I - The evocation of domestic spaces is not uniform: there are examples of nostalgic evocation (dreamlike, childhood?), there are cases of critical grouping (feminist, social?), there are cases of abstract formulation (conceptual, poetic?) What determines these different phases or types of approach? Is it the completion of a previously defined programme? Chance or experiences? External influences? Something else?

A.V - Possibly, diverse states of mind and experiences.

A.I - Going back to our second question. Does being faced with images which are offered to us yet inaccessible, desirable yet lost, lead us to the question of melancholy and voyeurism? How would you locate the images, or how do the images describe themselves with regard to you?

A.V - All, or nearly all questions about humans centre around the relationship with the other: to see and be seen, to provoke and be provoked, and, because of this they seem to me to be inseparable.

A.I - Each of your works seems to be structured according to an unfolding of dualities: inside/outside; high/low, light/shade, intimacy/openness, real/unreal... Does this interpretation make sense when you are conceiving, executing and exhibiting your works?

A.V - Duality is the cog which unleashes energies. I don't believe the middle ground can have the same power. {...}”

Arte Ibérica, no.20, Dec./Jan. 1999, pp. 8-13 (excerpt)

Catalogue Ana Vieira: Muros de Abrigo / Shelter Walls; Ponta Delgada [Azores], Museu Carlos Machado, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2010, p. 224 (org. Paulo Pires do Vale)
