

**Maria Filomena Molder, 1998**  
**THE HIDDEN WOMAN<sup>1</sup>**

“Someone dreams they are at a crossroads in the city of Vienna at around the beginning of the century. To get across, the person must follow the directions of some little boys - dressed in uniforms reminiscent of the student associations or military schools of the period - who mark out with a cord the prescribed angles where we must place ourselves in order to let cars pass. One of them addresses the person in German. This person has an idea of the language and understands that all the other schools have closed, only the boy’s one remains open. He learns French at school and speaks to the person of the difference between the *passé simple* and the *imparfait* (which in German are not normally distinguished). This person, who could not, in all conscience, say that she was dreaming but that she knew this time of the boy had happened long ago, this person, who was in 1998 and who had been at school many years after that boy, tried to tell him that in her time she learned good French, it is just that she is unable to tell him that her time was much later than the boy’s and that she was, in contrast to appearances, years and years younger than him.

This dream seems an allegory of the paradoxes of historical knowledge but any knowledge, in fact, suffers this paradoxical disorder, corrupted by all the forms of the past that feed it and the procession of its constantly changing location. The relationship with our own childhood ends up having exactly that type of dramatic scene, a dream play in which someone tries to explain to someone else the difference between “took place” and “was taking place”, between “was” and “was being” and between one and the other there is sleep, there is that time of enchanting tales in which the boy or the girl falls asleep to grow, to allow that, free of the social being and forever free of self-understanding, metamorphosis happens.

Artists officiate at their own sacrifice and are said to be close to childhood (either because it crossed someone’s mind or because it really is so), in the sense that that, which is neither social nor understandable, is retained in innumerable latent expressions, in the sense that these transformations, unfinished, hold and release the traces of primitive elements: tracks awaiting the good hunter.

The pieces by Ana Vieira are at least partly or, to be more precise, fundamentally theatrical types of this sleep, burdened with the yoke of the irrevocability of the metamorphosis that happened: to stop being a child and be free of constraints which, in adult life, are the lot of the accustomed cry: “If I had known then what I know now...”.

It is due to this that the relationship of an artist with childhood can never be returning to it because to return to it would be, is always, a sprained, impotent movement no matter what wonders it might promise. It is not a question of recreating childhood but of being an intermediary in its imagination. It is not a question of being a child again but of managing to decipher the traces of sleep, its desire not to awaken yet, whilst having already woken up.

As Clarice Lispector<sup>2</sup> knows so well, children painting and artists that paint like children can never meet, meaning that the child has still not gone through the metamorphosis of sleep and the innocence of the painter is marvellously dishonest. It is beside this door that Ana Vieira lives, although she never spent a night there: the delirium of converting one self into furniture or a curtain, into a soap bubble, typical of the theatrical game of peeping and hiding, typical of the allegorical nature, all enveloping, of the infant mind and its secrets - where anything can be something else-

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did not know the marriage of painting and sculpture and it is through this rejection that Ana Vieira devises her inventions.

Let's put it this way: for the artist, childhood has to be a halo surrounding his own life, his own body, a feverish temperature that alters the colour things have during that sleep of growth and which persists and takes its time expressively at certain moments that would condemn themselves if they were not forced to convert into habit, into a kind of secret that obeys the prescription of making itself visible.

In Ana Vieira, this secret takes the form of a game of identity, dispersed, divided and communicated as self-portraits without the portrayal of the face: almost-landscapes, environments, untitled objects, compositions of untouchable scenery, entertainments. Told in my own way: leaping roof roof to roof, from mountain to mountain, licking the dunes of the coloured engraving of a desert, rising and falling by the doorjamb, all actions of resistance, battles against the properties of the matter that luck brings to us: weight and its followers, impenetrability, inertia and all that come after. This resistance is a form of resistance to life that is only not lethal because it takes place in the kingdom of desires and its pure visions, something along the lines of the Kantian dove which imagined, without any danger, that it could fly better if the air did not restrain its wings.

In 1978, Ana Vieira opened out the internal plan of a house on the floor on the Quadrum gallery: there are no more fake walls, the net behind which all scenes were visible has disappeared. The provisions of this house, marking corners and divisions, were also written on the floor in capital letters:

HERE I WANT TO BREATHE  
HERE I WOULD LIKE TO PLANT  
HERE I WANT TO HARVEST  
HERE I WANT TO SEE COME IN  
HERE I WANT TO EXECUTE  
HERE I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE  
HERE I WILL KNOW HOW TO DISCOVER  
HERE I WOULD LIKE TO LOOK  
HERE I WOULD LIKE TO REFLECT  
HERE I WANT TO LEAVE  
HERE I WANT... HERE...

We are clearly dealing with a convalescent period in which to the experience of loss a kind of initiation ceremony (called "unhiding" by the artist) is added which, despite not permitting the constitution of any community, prepares us against chaos, encouraging the continuation of life and the renewal of its secret: children's games in the street are aware of both the procedure and the effects.

1978 was a transitional year just as the previous one had been a year of consummation. *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe 77* celebrated with all the trimmings the mastery of the projections and its ironic distancing, making the rejection objective, for the first and last time, as well as the lightness that is in it, on the craft of painting placing, among the provisions which normally no one touches, a palette and some brushes with everything later to be collected in the picnic basket, when the projectors are switched off. It was, however, many years later that Ana Vieira would really turn to painting nocturnes which pretend to be wallpaper. Apparent carelessness which will be mentioned later.

A group of *objects*, covered furniture - a desk, a table, several chairs, a *chaise-longue*, a cage, usual objects, now hidden - accompanied, like a smiling funeral

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procession, that plane of precipitation of new schemes, of expectations: I would like to do this, I will know how to do that, and of which there is not even an expectation or it is only its purely formal announcement: *here I want...* or even less: *here...* Before the first abandonment to surrender or rather than that, in the voluptuous choice of relishing what it does not want (not knowing what one wants and having voluptuousness through that or the wanting that is left unfulfilled, intact and empty). That the suspension will be anticipated is what is called an invitation to reverie. *Corredor* (Corridor), in 1982, was its natural metamorphosis.

Not only the cage but also the *chaise-longue* and all the other covered objects lead to a feeling of being prey and to a simultaneous acceptance and rejection of that feeling. Conversely, *here I want...* and especially *here...* lead to the splintering of those chains and, although the movements of the splinters is unknown, we recognise its final form: *Corredor*.

Furniture is covered when people move house, when building work is being done, when long journeys are undertaken. The hiding here is also to protect them from dust, from so much dust. Indeed, *Ocultação/Desocultação* (Hiding/Unhiding) not only sets up a dialectic between what was hidden and expressed decisions (even those that have no content), but also slides into each of its elements. The dialectic acts entirely as much in that which was hidden as in that which was revealed. Nevertheless, this is the first extinguishing of objects, extinguishing of memory, of the contents of the house that was abandoned.

This results in the increased importance of 1978, as the objects and the open plan make two tendencies coexist, in stills, as is said in the cinema. One is a kind of requiem, the other a prophecy to be fulfilled: the former windows, frames, boxes to the interior of which the exterior had been directed, open up. Now we can enter the box, the box is planned under the guidance of so many things that one wants, would like and knows but it is pure indetermination that is going to win: *here...*

The works of Ana Vieira are not abundant. Ana Vieira is in no hurry and there is no prevalence in the series, meaning that, despite the existence of transformation, dislocation, alteration of movements or even inversion there is no rupture. We should therefore not be surprised that so many years of rejecting painting, substitution, dislocation, have not invalidated the false wallpaper of *Diário de cinco dias* (Diary of five days, 1991) as they are canvases awaiting dematerialization which never came to pass: the project for the Praça do Município de Lisboa was turned down by the Sociedade Lisboa 94. In the old debate between Neptunians and Vulcanians<sup>3</sup>, I believe that Ana Vieira would be on the side of the former, slow erosions, lengthy sedimentation, slow crumbling, gentle falls.

We cannot, however, allow ourselves to be deceived by such slowness, because the scars caused by the decisions have almost but not entirely healed. This is shown by the passage, referred to above, from the *caixas* to the *corredor*. We can observe the type of movement that inverts the relative positions of all the wires, as in noughts and crosses, that is, subtly, in a single move, those that were inside are out and those that were out return to the inside forming a new symmetry each time. In this case, the intermediate moment was even conceded and assigned not only in *Ocultação/Desocultação* but also in *Mesas-Paisagem* (Tables-Landscape) of 1973 which preserve, as in certain natural metamorphoses, traces of their previous form.

*Corredor* is a box which opens and where we can enter and exit again but there is nothing to do there, nor to be done, the corridor no longer belongs to the category of objects. Ana Vieira is moving towards the suppression of any kind of representational gesture that anyone might attribute to her.

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It is for this reason, and in spite of this, that it is possible to highlight, through obedience to her constancy and her expressiveness, those two tendencies that call to each other, either acting in superimposition or mutual exaltation. Let us make them explicit. One is concerned with the production of objects (sometimes they are called that, other times “untitled” and sometimes “environment”) in which the window in all its lineage - frame, mirror, dolls’ house, puppet theatre - is the pattern and the place where the circumscription of the limits is at once a constant disturbance of the contours accentuating the imitation as an almost-entertainment (the walls of the net, the superimposition of the transparencies and the confrontation with the volumes, the plane which moves like a curtain out of the frame), but this is not for fun, this is not for participation. The constructed box displays visions and ironies, the illusion of the window with all its billowing variations displays a contemplative kingdom of door hangings, screens and curtains, whose acme is the slide show *Janelas* (Windows) of 1978, the key year in which curiosity and all the childhood factors which are in its origin were fully satisfied.

In multiplying the ingredients within the box, in augmenting its scale, in removing the imitation walls from the box (as in *Mesas-Paisagem*), little by little leads to the explosion of the opposition between inside and outside, until one is able to enter the box, finally left to itself and converted into a path. In other words, Ana Vieira is giving up objects, even the plaster works exhibited in *Diário de cinco dias*, not really connected to the family of objects, they are closer to being sculptures, taking on the complete role undertaken by previous scenarios, they are memories of those, ruins. Finally, Ana Vieira seems to have given up objects: *Ensaio para uma Paisagem* (Study for a landscape) is the most conclusive proof of this.

The other tendency is expressed in increasing diminution until it is almost eliminated from the intervention level. This movement of growing description (which has in some of the altered photographs its most subtle touchstones) paradoxically intensifies its effects, increasing that which gives the title to various 1970s works: the environment.

We can see, already in the 90s, the similarly unrealised project to flood Terreiro do Paço through the water of images; or the *Constelação Peixes* (Constellation of Pisces) in which the immense nocturne is illuminated, leaving its night untouched. In this last case, it is important to remember that the figurative and self-figurative nature - the constellation and its sign - of this truly cosmic action, add a kind of *vibrato* to the close relationship with so many land art projects. In this context as in others, Ana Vieira has used and displaced various artistic tendencies from the 70s crossing them with her intentions, as discrete as indelible, annulling the control of any influence.

Let us now look more closely, remembering things that have been said, and introduce something that remains to be said. In Ana Vieira, there is no real programme as such to be found. Her artistic activity has developed, obeying a refusal to paint that is also a renunciation, in the sense in which, like many other artists in our century, she sees her destiny as not being able to continue a tradition. This refusal is not a closed case, precisely because the creative impulse stems from it, as the revealing agent of all the experiments that belong to these initial desires: to be pulled free of gravity, to undo impenetrability, to duplicate. Those experiences are promised during the sleep which has been spoken of in which one passes, in this case, from a child to a girl. This cannot be forgotten in any of Ana Vieira’s inventions, in that, it is not only a rejection of painting in all its metamorphoses and degrees that crosses what she does, it is this inseparably expressed rejection of the critical awareness of being a woman. An inseparability that does not affect a constant understanding that art and life must

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not be mixed and that life is immeasurable.

To continue, this is the reason that there are no signs of aggression, no one is forced to do that which only life can force us to do. The demands of distancing that prevent us from entering the boxes or touching objects or, when entrance is permitted, prevent what has been done from being altered, come from the same source. Critical gesture in Ana Vieira never goes beyond that limit, even in the most outstanding case, even exceptional, of *Santa paz doméstica, domesticada* (Holy domestic peace, domesticated, 1977) in which the woman ceases to be hidden. Later, in *Estendal, Texturas, Ciclo e Percurso* (Washing Line, Textures, Cycle and Path, 1982), the psychological and sociological aspects of this intervention were to be diluted, restoring the pleasures of housework, returning to one of the motifs of her interventions: the box full of secrets.

Invisible (because the work is not exhibited) the parallelepipeds of *Ensaio para uma paisagem*, irrecoverable (because only through technical reproduction do we have access to them) the torches of the *Constelação Peixes*; they await a final word. In both, the duplicate relationships between the tendencies mentioned above reach their climax, through the transformation of the objects that immediately are intended to mean something into objects which are released from the restraints of signification. Before these works, we could observe in all the others, with greater or lesser intensity, an unstoppable back and forth between the representation and the criticism of the representation under the forms of pretence, theatrical games, which were superimposed on the representation itself, incorporating it, and everything began again and in a new way. We can identify this back and forth as a segregated movement through the work, where the artist turns to herself and subverts the questions of the genre: What is art? What is painting? Is it still possible to paint? What is seeing? And so forth.

Now, in recent years, objects are not even allusive, they are beyond allusion. They constitute the degree immediately after the degree zero of the symbol. They no longer intervene as actors. Ana Vieira has withdrawn to a deeper area, that is still not the sleep of a child who grows, that is still to be lived, but is the desire for reconciliation with all that. The theatre of life has been absorbed into the air, still or in movement, through earth and through lire, through spring water, through the sounds of the night, through light and silence. The parallelepipeds and the torches are emissaries of nature and destiny, boundaries beyond which it is not permitted to go."

**Catalogue Ana Vieira. Porto: Fundação de Serralves, 1998, pp. 161-164.**

**Maria Filomana Molder, *Matérias Sensíveis*. Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, 1999, pp. 197-203**

**Catalogue Ana Vieira: *Muros de Abrigo / Shelter Walls*; Ponta Delgada [Azores], Museu Carlos Machado, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2010, pp. 232-235 (org. Paulo Pires do Vale)**

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### FOOTNOTES

**1** Title of a short story by Colette, giving the collection *La femme cachée* its title, which have stolen, with acknowledgement.

**2** "... art is not purity, it is purification, art is not liberty it is liberation... perhaps it is because of this that exhibitions of children's drawings, no matter how beautiful, are not properly speaking exhibitions of art. This is why if children paint like Picasso, maybe it is better to praise Picasso than the children. The child is innocent, Picasso became innocent". "O artista perfeito" in *A descoberta do mundo*, Editora Nova Fronteira, Rio de Janeiro, 2nd edition, 1984, p. 348.

**3** This debate developed in the 18th century over the origin of geological transformations. Goethe took part in the argument and portrayed it, satirically, in the second part of *Faust*.