

# INTRODUCTION

## Presentation

The death of Arpad Szenes (1897-1985) awakened in his widow, the painter Maria Helena Vieira da Silva (1908-1992), the will to create in Lisbon a Study and Research Centre for the work of both artists. Although France had long been their adopted country – he was born in Hungary, she was Portuguese – and they were French nationals since 1956, their connection with Portugal was strong, especially for Vieira, who still owned the house that had belonged to her mother in Alto de São Francisco, Lisbon, near Amoreiras Gardens. On the one hand, the establishment of a study centre would resolve the fate of that place; on the other hand, it would provide the necessary framework to house the couple's personal and professional archives, which were being organised by her secretary, Guy Weelen.

The physical limitations of the old family home, too small to house a significant estate (which initially comprised a set of works and documents that Vieira da Silva had temporarily deposited in the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 1987) led to a more ambitious project, including the creation of a museum dedicated to Arpad Szenes and Maria Helena Vieira da Silva. The project was outlined in more detail from 1988 onwards, as the result of the efforts of Guy Weelen and José Sommer Ribeiro (who was then the director of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's José de Azeredo Perdigão Modern Art Centre and later the director of the new museum). It counted with the support of personalities such as the Portuguese President, Mário Soares, and Prime Minister Cavaco Silva, as well as several institutions: the Lisbon City Council, which ceded the premises of the old Silk Fabric Factory, chosen by Vieira da Silva for the future museum; the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, which paid for the works to adapt the building to its new lease of life as a museum, exhibition venue and Documentation and Research Centre; the Luso-American Development Foundation, responsible for equipping the building; and Fundação Cidade de Lisboa, which ceded the use of the space, which had been earmarked for a senior home. The Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva Foundation (FASVS) was eventually created by decree in 1990, to «promote the dissemination and study of the works of Vieira da Silva and Arpad Szenes». The construction of the Museum began immediately afterwards.

Despite being involved in those events since the beginning, Vieira da Silva would never see the new museum, inaugurated on 4 November 1994, two years after her death. Respecting the artist's memory and initial wish, her former studio and home, a stone's throw from the Museum, is also managed by FASVS and is a complementary exhibition venue. Its programming stresses its mission: to evoke the memory of the artist couple and promote learning and the dissemination of knowledge, creation, and debate.

The Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva Museum estate includes works from several origins, types, dates, and types of incorporation. Besides the main nucleus, including paintings and drawings representing the evolution of Maria Helena Vieira da Silva and Arpad Szenes's artistic production, the collection also boasts special editions illustrated by both artists, an important epistolographic section composed of professional and personal (family and social) correspondence, and a photographic collection from the couple's private archive. Two sets of donations by Vieira da Silva are behind the collection: the aforementioned donation, which was first deposited at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, comprising around 3,200 drawings,

paintings and engravings, and a set of works selected by Vieira da Silva, which she stated in her will to be handed over to the Portuguese State and negotiated between the French and Portuguese governments. The works arrived in Portugal as late as August 1994 and immediately became part of the Museum collection. Vieira da Silva also donated several works from her private collection to the Museum, namely pieces by Portuguese artist friends. Besides her legacy, the FASVS collection includes paintings and drawings deposited by private collectors or other institutions such as the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation or Metropolitan de Lisboa, the Lisbon Underground.

**Marina Bairrão Ruivo**

Director, Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva Museum

The history of FASVS, briefly evoked in the previous text<sup>1</sup>, exemplifies one of the possible outcomes of an artistic legacy: in this case, the institutionalisation of an artistic and documental collection, in a process that started while its producer and/or holder was still alive (Vieira da Silva, representing herself and her deceased husband), but which only materialised posthumously. This necessarily means that their legacy – both material and immaterial – ended up being managed by different players: initially, by people who were part of the artists' intimate circle (their friends and collaborators, whom they trusted), and, over time, by mediators who had never met them and were subsequently distant from more personal aspects.

The example of FASVS and its Museum refers to a framework in which the establishment of the institution and the definition of its mission started as a wish – of the artist and those around her – to protect, safeguard, study and disseminate an artistic and documentary collection. Similar cases of creation of artist's foundations, art centres and/or monographic museums from their estate (whole, partial or residual) abound all over the world, besides countless other public or private institutionalisation solutions that may take various forms: the deposit of the “documentary” estate in public libraries and archives; the acquisition *by*, or donation *to*, or the deposit *of* the estate (whole, partial or residual) in art museums, foundations or existing documentation centres; the musealisation of the artist's living and / or work spaces; the dissemination of collections in museums or virtual archives<sup>2</sup>.

Artistic collections are important repositories of historical-cultural memory. Taking care of them, in all the different aspects it implies (preservation, study, dissemination), involves great responsibility and possibly several players: the artists themselves, their heirs or legal representatives, galleries, museums, foundations or academic institutions. Hence, safeguarding their legacies and often boosting their public or private institutionalisation and making them available to the public is a complex task that is not always easy to manage – physically, materially, or even emotionally.

In recent years, the subject has been debated within international organisations such as The Institute for Artists' Estates (Germany), the Joan Mitchell Foundation / CALL program (Creating a Living Legacy) (USA), or the Swiss Institute for Art Research (SIK-ISEA) (Switzerland). Their projects have questioned some of the elements related to the management of artistic

legacies: mediation with artists or their representatives; the legal specificities in the reception and institutionalisation of works of art and documents; their cataloguing and archiving; the elaboration of catalogues raisonnés; study and dissemination strategies to keep legacies alive (academic and curatorial actions). In Portugal, these issues are mainly part of the work of institutions in charge of managing artistic legacies. Among the many examples, which feature organisations such as the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation or the Serralves Foundation, as well as many different foundations and monographic artist museums, one should highlight the recent research projects Laboratório de Artes na Montanha - Graça Morais (LAM-GM), which, in addition to varied research, creation and pedagogical activities<sup>3</sup>, is currently carrying out an inventory of the work and documentation of painter Graça Morais (b. 1948), in order to prepare her catalogue raisonné; and Banco de Arte Contemporânea Maria da Graça Carmona e Costa (BAC), which has been promoting the inventory, study, safeguarding and dissemination of documentary and artistic assets of visual artists, historians and contemporary art critics relating to the period between the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Among BAC's activities, an important conference cycle was held under the motto «Guarding the Past, Investing in the Present, and Informing the Future: Memory and Documentation, Collections and Estates», where several issues related to the safeguarding processes of artists' legacies were debated<sup>4</sup>.

The Foundation Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva decided to hold the international conference «Artists' Legacies: Preservation, Study, Dissemination, Institutionalisation» to bring together professionals, researchers, and all those who deal with the various challenges and issues related to the active management processes of artists' legacies. The objective was to reflect on its own work by promoting an enlarged debate on these subjects. To provide scientific support to the meeting, a team – our Scientific Committee – was constituted. It features representatives from academia and the museum world, museum and archive professionals, curators and art historians representing different approaches to the subject of the preservation, study and dissemination of artists' legacies: Marina Bairrão Ruivo, an art historian and the director of the Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva Foundation; Sandra Santos, head of the Foundation's Documentation and Archives Centre, where she has coordinated several publications on the life and work of Arpad Szenes and Maria Helena Vieira da Silva based on the Foundation's documentary collection; Raquel Henriques da Silva, an art historian and a professor at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, who also directed Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea - Museu do Chiado and coordinated many scientific projects, some of which on the monographic study of Portuguese artists, contributing to a historiographical reassessment of Portuguese art; Sara Antónia Matos, a contemporary art curator, currently the director of Atelier Museu Júlio Pomar and coordinator of the BAC project; Scarlett Reliquet, an art historian specialising in transatlantic artistic exchanges in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the author of several articles on women artists, and currently the cultural and scientific programming coordinator at Musée d'Orsay and Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris; and myself, Joana Baião, a member of the Institute of Art History at Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, and a researcher at LAM-GM, where I have been coordinating the inventory of the works and documentation of artist Graça Morais.

The conference «Artists' Legacies: Preservation, Study, Dissemination, Institutionalisation» was intended to be a platform for debate on active management processes of artists' legacies, covering a wide range of issues: the legal framework of copyright and other legal specificities related to the processes of institutionalising works of art and

documents; the challenges of promoting new knowledge, and the dissemination strategies to keep legacies “alive” in academic or museological contexts; the role of curators in the promotion of new critical discourses around works, periods and geographies, contributing to historiographical revision and new dynamics in the art market; and the role of projects such as catalogues raisonnés or documentation centres, which face new challenges in the digital age. We sought to bring together different perspectives on the approach to this rich, diverse subject: participants, who were selected through a call for papers, include representatives from foundations and museums, researchers from academic institutes and universities, artists’ heirs, curators, and cultural management experts. Their contributions – summarised in Scarlett Reliquet’s article – are now collected in this volume where fifteen out of the sixteen papers presented in the conference are published. The texts are published in several languages, reflecting the international nature of the event.

A final note: when we began to outline the conference «Artists’ Legacies: Preservation, Study, Dissemination, Institutionalisation», we were far from imagining that, a few months later, the world would be devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences, namely regarding restrictions on movement and social coexistence. These restrictions forced us to change the format of the meeting, which ended up taking place online. Thus, the much-sought establishment of close contacts with colleagues from various parts of the world was limited, and we were unable to promote a series of complementary activities designed to provide an in-depth look at the work of the institutions that were linked to the organisation of the event. The need to adapt to this “new reality” did not dampen the spirit of the Scientific and Executive Committee. Even though we were unable to celebrate this moment of sharing and debate in person, the overall balance was very positive: on the one hand, due to the expressive response from researchers and professionals from all over the world, who submitted fifty high-quality proposals – which made the selecting process a particularly challenging task; and, on the other hand, because technologies made it possible to break boundaries, both during the meeting’s preparation stage and during the event, which was attended by more than two hundred people from Portugal and abroad.

I wish to thank, personally and on behalf of the entire Scientific Committee, all the authors who have chosen this event to share and debate their research, and who generously share their papers in this volume. We are also very grateful to Leonor de Oliveira and Susana Martins, researchers at the Institute of Art History at Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, who agreed to chair two of the meeting’s sessions, as well as to the FASVS’s technical team (Sara Cavaco, Sofia Sutre and Renato Santos) that ensured the success of the online event.

**Joana Baião**

IHA, NOVA FCSH; LAM-GM, Instituto Politécnico de Bragança

---

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Information on the institution, the artists and their works is available at the FASVS website (URL: <http://fasvs.pt/en/>) and at the Foundation’s YouTube channel (URL: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCa0rMyNuND7XZqVTjG3QYXw>).

<sup>2</sup> See Madalena Nobre Pena, "Considerações sobre a salvaguarda e divulgação dos espólios de artistas contemporâneos em Portugal". *Dinâmicas do Património Artístico. Circulação, transformação e diálogo*, ed. Clara Moura Soares e Vera Mariz, 331-7. Lisboa: ARTIS - Instituto de História da Arte da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> See António Meireles and Joana Baião, "Laboratório de Artes na Montanha – Graça Morais: um projeto em construção". *MIDAS* [Online], 12 (2020). URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/midas/2478>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/midas.2478> (accessed 20-09-2021).

<sup>4</sup> The conference cycle was held in 2019. All sessions were recorded on video and are available at URL: [http://www.fundacaocarmona.org.pt/pt/ciclos\\_conferencias/2019.aspx](http://www.fundacaocarmona.org.pt/pt/ciclos_conferencias/2019.aspx) (accessed 20-09-2021).