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Visual arts and institutions in post-revolutionary Portugal: artistic interventions and the creation of a new museum of modern art

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the field of visual arts and artistic experimentation as important elements of civic agency in the Portuguese revolutionary process. It argues that Portuguese visual artists, who had been exploring new media and forms of expression since the late 1960s, anticipated and championed the Portuguese revolution as a democratic project. In doing so, they also proposed new forms of civic action, which intersected artistic practice with political engagement. I will specifically address the mobilization of the artistic and cultural community in Oporto for the creation of a “living” museum of modern art in this city. This project caused a rupture with the institutional apparatus of the dictatorship and effectively promoted a debate about cultural democratization and decentralization. This article conceives visual arts and action as a force for a more plural and progressive regime. It explores collective interventions in the public and institutional space; the configuration of democratic participation in the transformation of former dictatorial structures; and the envisioning of continuing change in order to consolidate democracy. The article thus advances a critical redefinition of the relationship between artistic practice and political mobilization and contributes to the dynamic dialogue between creativity and democratization in Portugal.

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Introduction

In 1968, the Portuguese artist Alberto Carneiro was attending a postgraduate sculpture course at Saint Martin’s School of Art in London when he was struck by the idea of recreating a cane field. *The Cane-field: Memory – Metamorphosis of an Absent Body* condensed and gave shape to his creative imaginings by recovering the artist’s memories of his rural birthplace in the north of Portugal, merging art with the aesthetic qualities of the union of different canes. While Carneiro’s memory materializes in the cane field, this

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Figure 1. Field After Harvest for Our Body's Aesthetic Delight. Installation in CGAC, 2001. ©Alberto Carneiro Archive. Art Library – Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

landscape also invites viewers to re-enact their own personal memories and a collective imagery as they stroll around the field (Figure 1).

The sensorial, immersive experience provoked by Carneiro's "involvements", as the artist named this type of installation, established a rupture not only in the relationship between artworks and the viewer, but also in the context where they are set up. The art critic and curator Fernando Pernes, who curated the first retrospective of Carneiro's production in 1976 at the Centro de Arte Contemporânea (Center of Contemporary Art [CAC]) in Oporto, described Carneiro's installations as anti-museological (Pernes 1976, 73–75); however, it was precisely their insertion into the museum context that underlined their propensity to scandalize and provoke, revolutionizing the way museums exhibit artistic production, promote the visitor's engagement with art and manage the installation and material ephemerality of the artwork. Furthermore, Carneiro's environmental sculptures challenged the Estado Novo's (New State) political and social order as they contradicted canonical collective representations, crystallized codes of behavior and traditional hierarchies and classifications. Their presentation in a national museum in 1976 symbolically conveyed the trajectory of political and institutional change that the 1974 revolution had triggered. The CAC was an experimental project that championed the creation of a new, modern and active museum and promoted the necessary convergence between artistic institutions, the new political times and contemporary artistic production.

While aspirations for political change and disruptive creative processes can be mapped in cinema, music, theater or dance, in this article I will circumscribe my analysis to Portuguese visual artists and explore how creative forms such as performance and installation that emerged in the late 1960s allowed artists to engage with the political transformation of the country and promote the democratization of its institutions, especially museums.¹

Looking inevitably with the eyes of the present at the complex period that preceded and succeeded the Portuguese revolution, my main aim is to reveal how, on the one hand, specific experimental artistic practices anticipated the revolution and consequent democratic turn, and, on the other hand, were also inspired by the revolution to engage directly with the political, cultural and social transformation of the country.

To do so, I will look at different contexts (Oporto streets, art school, museum rooms) where artistic intervention provided a ground zero to appropriate and reconfigure the public space, to create new forms of individual and communitarian representation and collective mobilization and, finally, to rehearse new modes of occupying and intervening in cultural institutions. All these new possibilities will converge in this article in its discussion of the creation and activity of the CAC (1976–1980), which provides a long-term perspective on the impact of artistic agency beyond the revolutionary period.

The sections that follow this introduction describe the institutional rehabilitation of Portuguese art museums after the revolution. The first section provides an overview of creativity and democratization in Portugal; the second highlights the 1974 collective performance/protest that targeted the national museum in Oporto and led to the establishment of the CAC in its premises; the third situates that action within a broader genealogy of performative practices and rethinking of artistic institutions in Oporto. The final section analyses the CAC's programming and its engagement with contemporary politics, challenges and civic awareness.

Creativity and democracy in Portugal before, during and after the revolution

My approach to this complex creative and political context encompasses an extended timespan, making it possible to consider the arts in the revolution as natural ramifications of the artistic experimentations which had developed in the previous decades. This research brings new elements to recent literature on the topic which has emphasized those continuities and, more importantly, the preparation in the cultural field of the new democratic context. According to Rui Bebiano (2010), the new youth culture that started to emerge in the mid-1950s with new cultural media (television) and new habits and consumption of new genres and forms in cinema (“teenpics”), music (rock, pop, folk, protest music) and literature (comics), played a definitive role in Portugal. That is, they led to the creation of a “universo potenciador da transformação e materializando um processo de desafecção em relação ao regime que apossará a sua derrocada” (universe that stimulated and materialized a process of disaffection in relation to the regime which hastened its downfall) (Bebiano 2010, 448).² For Luís Trindade, the newness of the cultural practices that characterized the “pop people” of the 1960s resulted in a particular relationship with the present, which “was experienced as if it were the future” (Trindade 2018, 220).

As I have recently argued, the common thread that connected many artistic experiments from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s involved what I have defined as “awareness of the incredible weight of symbolic readings”, whereby specific images and signs were loaded during the decades-long dictatorship with political and ideological discourses. Portuguese visual artists challenged the power of the Estado Novo to shape reality and attempted to shatter the codes and routes of interpretation that were imposed by the regime. From the late 1960s in particular, these objectives were articulated within a

more extensive cultural and artistic dialogue that involved European/North American dynamics and other underexplored territories of creative experimentalism, such as nature, language and the body (Oliveira 2020, 107).

So, on the one hand, the concept of democracy is understood here not only as a long-lasting aspiration of the artistic community under the dictatorial regime but also as something which was at the center of their artistic practice. I argue that by imagining democracy as the alternative to totalitarianism, Portuguese artists were projecting the future into the present, to borrow again Trindade's insightful proposition, and anticipating the transformation of the country in its political, social and cultural facets.³ On the other hand, if we take the aftermath of the revolutionary period in Portugal into consideration, we may also interpret democracy as an unstable and not fully crystallized concept: as an aspiration that is not entirely achieved through the publication of a constitution that validates and implements it (in the case of Portugal, the first democratic constitution was approved in 1976). Following Wendy Brown's analysis of the state of Western democracies in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries, I argue that democracy is a process, an end which remains unaccomplished and therefore needs to be constantly reinstated, revised and exercised (Brown 1995; 2015). For this reason, Brown asks: "might the realization of substantive democracy continue to require a desire for political freedom, a longing to share in power rather than be protected from its excesses, to generate futures together rather than navigate or survive them?" (1995, 4). Here, Brown hints at the possibility of democracy being progressively dismantled when authoritarian responses to the fears of contemporaneity (terrorism, mass migration, economic crisis, etc.) erode basic principles such as equality, individual freedoms and participatory decision-making.

In this regard, the creation of a museum dedicated to modern art attests to the interpenetration between the political and the artistic and provides eloquent examples of different approaches to democracy in action, to collective mobilization and intervention in order to "share futures together". The first step was the creation of the CAC, whose art exhibitions created a space where the democratic project was re-enacted and the participation of the public in the definition of new codes and routes of interpretation was promoted, as Alberto Carneiro's show exemplified.

Creating a new "living" museum: from the "funeral" of the Soares dos Reis Museum to the Center of Contemporary Art in Oporto

The crucial moment of the extended chronology I address in this article corresponds to the military coup that took place in Lisbon on 25 April 1974, led by the Movimento das Forças Armadas (Movement of the Armed Forces [MFA]). This coup was decisive in overthrowing the longest dictatorship in Europe, but it did not shape the revolutionary period that it initiated alone. According to the historian António Costa Pinto, "the non-hierarchical nature of the coup [which was headed mainly by captains], with the almost immediate intervention of the democratic elite and popular mobilization, accentuated both the real and the symbolic break with the past" (Pinto 2007, 179). The social movements that emerged in this period intensified and radicalized the revolutionary process, leading to purges within businesses, the occupation of factories, collective organization and self-management. Spreading from Lisbon and Oporto to other parts of the country, land

and house occupations, plenary assemblies of workers or students' or residents' committees (challenging the power of city councils) were other examples of an empowered population ready to make the necessary transformations in the country, prompting, in many cases, certain decisions taken by the new democratic governments. They also brought to the fore alternative forms of civic action and democratic decision-making. However, these episodes were downplayed and became anecdotes in the collective memory, probably because they were deemed too radical even by the Communist Party, which privileged a centralized intervention in political, social and cultural spheres and the control by the state of industries and businesses through nationalizations in the economic sector (Varela 2019, 96).

The Portuguese artistic community also participated in grassroots initiatives to trigger a definitive rupture with the dictatorial regime. Many actions attempted to decentralize artistic practice and engage directly with the population; to take over and transform public space through artistic interventions carried out in collaboration with the local community; or to reform cultural institutions, especially museums (see Couceiro 2004 and Henriques da Silva, Candeias, and Ruivo 2007).⁴ Many artists and artistic agents joined political actors, especially the MFA, in espousing the same objectives – for instance in the *Campanhas de Dinamização Cultural e Acção Cívica* (Campaigns for Cultural Promotion and Civic Action), which targeted the poorest and most isolated populations of the country. These communities attended and were also invited to participate in diverse cultural actions. Through them, military and cultural and artistic agents enacted the collective and popular dimensions of the revolution and shared new concepts and attitudes (Almeida 2009).

For Cristina Pratas Cruzeiro (2021), all the actions mentioned above come under the heading of socially engaged practices: they reflected not only the contradictions and parallel forces marking the revolutionary landscape, but also the confrontation and tension between the population and new creative practices, especially performance art, which criticized and made visible internalized social injustices, such as gender violence and discrimination (See Pinto 2019, 84–85 and Oliveira 2022).

One of the main reasons for artistic mobilization and intervention was the inexistence of a museum of modern art promoting the work of Portuguese contemporary artists as well as the artistic education of the population. In fact, in Lisbon, and, more precisely, in the Chiado quarter, an institution designated the Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea (National Museum of Contemporary Art), created in the 1910s, was still open to the public. However, since the late 1950s it had become completely disconnected from contemporary artistic production and a long period of decadence, both material and conceptual, ensued under the direction of Eduardo Malta and, after him, his wife, Dulce Malta. Indeed, the neglect and indifference with which the regime managed the museum was evident from the nomination of Eduardo Malta as its director. A successful portraitist in Portuguese high society, he considered modern art a conspiracy created by Jews to dominate European arts and culture (Duro 2012). Since there was no other public museum in the country dedicated to modern art, the demand for a new museum therefore articulated the revolutionary principles of democratization and decentralization and symbolically represented a necessary break with the past in artistic and cultural fields.

In Oporto, the only national museum in the city, the Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis (Soares dos Reis National Museum), was seen by local artists, writers and intellectuals as

an inactive and outdated institution. For them, the museum had distanced itself from the city and the population and focused exclusively on the conservation of an archaic collection, which had nothing to show or say about contemporary reality. For this reason, a group of artistic and cultural agents chose the Soares dos Reis Museum as a focus point for protest against the cultural policies of the dictatorship and the *status quo* of cultural life in Oporto. In doing so, the artistic and cultural circles of the city presented themselves as protagonists of the revolutionary transformations that should be implemented in the arts and culture in the democratic context.

That protest took the form of an “enterro” (funeral) of the defunct Soares dos Reis Museum. This demonstration/performance dominated the commemorations of the first 10th of June after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974. This was a national holiday that the dictatorship dedicated to the sixteenth-century epic poet Luís de Camões, Portugal and “a raça” (the Portuguese “race”). It therefore conveyed a specific narrative about Portuguese ethnic, cultural and historical identity and, at the same time, Portuguese exceptionalism, which was used by the regime to justify the country’s detachment from new international principles implemented after the Second World War, namely democratization and decolonization. The 10th of June was therefore the ideal moment to demand a general regeneration of the country and, inevitably, this had to start with its institutions. The “funeral” also marked an alternative, more interventionist action to that undertaken by artists in Lisbon, who responded to the appeal of the Movimento Democrático dos Artistas Plásticos (Democratic Movement of Plastic Artists) by painting on the same day a collective mural that celebrated the MFA: the driving force, in their view, of political, social and cultural transformation.⁵

In Oporto, the organization of the “funeral” was led by the Comissão para uma Cultura Dinâmica (Commission for a Dynamic Culture), which did not have a clear political affiliation, probably bringing together different left-wing tendencies. The Comissão had announced in the newspapers that it would be an “acção de choque” que pretende activar a consciencialização do povo acerca de valores negativos da cultura portuense” (“shock action”, intended to trigger the people’s awareness of the negative values of Oporto culture) (“Vai a ‘enterrar’ amanhã o Museu de Soares dos Reis” 1974, 4). The symbolic funeral procession (Figures 2–6) gathered:

Mais de quinhentas pessoas ... Junto da porta principal, efectuou-se, então, uma cerimónia cómico-fúnebre ... cuja figura principal era a “viúva” rigorosamente vestida de luto ... Nos alisares das janelas foram colocadas velas acesas, enquanto os artistas Alfredo Queirós Ribeiro e Joaquim Vieira, subindo a uma escada, colocaram, lá no alto da porta principal, uma coroa de flores e um epitáfio de consagração ao “ilustre morto”. Depois houve discursos de circunstância, paródia a capítulos ridículos do passado ... Os principais elementos – escritores ou artistas – que dinamizaram este “enterro” ... vestiam trajos antigos um tanto ou quanto ridículos nos dias de hoje ... numa figuração (propositada) de sabor carnavalesco. (“Artistas e escritores no ‘enterro’” 1974, 1 and 5)

(More than 500 people ... Beside the main entrance, a mock-funeral ceremony took place ... which had as its main figure the “widow”, who was rigorously dressed in mourning. ... Lighted candles were placed on the windowsills while the artists Alfredo Queirós Ribeiro and Joaquim Vieira climbed a ladder and placed on the top of the main door a wreath and an epitaph in homage to the “illustrious dead”. It was then time for the customary speeches, a parody of ridiculous chapters of the past followed ... The main elements –



Figure 2. The “funeral” of the Soares dos Reis. Photos by Manuel Magalhães. © Manuel Magalhães Estate.

writers and artists – who animated this “funeral” ... wore old costumes that today seem more or less ridiculous ... in a figuration which [deliberately] had a carnivalesque flavor.)

The epitaph and multiple protest posters that accompanied this cortege reinforced criticism of the lifeless museum and also drew attention to its detachment not from only intellectual and artistic circles, but also from the general population of the city. A young boy carried a poster with a very pragmatic request: to be able to have lunch at the museum and have toast and chocolate milk. The newspapers covered the demonstration very closely and published the Comissão’s communiqué/manifesto, which indicated the reasons for the general discontent with the Soares dos Reis Museum:

Os visitantes não dispõem de qualquer guia impresso; os catálogos que existiam, esgotaram-se; as colecções de postais acabaram; os diapositivos esgotaram-se ... O museu esgotou-se transformado num corpo inerte sem qualquer acção pedagógica ou didáctica para o grande público, sem qualquer iniciativa educativa. (“Artistas e escritores no ‘enterro’” 1974, 1 and 5)

(The visitors do not have access to any printed guide; the earlier catalogues ran out; the postcard collections ended; the slides ran out ... The museum ran out and became an inert body without any pedagogical or didactic activity aimed at the general public, with no educational initiatives.)

This manifesto also included an outline of the new museum that should be born out of the ashes of the old one:



Figure 3. The “funeral” of the Soares dos Reis. Photos by Manuel Magalhães. © Manuel Magalhães Estate.



Figure 4. The “funeral” of the Soares dos Reis. Photos by Manuel Magalhães. © Manuel Magalhães Estate.



Figure 5. The “funeral” of the Soares dos Reis. Photos by Manuel Magalhães. © Manuel Magalhães Estate.

A cultura fascista foi um cadáver nauseabundo, à frente dos organismos oficiais de cultura estão mecanismos de relojoaria acertados por um tempo medieval que queremos fazer desaparecer. Toda a cultura portuguesa durante o fascismo foi feita fora dos círculos oficiais e lutando contra eles. Esta comissão pretende apressar o processo de destruição deste estado de coisas. Pretende, em seguida, auxiliar a construir sobre os escombros uma cultura viva. Um diálogo aberto e não uma cultura de nuvens para eleitos. Não à cultura dos cemitérios ... chama-se “Nacional” o que quer dizer que todos o pagamos. (“Foi a ‘sepultar’ o Museu de Soares dos Reis” 1974, 4)

(Fascist culture was a nauseating corpse. The official cultural bodies were led by clockwork mechanisms set to a medieval time that we want to make disappear. All Portuguese culture during fascism took place outside of and in opposition to official circles. This commission intends to hasten the process of destruction of this state of affairs. After that, it aims to help build a living culture over the rubble. To establish an open dialogue and not a culture in the clouds for the chosen few. No to the culture of cemeteries ... it [the museum] is called “National” which means that we all pay for it.)

The “funeral” had an undeniably artistic facet. As José Rodrigues recalls, it was a “performance”, “manifestação poética e teatral” (poetic and theatrical demonstration), “uma forma de expressão” (a form of expression) and “espaço de liberdade” (space of freedom).⁶ It is also clear that this protest against the Soares dos Reis Museum was not motivated by an anti-museum stance. On the contrary, its organizers aimed at regenerating the institution in Portugal and creating a new type of museum that would reinforce, in the artistic and cultural sector, the collapse of the elitist and conservative environment of the dictatorship. The new museum, therefore, should be a democratic space with dynamic



Figure 6. The “funeral” of the Soares dos Reis. Photos by Manuel Magalhães. © Manuel Magalhães Estate.

educational activities; it should welcome the general public and make available relevant artistic production that would otherwise remain hidden from view in the houses of private collectors. Contemporary artists claimed that, with this action, they were playing a primary role in the transformation of old “fascist bodies” into new democratic institutions. Consequently, a close dialogue between the museum and the artistic sector would be essential not only for programming exhibitions and updating collections but also to maintain a constant critical enquiry into museological activity.

The “funeral” of the Soares dos Reis was therefore the catalyst for artistic and cultural agents to intervene directly in the museum. This demonstration was succeeded by the museum’s occupation by a self-nominated Provisional Administrative Committee. In the

meantime, a report by the museum's director, Maria Emília Amaral Teixeira, who was still in charge, explained that the situation of the Soares dos Reis had been caused by structural problems related to lack of state investment and admitted that she was open to collaborating with the protesters. In November 1974, Fernando Pernes presented at a public meeting the "Proposta para um Centro de Arte Contemporânea" (Proposal for a Center of Contemporary Art). Speaking on behalf of the Comissão para uma Cultura Dinâmica, Pernes indicated as a first step for the creation of the CAC the organization of an exhibition/survey of twentieth-century artistic production in Oporto, what would later materialize as the *Exposição – Levantamento* (1975). This exhibition would gather a first collection of artworks, which would be loaned by the artists themselves to the new organism. According to the November 1974 proposal, the future Center would be fully managed by the artistic community (Pernes 1974). The support provided by the Ministry for Education and Culture, headed by José Emílio da Silva, to the *Exposição – Levantamento* indicated that the demands made by its organizers were in tune with the new cultural and artistic policies that the new democratic regime wished to implement in the country.⁷ The aims of democratization and decentralization of cultural and artistic practice and promotion seemed to have in Oporto their natural point of departure.

The programming and discourse of the new Center favored a specific reading of artistic practice and museological activity as critical reflections on contemporaneity imbued with transformative effects. This vision was not only shaped by the Portuguese revolution but also by transnational events, especially the protests of May '68 in Paris. Artists were deeply involved in the struggles that marked and extended the effects of May '68 in the cultural and artistic sectors, thus initiating a new field of creative practice and research known as Institutional Critique (Kastner 2009, 44). Art schools and museums were the targets of many collective actions in this global context: in May 1968 Pierre Restany and other major figures of the Parisian artistic milieu attempted to "close down the *Musée National d'Art Moderne* because of its 'manifest uselessness'" (qtd. in Galimberti 2017, 316), and the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels was occupied by a group of artists.

In both cases, the museum became the place where institutional renewal took place. Indeed, both in Paris and in Brussels, the creation of museums of modern art was the most successful corollary of contemporary protests promoted by the artistic sector. The project of the future Center Pompidou was definitively launched in the aftermath of the 1968 protest mentioned above. This new museum, which opened to the public in 1977, had a noticeable impact on the creation in Portugal of new artistic institutions, notably the Centro de Arte Moderna (Modern Art Center) of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, established in 1983. Like its Parisian counterpart, the Lisbon Center eliminated the word "museum" in order to propose a new relationship between the public and twentieth-century artistic production. It also aimed at bringing together different creative manifestations and promoting interdisciplinary dialogue, which ultimately contradicted, according to Pontus Hulten, the first director of the Pompidou Center, the values of stability and conformism that were usually implicit in the activity of traditional museums (1975, 81 and 83).

Museum-making in Portugal was undoubtedly influenced by the new institutions that were created in major European artistic capitals such as Paris. However, for the organization of the "funeral" and the creation of the CAC, which opened one year before the inauguration of the Center Pompidou, we also find antecedents in the Portuguese context in

previous artistic practices and experimental institutional processes going back to the 1960s. Alberto Carneiro's installations, mentioned at the beginning of this article, are a good example. But it is also important to emphasize the specific artistic and cultural environment in Oporto, which framed Carneiro's artistic experiments and also the protests for a new museum of modern art.

Rehearsing democracy in the Oporto School of Fine Art

The criticism of cultural institutions that the creation of the Center of Contemporary Art and the exhibition of Carneiro's works provoked was anticipated by similar protest actions that occurred in another institution of the city, the School of Fine Art, from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. In this period the School still included in its curriculum the Architecture program that would become an autonomous school in 1979. This program was thoroughly immersed in the turmoil of the times, living in an environment of political contestation, experimental management, persecution and paralysis:

que oscilam entre dois polos: entre a utopia social e política fortemente influenciada pelo Maio de 68; e utopia formal e disciplinar que caracterizou o pensamento radical na década de 1970 ... E que opôs marxistas, leninistas, ou maoístas a trotskistas, situacionistas ou anarquistas. (Bandeira 2014, 11)

(which oscillated between two poles: between the social and political utopia strongly influenced by May 1968; and the formal and disciplinary utopia that characterized radical thinking in the 1970s ... and which involved opposition between Marxists and Leninists, Maoists and Trotskyists, Situationists and Anarchists.)

In 1970, students and teachers took inspiration from the protests of May '68 and the student revolts of 1969 in Coimbra and rejected the previous reform of the program. Consequently, they implemented a "regime experimental" (experimental regime). According to Pedro Bandeira:

... o chamado "regime experimental" – uma reforma que os jornais da época iriam apelidar de "inovadora" e "radical" pela gestão paritária entre alunos e professores, pela ausência de cadeiras no sentido convencional do termo, pela ausência de faltas, de horários, tudo isto em prol da integração de várias matérias estruturadas em torno de um núcleo central: o projeto de arquitectura (tido num âmbito alargado). (Bandeira 2014, 11)

(the so-called "experimental regime" – a reform that the newspapers of the time described as "innovative" and "radical", with management shared between students and teachers, the absence of conventional disciplines, the absence of records of non-attendance, of schedules, all of which aimed to promote the integration of the various topics structured around a central core: the architectural project [viewed from a broad perspective].)

However, the experimental regime "acabou por durar pouco tempo" (did not last long). The students' response at the end of the new regime's first year of implementation to the "boicote reaccionário" (reactionary boycott) was a "requiem por uma experiência" (requiem for an experiment) or "enterro da experiência" (funeral of the experiment), "uma performance no átrio da escola" (a performative act in the school lobby):

Os alunos vestiram-se de preto e simularam uma urna na entrada do edifício acompanhada de uma espécie de "cânticos gregorianas" ... Velas acesas recortavam, na penumbra da escadaria, a silhueta de um manto preto recebendo flores espalhadas. A cerimónia contou

obviamente com um solene discurso fúnebre, lido na galeria superior pelos três oradores de serviço. (Bandeira 2014, 71–72)⁸

(The students dressed in black and simulated an urn at the entrance to the building, accompanied by a kind of “Gregorian chant” ... Lighted candles, in the gloom of the staircase, marked the silhouette of a black cloak on which flowers were scattered. The ceremony of course included a solemn eulogy, read in the upper gallery by the three designated speakers.)

This lugubrious performance is where the stories of institutional criticism in the School of Fine Art and in the national museum in Oporto intersect. But as we have seen, the purpose of the latter was not to mourn the collapse of a radical experiment, but to set in motion a new experience, emerging from the definitive liquidation of a moribund museological existence. In this respect, it is also worth mentioning the presence of Alberto Carneiro in the School of Fine Art during that turbulent period as another element that holds together a story of institutional contestation, civic intervention and experimental practices from the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of democracy.

Carneiro was first invited to the Oporto school in 1971, where he would lecture in the Sculpture and Architecture programs throughout the experimental regime. He was also responsible for the Design module of the Architectural program until 1986. In October 1973, his “Notes towards a Manifesto of Ecological Art” (1968–1972) were published in the first issue of the *Revista de Artes Plásticas*. In these notes the artist formulated – possibly for the first time – the concept of “ecological art”, which had at its core the idea of a primeval unity between the human and nature:

A arte faz-se para transformar as imagens do quotidiano.

Consciência do atrofamento que os factores urbanos e culturais exercem sobre a alegria mais profunda do ser na ausência de uma intimidade com a Natureza, a ARTE ECOLÓGICA virá repor na memória das sensações estéticas os valores que da Terra no Homem se definiram e o estruturaram na sequência dos tempos. (Carneiro 2018, 345–346)

(One makes art in order to transform the images of everyday life.

As awareness of the atrophy that urban and cultural factors exert upon the deeper joy of being, in the absence of an intimacy with nature, ecological art may reinstate, through the memory of aesthetic sensations, the Earth-based values that found definition in Mankind and structure it as time unfolds.)

Carneiro’s theorization of “ecological art” and the implications of the interpenetrations between the artistic field, everyday life and the natural environment coincided with radical projects submitted in 1975 by his Architecture students. Their purpose, as Mário Ramos and Fernando Barroso have argued, was to “criar situações que contribuam, para uma modificação radical das actuais condições de dominação que caracterizam a vida e sejam a preparação de uma sociedade que confira ao homem a sua verdadeira identidade” (qtd. in Bandeira 2014, 35–36) (to create situations that contribute to a radical modification of the current conditions of domination that characterize life and prepare for a society that will give man his true identity) [English text in Bandeira 2021]. According to Ramos and Barros, such a goal could be achieved only by the “estimulação do indivíduo a exercer a sua imaginação e criatividade na apropriação do espaço, na revolução do quotidiano” (qtd. in Bandeira 2014, 36) (stimulating of the

individual to exercise his imagination and creativity in the appropriation of space, in the revolution of everyday life).

The project presented by Ramos and Barroso in 1975 proposed an *Organização Insurreccional do Espaço* (Insurreccional Organization of Space) in which the Avenida dos Aliados, a central artery of political, social and economic power in Oporto, became a derelict space, ready to be radically appropriated. As its proponents explained in an accompanying text: “é um projecto que propõe abdicar da arquitectura enquanto manifestação de poder, do seu sentido representativo, em prol de um espaço público que, à imagem de uma cidade em ruínas no deserto, se oferece à indefinição, ao uso livre” (qtd. in Bandeira 2014, 33) (it is a project that proposes to abdicate from architecture as a manifestation of power, its representative sense, in favor of a public space that, like a city in ruins in the desert, offers itself up to indeterminacy, free use [Bandeira 2021]).

In one of the photomontages that recreated the area around the Avenida dos Aliados as a post-apocalyptic scenario, we see bundles of rye, like in Carneiro’s installation, occupying a street. Both Ramos and Barroso’s and Carneiro’s projects reflect the belief that “a revolução implica uma nova linguagem” (Bandeira 2014, 38) (every revolution implies a new language). The transformations they made within the public space of Oporto’s streets or in the city’s national museum did indeed imply a new beginning, a degree-zero relationship with the city and the museum in which everyone could contribute with new meanings and experiences, freeing those spaces from the political, ideological, social and cultural symbols and codes they had previously transmitted. The new language that would convey the new times in the country was therefore seen by Oporto artists and architects as being based on creative experimentalism.

The CAC exhibitions: “a responsibility that, being aesthetic, will certainly become political”

The idea that experimental creative practice could reimagine reality and propose possible, more democratic futures based on a critical perspective on history and contemporary challenges also underpinned the activity of the new Center of Contemporary Art. Additionally, its program emphasized education and public participation as fundamental steps not only to democratize access to art but also to raise awareness about how extremist ideologies and capitalism condition individual freedoms and to foster individual and collective political intervention. These aims involved constant engagement with the public and the artistic community. The ultimate goal of the CAC, then, was the creation of a new and autonomous museological institution that could continually promote a productive intersection between contemporary artistic practices and new forms of civic action.

In practical terms, the “Programa do Centro de Arte Contemporânea do Porto” (Program for the Oporto Center of Contemporary Art), which Pernes announced publicly in January 1976, presented the CAC as a specific autonomous department within the Soares dos Reis Museum, dedicated to twentieth-century art. Pernes and the Brazilian museologist Etheline Rosas, who had previously worked at the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art and directed the Mini-Galeria in Oporto, took on together the Center’s artistic and educational programming and technical direction. Initially, it occupied three rooms on the first floor of the museum and held two exhibitions every fifteen days. This cultural

and artistic dynamic was not exclusively dedicated to Portuguese art. The Center also extended its program to include the international context, organizing exhibitions that highlighted relevant names and groups, such as Robert Rauschenberg (1977), Equipo Crónica (1977) and Wolf Vostell (1979).⁹

Pernes and Rosas were also interested in promoting different artistic media. In this respect, Vostell's exhibition, which included film, photography, photomontage and installations, brought to the Center new terminologies and creative practices (happenings, environments, *décollages*). In the article dedicated to this exhibition, Pernes also claimed that Vostell, one of the major figures of the Fluxus movement, advocated an artistic intervention in society that was self-critical and provocative, thus reflecting the post-revolutionary reality lived in Portugal. Vostell's "enérgica referência emocional à vida" (energetic emotional reference to life) constituted a "permanente apelo a uma rebelião libertadora de dogmas, tabús, forças opressivas com diversas máscaras ideológicas ou de aliciação publicitária" (permanent appeal to a liberating rebellion against dogmas, taboos, oppressive forces with various ideological masks or advertising ploys). The German artist, therefore, made us aware of the responsibility of "capitalist democracy" for "guerras, atrocidades, bem como pelo persistente demolir de quanto deveria ser pureza e fraternidade" (wars, atrocities and for the persistent demolishing of everything that should be pure and fraternal) (Pernes 1979b).

It is indeed possible to identify parallels between the post-revolutionary context in Portugal and the exhibitions programmed by the CAC, which openly dealt with the most brutal instruments of totalitarian (and even democratic) regimes by approaching in the same exhibition, for instance, the timely topics of the death penalty, torture and political imprisonment (*Pena de morte, tortura, prisão política* 1976). In addition, the Center reflected the new ideological atmosphere in post-revolutionary Portugal by looking at artistic contexts connected with the communist sphere of influence, that is, with the anti-capitalist societies in Eastern Europe. The Cold War, furthermore, impacted the activity of the CAC, and several shows dedicated to American art were also set up in the CAC's rooms, ranging from contemporary posters and comics to a homage to Edward Hopper, exhibited during the "American week" in 1980. Nonetheless, the attention given to American art, as well as to British art, responded to the ambition of the Center to narrate and map artistic production of the twentieth century and new artistic metropolises. In doing so, its activity acquired a museological dimension or aspiration.

Accordingly, from the very beginning, the CAC sought to gather a representative set of works that would constitute the "embrião de uma actividade museológica nortenha, relativa à arte do século XX" (embryo of a northern museological activity related to the twentieth century) (Pernes 1974). Tellingly, this ultimate intention already seemed to be a reality in Oporto's newspapers, which announced the "official opening" of the "first proper Museum of Modern Art" and declared that the Soares dos Reis had become "the only museum of modern art" in Portugal ("Programa de dinamização" 1976, 7). This news about the creation of the CAC highlighted the Soares dos Reis Museum as the institution that would give rise to the musealization of twentieth-century Portuguese art. However, it became clear that what was really at stake was the creation of a new museum. The constant criticism of Portuguese museological institutions articulated by Pernes in his texts for catalogues and newspapers implicitly advocated the foundation of a new revolutionary museum. In his essay for the catalogue of the international

exhibition *Fotografia como arte/Arte como fotografia* (Photography as Art/Art as Photography) (1979), Pernes drew attention to the fact that:

O espaço do museu isolara a arte e a cultura do mundo da rua e dos “mass-media”, do universo dos homens de todos os dias ... Importa agora ... que os seus espectadores a saibam entender no preço de assumirem a perturbação dos seus hábitos ou de reverem conceitos que, eventualmente, teriam admitidos como tranquilizantes definitivos. A liberdade do seu olhar implica tal sacrifício e põe em causa o seu comportamento futuro. É aliás por isso e para isso que quaisquer exposições se devem fazer: na consciência duma responsabilidade que, ao ser estética, logo será com certeza política. (Pernes 1979a, n.p.)

(The museum space had isolated art and culture from the street and the mass media world, from the universe of everyday men ... It is now important ... that its [the exhibition's] viewers know how to understand it and pay the price of assuming the disruption of their habits or of revising concepts that they might have admitted as definitive tranquilizers. The freedom of their gaze involves such a sacrifice and calls into question their future behavior. This is the reason for, and purpose of, setting up any exhibition: awareness of a responsibility that, being aesthetic, will certainly become political.)

Pernes addressed a specific reality, one that attempted to overcome a long period of dictatorial rule. Yet, the terms used and the dichotomy portrayed may also be set against the international context of the 1960s, shaped by military conflicts in Vietnam and in the African territories colonized by Portugal and student protests and revolts in 1968. Pernes addresses, on the one hand, an exclusivist access to culture and art and the museum as a space of reiteration of social privilege, and, on the other, the question of negotiation between artistic production and contemporary social conflicts and the museum as a site for social debate and transformation. The scenario of general conflict also took aim at institutional power and at its traditional processes and conventions. The renovation and reformulation of institutions such as museums was therefore a necessary step to ensure the effective impact of the revolution in the Portuguese case and to establish solid foundations for democratic progress. At the same time, this context also valued artistic and cultural agents as social actors. They were responsible for the materialization of a sense of belonging to a local community attempting to redefine itself and also to a global community coming together through awareness of the precarity of the democratic trajectory, to borrow Brown's and also Butler's critical analyses (Brown 1995; Butler 2004). And, again, the museum is the context where it is possible to articulate these identities with critical thinking and the exercise of democracy.

Conclusion

This article reveals how the revolution in Portugal not only allowed visual artists to have their creative experiments and interventions revalued in the context of the collective, collaborative transformation of the country but also how their production and actions promoted democratic participation and the reform of Portuguese institutions. Ultimately, these artists pointed out that a new democratic future required the necessary reconfiguration of the urban, social and cultural landscape to create a space for effective collective and civic intervention. Thus, beyond the best-known images of visual artists' cooperation with, and celebration, of the MFA (the mural art of 1974 has become the iconic image of the relationship between artists and the new political actors), there are other aspects of

artists' participation in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary context that should be highlighted in order to include them in the narrative of the country's democratization process.

Always overshadowed by the centrality of the capital, Oporto is highlighted in this article as the context of one of the most successful interventions in the cultural sphere in Portugal. The performance/protest of the *Enterro*, and the CAC which resulted from it, were indeed the driving forces behind the renovation of modern art museums in Portugal. The Center's activity, which focused on the education of the public, constituted the "embryo" of new museological practices in Portugal. Indeed, the CAC is considered the direct antecedent of the Serralves Contemporary Art Museum in the same city. This museum opened to the public in 1999 and immediately became a national and international reference in the contemporary arts circuit for its temporary exhibitions program that included national and international artists. The artistic sector in Portugal therefore turned an artistic cause – that of creating a new museum of modern art – into a political project. Creative action anticipated or triggered political intervention. Although the process of creating what would become the Serralves Museum was long and entailed overcoming political and economic obstacles, it is important to retain the aspects of this story that affirm the role of the arts and cultural practices in keeping political power and the state of democracy under constant review. Especially today, in a period when far-right movements are emerging and the ideological discourse of the dictatorship is being recovered, it is fundamental to support artistic and cultural activity as powerful tools of resistance and of renewal of imaginaries that provide new alternatives for sustainable futures.

Notes

1. More specifically, I will address artists who initially underwent a traditional academic training in the visual arts (mostly in painting and sculpture) and also in architecture, and from the late 1960s became involved in more experimental forms of creativity, such as installation or performance, and the rethinking of urbanism and public space.
2. All translations of Portuguese published texts and documents throughout this article are my own unless indicated otherwise.
3. The identification established here between the Portuguese dictatorship and totalitarianism follows Loff's analysis of Iberian regimes. Loff (2010) discusses the similarities between Francoism and Salazarism, arguing that the international convergence of both Iberian dictatorships and the modernization processes they launched in the post-war period must not obliterate their fascist and totalitarian ideology.
4. For instance, the *Encontros Internacionais de Arte* (International Meetings of Art, 1975–1977) organized by the art critic Egidio Álvaro and the painter and gallerist Jaime Isidoro took place in small towns in the center and north of Portugal.
5. This mural was inspired by a similar intervention that had taken place in Cuba and brought together forty-eight artists, each one responsible for one of the forty-eight sections of the panel, which symbolically represented the duration of the dictatorship in Portugal.
6. Interview with José Rodrigues during the preparation of a Master's thesis (Oliveira 2013, 85).
7. The *Exposição – Levantamento* was inaugurated in July at the Soares dos Reis Museum in Oporto and travelled to the Sociedade Nacional de Belas-Artes in Lisbon in November. It was sponsored by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and showed works by 104 artists from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. See more information and

photographs of the exhibition in History of the Calouste Gulbenkian Exhibitions website: <https://gulbenkian.pt/historia-das-exposicoes/exhibitions/248/>

8. Here Bandeira (2014) reproduces the testimony of José Gigante, a student in the Architecture program at the time.
9. See the chronology and list of CAC exhibitions in Oliveira 2013, 235–251.

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