

MANUEL CASIMIRO

STRUCTURES, INDEXES AND PROTOTYPES

Opening 10th May, 6:30 pm

Exhibition 11th – 30th May 2018 | Monday – Friday, 11:30 am – 7 pm

Espaço Camões da Livraria Sá da Costa | Praça Luís de Camões, 22, 4th floor, Lisboa

Beyond the gaze. Index before the prototype.

This almost intimate exhibition of Manuel Casimiro seems a provocation.

In one of the gallery spaces, there are paintings on whose green, red, and black backgrounds, para-geometric shapes, and lines, and even landscapes, are organized in a kind of polychromatic choreography over space and time. Is it an abstract painting? Is it figurative? Or just meta-art? They certainly are a deconstructive approach to representation and to that thing we call Art.

In another area of the exhibition, we come across a series of 'photographies érotiques', acquired by Manuel Casimiro in Portugal, but probably produced in France by the end of 19th Century. They epitomize the canons of voyeurism, of course. However, these 'rectified ready-mades', as Duchamp would call them, were approached by the so-called 'casimirian' ovoids, ceasing to be, as a consequence of this unexpected visit and metamorphosis, just copies of a collection of art in the era of its mechanical reproduction (Walter Benjamin), thus retrieving the old authorship and the material uniqueness of the artwork—the one that results from the appropriation carried out by Manuel Casimiro, but also by the unknown author who 'took' photographs of equally unknown flesh-and-blood models.

The new originality has thus a double origin, two inscriptions and a reinforced certification, for which a photographer, an industry and a gesture of semiological displacement ('casimiriana') converged.

At a time when new forms of puritanism and aesthetic dictatorship lurk in the world of museums, advertising, and art, this metamorphosis of the prototypes of western eroticism at the dawn of Photography, triggered by Manuel Casimiro's semiotic provocations opens a sweet perspective to what we really are and to what we know.

A different kind of appropriation is the transformation of Gerard-Georges Lemaire's book, "L'univers des Orientalistes" (2000), a luxurious anthology on Orientalist painters, into a new place for art making and for art staring:

— "You take a picture by Rembrandt and, instead of looking at the painting, simply use it as an ironing board." (Marcel Duchamp).

Finally, on the floor of the magnificent main gallery of Espaço Camões/ Livraria Sá da Costa, we can go back in time and see one of the most interesting artworks by Manuel Casimiro:

— "Structure of fruits and vegetables" (1975).

An invisible orthogonal mesh whose intersections are occupied by tomatoes, potatoes, pears, oranges, and lemons, establishes a rare dialogue between space, matter and time, three archetypes that have long been disputing the top of the podium of philosophical precedence. This piece is perhaps his most assertive work on the impossibility of a strictly monistic view of the world. A kind of sensitive and mental proof that art has always been among us to demonstrate the gross error of any monism. Time, after all, commands what happens—“what is the case”, according to Ludwig Wittgenstein. Nature, after passing away, still rots, serving as pasture to other living creatures.

Immersing itself in all this, the 'ovoid' - as Manuel Casimiro calls it - witnesses in all his work, not only a mark of originality, not just a 'difference', congenial to that Structuralism that flourished in France in the 1950s, 60 and 70s, but above all something stronger and anthropological born from the 'casimirian' impression. A glimpse to which Alfred Gell would have called an 'index'.

The 'ovoid' announces at the same time the presence of a work of art and the presence of its author, regardless of the landscape, 'abstraction' or 'ready-made' where it enters. In one sense, we can say that the 'casimirian' world is the place where a fingerprint, that is, the 'ovoid', decides to enter. Often, in someone else's work, which gains a new identity from a new author's appropriation, but also in the work itself which, because of this 'archeophany' (Robin Mackay, 2014), ends up also moving away from Manuel Casimiro, gaining that autonomy caused by the semiotic force of the Ovoid.

Antonio Cerveira Pinto

Manuel Casimiro is a Portuguese painter, sculptor, and photographer. In his long career, he has exhibited, individually and collectively, in many European countries, in the USA, Brazil, and China. His works are part of many private collections and museums such as Calouste Gulbenkian, Berardo Collection, Serralves Foundation, Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporáneo and many others.