

PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION "OTHER ALTERNATIVES: New Visual Experiences in Portugal"

DATES: 31 October 2003 – 25 January 2004

VENUE: ground floor exhibition rooms at the MARCO.

OPENING TIMES: Tuesday to Sunday (bank holidays included): 11 a.m.- 21 p.m.

CURATOR: David Barro

TECHNICAL ADVISOR: João Fernandes (Director of Museo Serralves, Oporto)

PRODUCED BY: MARCO Vigo

CO-ORDINATOR: Iñaki Martínez Antelo

ARTISTS EXHIBITED: 20

- Vasco Araújo (Lisbon, 1975)
- Leonor Antunes (Lisbon, 1972)
- Rui Calçada Bastos (Lisbon, 1971)
- Nuno Cera (Beja, 1972)
- Filipa César (Porto, 1975)
- Alexandre Estrela (Lisbon, 1971)
- Pedro Gomes (Mozambique, 1972)
- André Guedes (Lisbon, 1971)
- Ricardo Jacinto (Lisbon, 1975)
- Rita Magalhães (Luanda, 1974)
- João Onofre (Lisbon, 1976)
- Joana Pimentel (Porto, 1975)
- Francisco Queirós (Lisbon, 1972)
- Noé Sendas (Brussels, 1972)
- Sancho Silva (Lisbon, 1973)
- Miguel Soares (Braga, 1970)
- Rui Toscano (Lisbon, 1970)
- João Pedro Vale (Lisbon, 1976)
- Joana Vasconcelos (Paris, 1971)
- João Vilhena (Lisbon, 1978)

NUMBER OF PIECES EXHIBITED: 77

Sculptures	6	Mural paintings	2
Photographs	48	Mural drawing	1
Installations	9	"on site" pieces	3
Video-films	6	DVD	2

PARALLEL ACTIVITIES:

The curator of the exhibition will deliver a lecture in the conference room on December the 5th, Friday, at 8 p.m., under the title "*Portugal and its context: artistic periphery?*". Free, unrestricted access.

CATALOGUE:

The Contemporary Art Museum of Vigo issues a catalogue in three languages where, alongside individual texts by the curator on each one of the artists, there is an analysis of different aspects of the artistic context in Portugal during the nineties. Thus, experts such as João Fernandes (Director of the Serralves museum, Oporto) or Pedro Lapa (Director of the Chiado Museum, Lisboa) and critics such as Miguel von Hafe Pérez, deal with the various generations and their characteristics. The catalogue is completed by a text by Miguel Wandschneider (organiser of the innovative *SlowMotion* project) about the presence of the new media in Portugal.

THE CURATOR:

David Barro is presently a lecturer of videoart, photography and global arts at the Catholic Portuguese University, Oporto, director of *[W]art*; art critic for the Sunday supplement *El Cultural (El Mundo)* and for the magazine *Lápiz*; President of the Galician Association of Art Critics (AGCA) and member of the editorial committee of *Grial (Galaxia publishers)*. As an exhibition curator, he has carried out 20 individual and 2 collective ones (selection of the CGAC's collection and of the ARCO Foundation); he has been the director of the magazine *Arte y Parte*, director and founder of the magazine *InteresArte (Galaxia publishers)* and coordinator of the *IV Foro Atlántico de Arte Contemporánea*; he has published the books *Gary Hill, Poet of Perception e Imagens (Pictures) para uma representação contemporânea*; member of the purchasing committee for the Caixa Galicia Foundation. Currently, he is a member of the counselling committee of the MARCO Foundation; he has co-ordinated the elaboration of the catalogue of the Fundación ARCO collection. He has taken part in numberless conferences and round tables and acted as member of the jury for different awards and contemporary art contests.

SYNTHESIS OF THE EXHIBITION PROJECT

Once again, the MARCO, Contemporary Art Museum of Vigo, produce an exhibition, they offer us under the title "OTRAS ALTERNATIVAS: nuevas experiencias visuales en Portugal" (OTHER ALTERNATIVES: new visual experiences in Portugal). It is once more a joint exhibition the guiding thread of which is, on this occasion, more geographic than thematic: the first exhibition of a new generation of creators, born in Portugal during the 70's, that are brought together for the first time.

And it is precisely this fact which gives this exhibition a special meaning, in as much as it represents an effective connection with our neighbouring country. In fact, the choice of the curator, David Barro, was to a large extent owing to his intellectual and professional link with Portugal, not only for being a lecturer at Porto University, but also because he is closely acquainted with the artists exhibited.

It is surprising how such young artists are carving themselves a niche in the international art scene. In fact, we frequently come across their works in important biennial exhibitions or international ones. Many of them have chosen to live in other countries or are involved in foreign residence scholarships (Germany, the United States, Italy, etc.)

In the curator's own words, "we do not intend to suggest that there was a break with the nineties, or to speak about a group or current; about a new generation, at the most; a disperse and scattered one, though, as is suggested by João Fernandes in his text for the catalogue".

One more distinctive trait of this exhibition –and at the same time a key element in the programming of the exhibition by MARCO– is the multidisciplinary and the diversity of supports: photographs, sculptures, videos, installations, mural drawing, and also works created specifically for the site by some of the artists, namely Sancho Silva, Leonor Antunes, Pedro Gomes and André Guedes, who, in some cases surpass the physical boundaries of the exhibition rooms, and take up, with their works part of the museum hall.

The exhibition includes spectacular installations by Joana Vasconcelos, such as *A noiva* (2001) –a five-meter-high lamp made with 14.000 tampons by way of lightbulbs- or *Ponto de encontro* (encounter point) (2000), a merry-go-round on which the viewers are invited to jump; and the videos by João Onofre, Filipa César, Rui Calçada Bastos, Vasco Araújo, Miguel Soares (animation), or Alexandre Estrela. We also have the sculptures and installations by Noé Sendas, João Pedro Vale, Francisco Queirós y Alexandre Estrela, Rui Toscano's and Ricardo Jacinto's sound pieces and DVD monitors, or the photographs by Nuno Cera, Joana Pimentel, Rita Magalhães, and João Vilhena, the latter being the youngest of all the artists.

As regards those artists who have created specific works for the MARCO, Leonor Antunes's pieces play with the empty space below the ceiling of one of the exhibition rooms, while André Guedes takes a video recording of the "wearing out" process undergone by a carpet previously placed in the hall. Sancho Silva expands the opening of one of the windows looking onto the Príncipe street, which transports it to a position nearer the viewer, and Pedro Gomes who has done mural drawings on several walls of the exhibition rooms.

We are aware that both the selection of artists and the catalogue will be useful in the early future, as an example of reference and evidence concerning Portuguese artists due to its diversity of purposes its generational coincidence.

TEXT BY THE CURATOR:

The intention behind the exhibition entitled "*Otras alternativas. Nuevas experiencias visuales en Portugal*" (Other alternatives. New visual experiences in Portugal) is, to a certain extent, to act as a gage of a situation which is gradually becoming more apparent in the Portuguese art scene of the turn of the 21st century: the presence of a group of artists showing a subtle change of attitude with respect to the strategies used by their predecessors, who were more concerned with sociopolitical issues.

We do not intend to suggest that there was a break with the nineties, or to speak about a group or current; about a new generation, at the most; a disperse and scattered one, though, or better "a generation without generation" as is suggested by João Fernandes in the pages of the catalogue. Aware of the sin inherent to this selection and historicist vision, it is convenient to clarify that we are not talking in any way of a "before" and an "after", nor of a compact unit which verifies the "tradition of breaking with the past" defined by Octavio Paz, but of a series of advancements –not necessarily linear- made by a variety of artists who are gradually becoming better known.

The artists selected here feel restricted by their country's borders and have therefore attempted to broaden their horizons and to work in different distant locations which they, nevertheless, perceive as close to them as regards situations and pursuits. Very often, this keenness to undertake their creative work in places where it must stand its own ground has made them, paradoxically, much more "visible" than many other of their Portuguese predecessors, who focused more on consolidating their position in a precarious context such as that of Portugal and who lacked the facilities now enjoyed by the new emerging artists.

In this respect, this sort of "Diaspora" rescues attitudes which approach every-day reality from a fragmentary variety of different positions away from forced aesthetic coincidences. Owing to everything said above, we are talking of private universes, of up-dated discourses distant from past discussions and debates. Many of the selected artists live between two countries: a foreign one and Portugal. That is why we want to emphasise the fact that, even though this does not imply the loss of a common identity, it spreads and disseminates it, thus definitely enriching and complementing their creations.

As far as the title chosen is concerned –*Otras alternativas. Nuevas experiencias visuales en Portugal*- it responds to the necessary recognition of the appropriateness of an exhibition such as *Alternativa Zero* (zero alternative), a true turning point which was able to redefine Portugal's artistic situation. This exhibition, held in 1977 in the now disappeared "Galería Nacional de Belém", was promoted by the multitalented Ernesto de Sousa (1921-88) who, aware of Portugal's backwardness as regards the artistic debates which were being held in the international context -such as the end of avantgardes, the dematerialization of art, the demolition of walls between art genres and the use of new media- gathered together nearly fifty artists who took a conceptualist stance which augured a new reality.

Ernesto de Sousa defended a concept of open work where the spectator played an active role; also a redefinition of the artist's status. In order to celebrate art, one had to start from scratch. If zero was the starting point, the alternative, it was necessary to leave for somewhere else: liberation. Although at this time there was some evidence of the growing intention of creating contemporary art museums, they still had to wait for long. Nevertheless, the teaching system was strengthened and the conditions of professionals, both artists and theoreticians. It is within this context that *Alternativa Zero* arose, which was to become the most important and better remembered exhibitions among the ones held at that time, a manifesto-exhibition which intended to redefine the situation in Portugal and act as an appraisal of the advances made from the early sixties. That is why many pieces had already been exhibited, as is the case with some of the ones selected for this other revision, these *other alternatives*.

With the coming of the eighties, no other new tendencies emerge, or currents specific of that decade, but a set of artists with a strong individual personality who, together with new gallery owners and critics, managed to have a firm, dynamic presence in the culture of the time. Some like Julião Sarmento or Albuquerque Mendes, who had already emerged during the previous decade, and other like Pedro Calapez, Pedro Cabrita Reis, Rui Sánchez, José Pedro Croft, Jorge Molder, Gerardo Burmester, Manuel Rosa, Pedro Proença or Rui Chafes, who, although some of them had already had their work exhibited during the previous decade, only became well known in the eighties.

During the nineties, it all seems that it was the exhibition *Imagens para os anos 90* (images for the 90's), shown at the Serralves Foundation in 1993, that facilitated the emergence of a new paradigm which had already shown signs of its imminent appearance. Carlos Vidal, Paulo Mendes, João Louro, Fernando Brito, João Tabarra, Miguel Palma, Daniel Blaufuks, Manuel Valente Alves, Rui Serra, Baltazar Torres, António Olaio, Fernando José Pereira and Luis Palma are among the artists who participated in that exhibition. Their works gradually became more visible to the whole country during an artistic decade which was split in two halves: the first one with a more sociopolitical approach, and a second one which was more concerned with the exploration of new technologies -the one we are dealing with now. The first ones undertook the task of giving a profound answer to the artistic developments consolidated since the 80's. They still had to face up to backwardness, as compared to international art, and conceptual limitation, with the exception of certain artists with individual values resulting from the little extra information they could get. This group of artists, who became better known during the nineties, were more rebellious and ended up by confronting Portuguese critics. They did this overtly, as when they published the polemic and aggressive text entitled *Oito Novos Fora* (eight new ones outside) where they raised their voices against an establishment they considered narrow-minded. This showed a kind of generational complicity that was regarded by many as indicative of their being a group, although this interpretation is denied by those involved. At present, their attitude keeps being one of critical dissatisfaction, although their maturity has resulted in a more cynic, less obvious strategy.

Perhaps, the early consolidation of most of the protagonists of *OTRAS ALTERNATIVAS, Nuevas experiencias visuales en Portugal*, may be due to the fact that the aesthetic break with the early-eighties' generation is not such a sudden occurrence, but a gradual progression, never a drastic one. Among the combative artists emerging in the nineties –i.e. João Tabarra, João Louro, Carlos Vidal or Paulo Mendes- that briskness (a product of a radical change) is apparent and, perhaps, in the long run, the tension resulting from it took its toll, as they are still not held in high esteem by the prevailing artistic establishment, although they have managed to carve themselves a place thanks to the rigour and coherence of their work. The formal dryness and direct aggressive nature of their work contrast with the greater spontaneity and freshness of the artists dealt with here. This could be the cause of their good relationship with the critics and their fast and massive presence in foundations and museums, in contrast with the self-management of exhibitions that still today characterises some of the earlier artists and which is the case of some of the artists participating in this exhibition, such as Rui Toscano or Alexandre Estrela, also somewhat dissatisfied with the Portuguese medium. The fact that Rui Toscano, Alexandre Estrela, Noé Sendas or Miguel Soares have been selected may seem strange –never gratuitous- if we consider their involvement with the so-called 90's generation in many exhibitions. Nevertheless, they were selected due to their being neglected at an earlier stage, which means that they did not enjoy recognition until much later, and mostly because they handle image in a way that anticipates a new way of creating and integrating within a context.

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REQUEST FOR GRAPHIC MATERIAL

GRAPHIC MATERIAL AVAILABLE TO THE PRESS:

CD including texts and photographs of the exhibition in different formats.

IF YOU WISH TO RECEIVE DOCUMENTATION, PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND SEND IT BY E-MAIL, FAX OR MAIL POST TO:

MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo

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