

meu
amigo

my
friend

OBRAS E DOCUMENTOS
DA COLEÇÃO

WORKS AND
DOCUMENTS FROM

Ernesto de Sousa

(1921 — 1988)

COLLECTION

ORGANIZAÇÃO ORGANIZED BY ISABEL ALVES

MNAC

ABERTURA OPENING

18.05

15h — 18h

19.05. — 26.09.2021

PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION

My Friend — Works and Documents from Ernesto de Sousa (1921–1988) Collection

From may 18 to september 26 of 2021 at Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea.

About 124 works of 62 artists: painting, drawing, engraving, sculpture, photography, objects and various documents.

PRESENTATION

This exhibition is part of a series of events to mark the 100-year anniversary of Ernesto de Sousa's birth, in which the Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea seeks to pay tribute to one of the most important figures of contemporary Portuguese art and creation, whose influence continues to be felt to this day.

Organised by Isabel Alves, who has dedicated herself to the preservation and dissemination of the artist's legacy, the exhibition places documentation (correspondence, publications, projects) alongside artworks given to Ernesto de Sousa from the 1940s to the 1980s by some of the most important national and international contemporary artists.

This dialogue between documentation and artwork provides a multifaceted and heterogeneous itinerary of his aesthetic career and affinities, reaffirming the collaborative nature that always guided his activities as an "aesthetic operator". From post-war neorealism to the 1980s, from Almada Negreiros to Wolf Vostell, from cinema to mixed media works, from popular art to the exhibition Alternativa Zero; these are just a few examples of the vast network of artistic intervention, collaboration and reinvention of art and life that always motivated him. Ernesto de Sousa also played a crucial role in the promotion of Portuguese art and artists abroad and in disseminating the latest developments of the international artistic panorama within Portugal.

The aesthetic, artistic and historical range and reach of his work continues to be active and topical, inspiring new generations from various backgrounds and reaffirming the innovative and contemporary nature of his legacy.

Emília Tavares [CURATOR AT MNAC]

EXHIBITION ORGANIZED IN 7 CORES

My Friend

The 1970s — Art and Revolution

Neorealism — an Aesthetic of Opposition

Almada, a name of War

Fluxus and the Internacional Avant-garde — Bringing Art and Life Together

Catalog of Alternativa Zero, 1977

The 1980s and 90s — Being Modern in Portugal

MY FRIEND

This first section of the exhibition offers a potential synthesis of the various artistic periods and aesthetic currents that played a crucial role throughout Ernesto de Sousa's life.

Helena Almeida's work *Meu Amigo* (My Friend, which also gives the title to the exhibition) symbolises the sense of sharing and artistic companionship that was a feature of Ernesto de Sousa's entire life.

Over his career, de Sousa's aesthetic, historical and critical activities extended from post-war neorealism to the most revolutionary neo-avant-gardes of the 1960s and 1970s, including the dawn of post-modernism, magisterial studies on popular sculpture, and a continuous drive for renewal and internationalisation.

His artistic actions and projects were marked by multiple creative relationships of collaboration, a quality that is evident in the multiplicity and representativeness of the works of his collection exhibited here.

These artists and works embody an emotional and aesthetic resonance with Ernesto de Sousa's unique career and provide a retrospective view of contemporary Portuguese art and its international context. [E.T.]

"I dedicate the text the cold the sun to my old and new friends. Some old friends are very new. Friends, we may have different opinions, but none of that has anything to do with friendship. To my new friends, I only know that I am against the inquisition. If you say you are friends, then act on it; love and friendship are a continuous practice."

Ernesto de Sousa. "O seu a seu tempo – amigos e inimigos" In *Opção*, no. 110, 1 June 1978.

THE 1970S — ART AND REVOLUTION

The Carnation Revolution foreshadowed a decisive break with the state-approved art and aesthetics imposed by the dictatorial regime over four decades.

Ernesto de Sousa artistic, curatorial, critical and pedagogical activities placed him at the forefront of this new period of creative freedom.

His contribution to a wider understanding of the new artistic languages emerging from a revolutionary aesthetic rupture with earlier forms of modernism was decisive for the development of Portuguese Contemporary Art.

His activity as an art critic and curator was fundamental in the understanding and promotion of some of the most important artists to emerge in this period, both at home and abroad.

Visual poetry, mixed media, happenings, performance, objectuality, installations; a multitude of proposals that blazed a new trail in Portuguese art and gave it a place in the international artistic milieu. [E.T.]

"The true avant-garde is an original and necessary discovery about the present — a discovery based on a culture and an understanding of the world that it is necessary to know and study. Here and now."

Ernesto de Sousa, "Da Vanguarda como Necessidade" In *Vida Mundial*, no. 1834, 7 November 1974.

NEOREALISM — AN AESTHETIC OF OPPOSITION

Ernesto de Sousa's interest in and connection to the Portuguese neorealist movement was part of a broader political commitment. A member of the MUDJuvenil (Youth Democratic Unity Movement) from 1946, his friendships with Júlio Pomar, Lima de Freitas and Manuel Ribeiro de Pavia were key to his aesthetic and political engagement.

In the post-war period, the Neorealist movement would become closely associated with the main forces of political opposition to the Estado Novo regime, and it was in this context that Ernesto de Sousa developed his activity as a critic and art historian, notably with his participation in *Seara Nova* magazine, where he published dozens of articles and studies about the works of the most notable neorealist artists. This period also marked the beginning of de Sousa's innovative relational studies on artistic and popular Portuguese sculpture, with his documentation in both photography and film, subsequently compiled in the publication *Para o Estudo da Escultura Portuguesa* (For the Study of Portuguese Sculpture, 1965), taking on a phenomenological dimension.

In 1962, he directed the film *Dom Roberto* (1962), based on the homonymous novel by Leão Penedo but featuring de Sousa's own dialogue, a milestone in new Portuguese film awarded at the Cannes Film Festival in 1963. [E.τ.]

“We understand that a work of art is a reflection of the needs and struggles of men, but we sometimes forget that, as a work of thought, it also intervenes and in a certain sense modifies those same needs and struggles.”
Ernesto de Sousa. “Três pintores do nosso tempo” In *Mundo Literário*, no. 12, 27 July 1946.

ALMADA, A NAME OF WAR

In 1969, Ernesto de Sousa began a series of works based around one of the most representative artists of the Portuguese modernist avant-garde, Almada Negreiros (1893-1970). These resulted in what de Sousa himself described as an anti-film, *Almada, um Nome de Guerra* [Almada, a Name of War], and the mixed media project *Nós Não Estamos Algures* [We Are Not Somewhere], based on Negreiros' poem *A Invenção do Dia Claro* [The Invention of the Clear Day]. Presented in 1969 at the Primeiro Acto club in Algés, the works featured music by Jorge Peixinho and the participation of various artists, including Carlos Gentil-Homem, António Borga, Fernando Calhau, Peter Rubin and Marilyn Reynolds.

De Sousa closely studied and inventoried the work of Almada Negreiros in this period and the modernist's body of work had a decisive influence on de Sousa's understanding of the history and future of art and on his concepts of the “open work” and the “aesthetic operator”.

De Sousa found in Negreiros the ideal interlocutor and artist with whom to discuss aesthetic modernity in Portugal, and Negreiros' eclectic and avant-garde work became central to his research and artistic practice.

As a result of these studies and actions, the decorative panels by Almada Negreiros in the hall of the Cine Teatro San Carlos in Madrid, previously thought to have been lost, were recovered and brought to Portugal. [E.τ.]

“Almada Negreiros was necessary to me; he is necessary to all of us. I'm not so concerned with the labels of avant-garde and modernity, but I do think the only way to go is to be ‘absolutely modern’. In the here and now, original and originally. That is what *Começar* (Begin) was.”

Ernesto de Sousa. “Chegar depois de todos com Almada Negreiros” In *Colóquio – Revista de Artes e Letras*, no. 60, October 1970.

FLUXUS AND THE INTERNACIONAL AVANT-GARDE — BRINGING ART AND LIFE TOGETHER

The Fluxus movement and its neo-dada aesthetic and ethic of experimentation brought together artistic languages from the visual and performing arts, questioning the entire elitist and contemplative concept of the artwork and arguing for the collaborative construction of the artistic object and for an artistic condition that merges life and art.

This movement underpinned all de Sousa's activity in this period, in which he established contacts with some of the movement's main protagonists such as George Brecht, Ben Vautier, Emmett Williams, and friendships with Robert Filliou and Wolf Vostell. De Sousa was a regular participant in artistic meetings organised by Vostell in his museum in

Malpartida de Cáceres, such as *Voæx* in 1976 and *SACOM* in 1978–80. De Sousa was the curator of the Portuguese representations to *SACOM* and organised a retrospective exhibition of Vostell's work in Portugal in 1979.

“Let us say from the outset that Fluxus (...) is a movement that is historically very precise and whose general outlook leaves no room for doubt: to bring art and life closer together: aesthetic activity and the other conscious or unconscious actions of man. To aestheticise everyday life and make the performing arts the basis of all training and learning”.

Ernesto de Sousa. “Fluxus”. In *Opção*, 16 August 1978.

CATALOG OF ALTERNATIVA ZERO, 1977

With a considerable curatorial and critical career behind him, and in the effervescent cultural context of the post Carnation Revolution period, Ernesto de Sousa organised one of the most important artistic events of the decade: *Alternativa Zero: Tendências Polémicas na Arte Portuguesa Contemporânea* [Alternative Zero — Polemic Tendencies in Contemporary Portuguese Art].

In addition to the exhibition at the then Galeria Nacional de Arte Moderna in Belém that brought together some of the most important Portuguese artists of the time, a vast parallel programme was developed which included music, theatre, happenings and the presence of The Living Theatre.

His visit to the important *Documenta 5* in Kassel in 1972 and the ideas he encountered there provided a valuable conduit between Portuguese contemporary art and the international art panorama.

Without a doubt, *Alternativa Zero* was an aesthetic-political turning point between the heritage of the dictatorship and a new democratic era, a meeting place for the most important aesthetic currents in the Portuguese neo-avant-garde which had been emerging since the 1960s as a new generation of artists was consecrated. [E.T.]

“*Alternativa Zero* was a response to a profound need to end that double isolation (exiles abroad and exiles-in-their-own-country), fighting against the formula of the salon (and its false democratic appearances) and championing a critical perspective and a full sense of commitment.”

Ernesto de Sousa. *Catálogo da exposição Alternativa Zero* (exhibition catalogue), Lisbon 1977.

THE 1980S AND 90S — BEING MODERN IN PORTUGAL

In the 1980s, Ernesto de Sousa's artistic and curatorial activity became more international, though he continued to be a driving force in the development of the national art scene. His projects continued his practice of permanent collaboration and artistic reinvention, bringing together both his generation of artists and the emerging generation of the 1980s.

This was the case of the *pipxou* art box project, with a print run of 100 copies and organised by Maria Estela Guedes and Fernando Camecelha, in which Helena Almeida, Pedro Calapez, Pedro Proença, Rui Castelo Lopes, Xana, José Barrias, Alberto Picco, Carlos Nogueira and many other artists participated.

As always, his projects of this decade looked to the future, as was the case of his *Aldeia Global* [Global Village] project, which aimed to create a network of computers as a platform for communication and the exchange of ideas. [E.T.]

“Accept the fact that you were wrong, recognize your own ignorance. Once more on a knife's edge with eyes closed, determinedly in search of another breach in the wall. It is not easy... But to invent the future there is no other way: the future can only be *performed*.”

Ernesto de Sousa. “Action-arts or Performances (Performing Arts)”, Dialogue on Contemporary Art (Performing Arts), Lisbon, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation/Acarte, 1985.

PRESENTED ARTISTS

Alberto Carneiro	Irene Buarque	Lima de Freitas
Albuquerque Mendes	Isaia Mabellini (Sarenco)	Manuel Ribeiro de Pavia
Amélia Toledo	Joana Rosa	Marilyn Reynolds
Ana Hatherly	João de Melo	Marina Abramovic
Ana Vieira	João Moniz Pereira	Miranda Justo
Ângelo de Sousa	João Vieira	Noémia Delgado
António Sena	João Vieira	Noronha da Costa
Artur Varela	Jorge de Oliveira	Pedro Cabrita Reis
Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos	Jorge Molder	Pedro Calapez
Carlos Gentil Homem	Jorge Peixinho	Pedro Proença
Clara Menéres	José Barrias	René Bertholo
Costa Pinheiro	José Carvalho	Rober Filliou
E.M. de Melo e Castro	José Conduto	Rosa Ramalho
Ernesto de Sousa	José Luís Da Rocha	Salette Tavares
Estela Guedes	José M. Rodrigues	Seth Rubin
Fernando Azevedo	José Rodrigues	Teresa Tyszkiewicz
Fernando Calhau	Joseph Beuys	Triplov
Franklin Vilas Boas Neto	Julião Sarmiento	Túlia Saldanha
Graça Pereira Coutinho	Júlio Pomar	Wof Vostell
Hansi Stael (von Holstein)	Leonel Moura	Zdzislaw Sosnowski
Helena Almeida	Lieve de Pelsmacker	

ERNESTO DE SOUSA (LISBON, 1921–1988)

He studied Science and devoted himself since a very young age, to the study of art and photography. Open-minded, controversial, pioneer in many of the subjects that he approached, he exercised a vast action in the artistic field: visual arts, film-clubs, film, theater, outsider art, radio theatre, mixed-media art and experimental video.

He was a professor, curator, a prolific multidisciplinary artist and an avid promoter of synergies between generations of artists from the first and second half of the 20th century.

During the 1960s he got in touch with the Fluxus movement and with the European neo-avant-garde, becoming friends with Robert Filliou and Wolf Vostell. This contact was significant to his recast of art as an experimental and participatory “open work”. During this decade and up until the 1980s, he organized courses, conferences and exhibitions on experimental film, video art, performance and happening, while promoting connections between the international neo-avant-garde and the Portuguese context.

Ernesto de Sousa anticipated the Carnation Revolution (April 25th, 1974) and countered Portugal’s peripheral position in Europe when he proposed to celebrate Robert Filliou’s Anniversary of Art (Círculo de Artes Plásticas de Coimbra, 1974). The exhibition *Alternativa Zero* (Galeria Nacional de Arte Moderna, Lisbon, 1977) synthesized his project of creating a Portuguese avant-garde in aesthetic and ideologic dialogue with its international counterparts.

He published extensively in magazines and newspapers since the 1940s, and his critique was instrumental in encouraging experimental artistic practices in Portugal.

His strong involvement in the film society movement, which he founded in Portugal, was a major contribution towards the outbreak of the “New Cinema” announced by his only feature film, *Dom Roberto* (1962), awarded twice at the Cannes Festival in 1963. It’s also important to note his studies on Portuguese folk art and its theorization in the context of contemporary art as well as his rereading of the work of the “voluntarily ingenuous” artist Almada Negreiros, whose work anticipated the ideas De Sousa defended.

He was the Portuguese commissioner for the Venice Biennale in 1980, 1982 and 1984.

From 1992 to 2013, the *Ernesto de Sousa Fellowship* supported 20 young artists in the making of intermedia projects during an internship at the Experimental Intermedia Foundation in New York.

EXHIBITION CREDITS

ORGANIZATION

Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea

DIRECTOR

Emília Ferreira

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION

Isabel Alves

PRODUCTION

Emília Tavares

Sofia Nunes

TEXTS

Emília Tavares

DOCUMENTATION

Sofia Nunes

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Francisca José

TYPEFACE «SECRETARIADO»

Pedro Proença

EXHIBITION INSTALLATION COORDINATOR

Emília Tavares

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE

Angelina Pessoa, Sofia Khan

MEDIA

António Chaparreiro

EDUCATION

Hilda Frias

CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION

Alexandra Encarnação (ADF/DGPC)

Helena Nunes

TRANSPORT AND INSTALLATION

Setup

EXHIBITION INSTALLATION SUPPORT

António Rasteiro (Coordenação/Coordination)

Alberto Gomes, Diogo Branco, Luís Sousa, Maria Cecília Correia

PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINT

Fine Print

TRANSLATIONS

Kennistranslations

SINALETICS

VPrint

INSURANCE

Lusitânia

RECEPTION AND SURVEILLANCE

Alberto Gomes, Ana Cláudia Serra, Ana Maria Marques, Diogo Branco, Fátima Madureira, Irene Marques, João Carneiro, Liliana Guedes, Luís Sousa, Maria Cecília Correia, Maria João Pedro, Nuno Neves, Ramiro, Rita Eusébio, Susana Gonçalves, Vítor Pereira.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

António Pedro Mendes, Fátima Lopes, Francisca Sousa, Frederico Mendes, Gillian Sneed, José M. Rodrigues, José Manuel Costa Alves, Miguel Mesquita Guimarães, Ricardo Valentim, Rita Lougares.

MNAC

MUSEUARTECONTEMPORANEA.PT

RUA CAPELO, 13. 1200-444 LISBON TUESDAY TILL SUNDAY 10AM – 6PM [MONDAYS CLOSED]