

ATELIER-MUSEU JÚLIO POMAR

# JÚLIO POMAR

# REVOLUTIONS 1960-1975

Exhibition  
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Curators  
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The 1960s and 70s marked a period of profound transformation in the painting of Júlio Pomar (Lisbon, 1926-2018). The changes during this time were so radical that the artist's canvases and research could, at times, be considered the work of several different authors.

This exhibition offers an opportunity to evaluate these continuous changes in Pomar's work and explore the environments, context, and outcomes of his successive styles, series, and phases. The dates 1960-1975 do not establish definitive boundaries but rather highlight a period of significant evolution, with many works on display not seen publicly for many years.

Based in Paris since 1963, Júlio Pomar lived and witnessed political revolutions that had broad cultural impacts, marked innovations in the visual arts, and changed lives. Notably, the violent social uprising of May 1968, initiated by French students, which immediately became a theme in his work. During this time, painting as an artform was seemingly rejected, while attitudes, environments, and objects gained ground as anti-bourgeois protests ensued. In the year prior, Pomar had started making assemblages of found objects, works that remained out of sight for a decade, and are now displayed here. His May 68 paintings, like those of Rugby, were not exhibited at the time as they were all acquired by his friend and art collector, Jorge de Brito, from Lisbon. Following the French period of 1968 another political milestone in the artist's life were the years of 1974-75 in Portugal, which opened all borders and brought new practices and images. During this period, political changes were accompanied by rapid ideological shifts in society, such as anti-psychiatry and the sexual revolution.

Pomar left the Neorealism movement around 1955, with some larger works preceding the turn of the decade, such as *Maria da Fonte* or *Lota* from his "black" and Iberian period, which sought to blend Goya with the early Columbano<sup>1</sup>, of which the painting *The Blind of Madrid* is a good example. The first paintings, engravings, and drawings from the 60s on displayed here showcase a vibrant gesture that explores the abstraction of forms while retaining figurative references. These are paintings of witnessed events, such as *Beach Scene* and *Mule drawn carriage*, where figures at work are present, like in *Sargassum*, *Grape stomping I*, or in the collection of nets. These scenes, now living spectacles on the threshold of recognition, have moved away from previous militant content but still focus on people. Alongside are rare views of landscapes such as *Boats Albufeira II*, the Porto bridge, and a panorama of Lisbon from 1961-62, as well as "wise animals", including *Owl*, *Bull*, and *Chimpanzees, plus a Vulture* (all recurrent themes throughout his career) – pieces of humor and observation, like his sketchbooks from his arrival in Paris in 1963.

This period also saw the creation of the Tauromaquias (Bullfighting) series, which was popular (the *Fiesta*) and then his most famous, until Pomar became interested in horse races at Parisian hippodromes, with their variants, the gallop, the jump, the trot, the sulky races, as happened with the various bull programs, here we can see *Picador II* and *Bull running* (there were face catches and others...). While these series have descriptive

elements, Pomar focused primarily on formal aspects: the clash of opposing forces, impact explosions, scene dynamism, race speed, and continuous movement, the appearance of the escaping image. Similarly, a small series on Subways and studies after a battle painting by Uccello reflect Pomar's pursuit of "dynamic figuration", through "a renewed perspective, resulting from a revolution in visual habits" (1966, Grant Report).

During this time, Pomar approached abstraction, experimenting with representing Catch, French wrestling seen in the Salle Wagram near his home. Many studies and lithographs remain, but most paintings were destroyed around 1966/67, including other themes like Beatles, Battles, and parades, documented in grant reports to the Gulbenkian Foundation (1964-66) and in the *Void III* catalogue, published by the Atelier-Museu Júlio Pomar. «In the 60s the form began to break down and, little by little, the figuration dissolved» (Pomar 1982). «I felt the painting as if it were disappearing, I felt like I was losing myself in the void» (2002). From this period the exceptional and very abstract *View of Lisbon*, from 1966, now from Ilídio Pinho's Collection, has survived.

The international years were marked, mainly, by abstraction (expressionist, lyrical, informal, etc.), which some critics considered inescapable, and by the search for new possibilities of figuration – "other figuration", seeking syntheses with Abstractionism, after CoBrA artists and Dubuffet, narrative figuration, proto-pop, and in many cases, more personal, post-apocalyptic; during the Cold War, phantasmal... Throughout the 1960s, New Figuration and Pop Art prevailed. From Paris, with its groups and collectives, Pomar closely followed the confrontation of these movements. He was particularly interested in Anglo-Saxon artists, notably Rauschenberg, and, mentioned in letters from 1965, Allen Jones, Kitaj, Peter Philips, and Oldenburg. This sparked a need to transform his work, leading him to empty his studio and experiment with assemblages. His personal revolution in painting is evident in the series dedicated to Rugby and May '68, where gestures are reduced to clear forms on plain coloured backgrounds, evolving from gesture to cut-out stain. This period marks an important transition, with the portraits of Manuel Vinhas and another unexpected view of Lisbon (*Missing Lisbon/Lisboa*) still holding a unique place, both commissioned by his attentive art collector friend.

Next come the variations on Ingres' *Turkish Bath*, with forms moving through the round shields of the police and the bodies of odalisques,

which recall those of Matisse and communicate with Wesselmann's *The Great American Nudes*. A large nucleus from 1968-72 is present in this exhibition, well represented by *Table of Games*, with six interchangeable parts, and *Odalisque with Slave II*, both transferred from the Jorge de Brito's Collection to the Gulbenkian Foundation, *Thetis* and *Turkish bath*, which was in the Louvre in 1971, among other appropriations by Ingres, and now belongs to the Manuel Brito's Collection. This approach to Pop Art, neither claimed nor recognized as such, developed independently of any formal school discipline (which Pop Art itself did not follow). This period simultaneously led to confrontations with other "classics" through reinterpretations of Van Eyck, Courbet, and later Gris. It also marked a long phase of intimate portraits lasting five years from 1970. These portraits featured figures from Portuguese culture (Almada, Vianna, Pessoa – a personal pantheon), as well as close friends, acquaintances, and lovers (including Manuela – *Orange Surface, Gray Nude –*, Graça, with whom the 25th of April was celebrated, and then Teresa, embodying a different serenity). Additionally, he produced self-portraits (*Self-portrait, two (or Three) oranges and a monkey hanging upside down*), characterized by flat colours and cut-out shapes, resembling posters, with recognizable faces, body emblems, gender signs, and coats of arms. In the same decade, he also created a parallel series of pencil-drawn portraits, beginning with the one of Portuguese poet Alberto Lacerda.

A new transformation followed, with collages of painted canvas cut with scissors, emphasizing the eroticism always present in Pomar's work: "Theatre of bodies" and "Space of Eros." This series was extending beyond the exhibition's timeframe.

<sup>1</sup> Portuguese painter Columbado Bordalo Pinheiro (Cacilhas, 1857 - Lisbon 1929)