

STRATEGIES OF BELONGING

A SOCIAL ART PRACTICE



**António Gorgel Pinto
Paula Reaes Pinto**

PINTOS UPCOMING PROJECT

SHIFTING GROUND
OUTRO CHÃO

RESIDENCY

**IOWA CERAMIC CENTER
AND GLASS STUDIO**

JULY 14 - 27, 2019

NEW BO INSTALLATION

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA USA

JULY 27, 2019

EXHIBITION

JANALYN HANSON WHITE GALLERY

MOUNT MERCY UNIVERSITY

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA USA

SEPTEMBER 2019

RESIDENCY

ÉVORA, PORTUGAL

SUMMER 2020

EXHIBITION

ÉVORA MUSEUM

FALL 2020



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TITLE

Strategies of Belonging
A Social Art Practice

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A SOCIAL ART PRACTICE

ANTÓNIO GORGEL PINTO

PAULA REAES PINTO

**CSPS HALL
CEDAR RAPIDS**

1103 THIRD ST SE
CEDAR RAPIDS,
IA USA 52401

**APRIL 4 - 28
2019**

**CLOSING RECEPTION
APRIL 25, 5 - 7PM**

**CURATOR'S LECTURE
JANE GILMOR
6 PM**

PREFACE

F. John Herbert

Executive Artistic Director
Legion Arts

Legion Arts moved into CSPS Hall in 1992, and ever since we've been pre-occupied with two primary themes: works of art that display originality and innovation, and artists who engage the community in a positive, if unconventional manner.

When the two come together, the results can be powerful, so when Jane Gilmor approached us about the upcoming residency of Paula Reaes Pinto and António Gorgel Pinto, we proposed a gallery exhibit that would not only introduce audiences to the team's previous work, but also explore the historical and conceptual underpinnings of socially engaged art. We are delighted to present the results of that conversation.

STRATEGIES OF BELONGING

Jane Gilmor

Exhibition Curator

Artist, Professor Emeritus
Mount Mercy University

August 2003. Windows down, 103° Fahrenheit, Fado music blasting. I'm driving across the Alentejo plain in my little rented Fiat. Past the Roma encampment, past the tourist mobile home court, past the Roman wall. I'm headed to Leões, an old pasta factory, now home to the University of Évora Art Department. On a Fulbright placement, I'd landed in Lisbon only 24 hours earlier, but soon I'd be traveling daily from my convent room, built on the ruins of a Renaissance farm, to the campus where I would teach and partake in discussions on contemporary art, feminism, and the notion of collaborative art practices designed to give voice to the cultural outsider. Nights I'd be spending with Paula, Antonio, and Teresa, in the little Windmill restaurant on the edge of town, talking until closing time.

As what have been called "artist-citizens," Paula and Antonio work with disenfranchised Portuguese communities, both urban and rural, addressing issues like displacement, habitat disintegration and cultural deterioration. They subscribe to a notion of art that crosses diverse disciplines, as they push to create new models of community life, or ways of living, that support long-term, sustainable communities, worldviews, and

practices. Collectivity and collaboration are important features of their process. They believe that empathy, dialog and imagination – artistic strategies, essentially – can give voice to the outsider, connect people to each other, and support the socially significant values that underlie economic and cultural sustainability.

Now, fifteen years after we met, Paula Reaes Pinto and António Gorgel Pinto are bringing to Iowa their most recent project, *Shifting Ground – Outro Chão*, which will engage East African immigrants living in Cedar Rapids and in Évora, Portugal. In anticipation of their upcoming Iowa residency, Legion Arts is hosting this mid-career retrospective of the duo's innovative participatory practice.

Paula Pinto's early studio practice was rooted in the materiality of 60s and 70s earthworks and a minimal aesthetic. I vividly remember a component of Paula's beginning sculpture class, in which she assigned students to work with area artisans, tombstone carvers in one village, to a family who made tools for extracting cork in another. Students learned the materials and processes associated with that specific location, its people and its natural resources.

Simultaneously, Paula's own practice began to focus on labor and its connection to place. In 2001 she initiated a community-based action in the small salt-mining village of Castro Marim on the Atlantic coast. This pivotal work, *Salt Paths*, strove to uncover the vulnerabilities of labor in a globalized world, and to facilitate cross-generational learning and making. The artists

began with rigorous study and video documentation of the geophysical and socio-cultural nature of the site. They next initiated an ongoing dialog with people about their lives, eventually proposing several large collaborative outdoor salt sculptures referencing the community's past and present. The forms of these large outdoor sculptures were a response to the landscape, to long abandoned tidal mills, and to the work habits, memories, and stories of the salt farmers, craftsmen, and other workers. The final product brought the entire community together to both celebrate and plan for the future.

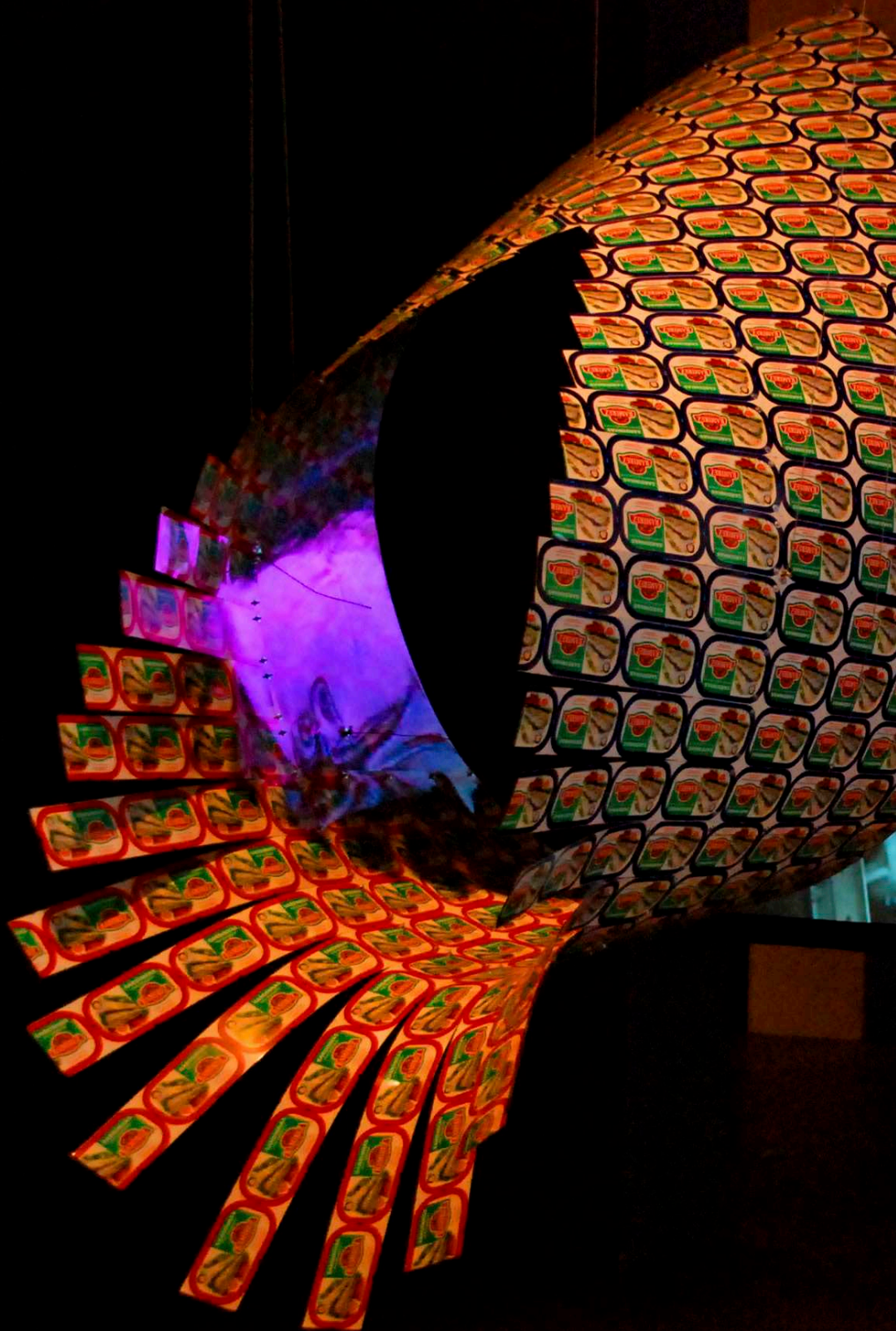
Given the social problems that occur in isolated immigrant neighborhoods, António's job teaching art in a barrio on the outskirts of Lisbon brought a new challenge. He and Paula set out to configure alternative approaches to teaching. The projects *Kowork*, *Net-skola*, and *Mais Sul* each extended their practice to disenfranchised urban neighborhoods, as they set out to increase the community's awareness of its own assets. In each of these yearlong projects, the participants determined their neighborhood needs and developed the skills necessary to implement solutions. In *Kowork*, for example, municipal wood benches made from repurposed shipping pallets were designed and built by the participants. The IKEA-like directions were then distributed to other neighborhoods and circulated online via a web link stamped on the back of the finished benches.

Other projects have included a study of the threatened sardine canning industry, *Ramifications*, and a collaborative-design project

in Azuruja, a rural cork-producing village, *Are We Human?*. In Cecela Velha, they orchestrated an unfolding group narrative about the multiple realities, burdens and beauties of an ordinary day's work for a fishing community in southern Portugal.

As the Pintos demonstrate in their work, art can serve as agency for collective memory and imagination. Through dialog-based, cooperative, and socially engaged projects, they give a voice to disenfranchised communities, while encouraging practical change. Their process is, as critic Nato Thompson (2015) might say, "... a mess worth making".

Thompson, Nato. *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Melville House, 2015.





RAMIFICATION

2008

Sculpture, video with sound

António Gorgel Pinto

Paula Reaes Pinto

Ramification is a work about the sardine industry in Portugal, and, in particular, about the Ramirez canning factory, the oldest producer and exporter of preserved foods in Portugal and Europe (est. 1853). The film traces the processes involved in taking a sardine from the sea through the factory. The video, which was initially presented side by side with a sculpture constructed of the printed tin used to create sardine cans, also looks at the social, economic, environmental, political, and cultural effects of the sardine industry on Portugal, and at the forces at work today to undermine this long-standing element of Portuguese life.

CREATIVITY, COLLABORATION AND CITIZENSHIP

António Gorgel Pinto

Transmedia artist,
Educator, Researcher

“Thus did Epimetheus, who, not being very wise, forgot that he had distributed among the brute animals all the qualities which he had to give - and when he came to man, who was still unprovided for, he was terribly perplexed. Now while he was in this perplexity, Prometheus came to inspect the distribution, and he found that the other animals were suitably furnished, but that man alone was naked and shoeless, and had neither bed nor arms of defense.” (Plato 380 B.C.E)

In Plato’s Protagoras, after the gods used earth and fire to model the set of Animalia’s beings, Prometheus and Epimetheus then organized abilities and attributed them to these new living beings. According to the myth, Epimetheus tried to distinguish all irrational animals by giving them unique characteristics, forgetting to designate the qualities of the human being, who remained without any protective physical advantages. To ensure the survival of the human being, Prometheus then granted him fire and the artistic wisdom of Hephaestus and Athena. In this way, through creativity and technical innovation, the human being constructs a means for his survival. Later on, given the difficulty of living among wild animals, cities were created and citizenship was developed through respect and justice, which Zeus ordered Hermes to distribute among humans to prevent them from destroying one another (Plato 380 B.C.E).

The myth of Prometheus reveals a fundamental relationship between human beings and what they create.

Throughout the millennia humans have created a succession of diverse apparatus and techniques to help them survive. Vengeon (2009) states that there is no separation between the human being and his creations because the transformations generated by these creations reveal his way of thinking. In this sense everything that is created reveals the human nature, no matter the area of knowledge. This created world reveals the form of human thinking and guides action, but it is the process of social interaction among thinking people that develops meaning.

Strategies of Belonging gathers selections from the work of our socially engaged, participatory and transdisciplinary art practice working with vulnerable urban and rural communities in Portugal. At the center of our practice are aesthetic and civic questions that become a way of developing citizenship and the socio-cultural sustainability of specific at-risk populations. Our community art practice has its roots in artistic knowledge while also participating in society's public life by offering possible solutions to social problems.

To achieve this we've developed a methodology where creative educational and dialog-based activities are generated within and in collaboration with each community we work with. This approach is informed not just by artistic and technical knowledge, but also by multiple other forms of know-how (social, cultural, anthropological). The community participants are the main reason for this kind of art practice, so their input in the development of each project is

primary. The point is to improve their sociocultural situation. We begin with our eclectic methods as artists, but the project develops primarily through their contributions and participation. Their involvement in this creative, social action then projects an image of them as citizens of value in society. Their own sense of self worth is enhanced based on their ability to make creative socio-cultural contributions. This synergy is repeated when an audience encounters the artwork – when someone sees a uniquely designed new bench in Barrio Cova da Moura and sits on it.

Strategies of Belonging is not about artworks centered on one artist's creations but rather about socially engaged works of plural dimensions that extend and combine several disciplines (art, design, sociology, anthropology, computer technology) in order to give a voice to a devalued neighborhood. The artists, the participants and their community, as well as the audiences who encounter each project, are part of the same tissue through which this social art action exists and has impact.

Plato, 380 B.C.E. Protagoras. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. [WWW Document], URL <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/protogoras.html> (accessed 19.01.26)

Vengeon, F., 2009. Defesa de uma Antropologia Filosófica da Máquina. Remate de Males 29 n.1, 103–108.

LOOKING AND LISTENING

Paula Reaes Pinto

Transmedia artist,
Professor, University of Évora
Researcher

Strategies of Belonging brings together a group of art actions marked by a practice of social involvement with rural Portuguese villages and Lisbon's barrio neighborhoods. The common denominator among these populations is the devalued nature of the work they do and the discrimination they endure as a result. In the rural locations like Castro Marim and Cacela Velha, work is related to the land and natural resources, whereas in the urban settings those who are employed work in the service industry. In both situations people must work more than one job to remain above the poverty line.

All of the communities represented in this exhibit also live on the periphery both geographically, in relation to the large urban centers, and in terms of the societal exclusion they experience. Globalization values societies according to their economic and political power, producing dominant and dominated countries. By accentuating the difference between them, the structure of minority communities is weakened or destroyed when, in fact, it could be reassessed sustainably using an alternate global perspective, one of balance and respect for difference. In turn, this approach could stimulate a proactive dynamic among diverse groups.

To challenge the stigma of an under valued life and job, our interaction strategy centers on the concept of culture. The early etymological meaning of the word "culture" comes from the Latin term "colere", which means the act of planting and developing agricultural activities, transforming the soil so that it becomes productive. Later the Latin words "cultura/

culturae” came to mean an action of care, or to cultivate, or cultivating mind and knowledge. More recently the term became associated with artistic and/or technical developments that result from this cultivated. We use the term in its several forms but are primarily interested in culture as an action of care, an action of sharing knowledge and developing cultural activities – of transforming a place through the voices of its residents.

Our approach to interaction and collaboration with each community is empathetic and oriented by an aesthetic paradigm of listening and discussion that seeks to circumvent formal power structures. The relational character of our meetings is evidenced in our recordings of participant life stories. The stories and unique culture of those living in a specific place reveal a varied and rich existence. In the Cacela Velha project, for example, we try to understand each other through non-hierarchical knowledge that values the sharing of the each collaborator’s experiences. Documenting these stories focuses on a community’s social diversity and anchors the project in lived experiences rather than in abstract structures.

Our initial conversation-based interactions also help us gain the confidence of those involved. In rural settings like the salt village of Castro Marim, we visited work sites, observing and talking with workers about their jobs. In urban contexts, we sometimes met in participants’ homes, talking with them about their past and what they most need and wish for. We also met in collective spaces, with multiple generations, where ideas

were developed through shared creative actions chosen by the participants. Through all of this, differences gradually fade and we are able to create a place of intimacy between the locals and the artists. This reciprocal learning situation creates a channel for engagement in the next stage of a project – the co-creation of symbolic and utilitarian objects.

The community-based artistic practices presented in *Strategies of Belonging* are interactions with the local people of a specific place in order to make visible their cultural values in relation to place, community and geographical context. Here culture not only includes heritage and the arts, but also social history, labor, and ethical values. Our projects give space to social development and transformation, while fostering mutual learning. Most importantly, however, we hope to give a voice to those who have none.

SALT PATHS

2003

Participatory art, sculpture,
video, photography

Paula Reaes Pinto

Castro Marim is a small fishing village in the Algarve region of southern Portugal where life revolves around traditional salt mining. Life there is inextricably linked to the land and the sea, but their way of living has become marginalized in the face of globalization.

We first got to know the site through multi-sensorial experience, direct observation, and a photo/video survey. This process revealed the ways in which human beings interact with the environment and stimulated our creative process for the remainder of the project.

Our next step was an ongoing dialog with the locals after which we proposed several large salt sculptures. The sculptural forms were a response to the landscape, memories of work habits and long abandoned tidal mills, as well as the stories from salt farmers, craftsmen, and nature reserve workers. In the final construction phase every generation got involved in creating two large platforms in the lagoon that held massive mounds of salt, and a large windmill form and salt wall both referencing nearby ruins.

We returned the next year to assist villagers in repairing the weathered salt mounds. This initiative gave visibility to those whose lives depend on their local natural resources. Their way of life is a form of knowledge the larger society can not afford to lose.





ARTISTIC INTERACTIONS WITH CACELA VELHA

2009

Participatory art, sculpture, video, audio,
stop motion animation, photography

Paula Reaes Pinto

Cacela Velha, Portugal is a small fishing village on the Ria Formosa in the Algarve region of southern Portugal. For generations Cacela Velha's economic and socio-cultural life has revolved around fishing, making artisanal fishing tools, and harvesting the catch.

After a detailed study and video documentation of the geophysical, biological and socio-cultural nature of the site, we spent time talking with fisherman, clam harvesters, and the village women who fabricate tools. Eventually we asked a diverse local group to participate in a workshop where each picked an important object from their life and shared stories related to it.

A final participatory event/exhibition included lightbox images with audio, projected video documentations, a video animation by the children, and two large sculptures created in collaboration with the villagers. One sculpture included cast metal fishing line sinkers floating in a large metal armature. Another stood in the river and used fishing net and a steel skeleton to reference fish containment. This final event brought the community and the artists together in mutual respect.





NETSKOLA

2013-2015

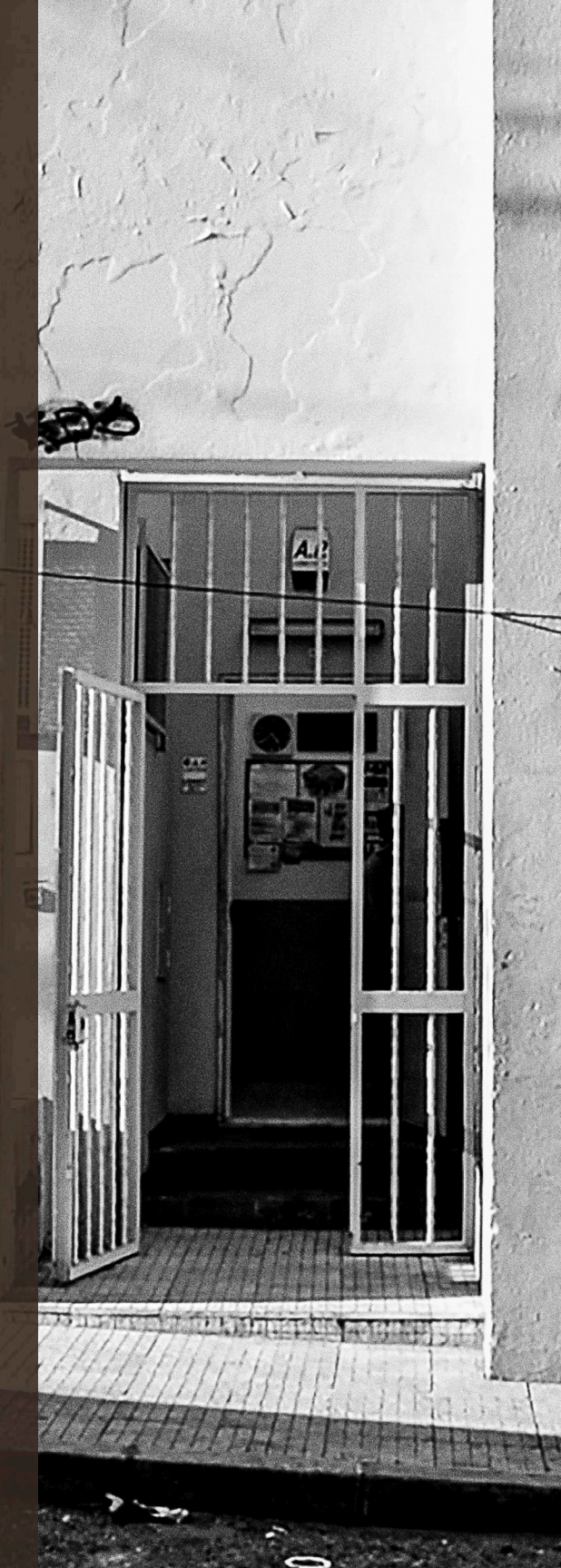
Participatory art, ICT and pinhole photo workshops, video with sound, video stills

António Gorgel Pinto in collaboration with neighborhood residents

Netskola was a project developed in a hidden, illegally constructed neighborhood in Amadora on the outskirts of Lisbon. Early on we collaborated with social psychologists and social workers in developing the project. This is an immigrant community from Cape Verde or other African Portuguese speaking countries. A primary goal was to explore local multiculturalism through a sharing of knowledge and preferences related to their African cultural heritages.

We first held small group workshops with seniors to develop computer literacy and Portuguese language skills. This allowed them to share life stories on a website for the project. With the youth we made pinhole cameras with which they documented their neighborhood. Later they learned to digitally and creatively manipulate their images. Computer skills training is important in allowing this at-risk group greater social inclusion.

Netskola gives us a closer look at what characterizes this and other immigrant neighborhoods, helping to deconstruct the usual stereotypes and stigmas assigned to them.





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KOWORK

2015-2017

Participatory art, codesign workshop,
urban furniture, communication design,
video with sound, video stills

António Gorgel Pinto in
collaboration with Delano
Rodrigues, Inês Veiga, Natália
Plentz and neighborhood residents

Kowork was a co-design initiative developed in the illegally constructed Cape Verdean neighborhood of Amadora, on the outskirts of Lisbon. A local association, Moinho da Juventude (Youth Mill), began the project as part of their long term commitment of preserving and promoting the culture of this community. Working with Youth Mill, the objective was to prepare young adults for jobs or for creating their own business initiatives.

Participants collaborated in the development of a project that resulted in a proposal and design for building much needed benches and trash containers from repurposed wood shipping pallets. The benches and trash containers placed in the main neighborhood square. With the aim of spreading the project, IKEA-like directions were created and published online and the web site stamped on every bench. Other neighborhoods have continued to design and build urban furniture as a result of this initiative.



MAKE AFRICA BE THE CENTER



+ **SUL**

2017-2018

Participatory art, codesign workshop, visual poetry, wood and linoleum block printing, sewing, video with sound, photography, video stills

António Gorgel Pinto in collaboration with Paula Reaes Pinto, the Aga Khan Foundation Portugal social technicians/advisers and neighborhood residents

+ *Sul* worked with residents of two government housing projects in Oeiras on the outskirts of Lisbon, Portugal. These neighborhoods have been disenfranchised by their minority immigrant status and the devaluation of their occupational skills. Beginning from the participants' unique labor activities, skills, and knowledge, we brainstormed ideas for communicating something unique about each of their heritages.

After energetic dialogs and much experimentation, we used hand cut linoleum blocks to print unique cultural expressions and symbols onto fabric which was then made into shoulder bags. Eight different African cultures were represented among the bags, which were displayed and sold in the community. The project gave the neighborhood an opportunity to show their talent, industriousness, and potential for contributing to the larger culture.

PRACTICES THAT BUILD THEMSELVES, BOTH ARTISTIC AND COMMUNAL

Hugo Cruz

Artistic Director, Cultural

Programmer, Researcher

Paula and António's body of work goes beyond what you see in this exhibition. Looking at these diverse and complex works requires us to dive into the dense layers that constitute us as humans and as collectives that organize toward a quest to be more. In this way, this text will always, and only, be a fragile, parcellar and relative look at the profound nature of the processes that inspire us to create in alternative ways, questioning the current normative modes of art production.

These works emerge from a concrete reality, the Portuguese one, full of contradictions and diversities, in dialogue with both artists' poetic and ethical sensibilities. In a world fraught with multiple impasses, it is important to see the powers surrounding our daily social, economic, cultural and environmental crises that tell us there are no solutions. As several examples in history reveal to us, it is in times like these that participatory art practices gain a new breath. In times of disbelief, of a supposed civic and political crisis of participation, of persistent attacks on democracy and citizenship, we must direct our attention to the emergence of new and inspiring political configurations and to artistic actions that connect us to each other and our citizenship. It is also important to consider participatory art practices as a diverse set of ways of doing, with

very different levels of participation, from the manipulative to the promoter of autonomy. However, there are some commonalities in these diverse approaches to process. These include the relationship between the artists and communities involved, the spaces of creation/presentation and access to them, the topics covered and how they are identified and implemented, and the predominant orientation of the process and/or outcome.

In the course of my research on participatory art I have been identifying as recurrent the perspective that gives priority to community-based artistic practices, considering the various aspects of such practices and the greater quality of participation of all involved, regardless of their functions. The community-based art designation takes on a double meaning that is inscribed with two challenges. First, how can these creative processes integrate a community scheme based on horizontality, sense of belonging, common space, integration, satisfaction and emotional connection? Second, how can this community logic assume itself as a genuine alternative mode of art production to our current hierarchical system of artistic creation?

Community-based art practices are defined as a field that integrates action and thinking based on participation in a process of collective artistic creation, which is triggered by cultures, identities, histories, traditions, people and the communities felt needs, that when approached through art set the base for different poetics (Cruz, 2015). In these simultaneously artistic and communal processes we look for the development of a critical view of the past as well as a state of play regarding the

present and a projection toward the future. It is crucial to consider community involvement in all phases as well as both the community experience and the artistic quality of the processes, taking into account who determines these and how. In line with Bishop's thinking "both art and the social are not to be reconciled or collapsed, but sustained in continual tension" (2011, p.6). This connection is unavoidable and it is affirmed even before art tries to deny this relation (Rancière, 2005). The maintenance of this tension strengthens the participatory, the heterogeneity, the re-interpretation of channels for change and the network collaborations that are the strategies of resistance to be considered in an analysis by the art of the present. The projects that Paula and António propose to us, along with their co-builders, contribute to this reflection on contemporary artistic practices.

In Portugal, as elsewhere, community-based art practices are growing dramatically in numbers and scope. Some of the Portuguese proposals assume themselves as re-significations of remarkable experiences developed in the post-revolution period (April 25, 1974). Following the revolution, which brought an end to one of the longest dictatorships in southern Europe and a devastating colonial war, the situation required experimenting with alternate considerations of the relationship between the "self" and the "other". The post revolution period was followed by Portugal's integration into the European Union and the consequences of the establishment of strong market logic. In 2011, the Portuguese request for support to the IMF and the European Union followed the severe economic break-

downs in Ireland and Greece. The Portuguese government implemented a series of austerity measures unprecedented in the country's short history as a democracy, with very significant impacts on the larger population, especially the most disadvantaged.

Several of the works from this exhibition reflect much of this recent history. The differences and inequalities between the rural and the urban, the viewpoints of immigrants and their children from Portuguese-speaking African countries, the aging of the population, the lack of preparation for the future of today's Portuguese youth, and the degradation of the country's traditional productive forces (fishing, canneries), are all key themes in Antonio and Paula's practice. In these art works, there is a consistent effort to strengthen the work: the cross between rural and urban contexts; the diversity of artistic languages with a strong concern for the communities involved and not vice versa; and the intergeneration perspective. It is also relevant that labor as an element of human existence is often at the center of a project. The space of daily labor may have the potential to be greatly fulfilling in life but one can also question the central role that it assumes in contemporary societies and rehearse other ways of relating to this dimension of life.

What provokes instigation in these works is that, in addition to being pertinent and sensitive, they are necessary because they reflect urgency and desire and project another possible reality, a future that we can build today.

BISHOP, Claire. *Participation and spectacle: Where are we now?*. Lecture for Creative Time's Living as Form. 2011.

CRUZ, Hugo (Coord.). *Arte e comunidade*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2015.

RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Estética e política: A partilha do sensível*. Porto.





CREATIVE PRACTICES AROUND THE PRODUCTION OF CORK

2015

Participatory art, audio interviews,
video with sound, video stills, pinhole
photography workshop

Paula Reaes Pinto in collaboration
with António Gorgel Pinto

The human, geophysical, and ecological layers of Azaruja, Portugal are all visible through the cork labor activities of the region.

Here we organized a participatory project engaging several generations of villagers to play roles as designers. We first documented the process of extracting cork from trees. Each tree can only be harvested every seven years. Next we met with workers and tool fabricators to learn about their jobs. We also visited a small family cutlery business and several local cork processing factories. As part of the process we recorded many life stories. Later we collectively settled on the idea of creating a unique cork food container to market online.

Through socially engaged projects like this one we've learned that a productive social group like that of Azaruja gets its resilience from knowing and using their collective memory to build a sense of belonging and of attachment to community values that leads to cultural sustainability.

