



 GULBENKIAN
MODERN ART CENTRE

ARSHILE GORKY AND THE COLLECTION

Artists represented in the exhibition:

JOSÉ DE ALMADA NEGREIROS
ANTÓNIO AREAL
FERNANDO DE AZEVEDO
JORGE BARRADAS
ROGER BISSIÈRE
FERNANDO CALHAU
CARLOS CALVET
MÁRIO CESARINY
JOÃO CHARTERS D'ALMEIDA
CÂNDIDO COSTA PINTO
ARTUR CRUZEIRO SEIXAS
JOÃO CUTILEIRO
LUÍS DOURDIL
MÁRIO ELOY
FERNANDA FRAGATEIRO
ARSHILE GORKY
ODETTO GUERSONI
ERVAND KOTCHAR
FRANTISEK KUPKA
FERNAND LÉGER
MÁRIO HENRIQUE LEIRIA
RUY LEITÃO
FERNANDO LEMOS
AURELIANO LIMA
MENEZ
ANTÓNIO PALOLO
ANTÓNIO PEDRO
JÚLIO POMAR
PAULA REGO
JÚLIO DOS REIS PEREIRA
AMADEO DE SOUZA-CARDOSO
ARPAD SZENES
MARCELINO VESPEIRA
EDUARDO VIANA
ANA VIDIGAL
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MARIA HELENA VIEIRA DA SILVA



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5 June 2014 to 31 May 2015

CAM - Gallery -1

Mário Cesariny, *Naniôra - Uma e duas* [Naniôra – One and Two], 1960
Photo: Mário de Oliveira





ARSHILE GORKY AND THE COLLECTION

The new exhibition of works from CAM's collection offers visitors a view of twentieth century art that centres on two classic genres – Portraiture and Still Life – and two essential languages that developed in the last century – Abstraction and Surrealism. These themes are introduced via the works of Arshile Gorky (Khorkom, Armenia, c. 1904 – Sherman, Connecticut, 1948), an American artist of Armenian origin whose presence in the collection allows twentieth-century American and European art to be discussed in a dialogue that also takes in several Portuguese artists. Of all these artists, Paula Rego has a very close, almost intimate, relationship with Gorky, whom she confesses to admire greatly (according to the statement she made in relation to her first solo show in Lisbon¹, at the Sociedade Nacional de Belas Artes in late December 1965, which followed Arshile Gorky's first solo exhibition in Portugal (23 November to 23 December 1965).

Other international artists can also be seen, such as Frantisek Kupka (1871-1957), whose gouache study for the series 'Jazz Hot et Machinisme' (1935) sets up a curious parallel with Gorky's studies for the murals *Aviation: Evolution of Forms under Aerodynamic Limitations* (1935-36). Situated between abstraction and figuration, these works clearly bear the stamp of the technological advances that took place in the 1920s and '30s, with Kupka's composition being notably more futurist in style than Gorky's elegant pieces. In planning his mural works for Newark Airport, Gorky carried out an exhaustive iconographic survey of the rapidly growing field of aeronautics, geometrically summarising these forms through the balanced use of a limited palette of colours comprised of blue, red, yellow, white and black.

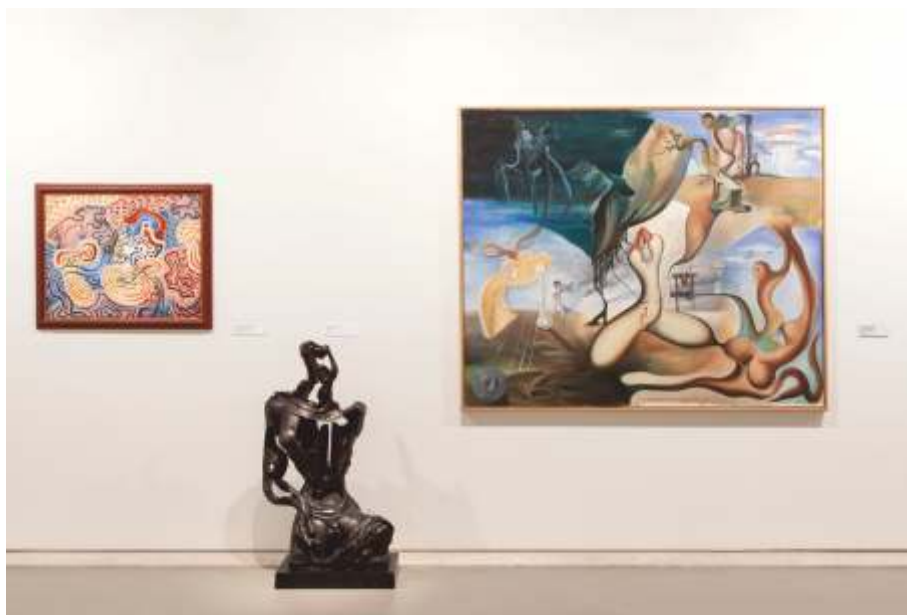
Tête [Head] (1933) and *Mélancolie* [Melancholia] (1959), two bronze sculptures by Ervand Kotchar (1899-1979), another Armenian artist, are also on display. In 1936, Kotchar signed the Dimensionist Manifesto along with many other Paris-based artists such as Calder, Miró, Arp, Duchamp, Kandinsky, Sonia and Robert Delaunay, Picabia, Ben Nicholson and António Pedro. The manifesto called for the boundaries between the arts to be diluted and for artistic practice to incorporate new ideas about space-time and new contemporary technical information: "Evolution, the instinct that breaks through all barriers, has sent the pioneers of creative art on their towards completely new realms!" On his return to Lisbon, António Pedro became an advocate of the principles of Dimensionism, which he put into practice in his 'poem-paintings' while gradually opting to follow a markedly surrealist path, a direction that was also affirmed and developed by several other Portuguese artists, including António Dacosta, Cândido Costa Pinto, Marcelino Vespeira, and Mário Cesariny. Gorky is represented in CAM's collection by one painting and two drawings, the other works on display belong to the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) and are being held in deposit by CAM.



Arshile Gorky, *Aviation: Evolution of Forms under Aerodynamic Limitations I Study for Mural Modern Aviation*, (1935-1936)
Deposit of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern)
Photo: José Manuel Costa Alves
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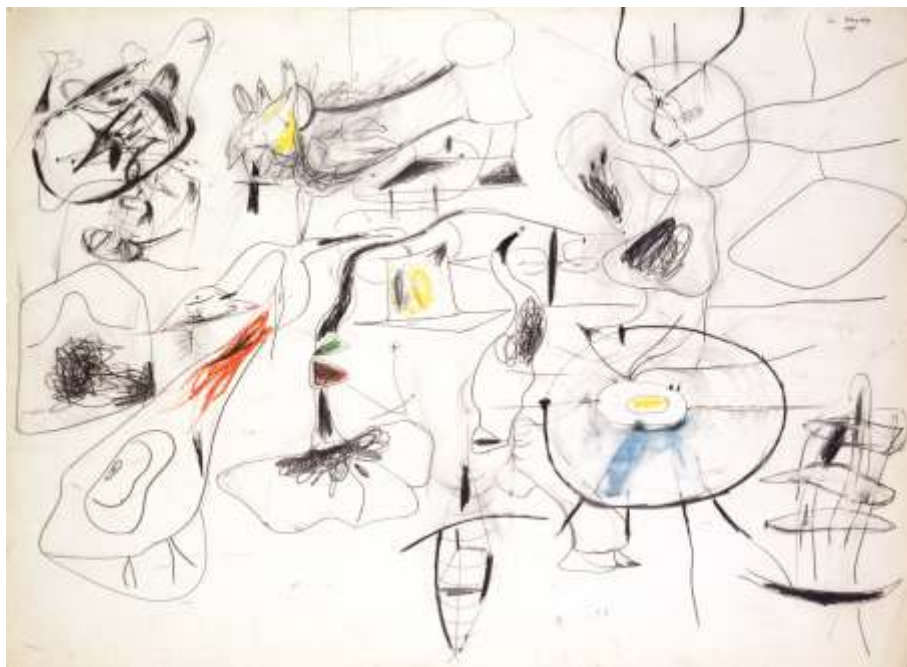
Frantisek Kupka, *Étude pour la Série Jazz Hot et Machinisme* [Study for the series Jazz Hot and Machinisme], 1935
Photo: Paulo Costa



Exhibition view with Ervand Kotchar sculpture and painting by Júlio dos Reis Pereira and *Cadavre-exquis*, from 1948.
Photo: Paulo Costa

This group of works, which belonged to Gorky's younger sister Vartoosh and her son Karlen Mooradian, consists of several paintings on canvas as well as paintings and drawings on paper, lithographs and also three models of Armenian ploughs created by Gorky. The collection was exhibited at CAM in 1984 and at the Gulbenkian Foundation's Cultural Centre in Paris in 1985. Since then it has been in deposit at CAM, where it has been periodically shown to the public (1993, 1996 and 2003).

In international terms, Arshile Gorky is an artist who remains relatively unknown although his work has recently attracted greater attention and appreciation. This revival has been fuelled by three biographies of the artist published between 1998 and 2003; by Atom Egoyan's film *Ararat* (2002), in which the artist is seen as a child in the city of Van and as an adult in New York; and by the large-scale retrospective devoted to him by the Philadelphia Art Museum in 2009, which was also shown at the Tate Modern in London and at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in 2010. Gorky's work was relatively overlooked in the period between his premature death, at the height of his artistic career in 1948, and the end of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, it played an important role in the development of postwar American art and also made its mark on European art from the 1940s onwards. Who was this artist, displaced from the Middle East to the United States, who also embarked on an imaginary European journey that allowed him to promote the work of the great modernist artists and the European avant-gardes in the United States without ever having lived in Europe? What has been the critical fortune of his work?



Arshile Gorky, *Vale of the Armenians*, 1944

Photo: Paulo Costa

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Gorky absorbed the influence of European artists in a manner that was almost autodidactic. His main influence was initially Cézanne, a fellow autodidact, followed in the early 1930s by Matisse, Miró, the Synthetic Cubism of Braque and Picasso, Léger, Picabia, and also de Chirico. He spent a long time studying the works of these artists at museums and galleries in New York or in articles published in journals, particularly the avant-garde journal *Cahiers d'Art*, which was launched in January 1926. The art historian Meyer Schapiro, whom Gorky encountered at exhibitions, described the artist as 'a feverish scrutinizer of painting' who spent hours on end studying the paintings that most interested him, forming an eyeglass with his hands to focus on particular details. His close friend Willem De Kooning, one of the first to openly admire Gorky's work, said in this regard: "I had more legitimate schooling in Holland but the things I was supposed to know he knew much better. He had an uncanny instinct for all art".

Gorky's commitment to art and the desire to become an artist who played a key role in the development of modern art was a form of total devotion in which natural talent was complemented by the intelligence of his eye and the understanding that he gained through working. However, unlike several Portuguese artists who sought in Paris the freedom denied them by the nineteenth-century academicism that prevailed in the Portuguese



Arshile Gorky, *Harmony*, (1931)
Deposit of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern)
Photo: José Manuel Costa Alves
© 2014 The Arshile Gorky Foundation

school of the early decades of the twentieth century, Gorky never lived in Paris or Europe and was never a pupil of the Académie Julian or Paul Albert Laurens, as he imaginatively claimed in a short autobiographical address given at the School of Painting and Drawing of the Grand Central School of Art in New York, where he taught between 1926 and 1931. One of his most disarming and seductive traits was his constant ability to create an artistic persona that allowed him to survive not only the eclectic artistic milieu of 1920s and '30s New York but also his tragic personal circumstances, which seem to have brought about his end: following a series of personal and professional disasters, Gorky committed suicide on 21 July 1948.

Gorky argued that art should tackle traditional subjects instead of inventing new ones, a conviction that was shared by many modernist artists who changed the conventions of pictorial representation, highlighting the artificial nature of painting and adopting the attitude expressed by Maurice Denis' famous statement made in 1890: "Remember that a painting – before it is a battle horse, a nude model, or some anecdote – is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order." Although an early Boston



Arshile Gorky, *The Female Nude*, (1932)

Deposit of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern)

Photo: José Manuel Costa Alves

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Paula Rego, *Triptico* [Triptych], c. 1964
Photo: José Manuel Costa Alves



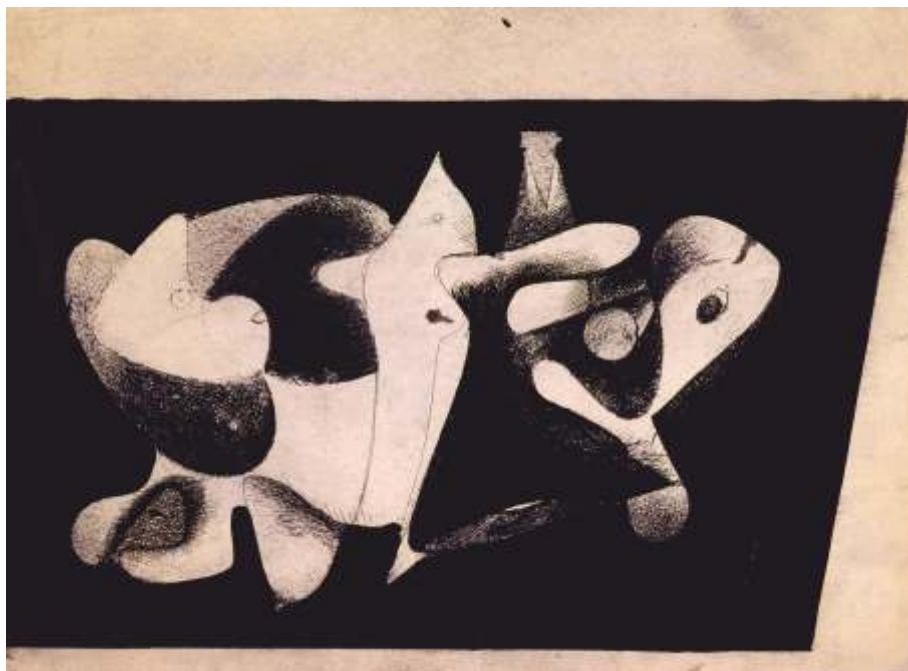
landscape from 1924 is painted in a post-impressionist style, Gorky's initial works, whether they be landscapes, still lifes or portraits, explore the non-naturalistic effects of modern painting.

Although he did not paint many works in the genre, portraits occupied an important place in Gorky's oeuvre. These works were pictures of family members, friends and self-portraits created between 1925 and 1943 (the date of his last portraits in pencil on paper). One of his most renowned portraits is the painting *The Artist and His Mother*, of which he produced two versions between 1926 and 1942. It depicts a long negotiation between Gorky (or, more appropriately here, Vosdanig Manouk Adoian, his real name) and his sacrificed mother, who tragically died of hunger and exhaustion at the age of thirty-nine. The painting was created after a photograph taken in Van in 1912 that was sent to his father, who fled to the United States in 1906. Gorky retrieved the photograph at his father's home in Rhode Island, and used it to produce the two paintings that currently belong to the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and the National Gallery in Washington. These paintings have become key symbols of the victims of genocide.

Portrait of Vartoosh (1933-1934) is one of three oil portraits of Gorky's younger sister that the artist painted in the 1930s. Vartoosh and Gorky lived with their mother before fleeing together to the United States after the 'march of death' and their mother's tragic disappearance in 1919. Vartoosh would remain a constant presence in Gorky's life and her son Karlen Mooradian would become one of the main, albeit occasionally misleading, advocates of his work as well as a keen scholar of Armenian civilization.

In technical terms, these portraits were created from many overlapping layers of paint smoothed with sand to give it the appearance of enamelled velvet. These works have a 'textural beauty' (Spender, 2007:7) In formal terms, besides the influence of Ingres, they seem to have been inspired by the composition of Egyptian funerary portraits in Fayum and the icons of the Orthodox Church. They are portraits of 'life beyond death', in which the presence of the sitter is evoked without recourse to psychologisms or emotional approximation (whether on the part of the painter or the observer) in a style characterised by 'intense concentration', to quote De Kooning again.

In 1931, Gorky began his largest series, a group of over fifty drawings and two paintings devoted to a theme inspired by the de Chirico painting *The Fatal Temple* (1914). In the manner of the Italian painter, the series was entitled *Nighttime, Enigma and Nostalgia*. This series, which Gorky continued to work on until the mid-1930s, reveals the emergence of surrealist language and a tendency towards abstraction, combining the metaphysical imagery of de Chirico with biomorphic surrealism, a characteristic of Picasso's painting in the 1920s and '30s. Through this style, Gorky gained an increasing degree of autonomy, becoming established in the New York art world and staging his first solo exhibition at the Mellon Galleries in Philadelphia in 1934, where he exhibited thirty-two paintings and gave



Arshile Gorky, *Nighttime, Enigma and Nostalgia*, (1931)
Deposit of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern)
Photo: José Manuel Costa Alves
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a lecture entitled 'Plastic Forms of Modern Painting'. The following year, he staged a new exhibition at the same gallery in Philadelphia, this time exhibiting drawings from the *Nighttime, Enigma and Nostalgia* series, which he would show again at the Guild Art Gallery in New York in the same year. The show was visited by Fernand Léger, who was in New York to attend the opening of a retrospective of his own work at the MoMA. Léger praised two of Gorky's still lifes as being “original and a distinct addition to the field of abstraction” (Taylor, 2009:34).

Also in the 1930s, Gorky joined the Federal Art Project (FAP) of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), for which he produced ten mural paintings devoted to the theme of aviation, creating highly elegant abstract and semi-abstract forms that owed a debt to Léger's monumental painting *The City* (1919) (Taylor, 2009:35). Of this work, four gouache studies for the large paintings, only two of which currently survive, are on display.

In parallel with creating state-subsidized public art, Gorky turned his attention to a new series – *Image in Khorkom* (his native village on the banks of Lake Van) – that was much more introspective and markedly autobiographical and abstract. The evocation of his childhood in a lost paradise acquires ever greater force of expression in an artistic style that abandons interlocked cubist geometric shapes for the biomorphic, fanciful and oneiric

explorations of surrealism. It was a style in which Gorky 'would feel at home', both literally and metaphorically. The painting 'Argula' (1938) and a subsequent series of works on the "Garden in Sochi" represented a real journey back to what was now a publicly professed memory of his native Armenia. When questioned on the occasion of Argula's incorporation into the MoMA collection in 1942, Gorky said that the title had no significance other than being the first word that he spoke at the age of five and that, attributed to the painting, it would correspond to a new period in his work that was 'closer to his instincts' (Spender, 2000:15).

In the 1940s, Gorky's personal and artistic life underwent a series of rapid changes, with his work receiving growing acclaim, his marriage to Agnes Magruder, and the births of his two daughters, Maro (1943) and Natasha (1945). The arrival of Shipwrecked Surrealism (coined by Dorothea Tanning, married to Max Ernst) in the United States put him in touch with various refugee artists, among the most influential of whom were Roberto Matta and André Breton. Gorky's accumulated artistic experience together with his interest in surrealism, which dated from the late 1920s, made him a privileged interlocutor and the American avatar of a movement that was given new impetus by his paintings. In an oft-quoted text, Breton would describe him as 'the first to whom the secret was revealed', highlighting the importance of Gorky's instinct and talent as a born artist over and above all of his accumulated knowledge. For his part, Matta introduced Gorky to surrealist automatism. Although this technique would already have been familiar to Gorky from reading about the movement, he now learnt to execute it technically, diluting oil in turpentine so that he could paint more fluently and quickly.

Matta, a Chilean who arrived in America from Paris in 1939, spoke of the importance of creating a 'new myth' and of "*il verbo America*", a transitive verb that revitalized all those whom it touched' (Spender, 2000:215). In the summer of 1943, following the birth of his daughter Maro, Gorky spent a long period in the countryside where he devoted himself to drawing, producing over 100 works *sur nature*. This is the point at which he moved into an artistic dimension of his own, a place where, as a genuine surrealist, Gorky re-encountered the vision of the childhood that he had left behind in Khorkom long ago. In the words of Mougouch (the Armenian diminutive that he always called his wife and the name by which she would become known), "This summer was the real release of Gorky. He was able to discover himself and what he has done is to create a world of his own but a world equal to nature, with the infinite complexities of nature and yet sweet, secretive and playful as nature is. They are not easily understood but then neither is nature, and to those free enough to follow they are very wonderful" (Spender, 2000:258).

During the years of the war, Gorky was part of a special circle of European artists in New York and Connecticut, whose names included André Breton, Marcel Duchamp and Maria Martins, Roberto Matta, Frederick Kiesler and Max Ernst, among others, and with whom he was photographed on several occasions. Following these encounters, Duchamp and

Breton invited Gorky to participate in the first major post-war exhibition in France, the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, which would also become known for the title of published catalogue *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, with its original cover by Duchamp.

The exhibition brought together 87 artists from 24 countries and was shown at Galerie Maeght in Paris from July to August 1947. The theme of the exhibition was Myth, presented by way of a provocative route designed by the architect Frederick Kiesler and conceived of as “an initiation, on the order of magic”. Visitors were asked to walk through a “hall of superstitions”, “overcome the Rain Room”, and “navigate a labyrinth of nooks” so that by “following a path of symbols” they would gain something “from themselves and from the world”.²

Mário Cesariny and João Moniz Pereira were in Paris in the Summer of 1947, where they saw the exhibition and met André Breton and the group of French Surrealists. Cesariny's surrealist collage dates from this visit, a two-page “poem-collage” containing fragments of visual and verbal texts. This allows “text and image to signify each other on the one hand, and on the other, for the discontinuity of meaning imposed on the word to be broken by the introduction of the image” (Ávila, 2001:253). One can see, in the (mis)aligned words and images, an ironic comment on the surrealist exhibition. It is completed on the margin by a handwritten copy of a citation by Antonin Artaud, founder of the Theatre of Cruelty, who had distanced himself from Breton's movement in 1927: “and it is this that through dying / I have come to achieve real immortality” together with the words “from Satan the Fiery”. For Cesariny, the exhibition was a return “to magic, to its power to distill and transform the world, and to its potential, even, for ritual”, something removed “from the 'street', which more appropriately belonged to the upheaval unleashed by Sartre” (Cesariny, 1997:11). Feeling reinvigorated from their voyage, Cesariny and Moniz Pereira wrote to Alexandre O'Neill and António Domingues in Lisbon, and in October 1947, they formed Grupo Surrealista de Lisboa (Surrealist Group of Lisbon). António Pedro, who had important connections to international surrealism, including the English, became its leading figure. Initially, the group included O'Neill, Domingues, Marcelino Vespeira, Fernando de Azevedo, Mário Cesariny, Moniz Pereira and José-Augusto França. At that time, controversy had already erupted with the participation of Costa Pinto in an exhibition at SNI, the “headquarters of the demagogy of colours”, which dictated his departure even before he had become a member of the group. In August 1948, it was Cesariny's turn to leave, declaring that it “was not a group and even less of a Surrealist one”. He founded an “anti-group” named “Os Surrealistas” (The Surrealists) and co-wrote an “Abjectionist Manifesto” with Pedro Oom. After Cesariny's departure, Moniz Pereira followed suit. The group attracted new members who had already been in contact with each other, including António Maria Lisboa, Henrique Risques Pereira, Fernando Alves dos Santos, Carlos Eurico da Costa and Cruzeiro Seixas, followed by Mário Henrique Leiria, Fernando José Francisco, João Artur da Silva, Carlos Calvet and António Paulo Tomaz.



Mário Cesariny, *Poème* [Poem], 1947
 Photo: Paulo Costa

In 1949, the Surrealist Group of Lisbon held an exhibition in which it presented 51 works of art, including the notable *Cadavre-exquis* of 1948, «distinguished in international historiography as “the only large *cadavre-exquis* painted in its entirety”» (Ávila, 2001:235).

The group printed a catalogue that was intended to be a subversive protest – its banned cover, originally a poster supporting General Norton de Matos's candidacy for president, was replaced by a white page containing a blue cross, identical to the markings made by Salazar's censors. This catalogue was the first of five Surrealist Notebooks that were published until 1950. In the Summer of 1949, “Os Surrealistas” organised their first group exhibition in the Pathé-Baby Screening Room, followed by a second and final exhibition in 1950 at Livraria Bibliófila in Lisbon.

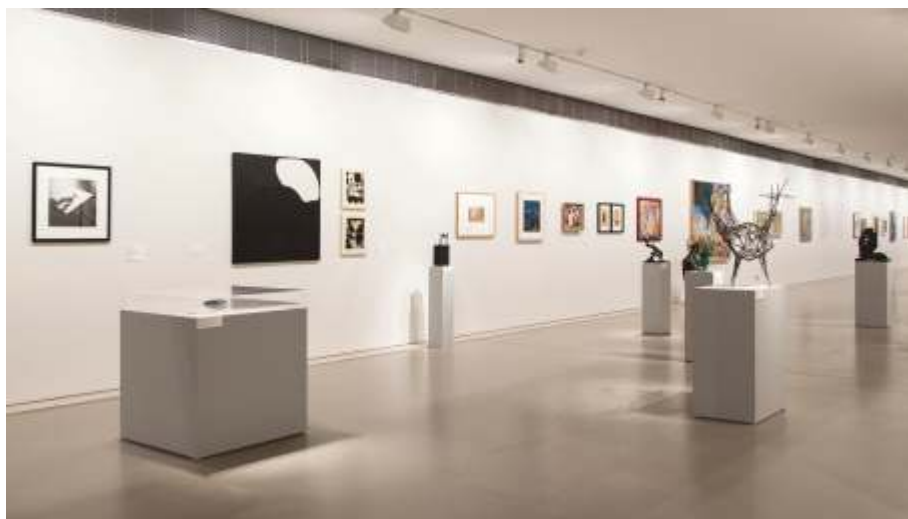
Portuguese Surrealism developed through the creative literary and visual productions of its various members – of which Cesariny's group had the highest in number – who mutually provoked each other and momentarily united against the repression of the Salazar regime. The dimension of social intervention, the transition from the represented into the concrete, would be the biggest challenge, whether through group action or individual action, leading to the dissolution of the groups and the withdrawal of many of its members. The most active years of surrealism in Portugal took place from 1947 to the beginning of 1952. From 5 to 15 January 1952, at Casa Jalco in Lisbon, an exhibition was presented of works by Fernando de Azevedo, Vespeira and Fernando Lemos, who added a group of



Fernando Lemos, *A mão e a faca* [The Hand and the Knife], 1949-52
Photo: José Manuel Costa Alves

photographs taken between 1949 and 1951 to the usual pictorial and sculptural supports. With this work, which extended into 1952, Lemos produced not just the only coherent *oeuvre* of Portuguese surrealist photography. He also portrayed “a generation (...) that did what it could to resist censorship and effectively constituted a vital expression of Portugal's intellectual and artistic avant-garde at that time”³, including the main figures of the tiny universe of Lisbon surrealism who retreated and dispersed in the wake of this exhibition.

Ana Vasconcelos



View of the exhibition
Photo: Paulo Costa

Consulted and quoted bibliography:

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Notes:

¹“Paula Rego - My first Solo Show in Portugal”, <http://www.webofstories.com/play/17605?o=MS>. I would like to thank Afonso Ramos for this reference.

²Text by Blaise Allan, written on the occasion of the exhibition (undated), cf. <http://www.andrebretton.fr/fr/item/?GCOL=56600100133360#>

³José Oliveira, 2010 cf. <http://www.cam.gulbenkian.pt/index.php?article=63743&visual=2&langId=1>

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Arshile Gorky, *Garden of Wish Fulfilment*, (1944)

Photo: Paulo Costa

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Arshile Gorky, *Untitled (Virginia Landscape)*, (1947)

Photo: Mário de Oliveira