

On Mural Painting —
Almada Negreiros,
Spain and dictatorships

*Conservation and
art historical approaches*

Ed. Mariana Pinto dos Santos, Milene Gil, Simão Palmeirim

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IHA - NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST
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DEFYING THE DICTATORSHIP: THE MURAL PAINTINGS OF ALMADA NEGREIROS AT THE MARITIME STATION ROCHA DO CONDE DE ÓBIDOS. NEW ART HISTORICAL READINGS

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ABSTRACT

This chapter seeks to add new insights on the mural paintings by the Portuguese visual artist José de Almada Negreiros (1893-1970) at Rocha do Conde de Óbidos based on their historical context, together with a thorough review of sources and an unprecedented close-up observation made possible by the recent scaffolding erected for its restoration work. This text analyses the available sources and documents on the mural paintings for Rocha do Conde de Óbidos, both those previously referred to by art historians (including my own previous work on the subject) and others that have been neglected. The essay also discusses for the first time an unpublished manuscript from the artist's estate which sheds light on the context of state commissions during the dictatorship as well as the artist's relation with his peers. Based on this research, this study revisits and reinterprets the main art historical accounts of the mural paintings at Rocha do Conde de Óbidos and also discusses the controversy that surrounded both the commission and its unveiling, which put the murals at risk of being destroyed. It finally analyses the paintings in light of new observations on the technique and preparatory drafts associating them with the themes and characters depicted, which include the representation of black people in a previously unseen in public commissions dignified manner, and also in relation to the historical contexts of emigration and the aftermath of the Second World War.

KEYWORDS

Art historiography, mural painting, state-commission, emigration, monumentalisation.

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JOSÉ-AUGUSTO FRANÇA'S ACCOUNT OF ALMADA'S PAINTINGS FOR ROCHA DO CONDE DE ÓBIDOS

José de Almada Negreiros (1893-1970) (hereafter referred to as Almada, as he signed his visual work) painted two sets of mural panels for two shipping terminals in Lisbon, or Maritime Stations (in a more direct translation of the Portuguese “Gares Marítimas”). The buildings were designed by the architect Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, with whom Almada had worked before twice (Church Nossa Senhora de Fátima in Lisbon, finished in 1938; *Diário de Notícias*, a newspaper building in Lisbon, finished in 1940). The first set of mural paintings for the first station comprised two triptychs (six panels) plus two isolated panels, with 6.2 x 3.5 metres each, and was completed in 1945. The second, with two triptychs, each panel 7.2 x 3.8 metres, was completed in 1949. In this essay I will focus on the second set of mural paintings.

José-Augusto França (1922-2021), the prominent Portuguese art historian who first studied Almada's work, wrote the most cited words on these murals in his first monograph on the artist, published in 1963¹: “They are the deliberate paintings of our solitude.”² (França 1963, 11). He would repeat it in his second monograph on the artist, published in 1974 (França 2020 [1974], 279), and in his survey on twentieth-century art in Portugal (França 1991 [1974], 333), adding that they responded to the fifteenth-century paintings known as the Saint Vicent Panels³ and further stating that: “They are the only serious mural paintings, thought out and painted beyond decorative functions, in public palaces, that have been done in Portugal. (...) With the Rocha frescoes, and above all with the Emigrants composition, Almada created the masterpiece of Portuguese painting in the first half of the century”⁴ (França 2020 [1974], 279-280).

França described the subjects depicted in the Rocha murals in more detail in his second monograph on Almada. It is relevant to point out that what was then highlighted by França would be enshrined as the most accurate and thorough analysis of the paintings, without any significant differences in subsequent approaches by other art historians. In his usual literary style, França paid attention to the formal composition and, at the same time, conveyed the characters within a psychological portrait. One of the triptychs, he writes, is organised as if seen from the river, showing Sunday scenes of “modest sadness”

¹ França read this to Almada before publishing it. See “Entrevista a José-Augusto França (2016)” (Pinto dos Santos 2022).

² “São estas as propositadas pinturas da nossa solidão.” All translations are mine except otherwise stated or quoted by other authors.

³ “Painéis de São Vicente” (c. 1445-1480) are a total of six panels attributed to the painter Nuno Gonçalves and praised for the “realism” of its portraits. They were said to be the prime example of national painting, especially during the Estado Novo dictatorship.

⁴ “São as únicas pinturas murais sérias, pensadas e pintadas para além de funções decorativas, em palácios públicos, que em Portugal se fizeram. [...] Com os frescos da Rocha, e sobretudo com a composição dos Emigrantes, Almada realizou a obra-prima da pintura portuguesa da primeira metade do século.”

(França 2020 [1974], 273). (Fig. 1 A) The panels are not sequenced, yet they depict scenes at the shore, all of them showing small wooden boats (“batéis”), each with different characters, in the lower half. The left panel shows a family of nine, packed in a boat. França mentions the oval shape formed by them, and describes each character by assuming their familiar relations, and mentioning the boy with the fish net as a dreamer. The middle panel has another boat paddled by a girl while a boy holds a fish net in the water; França considers this scene the centre of the composition. And finally, a third boat in the right panel shows three “clowns resting” although they are part of the show that other circus performers are presenting at the shore, in the upper part of the panel.

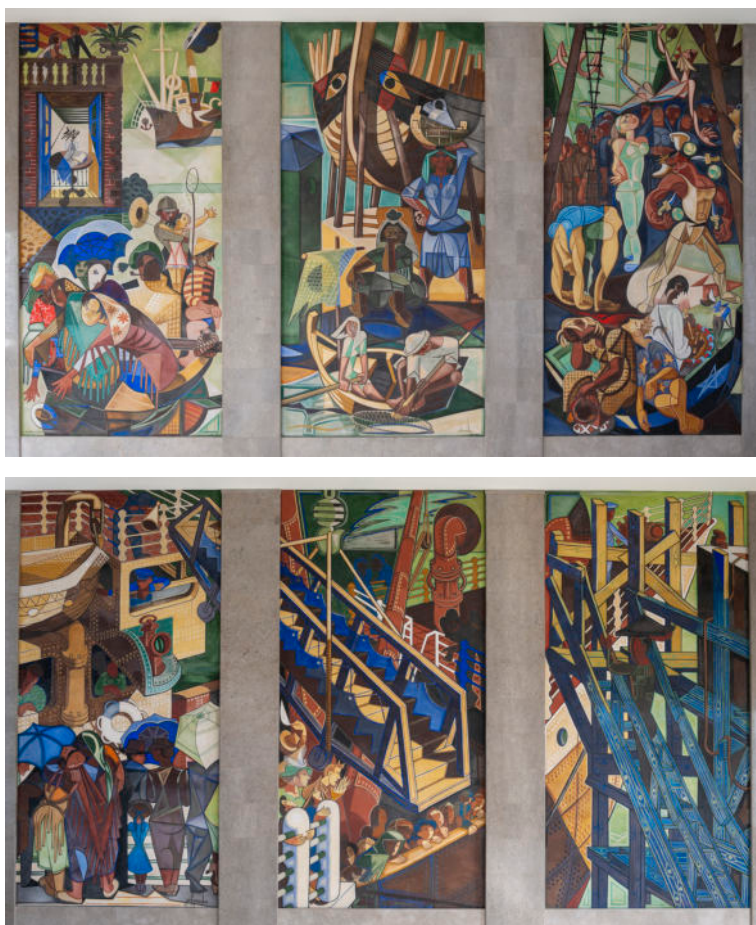


Fig. 1 A and B. Mural paintings at Rocha do Conde de Óbidos. Triptychs *Domingo Lisboa* (A Sunday in Lisbon) and *Partida de Emigrantes* (Departure of Emigrants). Centro de Documentação e Arquivo da Administração do Porto de Lisboa. Photographs by Guta de Carvalho. 2024

The upper parts of the three panels are also described by França. The left panel has a window opening to show a bourgeois interior, in a “geometric construction following cubist principles revitalised by post-war French painting” (França 1991 [1974], 333), and he notices the couple looking at the landscape from above (França 2020 [1974], 275). The middle panel shows two women sellers whom he calls “hideous statues of labour without salvation”⁵ (França 1991 [1974], 333) and above them, a boat under construction with eyes painted at the bow. The right panel shows circus performers, “saltimbancos”, a juggler, contortionists, and a trapeze artist, “whose meager body is little more than the arabesque of her function.”⁶ (França 2020 [1974], 276)

The other triptych (Fig. 1 B) has a narrative continuity, and França writes that one single scene is depicted in the three panels: a departure of emigrants that have just boarded a ship (the stairs are being removed) while a crowd waves goodbye from the balcony. Again, França combines formal description and psychological analysis. He mentions the details of the ship elements in “an obsessive rhythm that the colour variation resolves, in bluish whites and ochres that the shadows turn earthy, and the sun makes red”⁷ (França 2020 [1974], 276). He notices the wood knots that are like eyes everywhere in the scaffold where a man “looking as if he was made of wood himself” carries “sand”. He notices that the people bidding farewell in the balcony have different social origins: a family composed of father, mother (with a “low bottom, as Portuguese women have”) and daughter, a woman with an “incredible hat with a stuffed bird and a net” as if it was a “caricature”; behind them, two women, which he identifies as mother and daughter, are holding each other, wearing their shawls, the mother consoling the daughter perhaps because, he writes, her fiancée or husband is going away — they are working women and “represent the tragedy of the departure” (França 2020 [1974], 279). And then there are the ones who part, leaning over the ship’s rail, a “suffering and resigned flock”. França describes several of the faces, the white lines on the forehead of one of them, the stared eyes that “look at nothing”, and he lingers on the figure of a woman he presumes to be old, alone, as if “in an abyss” and “wrapped in a dark shawl, her old chin and sharp nose drawn in the shadow that divides her head, standing at the level of the rail, and above it a hand that advances, hesitantly, coming out of the fringe of the shawl like a foreign object that doesn’t even dare to grasp that wooden railing, over the coldness of the iron.”⁸ (França 2020 [1974], 279)

⁵ “estátuas hediondas de trabalho sem salvação.”

⁶ “cujo corpo mesquinho é pouco mais do que o arabesco da sua função.”

⁷ “ritmo obsessivo que a variação do colorido resolve, em brancos-azulados e em ochres que as sombras põem cor de terra e o sol vermelha.”

⁸ “Embiocada” is the old-fashioned Portuguese word he uses, referring to the use of “bioco”, a traditional cloak used to cover a woman’s head and face for modesty; however, these women are using shawls, not cloaks. “Esta mulher embiocada num xale escuro, o queixo velho, e o nariz agudo, desenhado na sombra que partilha a cabeça, postos à altura da amurada, e sobre esta uma mão que avança, hesitante, saindo da

Faithful to the modernist evolutionary narrative he developed in several of his studies, França's formal analysis of the murals focuses on how this work represented the final stage of the older generation of modernists in Portugal. França sees Almada as reaching the most mature stage of his generation laying claim as the natural heir of the cubist legacy, and at the same time closing that legacy and proving that the younger generation should not dwell in neo-cubist experimentations. França nevertheless points out that Almada had a unique approach in the murals that was contrary to Picasso's, consisting in the "treatment of the line" as a "characterising note" and "surrounding continuity" giving a unique quality to his paintings⁹ (França 2020 [1974], 280). Lastly, França sees Almada's murals as being parallel to the neo-realism proposed by a younger generation of artists that opposed the dictatorship and proclaimed a socially engaged art, stating that Almada actually surpassed them by expressing the condition of the humble emigrant like no other and by painting a "Portuguese portrait" (França 1963, 11). França sees the cubist vocabulary as a generational asset for Almada, who thereby marked out his superior, leading position in relation to the younger generation.¹⁰

I have recently proposed another approach that challenges this modernist narrative: the inverse relation occurred, because it was Almada who responded to the neo-realist artists and, far from closing a cycle from the past, he sought to enter their contemporary aesthetic preoccupations, renewing his art because he was affected by the younger generation and their defence of mural painting as socially engaged art. As an older modernist, Almada made use of such a commission for mural painting that would be unavailable to them, aiming at a renewal of his artistic position by catching up with the younger generation (Pinto dos Santos 2020).

Two earlier texts by José-Augusto França have not hitherto been considered. The first one was published in 12 January 1954 in a newspaper in Porto and deals with the "absence of mural painting in Portugal".¹¹ França speaks of the necessity of a "collective agreement" and that no one will allow painting about a "society in crisis" in official walls. He mentions *Guernica*, which he had never seen, as an anti-official painting that, not being a mural, was in fact a "free", "universal" painting. Regarding Portugal, he refers to the 1947 paintings by Júlio Pomar at Cinema Batalha, Porto, that were ordered to be covered in 1948, which amounts to, "even for Portugal, an exaggerated stupidity". He

franja do xaile como um objecto estranho, que não ousa sequer agarrar aquele corrimão de madeira, sobre a frialdade do ferro."

⁹ "apontamento caracterizante" and "continuidade envolvente".

¹⁰ "Nenhuma outra pintura portuguesa tão profundamente expressou a condição do emigrante humilde — em imagens paralelas àquelas que o jovem neo-realismo então propunha, com uma definição ideológica que não era, de modo algum, a de Almada, mas que ficava aquém da sua matura, experimentada sinceridade." (França 1991 [1974], 333).

¹¹ José-Augusto França, "Da não existência de pintura mural em Portugal". *O Comércio do Porto*, 12 January 1954, p. 6. I thank Sónia Moura for this reference.

finds the real mural painting, the one meant “to decorate, but also *being*, and representing our space, our time” in Almada’s work at the Maritime Stations: “Their authenticity is measured by the fright they provoked”.¹² França writes that they speak of the “emigrant’s homesickness” not being able to disclose fully that Almada depicted emigration, due to the risk of censorship. It was in this same text that he firstly referred to them as “the deliberate paintings of our solitude”, a sentence he would repeat several times in subsequent texts, for decades. But it is interesting to notice that it was first written in a text about the absence of mural painting and therefore its original context had to do with being a solitary example of mural painting in Portugal.

The other earlier text is dated 24 November 1963, published in Brazil and kept as a newspaper clipping by Almada himself.¹³ The text is about the initial wish and the bureaucratic impossibility of showing Almada’s work at the São Paulo Biennale, and the intention of getting the artist to travel to Brazil. França highlights the work for the Maritime Stations as the artist’s best and he repeats that these are the only true mural paintings in Portugal. It is in this text that França, writing more freely because he was getting published in a Brazilian newspaper, refers to the paintings firstly as depicting emigrants and a Sunday in Lisbon. The woman with the shawl (“*embicada*”) is already worthy of a thorough description as the most dramatic and moving symbol of departure and solitude. We owe José-Augusto França the titles for which the triptychs are now known, and they were consecrated in his first texts about the artist, probably benefiting from Almada’s own first-hand accounts.

ART HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO THE MURALS AFTER JOSÉ-AUGUSTO FRANÇA

Some art historians writing about the murals repeated, albeit more synthetically, José-Augusto França’s analysis and point of view. Frequently, as was already the case with França, the authors’ own critical view of the times of dictatorship was projected into their analysis of the murals, combined with the dominant modernist view of art-as-progress and the consequent relegation of Portuguese art to a place of belatedness associated with the dictatorship’s isolationist politics. The tropes about the dictatorial era — the solitude, an indetermined absence, the failed idea of glory — are often projected into Almada’s paintings. For instance, Margarida Acciaiuoli wrote in 1991: “Developing in his own name, and in the name of those who tried a journey without reach, he explored in the memory of time the construction of spaces that are the

¹² “A sua autenticidade mede-se pelo susto que provocou e que só dificilmente se deixou acalmar num consentimento desconfiado.” Idem.

¹³ José-Augusto França, “Almada Negreiros e a Bienal”. Suplemento Literário do Jornal do Estado de São Paulo, 24 November 1963. ANSA-COR-469-002. CEDANSA – NOVA FCSH / © Herdeiros de José de Almada Negreiros.

mirror of others (...).” (Acciaiuoli 1991, 747). The art historian repeated França’s ideas about the closure of a cycle of “an unresolved pictorial practice” with a “neo-cubist system”, while emphasising Almada’s individual artistic path.¹⁴

A few years before, in 1986, Rui Mário Gonçalves had a somehow different approach to the murals, making a more formalist analysis, yet also very much within the modernist narrative framework. He focussed on the “lines that command the composition and enhance the constructivism that always interested Almada” (Gonçalves 1986, 14), adding that the paintings in Rocha do Conde de Óbidos were a progressive step towards the “abstractionism” the artist would embrace in the late fifties. Rui Mário Gonçalves further considered that Almada “was not interested in making art as a means of critical action as the neo-realists or the surrealists” and that his interest in Picasso was not in his political side, but his cubist legacy (Gonçalves 1986, 16). In short, for Gonçalves, Almada was pursuing a pictorial evolution in direction to abstraction with no political readings implicated.

In 1995, Raquel Henriques da Silva, in a necessarily short reference (as part of a multi-authored survey on Portuguese art from the Baroque to the twentieth century) also quoted França and underlined the idea that Almada surpassed the neo-realist artists, because of “the impact of [the murals] dimension and their implantation in a public space” where “the silent scream of the emigrants’ anguish contaminates the Sunday joy” of the opposite triptych (Henriques da Silva in Pereira [coord.] 1995, 404).

In a more recent text, Raquel Henriques da Silva returned to the topic, always following França’s original study closely, but adding new insights. Henriques da Silva pays attention to the depicted emigration, stating briefly that the emigrants were probably leaving for the then colonies (Henriques da Silva 2018, 72).¹⁵ Furthermore, noting that the murals were threatened with destruction shortly after their creation (to which I will come back later), she writes that that circumstance meant that Almada was seen to be as dangerous as the young communist painter Júlio Pomar, whose murals for a private building

¹⁴ “Desenvolvendo em seu nome e em nome dos que tentaram uma gesta sem alcance, ele explorou na memória do tempo a construção de espaços que são o espelho de outros [...]” (Acciaiuoli 1991, 747). In her PhD dissertation about the 1940s art in Portugal, Almada’s murals are briefly approached (in two pages, 746 and 747) without new research or interpretation. At the 1984 catalogue of the major anthological exhibition that she curated for the Gulbenkian Foundation the murals are very briefly approached in her text, “O Pintor” (Acciaiuoli [coord.] 1984) and again in Fernando de Azevedo’s text “O Decorador” (Azevedo in Acciaiuoli [coord.] 1984), who, like França before him, relates Almada’s paintings with Renaissance frescos such as Piero della Francesca’s and Luca Signorelli’s (to whom the artist pays homage in a 1942 painting). In 1994, António Quadros Ferreira published a book with the title *Painéis das Gares Marítimas de Lisboa. Análise e Recepção da Modernidade em Almada Negreiros*. However, the book is about all of Almada’s artistic production (not only the murals) and, when addressing the murals, attempts at a semiotic reading which nevertheless is based on previous research and interpretations (published by Fund. Eng. António de Almeida).

¹⁵ This had previously been noted briefly by Paula Lobo (2014, 351).

(cinema Batalha, Porto) were painted over in 1948 by pressure of the State.¹⁶ However, in that same essay, Raquel Henriques da Silva uses the adjective “decorative” three times to describe the mural paintings of Rocha do Conde de Óbidos, a classification that seems intended to dilute the critical potential in Almada’s paintings. Its “exuberant palette” and the “resonance of synthetic cubism” are allies of his “taste for decoration” (Henriques da Silva 2018, 71). The art historian believes that Almada’s murals cannot be incorporated in the “international muralist conjuncture”, because in this work the artist “fulfils a personal journey” (Henriques da Silva 2018, 70), which appears to indicate that she does not attribute his murals a sufficient political stance akin to the one found in the “international muralist conjuncture”. Henriques da Silva further writes that, although Almada probably saw the painting *Café* by Portinari exhibited in 1940 in the Portuguese World Exhibition (a nationalist propaganda show promoted by the dictatorship) and that “perhaps” he knew about other muralists, “I am convinced that at no moment they influenced his work” (idem). In Henriques da Silva’s essay, the isolationist trope is projected back into the older artist, as if his age and the restrictions of the dictatorship both contributed to a singularly isolated path immune to external contact. This idea that the artist worked alone without considering his contemporaries or wanting to be part of the contemporary art scene is contradicted by the work itself, by Almada’s writings, by how he responded to interviews¹⁷ and paid attention to younger artists.¹⁸ Almada’s murals clearly show an awareness of the role and expectations about mural painting nationally and internationally, which, moreover, were discussed by neorealists and promoted in their publications.¹⁹

¹⁶ These were recently recovered from beneath several layers of paint. In another text, Raquel Henriques da Silva cautiously relates the murals of Rocha do Conde de Óbidos with neo-realism. (Henriques da Silva 2007, 201)

¹⁷ The most significant of all would be: “— A sua opinião sobre a pintura conhecida como ‘realismo social’.

— O ‘realismo social’ será uma das metamorfoses em arte, terá o interesse das pessoas que o vivam como arte, e sem ser um adepto, todo o artista, todo o artista faz conscientemente ‘realismo social’.” (“—Your opinion on the painting known as ‘social realism’: / — ‘Social realism’ will be one of the metamorphoses in art, it will be of interest to people who experience it as art, and without being a fan, every artist, every artist consciously does ‘social realism’”. Interview “Diga-nos a verdade Almada Negreiros”, *Diário de Lisboa*, 28 January 1953.

¹⁸ Such as Júlio Pomar, Querubim Lapa, António Dacosta, Mário Cesariny, Lourdes Castro, René Bértholo, Nikias Skapinakis, Ernesto de Sousa. He was the first one to buy a Júlio Pomar painting and a Querubim Lapa drawing, when they were still students at the António Arroio Art School. This is well documented in the writings and testimonies of these artists in several different situations, as well as by other artists, such as Hein Semke in his diary (Semke 2016).

¹⁹ The first images of works by Mexican muralists were published in Portugal before 1940. The first one was in 1935: Diego Rivera’s mural *El Ingenio*. Caldeira, Heliodoro, “A pintura mural mexicana: Rivera e Siqueiros” in: *O Diabo* 74, 24 November 1935. *Apud* Santos, Luísa Duarte, “Portinari: a descoberta do pintor d’além Atlântico”, in: *Nova Síntese* 8, 2015. See also Júlio Pomar’s 1940s texts defending mural painting (Pomar 2014).

Raquel Henriques da Silva also writes that Almada was one of the artists who received more state commissions. Yet, this supposition should require caution, in that Almada's works for the state were not only mainly owing to the intervention of architect Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, but also, a number of other artists had far more commissions (for instance, Guilherme Camarinha, Jorge Barradas, Leopoldo de Almeida, Lino António, not to mention architects such as Pardal Monteiro himself). It is, however, true that Almada created Portugal's largest surface of mural painting in the twentieth century in the Maritime Stations, as he himself stated in a manuscript drafted in 1952 and still unpublished to this day.²⁰ (Fig. 2)

ALMADA'S UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT OF 1952

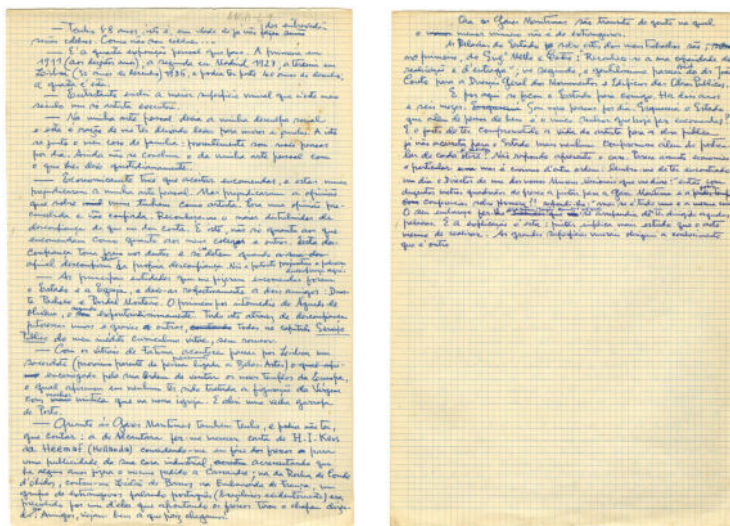


Fig. 2. Draft “Tenho 58 anos...”. Almada Negreiros’ manuscript, unpublished.
ANSA-L-9, CEDANSA – NOVA FCSH / © Herdeiros de José de Almada Negreiros

²⁰ Other scholars have mentioned Almada's works, but without focusing on them. For instance, Inês Beleza Barreiros discusses the condition of exile related to a series of references including Almada's murals and its ties to an imperial mythology. She refers to Almada's triptych on emigration as the “counter-image” of the dictatorship (Barreiros 2009, 142) and mentions Ângela Ferreira's artwork *Emigração* (1994), which employs a manipulated reproduction of the triptych *Departure of Emigrants* by Almada. In fact, it erases Almada's paintings and leaves the architectural space destined to the murals. Ana Balona de Oliveira, in turn, thoroughly analyses the same Ângela Ferreira's work. Balona de Oliveira shows that Ferreira refers to Almada's paintings by showing the emptied architectural space without the paintings, while at the same time recovering echoes of its elements, such as the mobile stairs to embark on the departing ship, or the bricks depicted in the original painting (Oliveira 2012).

We can infer the date of the manuscript as the artist states his age at the beginning, 58 years old. His 58th birthday was on April 7th, 1951, but the year must have already been 1952, because Almada mentions his fourth individual exhibition, for which this text appears to have been written. Actually, it was Almada's seventh individual exhibition. He makes a mistake, saying his first was in 1911, when in fact it was 1913, then he omits the second in 1920, he mentions his third in 1927, omits the fifth (1933) and mentions the sixth in 1936 when in fact it was in 1941 ("30 anos de Desenho", which was an official exhibition promoted by the Secretariado Nacional da Propaganda [National Bureau for Propaganda]). The seventh show (presented as fourth) was no less than the one promoted by José-Augusto França for the opening of his art gallery, Galeria de Março, in 1952. It is quite likely that this text was written as a speech for the opening and was never meant to be printed. Therefore, the artist allowed himself to say things that he probably would have to keep from censorship if published. Almada writes in the beginning: "I've filled the largest mural surface a single artist has created in half a century [in Portugal]." He goes on to state that his work has been acclaimed by foreigners, but not in Portugal. The information contained in the whole document is very significant, but I highlight three passages. The first one:

"Economically, I've had to accept commissions, and these have never jeopardised my personal art. But they did jeopardise people's opinion of me as an artist. It was a prejudiced and untrustworthy opinion. I see myself as the greatest dealer of mistrust that I know. And this applies to my commissioners as well as to my colleagues and others. This mistrust is excessive and only stops when they also mistrust their own mistrust. So, the word mistrust is not pejorative here."²¹

These words show that Almada was very much aware that the younger anti-fascist generation of artists and intellectuals (and França was himself an anti-fascist) had somehow been disappointed by his acceptance of state commissions. However, he also makes a point of stating that those who commission him also mistrust him, clearly alluding to the controversy sparked by the paintings at the Maritime Station. He nevertheless sees a positive side in being mistrusted by both sides. It can be inferred that that meant that he could keep his distance from the dictatorship and that even if mistrusted by younger artists, he could perhaps still surprise them with his work under commission. His words show how much Almada was aware and cared about how

²¹ "Economicamente tive de aceitar encomendas, e estas nunca prejudicaram a minha arte pessoal. Mas prejudicaram a opinião que sobre mim tinham como artista. Era uma opinião preconcebida e não confiada. Reconheço-me o maior distribuidor de desconfiança de que me dou conta. E isto, não só quanto aos que encomendam como quanto aos meus colegas e outros. Esta desconfiança toma freio nos dentes e só se detém quando afinal desconfiam também da própria desconfiança. Não é portanto pejorativa a palavra desconfiança aqui."

his work was being perceived by younger artists and cultural agents who opposed the dictatorial regime. He took the opportunity of staging a solo exhibition in a context of opposition, promoted by the young critic and art historian José-Augusto França, who shortly after proclaimed his murals in the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos as the masterpiece of the twentieth century in Portugal, to justify the fact that he had to accept commissions for economic reasons but, at the same time, that he was provoking distrust from the State. His following words, and my second highlight, support this:

“The main organisations that commissioned me were the State and the Church, and I owe them respectively to two friends: Duarte Pacheco and Pardal Monteiro. The first through Águedo de Oliveira, the second spontaneously. All this under suspicions, some picturesque and others serious, all in the Public Service section of my unpublished resumé, without resentment.”²²

In these lines Almada makes clear that there were specific intermediaries facilitating these commissions: the architect Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, as already mentioned, and Duarte Pacheco, the Minister of Public Works and Communications between 1933 and 1936, and again in 1938, combined with the role of Mayor of Lisbon, until his death in 1943. Both Duarte Pacheco and Pardal Monteiro were responsible for the mural commission for the Maritime Station. However, Almada mentions a name never taken into account before, Águedo de Oliveira. Artur Águedo de Oliveira was a lawyer who worked closely with the dictator António de Oliveira Salazar, and one of the regime’s ideologues, as well as its Minister of Finance between 1950 and 1955.²³ Like Almada, he studied at Colégio de Campolide at the time a Jesuit boarding school. Born in 1894 and Almada in 1893, they were most likely colleagues. This underlines something that has received little attention: the aristocratic upbringing of Almada in a boarding school²⁴ provided him with an environment in which he grew up alongside figures who would become prominent in the dictatorship’s political elite and who, as seems to be the case, would protect him. Moreover, Águedo de Oliveira was the Minister of Finance when Almada was writing those words, so perhaps it wasn’t just an acknowledgement of gratitude, but a subtle appeal for his work to be recognised by the state by naming his ally in the government.

²² “As principais entidades que me fizeram encomendas foram o Estado e a Igreja, e devo-as respectivamente a dois amigos: Duarte Pacheco e Pardal Monteiro. O primeiro por intermédio de Águedo de Oliveira, o segundo espontaneissimamente [sic]. Tudo isto através de desconfianças pitorescas umas graves outras, todas no capítulo Serviço Público do meu inédito curriculum vitae, sem rancor.”

²³ (Afonso dos Santos 2011).

²⁴ He arrived as an intern at around the age of six or seven, and his brother António joined him. After the death of their mother in 1896, his father became an absent figure and the only family contact was with his mother’s relatives, grandfather, step grandmother, aunts and uncles.

In addition, if any agent of the political police (PIDE – International and State Defence Police) was present at the opening of the exhibition (which was extremely likely) and heard him, the reference to the minister’s proximity would also mitigate the controversial statements made in his speech.

My third highlight is the following:

“Is the State forgetting that, as well as being a well-off person, he is the only gentleman who is commissioning work today? And the fact that it has committed the artist’s life to the public work no longer entails any commitment for the state beyond the private one of each work already realised?”²⁵

The artist writes, in Portuguese, “*peessoa de bem*”, which I have translated as “well-off person” – though it also reads literally as “good person” – as I believe that in this context Almada is saying that the State is the only entity with financial capacity to sustain artistic activity. But immediately after he states that even if the State has forced artists to work on commission (“it has committed the artist’s life to the public work”) that does not imply any further commitment – or endorsement – of the State by the artist besides delivering the work. In other words, the State must not interfere with artistic creation nor does the artist need ideological affinities with the State.²⁶

REVISITING THE COMMISSION AND THE CONTROVERSY

In 1946, Almada started working on the drafts of the mural paintings for the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Station. The commission of this set of mural paintings was a troubled process, because while Almada had already done a first set of murals for the neighbouring Alcântara maritime station (inaugurated in 1943, painted by Almada in 1944-45), that set of murals had already displeased the authorities. What is more, the Minister for Public Works, Duarte Pacheco, who had only made a verbal agreement with Almada to commission the murals for both stations, had passed away. There was nothing written about Almada getting the second one. José-Augusto França had already mentioned how the mural paintings caused controversy and were then under threat (França 1954; 1991 [1974], 334; 2020 [1974], 280), demanding the intervention of the National Museum of Ancient Art director, João Couto, who wrote a report defending them and thus preventing their destruction.

²⁵ “Esquecerá o Estado que além de *peessoa de bem* é o único senhor que hoje faz encomendas? E o facto de ter comprometido a vida do artista para a obra pública já não acarreta para o Estado mais nenhum compromisso além do particular de cada obra já realizada?”

²⁶ In 1936 Almada had already written an unpublished document expressing these ideas in which he confronts António Ferro, the National Propaganda Secretary, for wanting to control the arts through commissions (Almada Negreiros; Pinto dos Santos 2015).

Almada himself had implied so in an interview in 1953. Answering the journalist's question "how do you see those paintings today?", referring to the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Station paintings, he said: "As a stranger. And if I can see them today, I owe it to the report that prevented the last of them from being chopped off on the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos. I don't think I've ever done better, or done work that was more my own."²⁷

Years later, his wife and painter Sarah Affonso, interviewed in 1983 by her daughter-in-law, recalled that the late Duarte Pacheco was succeeded by José Frederico Ulrich who did not like Almada's work in Alcântara, and did not want to honour the verbal agreement of his predecessor. This was actually incorrect, since Duarte Pacheco was succeeded by Augusto Cancela de Abreu, Minister for Public Works and Communication between 1944 and 1947; Ulrich was then the Minister's Secretary, only replacing him as Minister in February 1947. Sarah Affonso's memory mix-up nevertheless reveals that it was probably Ulrich, one of the most conservative members of government, who lobbied the most against giving the second commission to Almada. She narrates that Ulrich's secretary, who had also been Duarte Pacheco's secretary and knew of the agreement, threatened Ulrich to go public if he did not proceed with the commission to Almada and that was the reason why he finally had it confirmed.²⁸

Sarah Affonso further told that in the end the paintings caused scandal, and confirmed that they were nearly destroyed, "because people thought that they were crazy, they even had circus performers!". (Negreiros; Affonso 1983, 71). She also indicated that a committee of influential people (though no names were named) lodged a complaint to the dictator Salazar, asking for its destruction. Salazar mentioned the case to a "Fine Arts Committee" (in fact, the 6th Section of Junta Nacional de Educação [National Council for Education]) over which the aforementioned João Couto "presided", she says (he was in fact, only a member), though he ended up saving the mural paintings. She further states that if the murals had been destroyed, the artist would have to return all the payment he had received for them: "This would be a terrible problem for an artist, because, not only would the work be destroyed and the commission given over to someone else, but there was also the financial problem. Usually, the work is paid in three parts, the first two are almost always just to pay the cost of the materials and the accumulated debts — the worries of those with little money." (Negreiros; Affonso 1983, 72)

²⁷ "Como um estranho. E se os vejo, devo-o ao parecer que evitou serem picados os últimos na Rocha do Conde de Óbidos. Creio não haver antes cumprido melhor, nem feito obra que fosse mais minha." Almada Negreiros, interview, "Diga-nos a verdade, Almada Negreiros", *Diário de Lisboa*, 28 January 1953, p. 9.

²⁸ There is, again, some confusion in Sarah Affonso's account. Duarte Pacheco's subsecretary for Public Works and Communications was the Engineer Roberto Espregueira Mendes but he left the position in 1944. In 1947, when Ulrich became minister, Mendes was appointed General Director of the Portuguese Railway. Two subsecretaries were then nominated: Luís José de Avelar Machado Veiga da Cunha and José Augusto Correia de Barros (Decree 36130, *Diário da República*, 4 February 1947), and none had worked with Duarte Pacheco. I cannot be sure which one was Sarah referring to.

Other art historians repeated França's narrative about the imminent destruction, which he probably heard from the artist over their many conversations (and he also read and quoted what the artist left half-said in interviews), without further documental research, but Sarah Affonso's account was neglected. I will come back to it further on.

In her doctoral thesis about Duarte Pacheco, Sandra Marques de Almeida attributes the 1946 request for an opinion from the 6th Section of the National Council for Education to purely budgetary reasons (Almeida 2009, 330). Her work reveals that the construction of the Stations attracted negative opinions regarding its costs, and Pardal Monteiro was unable to materialise several elements of his project due to budgetary restraints. According to the sources, Almada's budget was 500,000 escudos (today, around 2500 €) and in the end it was decided to pay him 450,000 escudos.²⁹ Yet, these cannot be taken as the only reasons behind the reluctance to give the work to Almada if one reads between the lines of the documents produced under conditions of dictatorship and censorship. Furthermore, Sarah Affonso's account, although with some natural confusions about events occurred forty years before, indicates that there were thematic issues.

In fact, there were two rounds of requests for reports to the 6th Section of the National Council for Education before the commission was fully approved. The first scholar to analyse several of the most important documents regarding this controversy was Paula Ribeiro Lobo in the article "Almada and the maritime stations: the portrait of Portugal that the dictatorship wanted to erase" (Lobo 2014). Lobo read copies of João Couto's reports as a member of the 6th

²⁹ The documents about the negotiation of Almada's budget are archived as Processo Rocha do Conde de Óbidos (IPA.0007086), SIPA, National Archive at Forte de Sacavém, Arquivo DGEMN, Instituto da Habilitação e Reabilitação Urbana. See "Request for advice on Almada's budget to Architect Baltazar da Silva Castro", dated 11 November 1946, by Direcção Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais – secção Administrativa; "Parecer sobre a proposta para a decoração da 'Gare' marítima da Rocha do Conde de Óbidos", dated 16 December 1946, stating the budget should be reduced to 336,000 escudos, by Direcção Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais – Repartição de Obras de Edifícios; Advice from Architect Baltazar da Silva Castro, dated 19 December 1946, stating that the cost of labour and materials increased since the work done in Alcântara, and thus 450,000 escudos would be a fair amount to pay. Documents 578901 to 578906. Also referred by Paula Lobo (2014, 348) and Raquel Henriques da Silva (2018), via Sandra Marques de Almeida (2009). In addition to these documents there is an official handwritten letter from Almada Negreiros justifying the value of 500,000 escudos by referring to the "oral agreement" with Duarte Pacheco that could not be proven because he had died in 1943. Namely stating that he had asked for 500,000 escudos for Alcântara and that the then Minister had said that the first set of murals had to have a lower budget, to be compensated in the second one: *"To begin with, it can only be this way now, but you'll never be short of work from the state again!"* This underlining was His Excellency's verbal declaration, which determined the contract and the trust in the work of those who have a family." ("Para começar não pode agora deixar de ser desta maneira, mas *nunca mais lhe faltará trabalho do Estado!*" Este sublinhado ficou declaração verbal de S. Ex^a, determinou o contrato e a confiança no trabalho de quem tem família constituída.). Letter from 7 September 1946 to Engineer Gomes da Silva, General Director of National Monuments and Buildings.

Section of the National Council for Education kept at his estate.³⁰ The first report by João Couto, dated 11 April 1946, was commissioned to the 6th Section, she argues, by Minister Cencel de Abreu to resolve the doubts about trusting Almada with the second set of mural paintings at Rocha do Conde de Óbidos.³¹ In it, Couto praised Almada's paintings in Alcântara and claimed he was the best choice. But, as Paula Lobo notices, he also "recalled the discussion generated by the paintings of the Brazilian Cândido Portinari in the Hispanic Foundation of the Library of Congress in Washington, to assure that this 'was not', and 'would not', be the case of the Portuguese maritime stations." (Couto *apud* Lobo 2014, 347). Paula Lobo clarifies that the reference to Portinari "revealed what was at stake: in the previous year Portinari had been candidate for federal deputy for the Brazilian Communist Party, and his work inspired the social themes' painting of Portuguese Neo-Realism, the artistic movement of opposition to the regime that by then had gained force." (Lobo 2014, 347).

Lobo's argument that political fear of social realism in state commissions was the reason for Couto's assurance that Almada's would not be such a case is certainly to take into consideration. But it can be added that the paintings by Portinari at the Hispanic Foundation in the Library of Congress in Washington were mentioned by Couto because he also had to produce a report on them. He writes: "As I write this report I have before my eyes the reproductions of the panels painted by the Brazilian Cândido Portinari in the magnificent new rooms of the Hispanic Foundation of the Library of Congress in Washington. It could be a cause for discussion there to relate the work of the modern artist to the decorative expression of the rooms they have received. However, this is not the case with the Alcântara Maritime Station, nor will it be the case with the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Station."³² As I have argued elsewhere

³⁰ The commission was then presided by engineer Henrique Gomes da Silva and had as members architects Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, Raul Lino and Paulino Montez; the director of Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, João Couto, and the director of Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis, Vasco Rebelo Valente; the sculptor Diogo de Macedo; the painters Varela Aldemira, Albano Portocarrero de Almeida Coutinho and Armando de Lucena, and brigadier Manuel Silveira e Castro (Lobo 2014, 345: footnote 11).

³¹ Paula Lobo states that the hesitations grew because the Alcântara murals displeased Duarte Pacheco and that it was the praise of António Ferro (he was the official National Secretary for Propaganda since 1933, who promoted a controlled version of modernism to renew the image of the State in public works or national and international exhibitions, and with whom Almada had several disagreements) that appeased the dictator Salazar. She quotes Ferro's wife's memoir, the writer Fernanda de Castro. But there are inconsistencies in this story, because Duarte Pacheco died in 1943 and never saw the Alcântara murals, only finished in 1945. Sarah Affonso, in turn, says that Almada anticipated any instructions as to what subject he should paint, telling Duarte Pacheco beforehand what he had decided to paint and finding no objection from him (Negreiros; Affonso 1983, 69). The documentation, in turn, shows that Salazar asked for the reports from 6th Section of the National Council for Education, despite any potential interference from António Ferro. I will return to this subject in a forthcoming article on Alcântara's mural paintings.

³² "Ao dar este parecer tenho diante dos olhos as reproduções dos painéis pintados pelo brasileiro Cândido Portinari nas novas e magníficas salas da Fundação Hispânica

(Pinto dos Santos, 2020), Portinari's paintings at the Library of Congress in Washington depicted the so-called "discovery" of America in a way that was unflattering to Portugal. The commission specifically asked to represent the Portuguese-speaking community of America, as opposed to the extant homage to the "Spanish contribution to American History"³³ in the Hispanic Foundation depicting Columbus. In the *Discovery of the Land* panel, instead of celebrating Pedro Álvares Cabral, Portinari represented the common sailors working with bare large feet and hands, among the twisting lines of the ship's rigging and ladders. Such a choice of theme caused controversy among the Portuguese government. The same happened with Almada in Alcântara: instead of celebrating national heroes, he depicted the common sailors by referring to a poem from the oral tradition about the hardships of sea life in the sixteenth century ("Nau Catrineta").

Portinari's murals were inaugurated in 1942, and it is unclear but not unlikely that Almada knew about them, as he was quite aware of the models favoured by a younger generation of left-wing artists and probably heard about the controversy surrounding those paintings. Portinari was indeed a reference for the Portuguese neo-realists which opposed the dictatorship³⁴ and was then close to the Communist Party, but he had also worked for the Brazilian dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas (also called Estado Novo [New State], as in Portugal) that ran from 1937 to 1946, and it was the Brazilian ambassador, together with Nelson Rockefeller,³⁵ who inaugurated the murals at the Library of Congress. Thus, his politics were not the main reason. The main problem at Alcântara that triggered doubts about keeping the second commission and the reports from the National Council for Education (aside from the budget argument) was, therefore, the absence of a nationalist and imperialist narrative that the Portuguese dictatorship promoted and expected in public works.³⁶ It was key to assure the same would not happen in the second commission. Two dispatches dated 11

da Biblioteca do Congresso de Washington. Pode ali ser motivo de discussão o associar-se a obra do moderno artista à expressão decorativa das salas que receberam. Não é, porém, o caso da Gare Marítima de Alcântara, nem será o da Gare da Rocha do Conde de Óbidos." Estate João Couto, MNAA Library, Lisbon, Folder 57 (Pareceres da Junta Nacional de Educação/ Projectos de Decoração em Edifícios do Estado [Reports from the National Council for Education / Decoration Projects in State Buildings]), Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon.

³³ "Hispanic Reading Room", Library of Congress, Washington. <https://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/portinari.html>

³⁴ About the relation of Almada's mural painting with neorealism and Mexican muralists, as well as the confrontation of the different conception of the role of the artist in society by Almada and the younger generation of artists, see my essay "State-commission in modern times. Realism and modernism in the mural paintings of the artist Almada Negreiros (1893-1970)" (Pinto dos Santos, 2020).

³⁵ Idem.

³⁶ Paula Lobo states that "subjects initially considered for the Alcântara decorations were the city of Lisbon and the Portuguese colonies" quoting the Master dissertations by Ana Assis Pacheco *Porfírio Pardal Monteiro: 1897-1957. A obra do arquitecto* (MA Dissertation in Contemporary Art History, FCSH-Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 1998).

and 14 May 1946 state that the minister (Cancela de Abreu) ordered that the commission should be handed to Almada, on the basis of the 6th Section reports.³⁷ There is a handwritten informal letter from Almada to Pardal Monteiro dated 17 May 1946 celebrating that he got the commission approved.³⁸ Thus, the first round of reports worked, at least João Couto's (which is the only one I had access to).

Nevertheless, the controversy arose again when he asked for 500,000 escudos, stating that amount had been verbally promised to him by Duarte Pacheco,³⁹ with a request for a second round of reports considering the budget only. Pardal Monteiro, also a member at the 6th Section of the National Council for Education, writes in his report dated 21 November 1946 that the price Almada was asking for his work was fair, since the painter "will be a slave to his work and will hardly be able to dedicate himself to other projects" while conceiving the murals. And further stating that the work would give "contemporary Portuguese art a greater universal projection", while comparing him to great international artists such as De Chirico, Vázquez Díaz, Portinari, and Léger, and praising his previous work in the buildings he projected.⁴⁰ João Couto was also summoned to give his opinion on the budget,⁴¹ to which he replied that he had

However, in all surviving preparatory drafts by Almada for the Alcântara murals there is no indication that the colonies were ever considered as a theme.

³⁷ Doc. n. 528 (11 May 1946) and Doc. n. 4325 (14 May 1946), Processo Rocha do Conde de Óbidos (IPA.0007086), SIPA, National Archive at Forte de Sacavém, Arquivo DGEMN Instituto da Habilitação e Reabilitação Urbana.

³⁸ "Sua Ex^a o Ministro das Obras Públicas manda entregar ao pintor Almada Negreiros a decoração dos frescos da Nova Gare Marítima da Rocha do Conde d'Óbidos. almada com um beijo ao Pardal. PARABÉNS" (Pardal Monteiro 2012, vol II, 342).

³⁹ Handwritten letter by Almada dated 7 September 1946 to Engineer Gomes da Silva, General Director of National Monuments and Buildings (previously mentioned in note 27). This letter seems to confirm that there were in fact only verbal agreements with the previous Minister, therefore explaining the absence of documents regarding Alcântara. Processo Rocha do Conde de Óbidos (IPA.0007086), SIPA, National Archive at Forte de Sacavém, Arquivo DGEMN Instituto da Habilitação e Reabilitação Urbana.

⁴⁰ "A obra realizada pelo pintor Almada Negreiros será, segundo creio, da que dará maior projecção universal à arte portuguesa dos nossos dias, pois conhecendo bastante obras a fresco executadas em muitos países por artistas de grande renome como por exemplo, os italianos Chirico e Achille Funi, os espanhóis Sert, Arteta e Vázquez Díaz, o brasileiro Portinari, os franceses Maurice Denis e Fernand Léger e tantos outros que em consequência de circunstâncias muito favoráveis são mundialmente conhecidos, vejo na obra de Almada Negreiros motivos que me levam a considerar que Portugal tem hoje um dos maiores pintores decoradores do mundo.

À obra realizada por este artista na Igreja de N.S. de Fátima, no edifício do Diário de Notícias e na Estação Marítima de Alcântara, tenho ouvido referências de pessoas de incontestável autoridade como artistas e como críticos que reforçam a minha opinião acerca do valor deste artista português." Parecer acerca dos painéis pintados por Almada Negreiros. [Documento dactilografado do Espólio PMA], 21 November 1946 (Pardal Monteiro 2012, vol. II, 343-346).

⁴¹ Letter to João Couto from the General Director of National Buildings and Monuments, n. 11254, 11 November 1946. Estate João Couto, MNAALibrary, Lisbon, Folder

nothing to oppose the price the artist asked for, and that it was a fair price considering the running prices of artists such as Portinari or Sert.⁴² Other reports, such as Engineer Mariano Pires', were unfavourable to Almada, but the final decision agreed on 450,000 escudos, considering that the same amount had been paid previously to another painter for a less extensive work.⁴³

Thanks to both rounds of reports, and probably some other internal interference that prevented more conservative forces from prevailing (according to Sarah Affonso's story about Ulrich's secretary, and what the artist said about Águedo de Oliveira in the 1952 manuscript previously analysed), Almada got the second commission.⁴⁴ The contract was signed on 19 February 1947, just after José Frederico Ulrich was appointed Minister of Public Works. Even

57 (Pareceres da Junta Nacional de Educação/ Projectos de Decoração em Edifícios do Estado [Reports from the National Council for Education / Decoration Projects in State Buildings]), Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon.

⁴² "Uma obra original da extensão e complexidade daquela que se deseja encomendar, paga-se cara em todos os países. E o preço pedido talvez seja modesto em relação àqueles por que se fazem retribuir os pintores estrangeiros, um Portinari ou um Sert, por exemplo. Convenho que o preço pode em Portugal parecer excessivo, mas devo chamar a atenção de V. Ex^a para as remunerações exíguas com que é costume recompensar o trabalho dos nossos artistas que não são piores nem menos capazes que os das outras nações. Peço a V. Ex^a para reparar nas quantias, aliás justificadíssimas, que pedem modernos artistas portugueses que têm trabalho no estrangeiro e estão habituados aos preços ali estabelecidos. Cito, por exemplo, o ilustre pintor [Henrique] Medina." Copy of report by João Couto, 12 December 1946 Estate João Couto, MNAA Library, Lisbon, Folder 57 (Pareceres da Junta Nacional de Educação/ Projectos de Decoração em Edifícios do Estado [Reports from the National Council for Education / Decoration Projects in State Buildings]), Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon. Also referred to by (Lobo 2014, 348).

⁴³ Engineer Mariano Pires report dated 16 December 1946 suggested the budget should be 336,000 escudos. The final decision dated 27 December 1946 and signed by The General Director of National Monuments and Public Buildings, Gomes da Silva, was that the budget should be 450,000 escudos considering that the amount allocated to Adriano de Sousa Lopes for the decoration of the Noble Hall of the National Assembly in 1937, which had an smaller area than Rocha do Conde de Óbidos, had been 459,000 escudos. Processo Rocha do Conde de Óbidos (IPA.0007086), SIPA, National Archive at Forte de Sacavém, Arquivo DGEMN Instituto da Habilitação e Reabilitação Urbana.

⁴⁴ In a 1950 interview Almada states: "[they thought it was expensive]. Cancela de Abreu, Minister of Public Works at the time, then asked the 6th section for its opinion. It was favourable. It's up to me now to show that I haven't forgotten the justice done to me by engineer Gomes da Silva, Dr. João Couto, architect Pardal Monteiro and, finally, by engineer Cancela de Abreu himself. I can say that I owe it to all of them to have had the opportunity to devote myself to a job that sincerely interests me." And he admits he had known that later his work had caused controversy. ("O eng. Cancela de Abreu, nessa altura ministro das Obras Públicas, perguntou então à 6.ª secção o seu parecer. Este foi favorável. Cabe-me agora aqui mostrar que não esqueci a justiça que me foi feita pelo eng.º Gomes da Silva, pelo dr. João Couto, pelo arquitecto Pardal Monteiro e, por último, pelo próprio eng.º Cancela de Abreu. Posso dizer que a todos devo o poder ter tido a oportunidade de me entregar a um trabalho que sinceramente me interessa.") "Almada, «aquele» que não se confunde com nenhum «outro» fala-nos das suas últimas obras", *Diário de Lisboa*, 22 March 1950.

so, another dispatch issued in March 1947 requested that the work was to be monitored.⁴⁵

There is no record of any kind of prior proposals having ever been submitted to the authorities regarding the theme that Almada had decided to paint on the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos was mentioned. Yet, a drawing in Almada's estate shows a very different composition from the one he ultimately delivered (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. José de Almada Negreiros, study, graphite on paper. Private collection.
© Paulo Costa, Gulbenkian Modern Art Centre.

In the first panel, one recognises the boat with the family and the boy who drops his hat into the river and tries to catch it, the only element seen in the final painting. In this drawing, the central panel would include references to Ulysses being seduced by the sirens, and the abduction of Europa with the bull and the figure of a woman with her face resting on her hand representing Europe. Sarah Affonso says that the theme “was initially supposed to be Europe, that is why there are so many drawings around here of the bull with Europe on its back” (Negreiros; Affonso 1983, 72).⁴⁶ On the third panel a sailor

⁴⁵ Contract signed 19 February 1947 between painter José Almada Negreiros and the general Director of National Monuments and Buildings, Engineer Henrique Gomes da Silva; Service Order n. 2172, Direcção Geral dos Edifício e Monumentos Nacionais, 19 de Março de 1947, doc. 578900, Processo Rocha do Conde de Óbidos (IPA.0007086), SIPA, National Archive at Forte de Sacavém, Arquivo DGEMN Instituto da Habilitação e Reabilitação Urbana.

⁴⁶ “Primeiro era para ser a Europa, por isso é que há para aí muitos desenhos do touro com a Europa às costas.” In fact, Almada was also planning to do an illustrated version of Fernando Pessoa’s book *Mensagem* from 1934, and one of the drawings

pilots a caravel with the stone pillars (“padrões”) used to mark “discovered” land, with the names of national heroes engraved: Diogo Cão, Vasco da Gama, Bartolomeu Dias, and even the name of Pedro Álvares Cabral, though mostly covered. Therefore, there was a moment when a much more conventional theme, more attuned to the State expectations, was considered. There is no information about whether this drawing was ever shown to government officials. What is certain is that it was abandoned.⁴⁷

As already mentioned, the final version caused controversy. Other than Sarah Affonso and Almada’s testimonies, no official documentation has been dug up attesting to complaints or pressure for destroying the murals. It may still surface, as Salazar’s estate is yet to be fully catalogued and researched. Most likely, however, there is no written account of such an order, because this kind of denunciation was often done verbally, by meeting with the dictator personally, especially if the pressure was coming from his closest advisors, as was the case with Frederico José Ulrich. What does exist is a third wave of reports from the 6th Section of the National Council for Education, including, again, Pardal Monteiro’s and João Couto’s, which are obvious indicators of the need to defend the work.⁴⁸ Paula Lobo also analysed these reports, mentioning that a first short letter from Pardal Monteiro dated 1 November 1948 to the head of Direcção Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais (General Directorate of National Buildings and Monuments) approving Almada’s composition already “hinted that the frescoes were controversial” (Lobo 2014, 349).⁴⁹ Yet, Pardal Monteiro writes that the artist had just concluded the “works for the expansion of the second triptych, entitled *Pier*”. This letter was registered 13 November 1948 and was followed by a dispatch dated 16 November 1948 from an officer at the Directorate National Monuments and Buildings to its General Director Engineer Gomes da Silva, stating that the “Director has confirmed in the artist Almada Negreiros’ studio the composition and conception for

mentioned by Sarah Affonso has written on its back a verse from the poem “O dos Castelos”, “O olhar com que fita é Portugal” (The look with which she stares is Portugal). That means that the face of the female figure is to be read as Portugal, the southwest corner of Europe. The drawing is in the estate of the couple. ANSA-A-1364 CEDANSA – NOVA FCSH / © Herdeiros de José de Almada Negreiros.

⁴⁷ I have previously mentioned this drawing (2018, 68), (2020, 449–450).

⁴⁸ I disagree with Raquel Henriques da Silva when she writes in a footnote, referencing Paula Lobo’s article, that a justification is still missing for the 1949 João Couto report. The justification is clear in the report itself, as Lobo had already analysed.

⁴⁹ Letter from Porfírio Pardal Monteiro to the General Director of National Buildings and Monuments, dated 1 November 1948: “Declaro que o pintor Sr. José de Almada Negreiros concluiu os trabalhos de ampliação do 2º tríptico, intitulado ‘Cais’, destinado ao ‘Hall’ da Estação Marítima da Rocha do Conde de Óbidos, e que estes trabalhos pela sua composição e concepção se harmonizam com a composição geral e merecem, portanto, aprovação.” Doc. 578907, Processo Rocha do Conde de Óbidos (IPA.0007086), SIPA, National Archive at Forte de Sacavém, Arquivo DGEMN, Instituto da Habilitação e Reabilitação Urbana.

expanding the second triptych ‘Pier’ and that it should be approved.”⁵⁰ Hence, these documents refer to the approval of the composition, not the final work. It is therefore plausible to consider that this officer visiting Almada’s studio saw a different composition than the one Almada decided to paint in the end. Perhaps he saw the drawing previously mentioned with Ulysses and Europe. These documents also attest to the monitoring of the artist that had been required previously (as mentioned earlier).

Almada dates his work “1946-49” (Fig. 4). Indeed, he was not only referring to the amount of time it took him to conceive the whole composition plus the execution in loco, which took around four weeks (Negreiros; Affonso 1983, 72),⁵¹ but also to the time the work involved, including its controversies, both the one regarding the confirmation of the commission, the budget and the one that erupted in its aftermath. Nevertheless, he did finish the work in early 1949, since the composition was being approved by mid-November 1948. When he finished, the controversy began and two important surviving copies of reports by Pardal Monteiro and João Couto from November 1949 attest to it. These documents were most likely determinant for saving the murals.



Fig. 4. Triptych A Sunday in Lisbon (detail). Photographed by the author. 2024

⁵⁰ “Em cumprimento do despacho de V. Ex^a exarado na carta do Arquitecto Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, que junto devolvo, tenho a honra de informar V. Ex^a de que tendo verificado no atelier do Artista Almada Negreiros a composição e concepção dos trabalhos de ampliação do 2º triptico ‘Cais’ a que se refere a carta, a julgo nas condições de merecer aprovação de V. Ex^a.” Doc. 578908, Processo Rocha do Conde de Óbidos (IPA.0007086), SIPA, National Archive at Forte de Sacavém, Arquivo DGEMN, Instituto da Habilitação e Reabilitação Urbana. It follows that there are two documents dated December 1948 that prove that the application of lime plaster to receive paint was only made in December 1948. Letter by Almada 9 December 1948, in the same archive.

⁵¹ João Couto mentions that it took him 30 days to conclude the paintings in his report dated 10 November 1949. Estate João Couto, MNAA Library, Lisbon, Folder 57 (Pareceres da Junta Nacional de Educação/ Projectos de Decoração em Edifícios do Estado [Reports from the National Council for Education / Decoration Projects in State Buildings]), Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon. Also referred by (Lobo 2014, 350).

Paula Lobo already underlined that both Pardal Monteiro and João Couto name the two triptychs by different titles than those later adopted. *Domingo Lisboa* (A Sunday in Lisbon) is named *Litoral* (Coastline) and *Partida de Emigrantes* (Departure of Emigrants) is referred to as *Cais* (Pier). The titles used were as neutral as possible in order not to indicate any sort of misrepresentation in the paintings, although they were nevertheless far from the obvious titles of supposed past glories, such as “The discovery of Brasil” or “Infante D. Henrique” which were common in other public commissions. Lobo quotes João Couto’s praise of Almada in his 1949 report to defend him, stating that he had surpassed his previous work in Alcântara and that “the triptych *Pier* impresses me beyond imagination and pleases me without restrictions” (Lobo 2014, 350). She does not mention a further report by Pardal Monteiro, in which he also acknowledges how this murals outshone his previous work and how he had “enriched the nation with an artwork of the highest level”.⁵²

Yet, I will highlight another passage from João Couto that Lobo does not quote, stating that: “[He solved] the problem of introducing the bow of the great ocean liner into the space available to him and found a way, apparently simple but in reality so difficult, of solving the bow into the scaffolding on the far right-hand wall. The nation and the city of Lisbon can and should be proud of this new artwork produced by one of its most glorious artists. And it’s a good thing that it appeared at the Rocha Maritime Station, the anchorage for the boats that come from the ports of Europe and America. When our visitors see it, they will make a proper judgement of us [...]”.⁵³

João Couto perceived Almada’s figuration as the depiction of an arriving ship, a transatlantic. By emphasising the pier of Rocha as the arriving spot for European and American boats he conveyed the idea that this harbour was the

⁵² Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, “Parecer sobre os Frescos de Almada Negreiros. [Manuscript in the PMA Estate], 16 November 1949 (Pardal Monteiro 2012, 358–359). Both Pardal Monteiro’s and João Couto’s 1949 reports only exist as copies in their respective estates. The sent originals and any further 1949 documentation regarding the need to defend the murals is absent from the official archives. It could have been destroyed, maybe by Ulrich’s order, or it simply disappeared.

⁵³ “Toda a história contada por Almada me convence. Isso, porém, não obsta a que o tríptico denominado *Cais* me impressione sobremaneira e me agrade sem restrições. Não sei que mais poderia obter um artista ao obrigar-se a solucionar o problema de introduzir a proa do grande transatlântico no espaço de que dispunha e a resolver a proa na aparência tão simples mas na realidade tão difícil e tão acertadamente achada, do andaime na parede extrema da direita. A nação e a cidade de Lisboa podem e devem orgulhar-se desta nova obra de arte produzida por um dos seus mais gloriosos artistas. E bem foi que ela precisamente aparecesse na Estação Marítima da Rocha, ancoradouro dos barcos que vêm dos portos da Europa e da América. Os nossos visitantes, ao vê-la, hão de fazer de nós condigno juízo, o juízo de que estamos ao par das novas e grandes mensagens artísticas e não apenas debruçados sobre um passado que não renegamos, mas que não se repete.” report dated 10 November 1949. Estate João Couto, MNAAL Library, Lisbon, Folder 57 (Pareceres da Junta Nacional de Educação/ Projectos de Decoração em Edifícios do Estado [Reports from the National Council for Education / Decoration Projects in State Buildings]), Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon.

destination spot from prestigious places. Then, obviously, the depicted theme was not, and could not be, a departure. He therefore described what was not there in what can only be understood as a deliberate manipulation of the authorities' perception of the paintings to try to convince them that they were not confronting the state.⁵⁴ And he apparently succeeded.

THE FIRST TRYPTICH: A SUNDAY IN LISBON. THE DEPICTION OF BLACK PEOPLE IN A PUBLIC BUILDING DURING THE DICTATORSHIP

I have mentioned how Almada (himself mixed-race, grandson of an Angolan black woman) paints African fishmonger women in the Rocha Station, as well as scenes of poverty and an emigrants' departure with a graphic vocabulary, applying a synthetic and geometric character to the depiction of bodies, referring to the Cubist appropriation of African masks to depict faces both in front and in profile, and leaving aside all the picturesque references to Lisbon seen in the first murals in Alcântara (Pinto dos Santos 2018, 13, 67; 2020, 450).

The depiction shows the exact place where it stands, the point of departure of ships and the actual balcony of the building designed by Pardal Monteiro. And it brings everything up front, to occupy not a hypothetical fantasised pictorial space, but the exact space where the observer is. They are part of the life at the pier. The homage to Picasso is clear, and a more direct one lies in the figuration of the young girl held by arguably her older brother in the first panel, which is quite evocative of Picasso's painted portraits of his daughter Maya.⁵⁵ On a side note, it is curious that Almada's homage to Picasso implied in these murals has more affinities to the pictorial vocabulary that the latter used in the late 1940s and early 1950s — that is, at exactly the same time — and not to his previous work.

In her testimony, Sarah Affonso intimated that she was the one assisting her husband so as to avoid hiring an external helper and thus keep the entire

⁵⁴ I had already briefly mentioned this in Pinto dos Santos 2020, 450.

⁵⁵ Almada had a large-scale reproduction of Picasso's *Guernica* in his studio, and it has long been known that Picasso remained his major reference since the 1910s. It was extremely difficult to get hold of a reproduction of *Guernica* in Portugal, since Picasso was then a communist, and therefore considered subversive by the dictatorship. In 1946 he stated that Picasso's art "shows pain. His art does not attack the programs that His art does not attack the programmes that bring pain to humanity. Picasso doesn't waste his time. In his paintings, he shows us what he sees: he only sees pain. To show pain is to call everyone to themselves, and that's the main thing: that everyone is in themselves and not in the programmes." ("Picasso é a pura coerência do seu próprio caso pessoal. A sua obra é amor. A sua arte é dar a ver a dor. A sua arte não ataca os programas que trazem a dor à humanidade. Picasso não perde o seu tempo. Em pintura, dá-nos a ver o que vê: só vê a dor. Dar a ver a dor é chamar cada um a si-mesmos. É o principal: que cada um esteja em si-mesmo e não nos programas.") *Diário de Lisboa*, 16 May 1946 (Almada Negreiros 2006, 319). We can infer that Almada was also talking about his own art.

budget for painting the murals within the family. Both she and Almada always refer to the murals in the Maritime Stations as *frescoes*. In 2017, the restorer-conservator Teresa Sarsfield Cabral, part of the first restoration campaign of the murals in 1971, shared the information that the technique used by Almada could not be *fresco*, since he used pigments inconsistent with that technique (as some shades of green) and, moreover, the different textures and patches of glossy surfaces betray the use of combined materials that must have been applied in *secco*. Also, the sort of problems these paintings suffered from, like flaking, would not happen in a *fresco* painting. This information was recently confirmed by a thorough scientific analysis by the team led by Milene Gil, which concluded that he used *fresco* and *secco* techniques and unusual materials (Gil et al. 2024).⁵⁶ Sarah Affonso described to her daughter-in-law the process of transferring the drawing: “There was a small-scale model and then he would make the drawings, and I would enlarge them. The enlargement was very well thought out, it was done with two gauges, one small for the original, the other large for the enlargement. I would take the sizes and then make the enlarged drawings in dotted lines. Then the dotted lines led to a line and the drawing came out. All this on the floor here in the room [...].!” (Negreiros; Affonso 1983, 72).⁵⁷

The recent chemical analysis of the green pigments confirms the use of different tones: emerald, Sheele green and viridian (Valadas et al., 2024). The experimental use of unusual materials by Almada might be tied to a wish for a predominant green, a self-referential colour (emerald-green, in particular), that appears abundantly in his avant-garde short stories and poems, not to mention that he signed some of his early texts and poems simply as “Green”,

⁵⁶ The team recently published articles sharing this information, and details about technique and pigments, showing a great deal of experimentation with organic and inorganic materials, some not appropriate for fresco painting. For instance, they came to the conclusion that the artist resorted to “the synthetic ultramarine blue and cadmium-based pigments, as well as the exotic but toxic copper (II)-acetoarsenite, commonly known as emerald-green. These pigments were used pure, mixed, and overlaid. [...] the use of emerald-green, a very bright but very toxic green pigment [...], according to the technical literature, was not advised to be used in fresco paintings.” (Gil et al. 2024, 3325, 3329).

⁵⁷ She continues: “Then the drawing is perforated along the lines, then placed against the wall in its final position, hit with a pounce pad full of colour that goes through the little holes and leaves the perforation marks in the fresh mortar on the wall. Then, with the handle of a brush, the dots are joined and colour is applied.” (Negreiros; Affonso 1983, 72). (“Havia uma maquete em tamanho pequeno e depois ele ia fazendo os desenhos e eu aumentava-os. O aumentar estava muito bem pensado, era feito com duas bítolas, uma pequena para o original, outra grande para a ampliação. Eu tirava os tamanhos e ia fazendo o desenho aumentado em picotado. Depois o ponteado juntava-se com um risco e saía o desenho. Tudo isto aqui no chão da sala, calculas como estava ao fim do dia! [...] Fui eu que montei os painéis mas estava tudo tão arrumado, tudo tão lógico, que eu que não estava metida no assunto, armei tudo sem nenhuma dificuldade. [...] A seguir o desenho é furado ao longo dos riscos, depois encostado na parede na posição definitiva, bate-se com uma boneca de trapo cheia de cor que atravessa os buracinhos e deixa as marcas do picotado na massa fresca na parede. Depois com o cabo do pincel unem-se os pontos e aplica-se a cor.”)

instead of as Almada.⁵⁸ Other self-references in this triptych are the allusions to two of his literary texts, *A Invenção do Dia Claro* [The Invention of the Bright Day] from 1921, and *Saltimbancos (contrastes simultâneos)* [Circus acrobats (simultaneous contrasts)] from 1916. The first one is alluded to in the stage-like architecture, in which an unnaturalistic window is seen through the wall with a table and a vase of strange flowers. When he wrote the 1921 prose-poem, Almada made some related drawings employing this same motif, the window, the table, the vase, which are also structural elements of several canonical Cubist paintings. As for *Saltimbancos*, his unpunctuated and breathless short story published in the magazine *Portugal Futurista* in 1917, it is clear that the poverty, the ragged costumes and bare feet described in the avant-garde text are reenacted in the painting (Pinto dos Santos 2019, 39). A surviving sketch for the juggler depicts a tattooed naked woman on his arm and chest hair that the artist abandoned in the final version (Fig. 5), but it demonstrates how Almada was keen on working to show a poor marginalised reality.



Fig. 5. José de Almada Negreiros, study, graphite and gouache on paper. Private Collection. Photograph © Paulo Costa, Gulbenkian Modern Art Centre.

⁵⁸ The colour *green* is always self-referential in Almada, even in later years when he is working under commission. The colour emerald-green appears in his 1917 short story *A Engomadeira* in a very explicit and erotic way and he also wrote autobiographical stories titled “História Verde”, “História verde (autêntica)” and “Verde”, dated 1920 and 1921. These and other stories or poems were often written in green ink, as is the case of the poem “O Menino d’Olhos de Gigante”, also from 1921. It is also the colour of the cover of his book *A Invenção do Dia Claro*, which he designed, published by Fernando Pessoa in 1921. In 1916 Almada drew a green Christ, causing scandal, for the cover of the periodical *A Ideia Nacional* of 20 April 1916. When Almada worked for the first time with the architect Pardo Monteiro in 1938 in the church Nossa Senhora de Fátima in Lisbon, he depicted in a stained-glass window for the mortuary chapel a greenish crucified Christ, recovering, in a way that was unknown both to the commissioning body and the religious public, the self-referentiality of the colour green. Other works also show a dominance of green. For full source references and explanation see Pinto dos Santos 2015; 2017; 2019.

Considering the upper part of the first panel, one can notice that Almada depicted a couple standing in a balcony underneath a stripped awning, watching the whole scene developing in both triptychs. One might posit the hypothesis that this is a self-portrait of him and his wife, considering that the other depictions Almada made of Sarah would show her with her elbow resting vertically, her hand holding her face —the same position of his depictions of the female figure of Europe. This figure is flanked by a man whose oval-shaped face, head and hairline have some affinities with a few of Almada’s self-portraits. The colour of the couple’s skin is dubious, with a shadow-light playing of dark brown and lighter surfaces, but the woman’s skin is lighter than the man’s. It is possible, therefore, that this image is a portrait of Almada, with his darker skin, and Sarah, who echoes the figure of Europe from his first studies for this triptych.

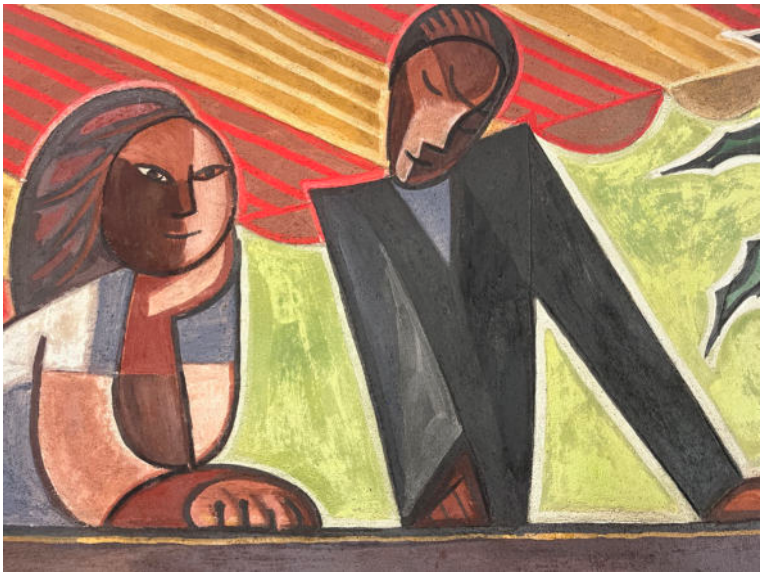


Fig. 6. First panel of triptych *A Sunday in Lisbon* (detail). Photograph by the author.

The second panel of this triptych is, nevertheless, the most striking one, since the central figure of the panel and of the whole three-part composition is a monumental African fishmonger sitting down. The central panel shows two working-class women that have been elevated to monuments: strong, powerful, barefoot women. It is very clear that the seated woman is black, but it is more ambiguous if the one standing is too. Almada fills the “white of the eye” with blue, as if indicating the eye colour there instead of the eyeball, which is black. It could however be a pictorial device to associate the woman with the sea. A sketch for this character shows that, at least at an earlier stage, Almada first thought of portraying her as a black woman too. (Fig. 7)



Fig. 7. José de Almada Negreiros, study, gouache, Indian ink and graphite on paper.
Private collection. © Paulo Costa, Gulbenkian Modern Art Centre.

What is unquestionable is that the centre of the triptych is occupied by a black fishmonger sitting down. There is no other painting, public or private, that elevates such a figure to a central monumental position like this one. Moreover, she rests her head in her arm, also recovering the position of the figure of Europe in the sketch previously shown (Fig. 3), which was meant for this same panel. One cannot know the motivations of the artist and there is no document that attests to this, but this extraordinary idea of transforming the figure of Europe into a black powerful fishmonger could not but displease the authorities.

Yet, nothing is mentioned about her, not in official documents, interviews, testimonies, or art historical accounts.⁵⁹ Neither José-Augusto França nor any other art historian mentioned that this woman was black. Furthermore, using the primitivist trope of the mask, Almada leaves the skin colour ambiguous in several other characters in the murals. It is even more ambiguous because some characters are clearly depicted as white, contrasting with the darker skin tones and the play of contrast light/shadow.

Since 1954 and until 2017, white scholars writing about the murals did not mention black people depicted in a dignified way in both triptychs. Was it because they could not see what was not supposed to be in official commissions,

⁵⁹ The first mention is by Pinto dos Santos 2017, 19, 328.

even in a singularly provocative case as this one? Or were they accustomed to not see them? The central woman was not supposed to be a subject either of painting or of a modernist art history analysis and therefore it was not noticed that she was there, depicted as a monument.

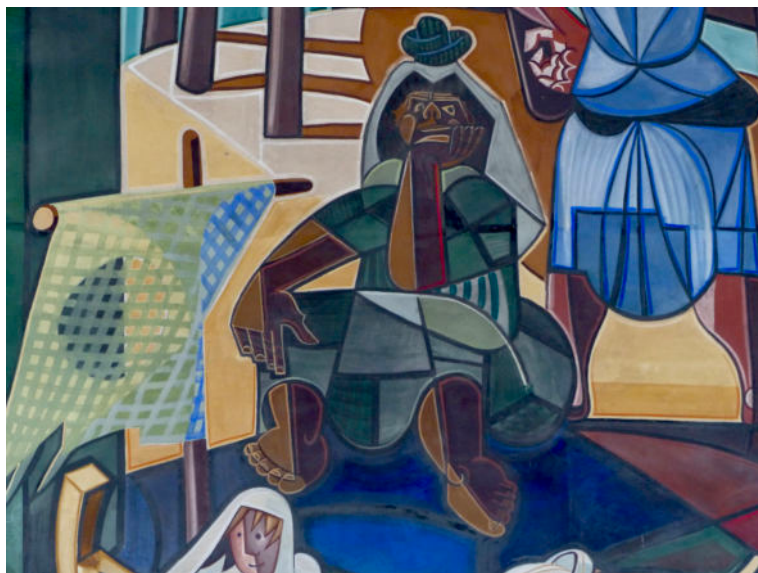


Fig. 8. Central panel of triptych *A Sunday in Lisbon* (detail). Photograph by the author. 2024

THE SECOND TRIPTYCH: WHO ARE THE EMIGRANTS AND WHERE ARE THEY GOING?

In the second triptych there are class differences in the people depicted. Several of the characters on the balcony in the left panel are middle-class, including a family seen from the back, already described by José-Augusto França who derogatorily mentioned a “low bottom” that he believed to identify the woman as Portuguese. Although their skin colour is, again, ambiguous, especially in contrast with other characters who are indeed white, the darker skin tones in this case are probably cast by the shadow provided by their umbrellas.

A man with a hat waves a handkerchief in the left corner of the central panel, a clear indication that the ship was departing, adding to the single man depicted in the right panel carrying coal (and not “sand” as França described) to the ship’s engine. Also signalling the situation of parting of loved ones are the two women hugging behind the people on the first row of the balcony next to the ship. This means they are closer to the viewer’s sight, and they too become monumentalised, comforting each other over the departure of loved ones in an embrace of shawls and covered heads, signs of their lower social condition.

A white woman wears an absurd hat with a bird covered by a net that França described as if it was a “caricature”; however, the bird is in fact a caged white dove which opens the possibility of a symbolic meaning⁶⁰ — a white dove was for long a Christian symbol for peace and freedom, and it became a laicised one when Picasso made a lithograph in January 1949 that would be used in the Paris Peace Congress promoted by the French Communist Party in that same year. In Almada’s estate there is a set of lined sketches from one of the stages of augmentation and transfer of the design — in other words, they are already very close to the final decisions put on the wall. The one corresponding to the central panel shows that Almada had not drawn the bird and net yet, although the hat was already strangely shaped. (Fig. 9 and 10).

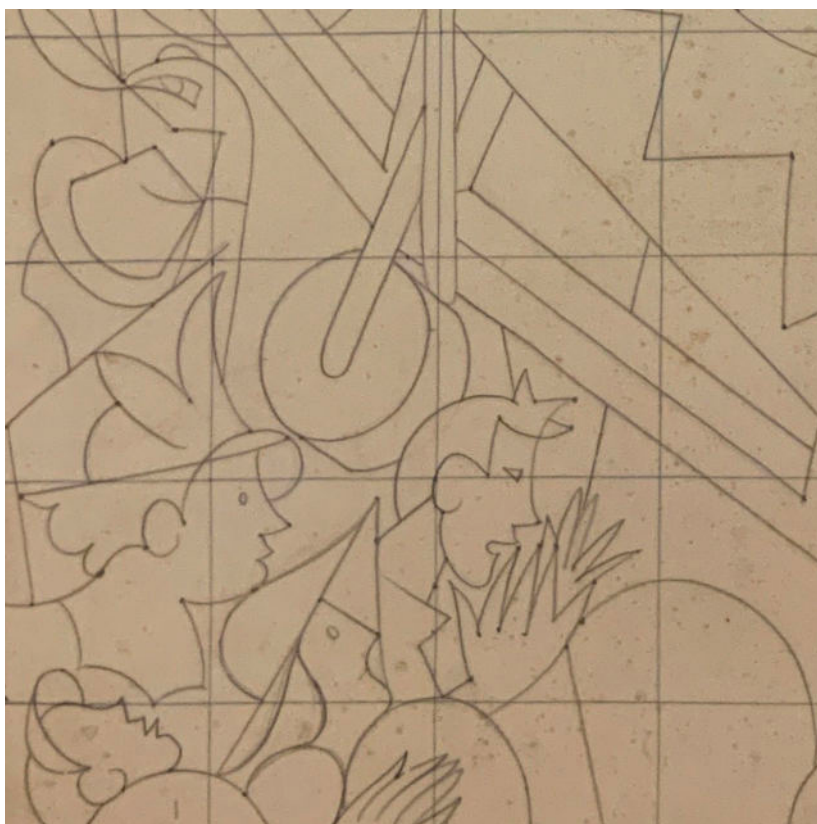


Fig. 9. Lined sketch for central panel of the triptych *Departure of Emigrants*. (Detail) ANSA-A-1362-1, CEDANSA – NOVA FCSH / © Herdeiros de José de Almada Negreiros

⁶⁰ This was first suggested to me by a visitor to whom I made a guided tour in 2017. I am thankful for that suggestion.

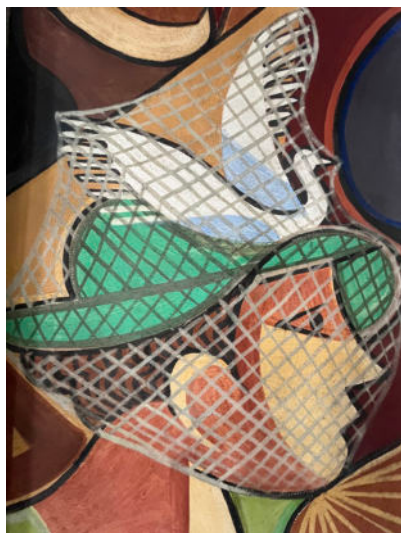


Fig. 10. Central panel of the triptych *Departure of Emigrants*. (Detail). Photograph by the author. 2024

A caged symbol for “peace and freedom” cannot but echo the political context in Portugal. In 1945, pressured by the outcome of the war and the international situation, the dictator Salazar had made a discourse signalling a “democratic opening” with the promise of free elections. But the opposition was rapidly controlled, and the threat of several coups since just before the end of the war was debunked (namely by the UK, with a vested interest in maintaining the Portuguese colonial regime). The conditions for free elections were never met, and in 1949 the opposition candidate Norton de Matos was forced to withdraw for fear of falsified results (Rosas 2013, 221-235). It is also worth signalling that Portugal was one of the few countries that did not sign the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations in 1948. It is therefore plausible to consider this strange hat as a commentary on the political situation after the war and the false promises of freedom.

The group of people depicted already embarked in the lower part of the ship are obviously from a lower social status. They travelled third class, looking anguished, and their faces are portrayed as masks — this primitivist trope I mentioned earlier (the mask) was not present in Almada’s visual works before the murals or after. It is relevant to point out that Almada participated in a modest, albeit very important show promoted by young oppositional art critic Ernesto de Sousa in 1946 comparing African and modern art⁶¹ (Pinto dos Santos 2017, 18), and it was probably then he gained a more vivid awareness of

⁶¹ The exhibition took place at the Colonial School, where administration people for the then colonies were educated. For more information see (Pinto dos Santos; Dias Ramos 2023, 162-169).

the graphic characteristics of using the mask as a pictorial device, as well as its expressive potential for depicting poverty and distress (Fig. 11).

Almada also plays with the shadow / light contrasts, fostering ambiguity about the skin colour of the ship's crew, depicting two sailors completely black (the details cannot be seen other than in close-up view) (Fig. 12) as well as a couple of passengers highlighted only by the contour of their profile in red and yellow (Fig. 13), the contours of the woman's breasts being almost undistinguishable when seen from the ground. Another example are the two figures that emerge from a window of the ship, the one in the back a black shadow whose expression can only be detected up close. (Fig. 14)

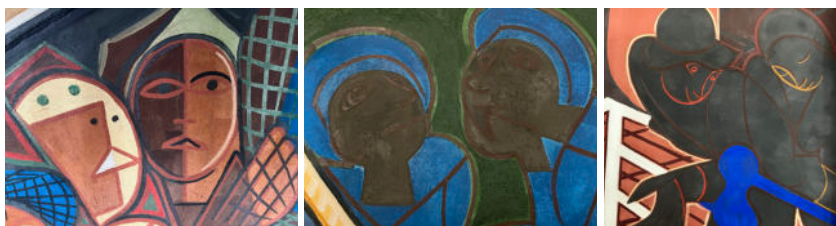


Fig. 11, 12, 13. Central panel of the triptych *Departure of Emigrants*. (Details). Photographs by the author. 2024

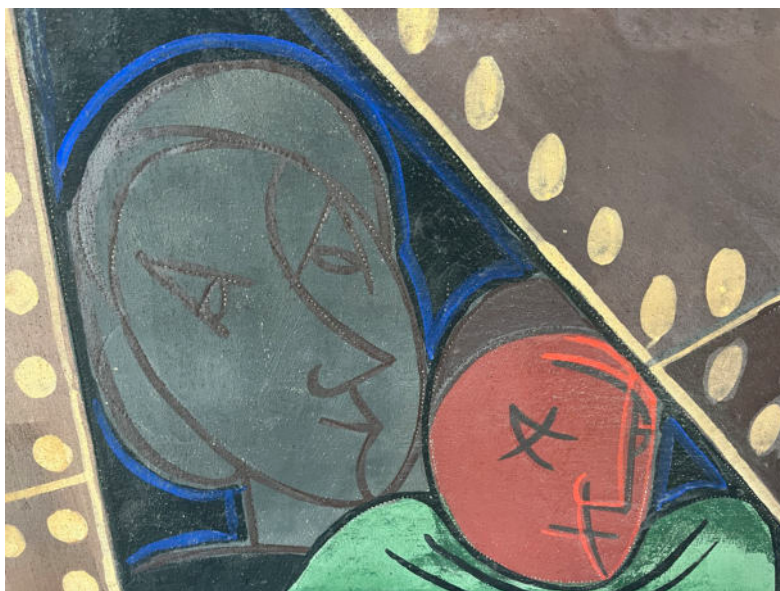


Fig. 14. Left panel of the triptych *Departure of Emigrants*. (Detail). Photograph by the author. 2024

Yet, the most striking figure hides in the left edge of the left panel, barely noticeable if seen from the ground. He emerges from behind an undoubtedly

white (female?)⁶² figure and stares right into the viewer with eyes wide open and a curly Afro hair, his nose and features highlighted in red contours (Fig. 15). The matching sketch strongly underlines African features (Fig. 16), but the final figure depicted is quite different: his features changed from the sketch version and now resemble Almada himself and some of his earlier self-portraits. There are no dots marking a transferred drawing, thus the final version of this figure was decided right there on the spot. The similarity is striking, suggesting that this might be a second self-portrait of Almada in these mural paintings (considering the first one to be in the opposite triptych alongside maybe Sarah Affonso, which nevertheless cannot be proven). This hypothesis leads to consider that Almada portrayed himself as one of the emigrants, forced to leave due to the vexations and constraints he faced as an artist in his own country, or the dark inside of the boat from where he stares back serving as metaphor for that same condition. Almada had left the country to live in Madrid for five years before he was married and had children but would not leave again. Nevertheless, despite the changes between the sketch and the final version, the character is depicted as a black person, unambiguously, expressing his helpless condition by staring outside the painting.

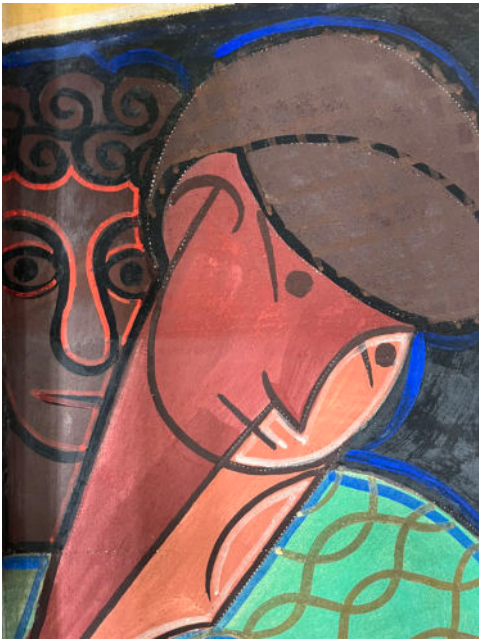


Fig. 15. Left panel of the triptych *Departure of Emigrants*. (Detail). Photograph by the author. 2024

⁶² The sketch marks the breasts of this figure, and they are still defined, but more discretely, in the final version. But the hat points to a masculine figure. It is a rather strange androgynous character.

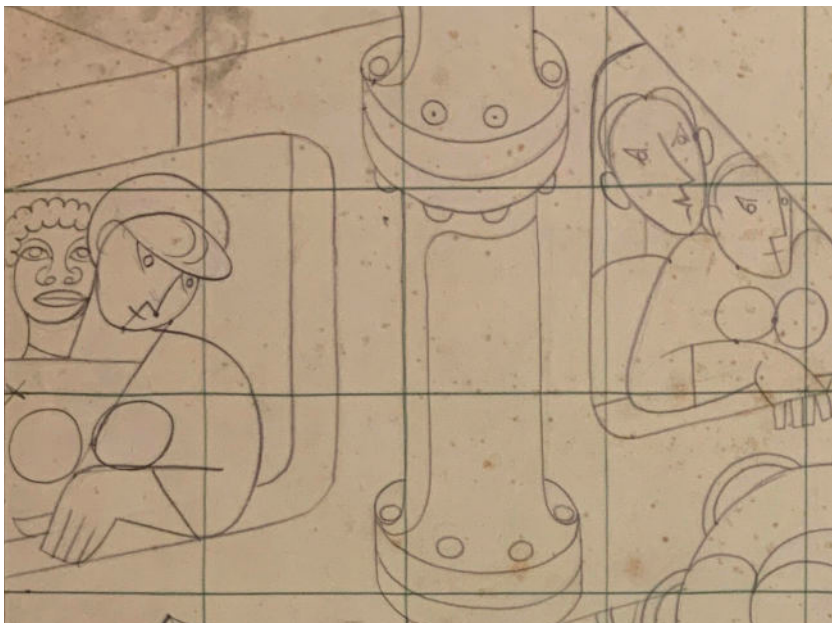


Fig. 16. Lined sketch for central panel of the triptych *Departure of Emigrants* (Detail). ANSA-A-1361-I, CEDANSA – NOVA FCSH / © Herdeiros de José de Almada Negreiros

The emigrants on the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos mural paintings are probably departing for the then colonies, mostly Angola but also Mozambique, as well as for Latin America. Before the Second World War, the overseas destination of emigration was mostly Brazil, and during the war, especially in the first two years, a vast number of refugees crossed the Atlantic through Lisbon to reach the United States and other countries in America. That number was residual by the time the first Maritime Station became operative in 1943, and the migration numbers also dropped during the war period. After the war, emigration rose immensely with 5000 people leaving the country legally already in 1945 (illegal emigration also occurred) (Santos 2023, 99). Just after the Second World War and before Rocha do Conde de Óbidos was inaugurated on 19 June 1948, the most popular destinations were Brazil and Venezuela, but soon the dictatorship's political police, PIDE, imposed restrictions to reduce the migration to those countries. In 1947 the Minister of Internal Affairs, Augusto Cancela de Abreu (who had already asked for reports on Almada's murals when he was Minister of Public Works, between 1944 and February 1947), temporarily suspended all migration to foreign destinations to instead promote migration to the then African colonies (which was not considered migration, since the territory was seen as part of the nation). The Junta de Emigração (Emigration Board) was created in October 1947 to control this exodus, and to manage migration according to national needs, including labour necessities and white colonisation

in Africa to secure territories in face of international pressure and the debates on the autonomy of African peoples (Santos 2023, 108 and ff). The colonisation exodus increased in 1947, and decreased again, in 1948, the year Almada was painting the triptych *Departures of Emigrants*, when 4984 people departed for the colonies and 10322 to Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina (Santos 2023, 110).

Almada painted migration at a time when all efforts were made to increase a white colonisation of Angola and Mozambique, and when a Board was created to manage emigration as a tool to “relieve tensions and balance socio-economical needs” (Santos 2023, 98), even though the desire to emigrate to Latin America continued to increase. In fact, when the liberation wars broke in Africa in 1961, there were more Portuguese in Argentina and Venezuela alone than in all the colonised African territory (Teixeira 2001, 32).⁶³

EPILOGUE: MASS CULTURE AND CUBIST TECHNIQUES TO MONUMENTALISE COMMON PEOPLE

José-Augusto França had already noted that Almada works the “line” differently from Picasso: as a “characterising note” and “surrounding continuity”, which I take to be a very insightful point. But I would go further, benefitting from the close look enabled by the scaffolding.

Almada, in fact, used the graphic design strategies that he mastered — by then he had produced hundreds of book covers, promotional pamphlets, publicity illustrations, posters, comic strips, and so on, in Portugal and Spain — aiming to enhance production and expression, and emphasise a visual message. These were therefore publicity or information techniques used in mass visual culture that were not only transferred to mural painting (supposedly a “high” art) but in fact blown up by Almada to their fullest potential. The line is used as a substitute for tridimensional illusion, eschewing any trace of naturalistic representation, and its effect is exaggerated by repeating the contours in different colours. This intensifies the proximity and the presence of the depicted figures. Although static, they are given a transient quality — the reverberation of light via the coloured contours is momentary, and it has the effect of a poster that needs to vibrate so as to capture one’s attention, for a short period of time. But here, the temporary becomes permanent.

Moreover, Almada used techniques foreign to fresco and mural painting that were actually Cubist, such as the mixing of sand to produce textures, which can easily be observed on a close-up look, and boldness of contours and fillings, contrasting with smooth surfaces with colour overlaying of different tonalities obtained by more or less diluted paint.⁶⁴ These kinds of tech-

⁶³ Many thanks to Afonso Dias Ramos for this reference.

⁶⁴ Milene Gil’s team described “the use of textured, opaque, and transparent paint layers” and their variants in the different panels, also providing information about the granulated surface: “the paint layers, particularly the backgrounds, are generally very textured, and grains of aggregates can often be seen through the paint and even

niques are invisible when seen from the ground, but they add up to a visual effect of colour reverberation and monumental impact. In addition, the depicted scenes gain this immediate quality by being fragmented into geometrical figures and depicted through angular and curved lines that are almost always closed to give a finished shape to every element, even those such as the waving water where the boats stand (Fig. 17).

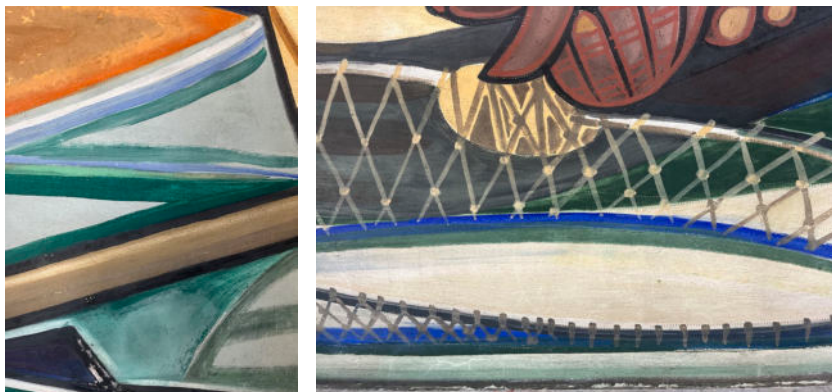


Fig. 17 A and B. Central panel of the triptych *A Sunday in Lisbon* (details).
Photographed by the author. 2024

Although the strong black contours can also evoke the delimitations required for the composition of stained-glass — that Almada experimented with when working for the first time with Pardal Monteiro, in the *Our Lady of Fátima Church* (1938) — the fact is that here the contours are duplicated, triplicated or even quadruplicated. Hence, there is a multiplied intensification impossible to achieve in the rigidity demanded by the stained-glass technique.

For instance, the face of the seated fishmonger supported by her hand is emphasised by the juxtaposition of pale yellow, black thick lines and dark brown and ochre/brown filling (Fig. 18 A), while her arm is marked with a sharp and bright red line (Fig. 18 B) right next to a black continuous contour that defines the hand base. The black lines also seem to bear some component that makes them shine — which is not possible in fresco painting. Although a conclusion as to whether the artist mixed something with the black pigment to make it glossy, or if this effect was a reaction to a previous and urgent intervention of restoration in the 1970s (that covered the surface with a vinylic substance to stabilise it) was not reached,⁶⁵ I believe this was a deliberate decision by the artist.

on the paint surface. In addition to the texture conferred by the granulometry of the top plaster and pigments used, it is possible that grains of calcium carbonates and sands were occasionally added to the paints.” (Gil et al. 2024, 3310 and 3322).

⁶⁵ Milene Gil’s team analysed the presence of oil paints and PVA in the binders, not being able to affirm for sure which were the artist’s choice, and which were the remains of past interventions (Gil et al. 2024, 3325-3326).

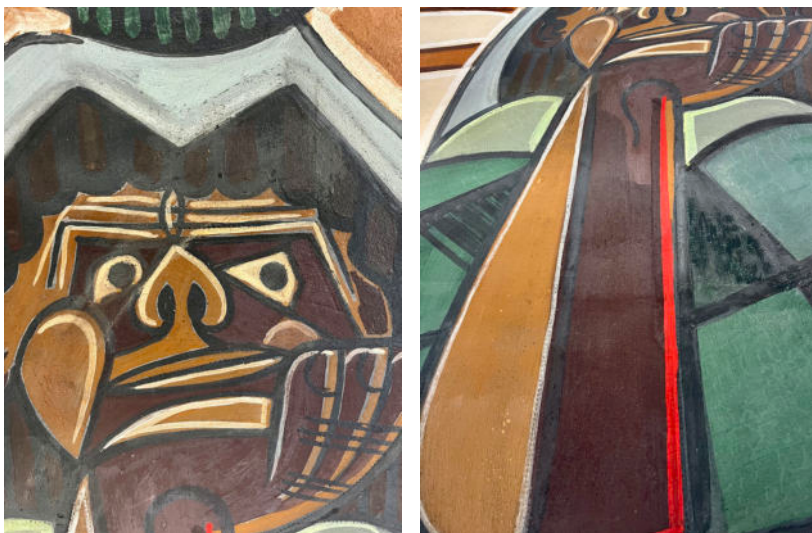


Fig. 18 A and B. Central panel of the triptych *A Sunday in Lisbon* (details).
Photographed by the author. 2024

Other examples can be seen in the red, blue, brown, black and light yellow used in the hand of the standing fishmonger (Fig. 19), the red contour in the arm of the juggler (Fig. 20) or the blue contour emphasizing the face of one embracing woman at the balcony (Fig. 21) and more, such as in the previously mentioned face of the staring (perhaps) self-portrait inside the ship (Fig. 15).

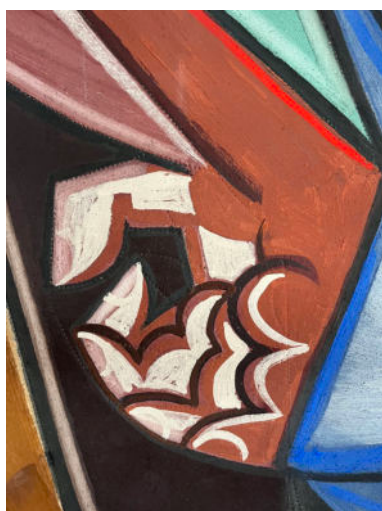


Fig. 19. Central panel of the Triptych *A Sunday in Lisbon* (detail). Photographed by the author. 2024

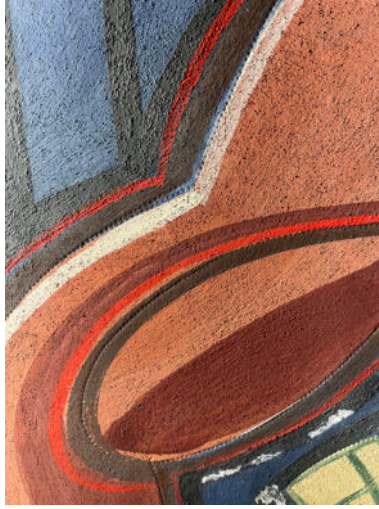


Fig. 20. Right panel of the Triptych A Sunday in Lisbon (detail). Photographed by the author. 2024

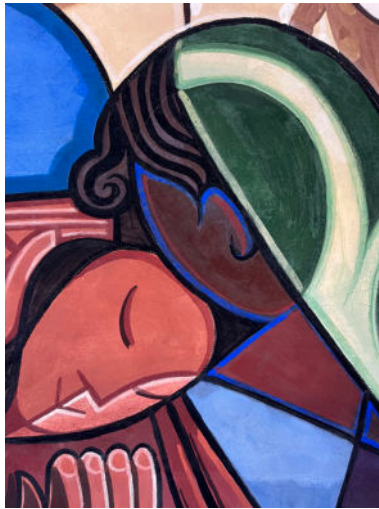


Fig. 21. Left panel of the triptych Departure of Emigrants. (Detail). Photograph by the author. 2024

Overall, the result of these combined techniques produced a proximity of the depicted subjects to the viewer and a visual communication akin to the language of advertising design. Thus, the monumental figures do not have the distance of monuments, but the proximity seen in common people, part and parcel of everyday life, including the ones that crossed that station to emigrate.

In 1969 someone who inhabited that part of Lisbon, the son of a fishmonger himself, testified: “All those people had my mother’s face, my grandmother’s, my uncle’s and also mine, in a way. I mean, I walked along the river, my mother sold fish, she worked at the fish market, so that’s where I grew up, right? So, when I arrived at the panels of the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos, I looked at those faces, they were my faces, you know, the faces of my people, and the people I dealt with.”⁶⁶

⁶⁶ “Aquele gente toda tinha a cara da minha mãe, da minha avó e do meu tio e também a minha, de certo modo. Quer dizer, eu andei ali pela ribeira, a minha mãe vendia peixe, trabalhava na loja, e portanto foi ali que eu cresci, não é? De modo que quando eu chego aos painéis da Rocha do Conde de Óbidos, olho para aquelas caras, eram as minhas caras, pá, as caras dos meus, e da gente com quem eu lidava.” Vitor Silva Tavares, interview to José de Almada Negreiros, 1969, transcribed recording, dactyloscript, Ernesto de Sousa estate. Previously referred in (Pinto dos Santos 2017, 328).

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