



FEATURED TEXTS OR PROJECTS

The Exercise of Photography

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Abstract

This essay explores the emergence of Contemporary Photography from the 1970s onwards, a period marked by its liberation from traditional social functions and its intersection with the second Avant-Garde. Photography became a tool for performance, self-representation, and socio-anthropological expression, establishing its artistic autonomy through fiction and theatricality. Within a pedagogical context, students develop two semester-long projects—self-portraiture and either appropriation or visual narrative—each emphasizing photography as a poetic, narrative medium. The essay reflects on student works that exemplify these approaches: from Eva Postica's introspective visual poetics to Salomé Monteiro's reinterpretation of Jeff Wall's *Insomnia*, and Ricardo Almeida's chromatically rich urban interventions. These projects underscore contemporary creation as rooted in appropriation, narrative layering, and relational image-making, positioning photography as both a personal and conceptual practice grounded in critical artistic inquiry..

Keywords: Contemporary Photography, Self-portraiture, Appropriation, Narrative Expression, Artistic Autonomy

Biography

Artist, curator, and professor. He holds a PhD in Contemporary Art from the College of Arts at the University of Coimbra. He is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture at the University of Coimbra and the College of Arts. He studied Modern Languages and Literatures at the Faculty of Arts, University of Coimbra. He completed a postgraduate degree in Arts Management at the Institute of European Studies of Macau in the 1990s, where he lived and worked. His works are represented in collections such as the Circulo de Artes Plásticas de Coimbra, the Coimbra Photography Meetings, the PLMJ Foundation, António Cachola Collection, Figueiredo Ribeiro Collection, EDP Foundation, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Berardo Collection, and the State Contemporary Art Collection, among others. A contributor and published author with scopia Editions, he was also a co-supervisor of Pedro Leão Neto's postdoctoral research at FAUP, titled "Mapping Documentary and Artistic Photography: A Contemporary Look at Architecture and Reference Spaces in Porto (MFDA-ARP)." He is the author of several books on photography and video art. Curator of the Coimbra Contemporary Art Centre since 2020. Coimbra Contemporary Art Centre since 2020..

Essay

Photography liberated itself from its social function from the 1970s onwards, coexisting with the emergence of the second Avant-Garde movement of the 20th century. At this point, it began to be instrumentalised for practices requiring a lasting medium, such as Performance and Happenings, or, in a more vernacular sense, to express issues subject to sociological or anthropological reception.

What is certain is that its importance and freshness emerged within the artistic field, particularly in the realms of the theatricality and fiction. We therefore consider that the starting point for Contemporary Photography lies in this period, with many of the authors who began their careers at that time still actively producing work today. The students' practical work, which constitutes 75% of their final assessment, is developed over the semester within the framework of two projects. The first focuses on self-portrait, while the second revolves around the idea of appropriation or, alternatively, the development of a visual narrative.

Despite its autobiographical definition and affiliation with Art History, self-portrait is understood broadly and diversely. It is always a poetic point of view (that which lies beyond the real), the "self" as "other", transforming Photography into a field of narrative expression. In the second project, the methodology of appropriation is based on the idea that appropriationist methods define the paradigm of contemporary creation, aligned with acquiring knowledge as the starting point for all learning. The alternative second project fits within a broad field, which can be called domestic or private narratives, favouring a sequential organisation (however paratactic it may be) and the coexistence of images with a relational dynamic that enhances their connection more than the individual value of each image.

Eva Postica's self-portrait work embodies a refined poetic directness but also reflects the strangeness of places, adopting a critical stance in self-representation. Margaux Mazure's photographs, also in the field of self-representation, possess an atmosphere akin to photo-performance, influenced by modern experiments from Man Ray to André Kertész. Ricardo Almeida's self-portraits should be viewed as critical gestures of self-representation in suburban public spaces. However, they reveal a very intense chromatic and constructive density that favours the fusion of figure and background.

*Salomé Monteiro's appropriation project begins with Jeff Wall's photograph *Insomnia*, making a radical shift from the original setting to a public garden. By stripping the work of its depressive character, she updates the everyday gestures and postures of idle life in the garden and daytime sleep.*

Finally, Sofia Pratas Morais' work holds narrative potential, wandering through urban spaces that close off to the photographic lens through compositional choices that hint at hesitant exits and reveal a familiar strangeness.

