

Paula Rego: Drawing, enacting, painting

Curatorship: Catarina Alfaro
5 December 2019 to 24 May 2020



Paula Rego, Life Room II, 2005

It is now ten years since the opening of Casa das Histórias Paula Rego, a monographic museum dedicated to the world's most famous contemporary Portuguese artist. At the twenty-one exhibitions held about her work during this time, specific periods of her vast production have been examined in some depth, or else her work has been presented in line with certain themes. This is the ideal moment to bring together a series of works that reveal the creative process through which Paula Rego has constructed her own unique and personal figurative world. The first step towards understanding this process is to recognise that, in her work, drawing has always functioned as the blueprint and a transfigurative force for the stories. We know that Paula Rego has been drawing intensely, ever since she was a child. She draws just as she breathes, with or without awareness of this act. The intensity of the experience that drawing brings with it never left her and would also become installed in her painting when she exchanged acrylic paint for pastel, already in the 1990s.

For the artist, all the drawings that she produces before developing her complex compositions are important, and almost all of them are necessary. The works selected and now on display demonstrate precisely the non-utilitarian status that she attributes to her drawings. Presented at this exhibition are a set of the artist's loose drawings and sketchbooks, some of which have never been seen in public before. On the one hand, this selection includes a most varied range of free drawings, model drawings and composition drawings, establishing the coordinates for a final work, which is normally produced in the form of a painting or engraving. Yet, on the other hand, many of these drawings are spontaneous graphic realisations that only have a place on that piece of paper, acting as the direct expressions of an emotional experience in picture form and revealing an intimate process of visibility.

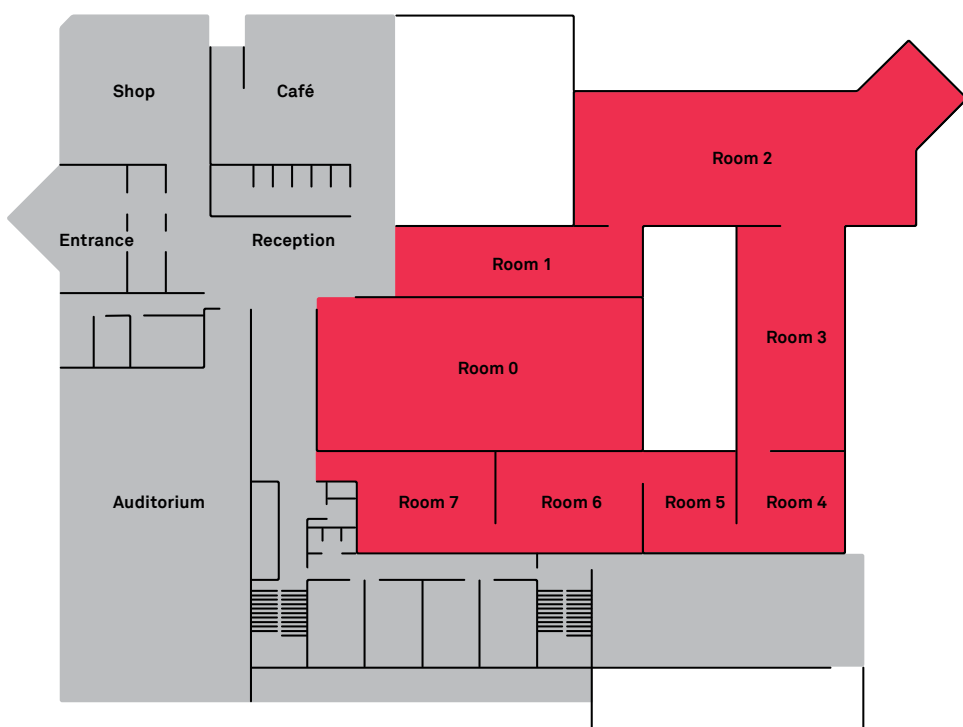
From the 1990s onwards, in the realisation and expression of her visual language, just as important as drawing is the process that enables her to create the spectacular dimension to be noted in the way she constructs her works, affording

them the status of genuine tableaux vivants. The stories begin to be enacted, represented and reinterpreted in her studio, gaining their own life through live models that follow the artist's perceptions. From the late 1980s onwards, Paula Rego began to ask her relatives and closest friends to pose for her. The bodily presence of these "actors" and the way in which Paula Rego directed them in order to place them in a space that began to resemble a stage or a film set had other implications for the way that she would begin to conceive her works. Beginning in the 1990s and continuing until today, all of this initially intuitive process has evolved and established itself as a complex working methodology. Models and scenarios became fundamental in Paula Rego's creative process, for they enabled her imagination and memory to work and reveal themselves. In the production of her paintings, there is a first phase when the characters are chosen in a rigorous casting process directed by the artist. When she doesn't find the ideal model, she creates a three-dimensional "doll", whose material form is fabricated with the same artistic impulse. Paula Rego began building characters in cloth, stimulated by the vivacity she found in the traditional folk tales that were the object of her research and work between 1977 and 1978. It is therefore not surprising that, in 2019, at Art Basel, the artist publicly presented her three-dimensional creations, now acknowledged to have the nature of a series, just as frequently happens in her paintings and engravings on a common theme: the seven deadly sins. *Pride*, the seventh in the scale of the vices condemned by Christian teachings, is represented through the majestic figure of Marie Antoinette, the French Queen Consort tried and condemned for treason during the French Revolution. In this work, Rego incorporates a series of other three-dimensional elements that were to be found at her studio — including models manufactured by her, but which now perform differentiated roles — following a logic of accumulation. Paula Rego paints in order to tell stories and, at the same time, is the protagonist and narrator of timeless stories, reinscribing them in her own epoch. In this storytelling process we always witness a process of questioning, and also a crude and often brutal revelation of human nature and the relationships that people establish between themselves, whether based on family, love or politics. In this process her works become the very driving force of this inhospitable territory that gives rise to drama.

Circulation Route

Map of the building
Ground floor

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