



Novas Novas Cartas Portuguesas

Audun Alvestad, Aura, Fabiana Faleiros,
Sara Graça, Rita Moreira, Delphine Seyrig,
Caio Amado Soares, Francisca Sousa,
Aleta Valente

Galerias Municipais – Galeria Quadrum
Rua Alberto Oliveira 52
Palácio dos Coruchéus, Lisboa

Tuesday to Sunday 10am-1pm and 2pm-6pm
Free entrance

Guided tours by appointment
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Novas Novas Cartas Portuguesas

The present exhibition *Novas Novas Cartas Portuguesas* and its related publication have been organized on the 50th anniversary of the feminist publication *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* (NCP) by the Three Marias (Maria Isabel Barreno (1939-2016), Maria Teresa Horta (*1937) and Maria Velho da Costa (1938-2020)), which was originally released in 1972. Following the publication of *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* by Estúdios Cor, who had the courage to print it, police immediately made efforts to apprehend the copies that were distributed around the country. The book was prohibited. Phones were bugged. When questioned about the authorship of the letters, the Three Marias answered, that “We all wrote everything.”¹ Their collective cohesion and solidarity must have further angered officials and it is unknown to the public until today, which one of the three women wrote which letters. The trial against the Three Marias started one day before a three-month long court holiday in 1972. The final session was delayed to 25th of April 1974 (the day of the carnation revolution, the trial session did not happen, for obvious reasons) with the acquittal session finally taking place on May 7, 1974 and closing the case.

Novas Novas Cartas Portuguesas at Galerias Municipais – Galeria Quadrum manifests the urgency for an update. Fifty years after its release the publication has not entered the Portuguese school curriculum², yet it seems the book is gaining the traction and recognition it deserves in an era that also acknowledges the battles of feminism, of trans- and intersexual, and non-binary people under the acronym LGBTQIA2S+ that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and Two-Spirit. If the Three Marias questioned throughout their publication *Sisters: “What can literature do? What can words do?”*³, this exhibition in turn wonders what images and art works can do, and how an exhibition can reflect on

1 “Quem escreveu o quê? Todas escrevemos tudo.” Conversation between Maria Teresa Horta and the curator on January 22, 2022.

2 “*Novas Cartas Portuguesas* deviam estar mais nas escolas”, afirma a Ministra da Cultura [“*Novas Cartas Portuguesas* should be taught more in schools”, affirms the Minister of Culture], published on March 8, 2022 <https://observador.pt/2022/03/08/novas-cartas-portuguesas-deviam-estar-mais-nas-escolas-afirma-ministra-da-cultura/>. Last accessed on July 2, 2022.

3 See also “Terceira Carta V: Minhas irmãs: Mas o que pode a literatura? Ou antes: o que podem as palavras? 1/6/71”, in Barreno, M. I., Horta, M. T. & Costa, M. V. (2017). *Novas Cartas Portuguesas, Edição anotada, Organização de Ana Luísa Amaral*. Alfragide: D. Quixote, p. 197. The connection between word and image is also apparent in the inclusion of five concrete poetry works in *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*, namely “I Jogo – V Jogo”. Idem, *Ibidem*, pp. 236-238.

the discourse that benefited from and advanced since the release of the Avant-guard literature that is *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*. Even though *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* has been published fifty years ago, its contents – deemed immoral and pornographic by the Portuguese dictatorship at the time – continue to resonate into the present.⁴

Novas Novas Cartas Portuguesas at Galeria Quadrum opens with a series of poems by Maria Teresa Horta. Horta revisited poetry from over fifty years of production, bringing to the table a selection of hand penned poems that were previously published in *Minha Senhora de Mim* (1971). These literary works are presented in analogy with black and white photographs by her brother **Jorge da Silva Horta**, who has been accompanying his sister during the trial at Boa Hora court in Lisbon. The dynamics of the 1970’s is further contextualized via the film *Les trois portugaises* (1974) directed by **Delphine Seyrig** in collaboration with Carole Roussopoulos and Ioana Wieder. The 29-minute-long piece documents the actions of support for and dissemination of the *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* book that took place in Paris between March 1973 and September 1974, in particular the reading-performance “La nuit des femmes” and a night demonstration in front of Notre Dame cathedral in January 1974.⁵ Seyrig, Roussopoulos and Wieder kept in touch and continued collaborating until 1982 when founding the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, the feminist film and video archive based in Paris.

Sara Graça accepted the invitation to create *Echoes* (2022), a site-specific work at the entrance of Galeria Quadrum, concretely for the space delimited by a cobogó structure, situated in the transition between the adjacent garden and the gallery’s vestibule. Cobogós - more frequently found in Brazil than in Portugal – are designed to provide shadow, to separate the inside from the outside while still allowing for natural light and ventilation. Here Graça’s newly developed work refers to the three writers’ figures, appropriates the bar structure, and – following the *O Cárcere* [The Prison] letter from May 17, 1971, in *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* - alludes to the home as a prison.⁶

4 A passage that could have been deemed pornographic can be found in the letter “Meu texto de amor ou proposto de uma mulher, à maneira de monólogo”: “This urge to bite your wrists and belly, your warts. This anxiety when you kiss my shoulders and slowly violate me into ecstasy. This frayed, light tenderness of slowly running my tongue down your legs, under your armpits, your testicles, so fragile and unprotected, so wonderfully warm and velvet that fruit is clothed in.”, p. 305. And “On my hips I still have the mark of your fingers; the mark of your mouth, the wet trace of your tongue, your teeth.”, p. 307. Furthermore, multiple references to the cruelties and violence resulting from the Portuguese colonial wars countered the censored official narrative of the regime. One passage reads, for example: “The other day there was one who lost his balls and Francisco from Aunt Maria da Abelha, remember? They could not even identify his face.”, p. 177

5 <https://www.festadocinemafrances.com/post/les-trois-portugaises>. Last accessed August 4, 2022.

6 The letter *O Cárcere* [The Prison] begins as follows: “I walked between the four walls,

This entrance constellation gives way to a suite of figurative paintings by **Francisca Sousa** who portrays the Portuguese poet Florbela Espanca (1894-1930), herself one of the most radical feminist activists and poets in Portuguese Modern History.⁷ Sousa is interested in the reflection of sexuality and gender, the explicit vs. the unexplicit in her pictorial research and how to take sexuality as a departure point to speak about female pleasure and the liberation of the feminine voice. Sousa takes her inspiration from the common, from friends who don't feel understood and sisterhood, and the utopia of the new body that is transforming and metamorphosing. *Orgulho* (2019) advocates "gender liberation and demonstrates that we can still use folk costumes in contemporary struggles", as Sousa affirms. Another painting, *Queen of wands* (2020), depicts a woman with a magic soup wand in hand.

Highly empowering, Sousa's work is placed in dialogue with **Aura's** installation. Stemming from a performance art context, Aura looks at another variant of what it can mean to be a woman. Aura is interested in the aesthetic, mystical, religious notions of identity, multiplicity, and trans-feminism. For her, the Three Marias also evoke the surrealism of Hieronymus Bosch, Gustave Courbet's painting *The Origin of the World* (1866), and Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés* (1946-1966). Aura is thus establishing an analogy between a literary benchmark and beacons of art history. Inspired by the work of Duchamp, her installation for this exhibition departs from the unavailability of scientific image databases of the neovagina for trans-women seeking surgery (In Portugal realized by the state-funded Centro Hospitalar e Universitário de Coimbra).

which had saltpetre blisters and large brownish stains, dragging my feet on the flagstones. I walked that floor throughout the day, over and over again, and also with my hands and knees, and not lifting my feet was tiredness, but more so unnecessary effort on a floor all too familiar. In one corner was the small stove and the dented lunch box, goods attained with great effort. On the other wall was the cot, with a hard and knotty mattress, covered by the only blanket, bumpy and dirty from so much washing and washing (...)", p. 169.

A connection between the colonial wars and domestic violence also becomes evident in another letter of *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*: "«Maria be careful, you never know about marriages, sometimes it's better to stay single ...» But how was I to know that my António would come from the African continent like that, he was such a good-hearted person, and since he came back from the wars he's been so upset and he frightens me, shouts at me day and night, beats me until he's sick of it and leaves me lying on the floor", p. 163.

In a conversation on July 29, 2022 Maria Teresa Horta further recounts moral abuse: "Married men in Portugal could cash the wages of their employed wives. They took the wages and paid the prostitute."

⁷ A street in the immediate vicinity of Galerias Municipais – Galeria Quadrum has been named after Florbela Espanca in 1949. The National Education Council (Concelho Nacional de Educação) has its offices on that street. The scarcity of street and squares that are named after women in Portugal has been eloquently debated in *Alameda, Avenida, Mariana, Maria, Maria, Maria* (2022), a work by artist Susana Mendes Silva, which was on view in the exhibition *Pacto* at Galeria Municipal Almada (May 21 - August 27, 2022).

Filmmaker **Rita Moreira** has been an advocate of feminist cinema since the 1970's. Shown at Galeria Quadrum is her recent film *Ti-Grace Atkinson – Uma biografia de ideias* (2018), a portrait of the American radical feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson who has also been cited in *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*: "Love is the trap, the barbed wire fence, the axis of oppression of women in a mocking universe. What is love but necessity or fear?"⁸ Another work by Moreira in this exhibition has been shot during the XVIth Lesbian Walk, which took on an unprecedented dimension in 2018 following the assassination of the Rio de Janeiro councillor Marielle Franco. More than forty years after conducting interviews on the streets of New York (for *She has a beard*, 1975), during the *Caminhada Lésbica for Marielle* (2018) Moreira speaks to a group of women on the streets of São Paulo that are voicing their support for and mourning the loss of Marielle.

The viewer also encounters liberation, humor, and self-confidence in the art of **Aleta Valente**. Beginning with a cell phone and a selfie stick, Valente's production has – since its inception - become more tangible in physical appearance, namely through the production of photography, sculpture, and video, and continues to address a broad variety of feminist issues in myriad formal languages. Valente's mural painting *Marque um X para cada aborto que você já fez* (2019) alludes to the letters that refer to abortion, namely the letter from June 1, 1971 where the Three Marias relate: "And a friend of mine, a doctor, told me years ago that on the hospital bench women were treated with contempt when they came in with their uteruses pierced, ruptured, bloodied from attempted home abortions, using knitting needles, sticks, stalks of cabbage, anything penetrating and blunt at hand, and that cold scraping of the uterus were done on them without anaesthesia, and with sadistic relish, «for them to learn». Learn what, ffs?!"⁹ Valente has debated the subject of abortion and giving birth (*Bárbara*, 2019) on myriad occasions via social media and in exhibitions but also contributed to supporting women in need via her engagement with the NGO *Milhas Pela Vida das Mulheres*.

The *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* also do elaborate on the pleasures of sexuality and female orgasm.¹⁰ The Three Marias cited the nun Mariana: "The life of a woman is like giving birth, a lonely and painful act, hidden and round up

⁸ Barreno, M. I., Horta, M. T. & Costa, M. V. (2017). *Novas Cartas Portuguesas, Edição anotada, Organização de Ana Luísa Amaral*. Alfragide: D. Quixote, p. 249.

⁹ IDEM, IBIDEM, P. 205.

¹⁰ "I ask: Hasn't the time come to tell, for example, what we know about the truth of our pleasure in bed, clearly denouncing man's game in making vaginal orgasm a myth, accusing as frigid those women who complain of not reaching contractions but simple coitus? Unfortunately falling into the frigidity trap, here the woman once again becomes, his prey, his inferior. Shall we remain silent?" in Barreno, M. I., Horta, M. T. & Costa, M. V. (2017). *Novas Cartas Portuguesas, Edição anotada, Organização de Ana Luísa Amaral*. Alfragide: D. Quixote, pp. 248-249.

from everyone's gaze under the banner of decency. Decency is a nostalgia, it serves to pretend that the too bothersome living are dead."¹¹ Decency is also nostalgia in **Fabiana Faleiros'** work, which explicitly deals with female masturbation, where "the pleasure generated by the masturbating hand is a threat to the organization of reproduction as sexual labor. Since the eighteenth century the hand has been repressed and disciplined through a series of technologies such as the chastity belt, the invention of hysteria, the orgasm as illness, electric shocks and other appliances that prevented the hand to touch one's own body. For the female body, considered a machine that re-produces, the clitoris has no function, and the hand must not reach it."¹² The works presented in this exhibition stem from Faleiros' PhD research into (pathology in) history of female masturbation, finding their representation in a neon sign, poster, T-Shirt, and artist book that reveals aspects of her research.

If Francisca Sousa's paintings introduced earlier on testify to an uninhibited approach to femininity and the ideas of the possible, her works are here placed in analogy with **Audun Alvestad's** paintings that allude to myriad male perspectives. Alvestad's paintings stem from a process of observation, they represent the lived reality as well as dream like sequences, carrying a narrative that deals with and speculates upon male-to-male relationships and the heteronormative, for which the Three Marias also did have their qualms.¹³

Finally, at the rear of the gallery the viewer enters **Caio Amado Soares'** experimental fiction web-series *Club Splendida* (2019), which originates in a scenery of the Anthropocene: "Based on the principles of democratic structuring proposed by Jo Freeman in *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* (1970), *Club Splendida* is an attempt to explore the successes and imperfections of this proposal, when friendships, insecurities, attraction (or lack thereof) stand in the way of a shared vision", explains Soares. Amidst destruction and ecological warfare, a group of five friends decides to search for *Club Splendida*. On board the blood powered spaceship, Daphne asks Samuel about the characteristics of their destination in galaxy: "What do you think how *Club Splendida* is going to be like? It would be nice if it is a place where there were no useless expectations, and I would not worry what people think (...)"

¹¹ Idem, *Ibidem*, p. 141.

¹² Excerpt from the press release for Fabiana Faleiros, *Mastur Bar*, SOLO SHOWS, São Paulo 2015, https://solo-shows.com/img/SOLO%20SHOWS_MasturBar_Fabiana%20Faleiros.pdf. Last accessed on May 13, 2022.

¹³ On hetero-normativity and the advantages and disadvantages of marriage vs. single life the Three Marias wrote in different letters, such as: "(...) in order to give them the constant certainty of their vigorous virility, aura: good in bed and at work, excellent fathers of the family and patrons of women, with a certain salary at the end of the month so that one can eat and have a car", in Barreno, M. I., Horta, M. T. & Costa, M. V. (2017). *Novas Cartas Portuguesas, Edição anotada, Organização de Ana Luísa Amaral*. Alfragide: D. Quixote, p. 101.

Using the popular TV/web soap format, Soares creates a forum of utopia, a space for voyage that allows its characters to unfold in an unregulated sphere or in one where rules (if there are any) are yet to be negotiated.

Curator's acknowledgements: All the artists and lenders to this exhibition, Maria Teresa Horta, Jorge da Silva Horta, Ana Luísa Amaral (RIP), Gisela Casimiro, Íris Dórdio, Joana Meirim, my colleagues at Galerias Municipais, Diogo Pinto and Nadja Abt.

Public Program

November 12, 3.30pm

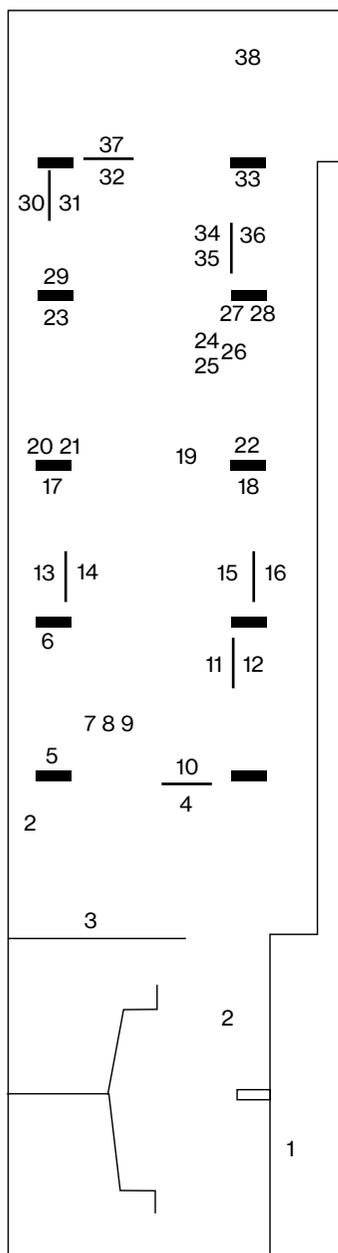
"Words are made of flowers" - New Portuguese Letters: reading, dialogue, manifestation.

Free workshop with writer, artist, performer and activist Gisela Casimiro, registration required, bilheteira@galeriasmunicipais.pt

December 1, 4pm

Exhibition tour with Tobi Maier, director of Galerias Municipais and curator of the exhibition.

This exhibition contains sexually explicit works. We recommend that adults accompany minors.



1. Sara Graça
Problema na Porta, 2022
Bead curtain, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
2. Sara Graça
Echoes, 2022
Mixed media, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
3. Aleta Valente
Marque um X para cada aborto que você já fez, 2019
acrylic paint on wall, 320 x 250 cm
Courtesy the artist
4. Delphine Seyrig
Les trois portugaises (ou les trois Marias), 1974
Documentary, France, b&w, 29'
Courtesy Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir, Paris
5. Maria Teresa Horta
Minha Senhora de Mim (in *Minha Senhora de Mim*, 1971)
Handwritten in 2022, 21 x 29,7 cm
Courtesy the author
6. Maria Teresa Horta
Segredo (in *Minha Senhora de Mim*, 1971)
Handwritten in 2022, 21 x 29,7 cm
Courtesy the author
7. Maria Teresa Horta
Existem Pedras (in *Minha Senhora de Mim*, 1971)
Handwritten in 2022, 21 x 29,7 cm
Courtesy the author
8. Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta, Maria Velho da Costa
Novas Cartas Portuguesas
50th Anniversary Edition (hardcover), Publicações Dom Quixote, 480 pages, Lisbon, 2022

9. Jorge da Silva Horta
Photos from the trial process, 1973 / 74
Prints on photo paper, dimensions variable
Courtesy the photographer
10. Aleta Valente
Bárbara, 2019
Photo print on vinyl, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
11. Francisca Sousa
Queen of wands, 2020
Oil on canvas, 50 x 70 cm
Courtesy the artist
12. Aleta Valente
Material Girl, 2019
Photo print on vinyl, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
13. Francisca Sousa
Orgulho, 2019
Oil on linen, 80 x 80 cm
Courtesy the artist
14. Francisca Sousa
Boyfriend, 2020
Oil on canvas, 50 x 50 cm
Courtesy the artist
15. Francisca Sousa
Quarantine Delights, 2020
Oil on canvas, 50 x 50 cm
Courtesy the artist
16. Aleta Valente
Miss Faxina, 2019
Photo print on vinyl, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
17. Francisca Sousa
Aula de costura, 2017
Oil on canvas, 30 x 30 cm
Courtesy the artist

18. Francisca Sousa
Floribela, 2021
Oil on canvas, 50 x 50 cm
Courtesy the artist
19. Aura
The Transformation of the World, 2022
In collaboration with Aurora Pinho
Digital print, ecological latex paint on recycled polyester fabric, 500 x 300 x 250 cm
Courtesy the artist
20. Rita Moreira
Lesbian March for Marielle, 2018
Documentary, Brazil, 16:9, 15' 35"
Courtesy the artist
21. Rita Moreira
Ti-Grace Atkinson – A biography of ideas, 2018
Documentary, Brazil, 16:9, 33' 30"
Courtesy the artist
22. Fabiana Faleiros
Mastur Bar, 2015
Neon light, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
23. Maria Teresa Horta
Cinto de Castidade (in *Minha Senhora de Mim*, 1971)
Handwritten in 2022, 21 x 29,7 cm
Courtesy the author
24. Francisca Sousa
Tarot: Two of cups, 2019
Oil on cotton, 15 x 20 cm
Courtesy the artist
25. Francisca Sousa
Tarot: the Fool, 2019
Oil on cotton, 15 x 20 cm
Courtesy the artist

27.
Fabiana Faleiros
Mastur Bar, 2016
Risography on paper, 21 x 30 cm
Printed by Edições Aurora, São Paulo
Private collection

28.
Fabiana Faleiros
Mastur Bar, 2015
Silkscreen on linen and viscose t-shirt,
dimensions variable
Private collection

26.
Fabiana Faleiros
*O Pulso que cai e as tecnologias do
toque*, 2016
Book, cover with a fluorescent drawing,
Ikrek Edições, 120 pages, São Paulo,
15,5 x 23 cm
Image: women wearing chastity belts
in an erotic context in the early 20th
century. Unknown author.
Private collection

29.
Audun Alvestad
It wasn't supposed to go down like this,
2020
Acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60 cm
Courtesy the artist

30.
Aleta Valente
Queimada, 2015
Photo print on vinyl, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

31.
Audun Alvestad
Morning buns, 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60 cm
Courtesy the artist

32.
Audun Alvestad
Not everything is for everyone, 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 50 cm
Courtesy the artist

33.
Audun Alvestad
Wearing your smell, 2020
Acrylic on paper, 21 x 28 cm
Courtesy the artist

34.
Audun Alvestad
*Nobody knows you and nobody gives a
damn*, 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 37 x 46 cm
Courtesy the artist

35.
Audun Alvestad
Once I had a passion for beginnings, 2020
Acrylic on canvas, 37 x 46 cm
Courtesy the artist

36.
Aleta Valente
Sua beleza é uma arte, 2019
Photo print on vinyl, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

37.
Audun Alvestad
You prefer Lucky Strikes?, 2020
Acrylic on paper, 21 x 26 cm
Courtesy the artist

38.
Caio Amado Soares
Club Splendida, 2019
23' (5 x 5'), experimental fiction web-
series, Germany / Portugal
Installation: video, posters, fanzine,
postcards, dimensions variable.
Courtesy the artist