

Paula Rego Secrets & Stories

Curators: Nick Willing e Catarina Alfaro Assisted by: Leonor de Oliveira
7 April to 17 september 2017



Paula Rego, Ten (From the Depression series), 2007

This exhibition is based on the assumedly intimate and personal tone of British director Nick Willing's film about his mother, the artist Paula Rego. It is, therefore, a biographical exhibition that introduces a spatial dimension to the artist's memories and personal references. But notwithstanding this biographical dimension, the exhibition doesn't succumb to a chronological order and sometimes successive events in time give way to simultaneous occurrences, since Rego's artistic thinking is constructed on the basis of reflection of her personal experiences, rendering her life and work inseparable realities.

The items on display in the exhibition's eight rooms take us back to her childhood and formal artistic education in the Slade School of Fine Art, London, from 1952 to 1956. Photographs, letters, books from Paula Rego's childhood and even a small painting by her mother, illustrate her genuine interest in artistic activity from an early age, which was also encouraged by her family. The majority of these items date back to the years prior to her formal artistic education and are testimonies to the familiar and private ambiance that is permanently evoked in her oeuvre. The exhibition includes books she read in her childhood that have become essential references for development of her figurative narratives, photographs and films, as well as works from her personal art collection. Such references include the memories of her childhood spent with her family, and of fishing trips with her father at the Cabo da Roca, which the artist recalls in the 2005 triptych, *The Fisherman*. Although she wasn't aware of this process of recollection when she painted the triptych, Paula reconstructed several familiar images drawn from her unconscious: 'The fisherman is my father.'

In addition to her family background, which was highly conducive to development of her artistic training, Rego also had the support of Victor Willing during the years in which they lived and worked together. Admired by his colleagues at Slade, Willing quickly affirmed himself as 'a spokesman for his generation,' as explained by the art critic, David Sylvester. She was immediately taken by his intellectual zest and charismatic personality. They were also drawn to one another by a profound mutual artistic



admiration. In fact, Victor was, according to Paula, the person who best understood her work and this fact cemented their relationship. ‘He’s the person who knew my work better than anyone else in the world. And he could tell what I was about just by looking at the work, and there’s nothing more special than that. If there’s somebody who understands your work really well then that person will understand you really well.’

In addition to some of her most outstanding works — *The Fisherman*, *The Crime of Father Amaro*, the *Dog Woman* series or the *Abortion* series, and works from her private collection that have never previously been shown to the general public, in particular a portrait of her father dated 1954–55, and *The Descent from the Cross*, 2002 — the *Depression* series will be shown in Portugal for the very first time. These powerful images, that remained hidden for ten years, explore the paradoxical dimension of psychological depression. This secret, now revealed, generated a sense of shame for many years, which is now assumed by the artist: ‘They should be put in a drawer never to be seen again, because I was ashamed to be so depressed.’ The evocative power of these images and the intensity with which they reveal the complexity of this illness are so real because they are directly linked to Rego’s inner world, given that she has experienced several periods of depression in her life. But their strength resides mainly in the fact that these images are infused with the hope to find a way out. It is precisely this embracing gesture, this essential link between art and life, that epitomises the meaning of her work from the outset: ‘We must confide in painting because it reveals what’s inside us and this isn’t always pleasant. It’s about discovering who we are.’ This exhibition also includes an unprecedented reconstitution of Paula Rego’s studio based on various elements — such as sets, models and costumes used by the artist. Rego builds her own personal world of fantasy and enchantment inside the studio, and through her paintings expresses what she’s unable to put into words, thus giving them a magical and revealing power.

Paula Rego, ????????????

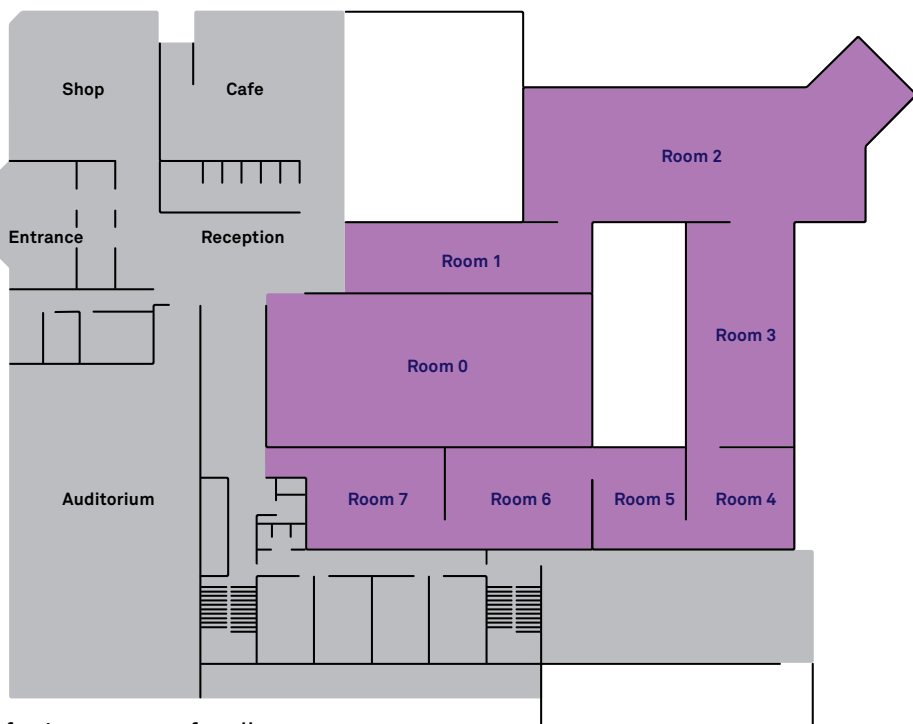
Catarina Alfaro

Programming and Conservation Coordinator of CHPR

Route for the Exhibition

Map of the building
Ground floor

Paula Rego: Secrets & Stories



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