

PEDRO PAIVA

*Em Frente da Porta
do Lado de Fora*

Press release

Pedro Paiva

Em Frente da Porta

do Lado de Fora

19.03.2024 – 20.04.2023

Galeria Francisco Fino is delighted to announce *Em Frente da Porta do Lado de Fora*, Pedro Paiva's first solo exhibition at the gallery, opening 19 March at 10 PM.

Calendar

19.03.2024 – 20.04.2024

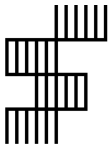
Tue. – Fri. 12 PM – 7 PM

Sat. 2 PM – 7 PM

Biography

Lisbon, Portugal, b.1977 in Lisbon. He attended the Faculty of Fine Arts School at the University of Lisbon and the UDK, Universität der Künste, Berlin. Paiva has been working as a visual artist since 2001, when he began an artistic partnership with João Maria Gusmão, that continued until 2021. Over the last twenty years, this work has been presented in museum exhibitions, art galleries, cinemas and even theater stages. In recent years Pedro Paiva has been directing his fictional feature film *A-Moeda-Viva*, as well as collaborating with Cláudio da Silva and Carolina Dominguez in the theater production *Woyzeck, Fuk'em'oll*, premiered in 2023.

His long-standing multidisciplinary collaboration with João Maria Gusmão began in 2001, in the field of experimental analog film, photography and installation, while simultaneously developing an essayistic discourse. The use of obsolete image reproduction processes, such as 16mm film or slide projections, supports an aesthetic vocabulary based on philosophical references such as Nietzsche or fantastic and science fiction literature.



Their career has been consolidated internationally at events such as the São Paulo Biennial, Brazil (2006), Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre (2007), Manifesta 7, Kassel (2008), and PhotoEspaña, Madrid (2008). They represented Portugal at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009.

Their work is represented in several international museum collections, including: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, MACBA, Centre Georges Pompidou, Tate Modern, SFMOMA, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Nouveau Musée National de Monaco and the Serralves Museum.

Exhibition text

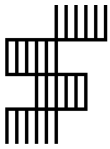
ROOFLESS, AMID RUINS...

«There goes a man, in his body, as he suddenly falls...»¹. This line from *The Book of Falls*, by poet Casimiro de Brito, could be the gist of how events unfold across Wolfgang Borchert's play *The Man Outside*², as well as across so many of his narratives. The oeuvre of this short-lived author is often seen as the epitome of *Trümmerliteratur* (lit. «rubble literature») of Germany's «Zero Hour» in the years following the Second World War. In it, the protagonist's situation – condition even – is always that which can be found in the title of another novel by a Portuguese author (Augusto Abelaira, who in turn gleans it from Raul Brandão's *Memórias*): *Sem Tecto, entre Ruínas* [Roofless, amid Ruins]. In Borchert's case, the ruins are in plain sight and the roof, aside from being absent, also refers to a frightening memory, whose presence is unable to nurture any possibility of a future. While the author's narrative work, namely in a book like *The Dandelion*³, published a few months after his death in a hospital in Basel, still contains vestigial hope and faith in life, the play, written in his final days (and a paradigm for «rubble literature»), confronts us with a dead-end world (like the one we are awakening to today?). The hour in which this author of «Nothingness and Despoilment» writes is characterized by an identifiable historical void: the «zero hour» of 20th century German and European history, which was, at the time, already perceived as the century of all calamities. Our time, in which so many are left «outside the door» (of life opportunities), is not (yet) that of another «zero hour», but it might be that of a handless clock: a time suspended, a time of expectation for uncertainties and horrors at a universal scale. With his radical scepticism towards the history and myths he experienced, Borchert sought to give a voice to a disillusioned generation, unable to find answers to essential questions, a generation of «Despoilment» (or «Despoiled of Yes» — his advice, including to his naïve alter ego, the figure of «The Other», is always: «Say NO!»); our time, however, seems to have produced a (self-deluded)

¹ [Um homem vai no seu corpo, e subitamente cai...], in *O Livro das Quedas*.

² *Draußen vor der Tür* [lit. «Outside, at the Door»].

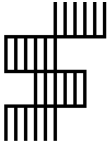
³ *Die Hundebblume*.



generation capable of many «Yesses» and a few «Nos», albeit void of content, and made only of illusions and virtual ghosts.

In the preface to Borchert's play, another great author of the period, Heinrich Böll, points out the «committed», but *ex negativo* nature of that work, due the clear «attrition between the individual and History». In fact, Wolfgang Borchert's texts never seek to read History factually, it is the human all too human that takes the place of History. A real, all too real and close abstraction in its indifference to life, a bowl in which Pilate washes his hands again. The counterpoint to History is a living, and radically critical, *memory*. Something which today, in our «era of emptiness» labouring under the illusion of plenitude, seems not to exist, insofar as only «real time» counts — as if other times, including the bygone and the yet-to-come, were not «real», despite our awareness that their power is often greater than the sterile «evidences» of the present.

In the play, Beckmann, the scarecrow-man who «returns to Germany» after the war, is the affirmative and paradoxical centre that absorbs all other figures (because everything takes place in the deepest depths of his oneiric consciousness), from the most pedestrian to the most transcendent. These include the «Street Sweeper», who represents *Death* (who had once also been the «General» and is now the inseparable and unavoidable companion of those who see no sense in an outer and inner world of rubble) seeking an escape in the waters of the Elbe from whose embrace it is reborn to pursue a post-mortem dialogue of the deaf; or the «Old Man», who embodies a useless, mute *God*, that everyone since Nietzsche knew «is dead». Beckmann, who lives immersed in a dreamworld, but seems to be the only man who is awake amid a conformist, conventional, apparently amnesiac and once again «happy» world (despite the catastrophes of History), takes on the role of great debunker of all illusions, «returning» the *responsibility* for every death to the Colonel (at the time, the responsible were still identifiable; today they are «faceless», unimpeachable, controlling every face at the global scale, in a time of barely controllable rhizomatic biopolitics) and reminding everyone of the weight of their *guilt*; Beckman, a manifold figure who chose the path of dream (to escape life), acts, in fact, with the greatest lucidity on the plane of life (dismembered families, broken relationships, politics and even art, which the «Cabaret Director» thinks «has nothing to do with truth»...). Beckmann is the disillusioned par excellence, against his «Other», who represents a baseless conformism and optimism and, in this case, is incapable of imposing itself to the Self (in fact, the very opposite is true). Beckmann is thus the only individual with a consciousness of his own amid a destroyed world, albeit resigned to, and guided by, conventions that are but rubble. His «Other», to which psychoanalysis attributes such an influence, but whom he does not obey, is the insistent voice of that conventionality of the empty commonplace, a falsetto voice with answers to everything but no solutions: its answer is always identical, consisting of purported «truths» contradicted by the facts – a contemporary example that now comes to mind would be Jean-Pierre Sarrazac's play *The*



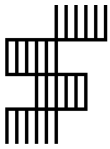
*End of Possibilities: A Satanic Tale*⁴, where Aragon's verses echo « We brought the dead to the table / We built sand castles... »⁵, and where the protagonist is a certain J. B., the so-called «champion of 'over-death'», who resembles Borchert's Beckmann, who at a given moment plays with his surname by removing its initial and thus becoming what he had been since his return: an «eckmann», i.e., a man (*Mann*) curled up in a corner (*Eck*).

As a testimony of a particular historical moment, that of post-war Germany, and also of a tabula rasa literature, a literature of the naked word, in which language, debased by Nazism, is purified, Wolfgang Borchert's play has its own models and parallels in a more or less recent past and in his own time. From early on, the author claims an Expressionist heritage, which cultivates a type of drama in the field of theatre which is also that of *The Man Outside*: the so-called «station drama», which evokes the moments of Christ's path to the Calvary and whose structure is made of a series of episodes that problematize an individual trajectory which, like Borchert's play, alternates between radical scepticism and a pathos of occasional hope. In this «station drama», found in German Expressionists or already in Strindberg, the focus is not only individual fate, but rather a problematic of the human, in a tension that also exudes from Borchert's play between a Self that is not «One», but «one of them» (a «representative»), and the broader plane of a «universal drama» (at stake here is always the human condition itself, seen from the perspective of a Self with no illusions). Indeed, from a more universal perspective, *The Man Outside* could be read as a version of the medieval morality play (*auto*) whose Portuguese version is titled *Todo o Mundo e Ningém* [The Whole World and No One], a «Whole World» of the Second World War that transcends its historical boundaries and contains in itself the essence of every disaster in History. And we could also ask whether the play, and its protagonist, can be seen as a sort of 20th century *Woyzeck*, himself lost in a society of «normal» people that do not understand him, between military discipline and fair clowns, between the obsession with the Other of himself and the inability of relating to others. Like Büchner's *Woyzeck*, Beckmann is also an anti-hero riddled with insoluble paradoxes. He who has only doubts spends his time asking questions for which he knows there are no answers. Laughter, once a frequent weapon in Borchert's short stories, is now impossible, in this grand theatre of the absurd (of the world), in which even God has deserted his mission.

And this is projected on the very language of the play. Wolfgang Borchert's style mirrors a mental state of obsession or loss: repetitions upon repetitions, a constant alternating between conviction («yes or no») and the escape into dream or a fall into pathetic expressionistic expression, the loud, albeit empty scream. A despair without illusions, or the illusions of despair? We ask: why so much insistence on repeating the same ideas or actions, the same unstable «truths»? Probably because the world, much like today, has trouble listening, it is almost always deaf – especially to the most blatant events and

⁴ *La Fin des possibilités: Une fable satanique.*

⁵ [On avait mis les morts à table / On faisait des châteaux de sable...].



situations, such as war, injustice or inequality. Confronted with the calamities of this world, we become speechless, mute. The world is particularly deaf to the grim music of large-scale disasters, and it is necessary to repeat, to insist, so that the «greyish and honest faces» might wake up, as illustrated in Borchert's short story «Along the Long, Long Road»⁶. On the road, which stands for the course of life itself, and along which «Left-tenant Fischer» races, stumbling to the sound of the hurdy-gurdy man's refrain («Rejoice! Revell!») while chasing the tram that would take him somewhere unknown, illusions, misunderstandings and inequalities are patent. Especially between the women, the eternal Penelopes of expectation – childless mothers, widows, desperate girls –, and the men, the destroyers of the world (and still, in this horizonless world, the time has not yet come to say, like Roland Barthes in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*⁷, that «the future belongs to the feminine»).

Now, too, none of us know where we are headed, chasing the yellow tram of alleged hope, and, adding offense to injury, having ourselves to pay for the ticket.

We could close with some poets of the «Zero Hour», who knew, like Wolfgang Borchert, that the returned, or the exiled were (are?) the tenants of Death. Some, like Jewish exile Nelly Sachs, in the cycle *In the Houses of Death*⁸, still hoped for some luminous window to open up: «When you raise up your walls again [...] / Do not garland the departed with tears [...] / Do not weep the minutes together with the dust, / which covers the light». Others, closer to Borchert (and to us), harbour no illusions, such as Peter Huchel, one among the poets the most sensitive to the course of History, who writes in the final strophes of the poem «Psalm»: «The desert becomes history, / written by termites / with their fangs / in the sand. // And no one will unravel the mysteries / Of a species / Decidedly committed / To destroying itself».

Among us, although much later, some also came to share this vision of the world as a «garden laid waste to». Such is the case of Maria Gabriela Llansol, with her apodictic, disillusioned statement: «Nothing has yet changed the world». Which she complements with another that we could use and leave hanging in today's barely breathable air: «Conceive a human world that might thrive here, in these rootless lands». However, as if echoing Beckmann, or Primo Levi in *If This Is a Man*⁹, the author herself concludes: «I couldn't tell what a human being is».

João Barrento

⁶ «Die lange lange Strasse lang»

⁷ *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*.

⁸ *In den Wohnungen des Todes*.

⁹ *Se questo è un uomo...*

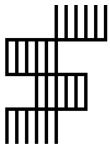


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Further information

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