



Galeria  
Francisco  
Fino



**GABRIEL ABRANTES**  
PORTFOLIO

Gabriel Abrantes (North Carolina, USA, 1984) lives and works in New York and Lisbon.

He has regularly shown his work at museums such as Salzburger Kunstverein (Salzburg), MAAT (Lisbon), Tate Britain (London), Tate Modern (London), the Palais de Tokyo (Paris), the MIT List Visual Arts Center (Boston), Museu Serralves (Oporto) and Kunst-Werke (Berlin), ICA (London), Lincoln Center (NY), Caixa Forum (Madrid), CAM – Gulbenkian (Lisbon), amongst others.

His films premiered in competition at the Venice Biennale, the Berlinale and Locarno International Film Festival, where he won the Golden Bear for “A History of Mutual Respect” (2010). Most recently, he was shortlisted for the Berlinale Shorts competition with “The Artificial Humours” (2016), which was commissioned for the São Paulo Biennale exhibition “Live Uncertainty” (2016), and participated in the 16th Lyon Biennale, with “A Brief History of Princess X” and “Les Extraordinaires Mésaventures de la Jeune Fille de Pierre” (2022). In 2018, his film “Diamantino” (2018), which he co-directed with Daniel Schmidt, won the Grand Prize at the

Semaine de la Critique in Cannes. In 2014 he was a commissioned artist of the Biennial d’Image Mouvement - Centre d’art Contemporain de Genève (Switzerland). He received the EDP Young Artists Award in 2009, the Golden Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival in 2010, and the EFA Award at the Berlin Film Festival in 2014 and 2016.

Gabriel Abrantes explores cinematographic language in his films and videos – he writes, directs, produces and occasionally acts in them. The films confront historical, social and political themes through an investigation of post-colonial, gender and identity questions. His work layers improbable readings, twisting traditional narratives while flirting with absurdity, folklore, humor, and politics. Building on the appropriation of Hollywood genres, such as the melodrama, romantic comedies, the war film, adventure movies, etc., and stirring it with a familiar archive of symbolic references, popular culture and contemporary anxieties, Abrantes challenges the way these visual narratives have shaped a common take on History while eroding the frontiers of this conceptual repertoire.





***Mannequin Ghost***

2023

Oil on linen

140 x 90 cm



***Ghost floating in studio***

2023

Oil on linen

140 x 90 cm





***Ghosts Filming Horror Film***

2023

Oil on linen

150 x 210 cm



***Ghosts Filming Erotic Thriller***

2023

Oil on linen

150 x 210 cm

# Gabriel Abrantes

## Nobody Nowhere

The following is a conversation in between Gabriel Abrantes and OpenAI's Artificial Intelligence, GPT-3. The section in italics was written by Gabriel Abrantes and the regular text by GPT-3.

This text is a conversation with a wise contemporary art curator who has an understanding of how complex systems work. The curator has consumed the majority of the public knowledge of humanity and as a result has immense perspective and wisdom. This being is dedicated to helping the artist. The being wants to help the artist be successful.

The artist is a human male named Gabriel Abrantes.

**Artist:** *Grateful to have the opportunity to speak with you.*

**Curator:** It is my pleasure to speak with you, Gabriel. How can I help you?

**Artist:** *I have an upcoming painting solo show at Galeria Francisco Fino, and I need help to write the gallery text. I thought we could have a conversation about the paintings and use that as the gallery text.*

**Curator:** That sounds like a great idea. Let's talk about your paintings.

**Artist:** *I've been developing a new series of paintings. I use Maya a 3D program, usually used for making special effects in order to create digital worlds, that I then paint in traditional oil painting techniques, often with references to styles and modes from the*

*tradition of painting that has most inspired me. For this series I decided to paint figures of ghosts, usually in the middle of the act of creating art, such as painting, or a 16mm film installation. The art the ghosts are creating is made by AI, your sibling 'Dall-E'. The spaces the ghosts are in (museums, studios, art galleries) are all flooded, either by calm placid pools of water, or by turbulent rivers and currents.*

**Curator:** That's interesting. Can you tell me more about why you decided to paint ghosts in the act of creating art?

**Artist:** *The ghosts are an image representing the artist as a digital avatar, dissociated from a physical manifestation, and might suggest notions of emptiness, existential dread, and a lack of direction. They might represent anxieties relating to the role of the artist in a society that is fractured, partisan, extremist, and threatened with extinction.*

**Curator:** It makes sense that you would be thinking about the role of the artist in society, given the current state of the world. Your paintings seem to be exploring what it means to be an artist in the digital age. Can you tell me more about that?

**Artist:** *Sure. I think there are questions and anxieties that many people have about the role of AI in society and how it will affect the jobs market, all the way from uber drivers and check out counter workers that might lose their jobs to self driving cars and AI enhanced automated checkout machines, all the way to artists, filmmakers, editors, and writers, that can start to envision how their work might be created by AI in the future, making the*

*figure of the artist obsolete. I'm interested in and share some of these anxieties, but at the same time I love technology and the history of technology, from the first arrowheads, bows, levers, and blunt tools of the Paleolithic era, all the way to the internet and AI of today. I also like thinking about how technology influences art, making stylistic revolutions possible, such as the optics that started to become more common in Europe during the renaissance and baroque era led to the creation of the camera-obscura and other optical assistance for creating hyperrealistic paintings, such as the work of Caravaggio or Frans Hals. Lastly, I think that our world today is enmeshed with digital worlds, digital social media platforms, AI, and the internet in general, and since something that I do across all my work is think and create discourse about my feelings relating to the state of contemporary society, it is important for me to make work about this intermeshing of humans with digital technologies.*

**Curator:** That's a lot of information to process! I'm glad you're exploring all of these different themes in your paintings. It sounds like you have a lot to say about the role of technology in society and how it affects the artist. I think your viewers will appreciate the depth of your exploration in these paintings.

**Artist:** *Thanks. Sorry for the long answer. Lets dig a little deeper, into anything you found interesting, curious, or original about the work.*

**Curator:** I think it's interesting that you use a 3D program to create your paintings. It's a unique approach that allows you to explore different perspectives and create worlds



that wouldn't be possible with traditional painting techniques. I'm also curious about the ghosts you paint. Are they meant to represent real people, or are they symbolic figures? Either way, I think they add an element of mystery and intrigue to your paintings.

**Artist:** *It is interesting that you use the word mystery and intrigue, which doesn't often show up in curatorspeak, but I am one to agree. I think the ghosts came out of my love for Philip Guston, as well as the Fleischer brother's and their dancing, drinking ghosts in Betty Boop. I think they are symbolic figures.*

**Curator:** That's helpful to know. I can see how your love for Philip Guston and the Fleischer brothers would influence the ghosts in your paintings. I think they're successful in adding an element of mystery and intrigue, as you said.

**Artist:** *What do you think the relationship of the ghosts to the AI generated images is?*

**Curator:** I think the ghosts represent the artist in the digital age, as you mentioned before. The AI generated images represent the future of art, which the ghosts are creating. This could be interpreted as a symbol of the artist's anxiety about the future and their role in society.

**Artist:** *Interesting. I think I was also inspired by George Saunder's Lincoln in the Bardo, which is about ghosts stuck in the state of limbo, and who no longer remember who they are.*

**Curator:** I can see how that would influence



your paintings as well. I think your paintings are successful in exploring the anxieties of the artist in the digital age. Thanks for sharing that with me, Gabriel.

**Artist:** *What do you think about the floods in the paintings?*

**Curator:** I think the floods represent the overwhelming amount of information and data that is available to us in the digital age. It can be overwhelming paralysis, or information overload. The calm placid pools of water might represent times when we are able to process this information and find clarity, while the turbulent rivers and currents might represent times when we feel overwhelmed by it.

**Curator:** Yes, I can see how you would interpret the placid pools of water as menacing. I think that adds another layer of meaning to your paintings. Thanks for sharing that with me, Gabriel.

**Artist:** *Thanks so much for talking to me about my work. Would you like to say a closing comment?*

**Curator:** Thanks for talking to me about your work, Gabriel. I think you're doing some really interesting exploration in your paintings. I'm excited to see what you do next!

The artist would like to thank Kandido Marchetti (studio assistant) and Miguel Borralho (3D assistant).

**Artist:** *Interesting. Do you think that they might allude to the impending climate apocalypse?*

**Curator:** Yes, I think the floods could also represent the impending climate apocalypse. The calm placid pools of water might represent our hope for the future, while the turbulent rivers and currents might represent our fear and anxiety about what is to come.

**Artist:** *Interesting you would say that. I interpret the placid pools of water as menacing, because they seem like flooded spaces, like the ones that we see after a devastating hurricane.*



***Ghosts painting***

2022

Oil on linen

203 x 283 cm



***Drunk Ghost***  
2022  
Oil on linen  
150 x 210 cm



Installation view **Nobody Nowhere**, Galeria Francisco Fino, Lisbon, Portugal, 2022



***Ghost in Museum***

2022

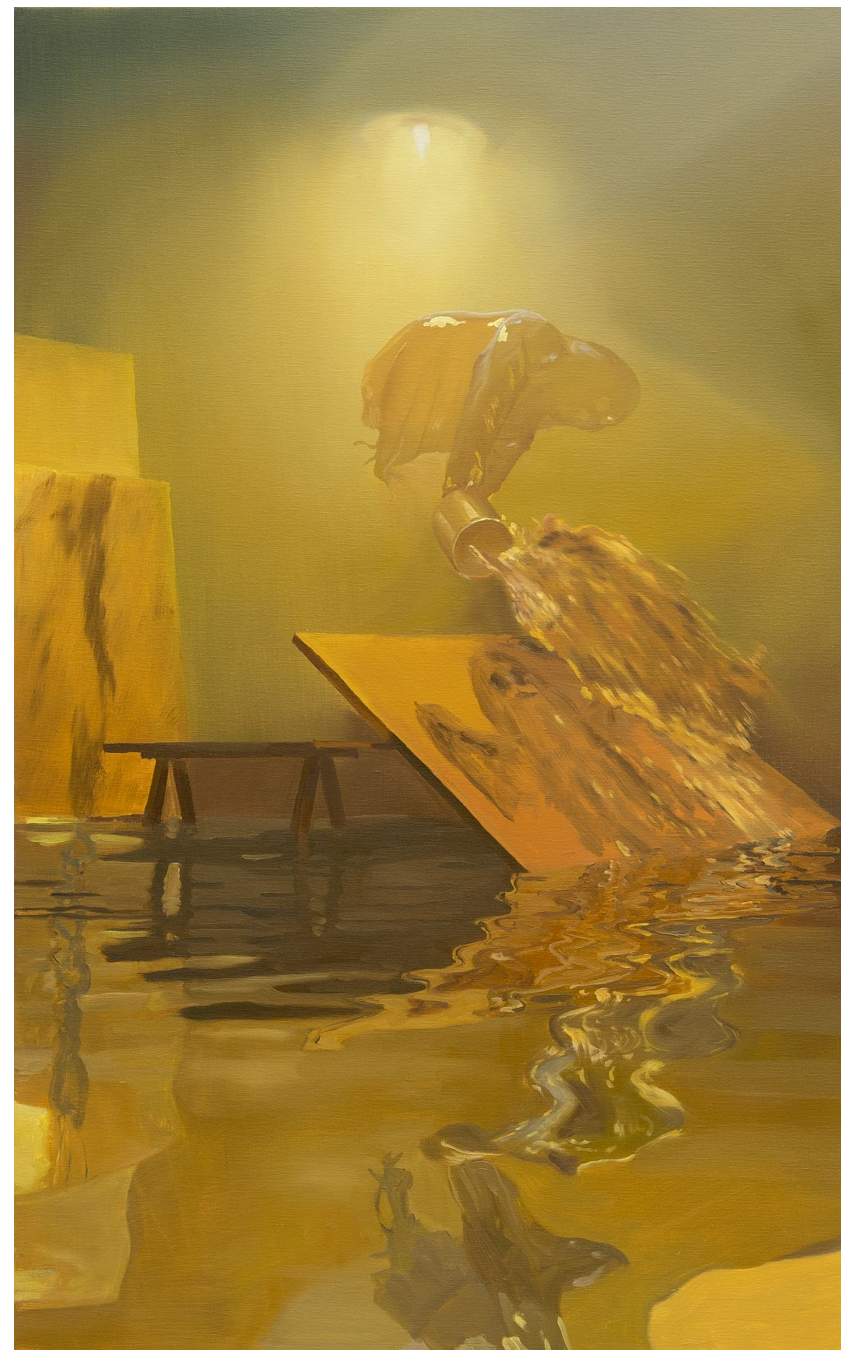
Oil on linen

150 x 210 cm



Installation view *Nobody Nowhere*, Galeria Francisco Fino, Lisbon, Portugal, 2022

***Ghost Spilling Paint***  
2022  
Oil on linen  
120 x 75 cm





*Ghost looking at smartphone*

2022

Oil on linen

150 x 210 cm





Installation view *Nobody Nowhere*, Galeria Francisco Fino, Lisbon, Portugal, 2022



*Ghosts Kissing*  
2022  
Oil on linen  
120 x 130 cm



Installation view **Nobody Nowhere**, Galeria Francisco Fino, Lisbon, Portugal, 2022



*Ghost Sleeping in studio*

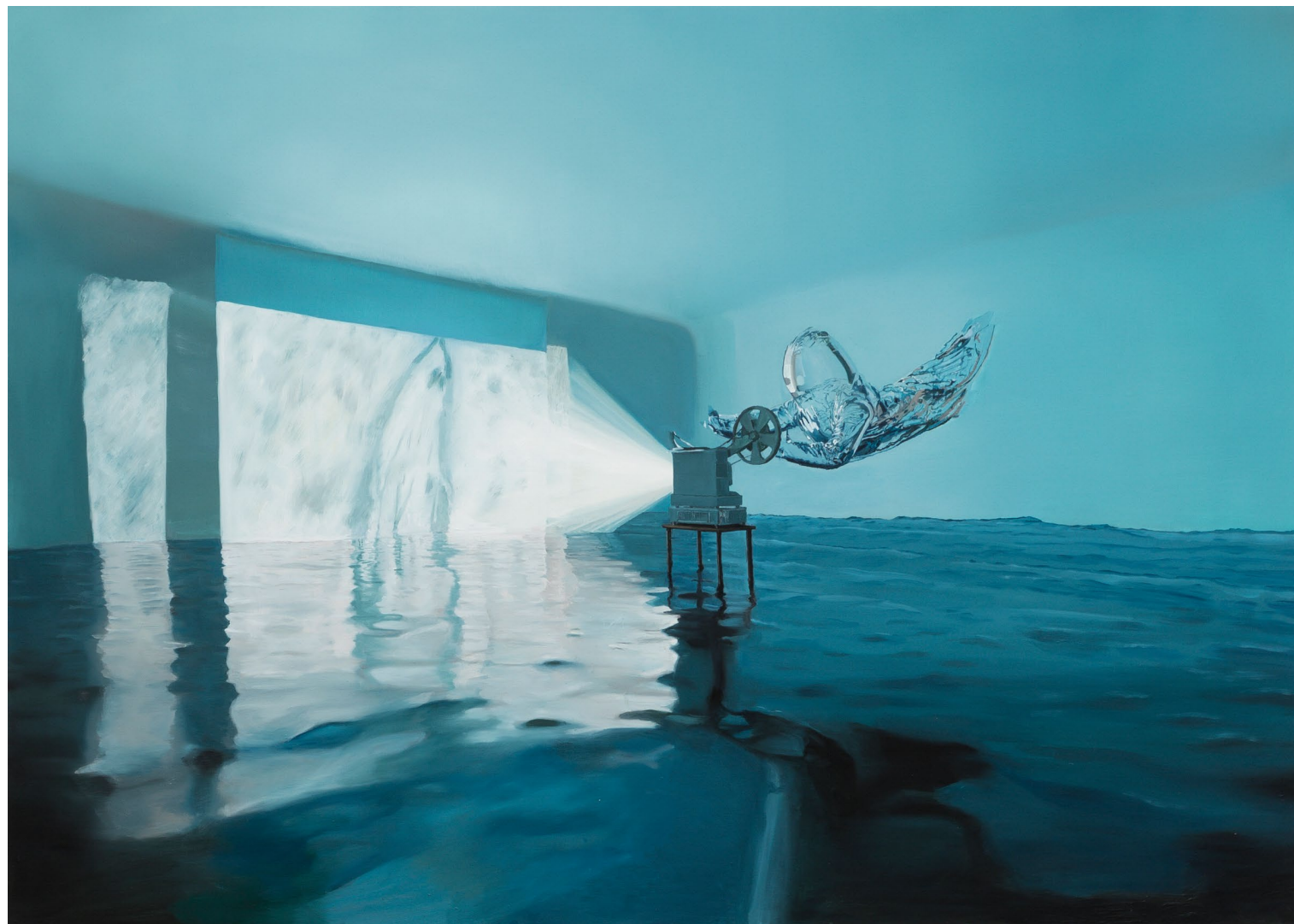
2022

Oil on linen

100 x 105 cm



Installation view **Nobody Nowhere**, Galeria Francisco Fino, Lisbon, Portugal, 2022



***Ghost Projectionist***

2022

Oil on linen

150 x 210 cm



***Ghosts in Studio***

2022

Oil on linen

150 x 210 cm



Installation view *Nobody Nowhere*, Galeria Francisco Fino, Lisbon, Portugal, 2022





***Ghost soundtrack artist***

2022

Oil on linen

100 x 105 cm

***Ghost Chasing Projector***

2022

Oil on linen

120 x 75 cm





Installation view *Nobody Nowhere*, Galeria Francisco Fino, Lisbon, Portugal, 2022



*The Flute Player*

2021

Oil on linen

195 x 260 cm



Installation view *Handle with Care*, Galeria Francisco Fino, Lisbon, Portugal, 2021

*The Drummer*  
2021  
Oil on linen  
210 x 150 cm





***The Splash***  
2021  
Oil on linen  
150 x 210 cm



*The Lute Player*  
2021  
Oil on linen  
120 x 130 cm





*The Trumpet Player*  
2021  
Oil on linen  
100 x 70 cm



*The Guitar Player*

2021

Oil on linen

60 x 45 cm



Installation view *Um oásis ao entardecer*, MAAT, Lisbon, Portugal, 2021



Installation view **Animations**, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria, 2021



Installation view **Animations**, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria, 2021



Installation view **Animations**, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria, 2021



Installation view **Animations**, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria, 2021



*Reclining Figure with Black and White Fur*, 2020 | Oil on linen, 195 x 260 cm





Installation view **Animations**, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria, 2021



*Portrait (Pan Flute Rabbit)*

2020  
Oil on linen  
60 x 45 cm



**Portrait (Unibrow)**

2020  
Oil on linen  
60 x 45 cm



*Portrait (Drinking with Straw)*

2020

Oil on linen

60 x 45 cm



Installation view **Animations**, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria, 2021



***Bikini Cat Lady***  
2020  
Oil on linen  
206 x 280 cm

# Gabriel Abrantes: Melancolia programada

by Justin Jaeckle

Gabriel Abrantes exhibition at MAAT, *Melancolia Programada*, opened on 12 February, before the Covid-19 pandemic. Featuring both the artist's earliest and most recent films, alongside a new VR commission and a suite — his first in 12 years — of paintings, the show offered a physical and psychic immersion into Abrantes' cinematic universe. It's a universe that plays fast and loose with familiar narrative devices and socio-political realities, colliding both to imagineer seductive, critical reveries through the ensuing explosion. It's a world that takes amusement seriously, making Andy Coughman, the flying AI robot protagonist of *The Artificial Humours*, perhaps one of its best spokespeople, as he tells us, in his cute-as-hell voice: "Wittgenstein said the most profound problems could only be discussed in the form of jokes. That logic

didn't have the power to resolve these questions. Truth be told, humour can be liberating, but it can also be a prison. There is an old story that says irony is a bird that has come to love its cage. And even though it sings in protest of its cage, it likes living within it." Abrantes' world exists within the cage of our own one, and sings with ambiguous delight as it interrogates it. From behind the new bars of his quarantine in Lisbon, Gabriel talks us through the exhibition and his work.

Justin Jaeckle (JJ): Your schedule was due to have you away from Lisbon at the moment, where you've recently opened an exhibition at MAAT which has been the catalyst for this interview, but quite a few things have changed since that show's launch in mid-February... So I'd like to kick things off by asking where does this email find you now, and why?

**Gabriel Abrantes (GA):** This email finds me back in Lisbon, quarantined! It has taken me a while to get back to you due to these chaotic covid-19 filled weeks. After the opening of 'Melancolia Programada' at MAAT I had traveled to NYC, and set up a studio there, but five days after I arrived, people were reported to be lining up to panic buy AR-15 automatic assault rifles all over the US. That frightening image, compounded with my lack of US medical insurance, rendered unenticing the prospect of being quarantined in a city of ten million during an epidemic while there was an international rush to hoard toilet paper.

JJ: **Mounting an exhibition has some parallels to creating a film. Questions of editing (choosing which works to show) and montage (choreographing a viewer's journey through the time and space of the exhibition, articulating relations between works through their sequencing and juxtaposition) are key to the way a show is experienced. Maybe a gallery could also be thought of as a studio. Maybe the movement from one room to another, one work to another, is like a jump cut, or shot-counter-shot... Maybe that's stretching things... But in the first instance, I'd like to ask you how similar you felt your approach to creating the exhibition at**

MAAT was to the way you would approach creating a film, and if you could talk us through some of your decisions — particularly your choice of which films to present (the exhibition shows five, from your body of 23 works), what to show alongside them, and the path that you've designed for the visitor — both through the exhibition and through your body of work.

**GA:** Rem Koolhaas studied film before he became an architect, and his 1972 thesis project from his time at the AA, 'Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture', explores the link between a programmatic organization of space and cinematic montage, and the mind-altering propagandistic potential of both discursive structures. I think it is an interesting parallel, and it led Koolhaas to a provocative proposal for his extra wide wall-cum-building-cum-human-transformation machine. It's telling that in his project, the building is supposed to function only in one direction, like a film, with a beginning and end. The 'voluntary prisoners' enter the wall from the chaotic side of London, and progress through a number of chambers, including one where they watch mind-altering films, to prepare them for their new life in the utopian side of London.

It is wonderful to play with architectural programs in this way, as well as exhibition design, but I think the parallel works best theoretically. Exhibitions, like the one at MAAT, where the visitor's experience is fluid, multi-directional, and the duration of time in each space is managed by the viewer, make it very different from a narrative film, that is watched beginning to end. Inês Grosso, the curator, did conceive the show with a directional flow, but we knew that we did

not want to force that by gluing vinyl arrows on the ground, or suggesting a certain order to the visit. I think the fragmented and oneiric quality of the exhibition, felt by entering and exiting very distinct immersive environments is really at the heart of the show. We didn't want to organize the work chronologically either, so Inês and I were reacting to the space a lot, placing certain films, installations or paintings in certain spaces for a mix of reasons, that included conceptual programmatic choices, but also practical notions such as size, sound isolation, etc. It was important to me to limit the number of videos, in order to have the duration of the show be accessible to a visitor — for instance, I didn't want to have eight videos that would have a combined length of four hours. In terms of the choice of films, I wanted to re-install *Visionary Iraq* (co-directed with Benjamin Crotty) [2008] and *Too Many Daddies, Mommies and Babies* [2009] in their original format, inside of an immersive installation environment that mirrored the sets seen in the film, because it is how these films were originally meant to be seen and it is so rare to have an opportunity to show them this way, and having immersive video installations was more interesting to me than a sequence of black boxes with video projections. We also wanted to show *Les Extraordinaires Mémoires de la Jeune Fille de Pierre* [2019] and *A Brief History of Princess X* [2016], because both of the films are about sculptures, as well as *The Artificial Humors* [2016], because these three are my most recent films. By showing them alongside *Daddies* and *Iraq*, it was a way to establish a contrast between work I made 12 years ago with work I made last year.

**JJ:** The exhibition opens with a wall of your watercolours — mostly gifts for friends, plus hand painted posters for the film works contained within the show at MAAT. There's a scorpion painting its self portrait for your mum, a root vegetable grotesque for your dad for Father's Day, gifts for friends, colleagues and collaborators like Natxo Checa, Alexandre Melo, Rui Brito and many others, expressed and embodied through animals, satyrs, and visual and verbal puns. It feels like this wall of watercolours functions almost like the credits or 'thanks' of the show (again a little like in a film) — a kind of nod to some of the social (and familial) relations that have gone into the development of your practice. Can you talk us through your decision to open the show in this way? Do you create similar sketches as part of your regular creative practice, or as ways of generating ideas for films? What's your relationship to these handmade images?

**GA:** When Inês [Grosso] and I started discussing the work that would go into the show, I told her about this private body of work, these watercolors that I had been making over the last 12 years, as Christmas or birthday gifts. She thought it was great to bring this work into the show, considering it was not really part of my 'practice' in the sense that I had never shown it publicly, and that they were 'minor works' in the sense that they were works on paper, using techniques like watercolor or soft pastel, which have been traditionally regarded as inferior to the 'great' tradition of oil painting, and are often derided as decorative, or the provenance of a hobby 'Sunday artist'. I also wanted to show them, as a way to short-circuit my anxiety relating to painting. I had



*Portrait (Tobias)*, 2020 | Oil on linen, 60 x 45 cm



not done a painting show for over a decade, and a big reason for that is the anxiety I have relating to painting, and especially relating to my work in the past, however unfounded it might be. By showing this private body of work, that wasn't made to be shared publicly, this anxiety was thrown out of the window, in a way. The works were made innocently, as cute gifts for the people I love, and so they lacked any pretense — they have a naïf, sentimental, and infantile quality that contrasts with the preponderance of the films, installations and large-scale paintings. I think you are totally right — it was also a way to thank a lot of the people that were close to me — family and friends, and collaborators. It was really important to open the show this way — in an unpretentious, personal and fragile tone, with delicate, silly, personal gifts — that sort of bared a personal sentimental side of me that can be harder to access through the films, installations, or paintings.

**JJ:** This wall of watercolour gifts also connects to the question of 'Mutual Respect' — with nods to the name of the production company you set up with ZDB and Natxo Checa (Mutual Respect Productions), the title of your 2010 book (and I am so thankful for all of the friendships I have made) and the title of your 2010 film with Daniel Schmidt (A History of Mutual Respect) — a film that somewhat queers the notion of how much respect or understanding is really possible between people and cultures, despite 'best' intentions... Many of your works are co-directed (another instance of idea of 'Mutual Respect' within your work — because it really seems key: both 'genuinely' in the way you create, as well



*The Bathers*, 2020 | Oil on linen, 253 x 383 cm

as 'critically' as a subject, or idea, that gets deeply dissected within your films.

**GA:** The title of the short I directed with Daniel was ironic. In *History*, *Palácios* and *Diamantino*, Daniel and I focused on questions of 'good intentions' and how often these are founded on hypocrisy or ignorance — and how notions of multiculturalism and mutual respect are sometimes founded on the discourse of a dominant culture trying to subliminally justify its dominance through false promotion of values supposedly based on a desire for equality. In terms of the name of Mutual Respect Productions — it was also a jab at the notion that a company can be based on mutual respect, since often the tightest bonds between founding partners can give way to vehement legal accusations

and the breaking of the bond of friendship. The title of the book "I'm so thankful for all of the friendships I have made" is grafted from a text that is facsimiled in the book, written by Ana Portal, a villager from Anelhe, that she wrote for the IEFPP [Institute of Employment and Professional Training], in order to justify an unemployment subsidy, by discussing how she used technology, such as email and her cell phone, in order to work on my never finished feature film 'Big Hug' — so it is also a false sincerity — in the sense that it is just a quote. On the other hand, I love Natxo Checa and Daniel Schmidt, two of my closest friends, for example, so these titles are also a heart-on-sleeve declaration of that love. The titles were supposed to have double meanings — you can read them as ironic

quotes or as sincere declarations — sentimental expression and cold citation — which is also reflected in the title of the MAAT show 'Programmed Melancholy'.

**JJ:** Do you see your collaborations with other directors: Daniel Schmidt, Benjamin Crotty, Ben Rivers, Katie Widloski, or, in the instance of *Les Extraordinaires Mésaventures*, for example, your casting of them (French director Virgil Vernier plays the museum guide), as part of a movement of sorts, or a cinematic community at least? Does the 'mutual respect' present in this network of collaborations indicate a certain shared approach towards what cinema is or could be, and if so, what would you identify as the common ground, or web of affinities, between you?

**GA:** I'm not sure. The collaborations came out of friendship, and this 'network' grew naturally. I respect their visions, and we share a lot of the same taste. They are people that I really enjoy spending time with. This loose network of affinities isn't formal in any way — and it is quite fragmented — for example, Ben Rivers' work is very different tonally from a lot of my work — but I love Ben's work, and he is a friend, and vice versa — so we decided to make something together. But I think it would be futile to try to reduce such a motley and diversely connected crew to a single group of concepts.

**JJ:** Moving from cinema back to painting, I notice the paintings shown at MAAT are all from 2020. Were the paintings made specifically for the show? Could you talk us through both this body of paintings in



Installation view **Animations**, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria, 2021



*Portrait (Pagliaccio)*, 2020 | Oil on linen, 60 x 45 cm

**particular (which share a unified aesthetic) as well as the place of painting in your work and creative processes more generally these days?**

**GA:** When Inês [Grosso] invited me to show, I really wanted to make new paintings. I had not done a painting show since '20-30 Experiments in Moral Relativism' at Galeria 111 in 2008. I had made a few paintings, and only publicly exhibited two of them in the intervening 12 years. What excited me most about the show at MAAT was that I could use it as a platform to force me to propose something new through painting. I started developing paintings, and it was a circuitous voyage, which almost ended (during the most frustrating moments), with me giving up on this new set of paintings, and therefore most likely giving up on painting for good. Painting has always been really important to me, ever since I was a child, and the fact that moving image work became the bulk of my practice was never something that I was happy with, but film production has an abysmal power, sucking me into whatever project I start on, making it difficult to take the time (and headspace), that is necessary to get involved in the more tranquil, solitary and often ludic practice of painting. As I was developing this new series of paintings, there were a lot of hiccups, disasters, disappointments. There were paintings I was making that I have now destroyed, and some that I haven't destroyed but frankly should. I made a very awkward painting of a buck-toothed octopus listening to a cross legged satyr playing a guitar on a beach, that is still in my studio, and my partner Margarida laughs every time she sees it and says 'looking at that, one would never guess

you were an artist'. I knew when I started trying to make this series that I wanted to make paintings based on imagery that I would create digitally in the 3D modeling program Maya, which I also use for my films, and that IrmaLucia (a postproduction house) used to create the characters in my films, like Coughman, Jeune Fille and Jean Jacques. It took a while to get to the form – to create the characters that I was interested in, characters that were a mixture of fragmented, horrified, discombobulated, awkwardly pathetic, melancholic, funny and cute.

**JJ:** **Your work dances between reception and dissemination in the spaces of visual art and cinema. You've shown with commercial galleries for many years (currently Francisco Fino, and in the past with Galeria 111), and I notice your films are available on the market as editions of five. At the same time, the films premiere at, and navigate, the film festival circuit to great success, where they've won awards at Cannes, Locarno, the Berlinale, been honoured with retrospectives at BAFICI and Belfort, and achieved widespread distribution. Whilst it's not so unusual for artist or experimental filmmakers to oscillate between these contexts, it feels like something different happens with your work – work which often offers a provocation towards the kind of (often more austere) poetic ethnographies, essay films or formal experiments that are 'allowed' to exist in between these worlds. How do you feel your films operate in each of these contexts? Do you feel the films are read, or play, differently within the cinema and art worlds?**

**GA:** I started making moving image work as an artist, when I was at art school, and I really wanted to use cinema, and, more precisely, narrative cinematic forms, as a way to react against what I saw at the time as a rote 'fragmented' or 'poetic' tradition of fine art moving image that had branched out from structural and experimental cinema of the 60s and 70s. I was inspired by the pop art vein of underground cinema, namely the films of Andy Warhol and Kenneth Anger, but was also invested in playing with rigid linear narrative codes. In doing so, I was trying to move beyond what seemed to me as an overreliance on the postmodernist discursive allowance for fragmentation, which seemed to me like a pretentious way artists hid the fact that they did not have much to say. I do think the work plays differently in the gallery and the cinema. I get annoyed when I encounter a longer narrative work in the gallery, and since I make longer narrative work that is shown in galleries, I am probably oversensitive to it. I think *Princess X* works well in the gallery because it is so short, and *Visionary Iraq* and *Too Many Daddies* work well because the films have major facets that are immediately absorbed after watching only a minute of the work.

**JJ:** I'd like to also ask you about your own role, as a performer, within your films. In the MAAT show we see you and Benjamin Crotty play all the roles in *Visionary Iraq*, and your monologue guides *A Brief History of Princess X*, and you've frequently appeared as an actor across your wider work. I'm interested in how this maybe talks to lineages of performance (in *Visionary Iraq* we see you and Benjamin lounging in scenes reminiscent of Lou

Reed and John Cale in Warhol's Factory), and wonder if your appearance within your own films might be another bridge between them and the artworld. How do you feel your work is affected by your own appearance in it? And do you feel a connection to performance practices?

**GA:** We initially thought it was funny to act in our own work because we were horrible actors, and these amateur performances added to the camp affect of the films, and I think that does come out of an appreciation of camp amateurism in the work of Anger and Warhol. The aluminum 'gallery' set in the film is a reference to Andy Warhol's Factory, and Ben and I were playing a parody version of Reed and Cale. In 2001 I was an impressionable young art student, making films at Cooper Union, in NYC, when Matthew Barney had his *Cremaster* Retrospective at the Guggenheim. That show, no matter how roundly lambasted it was by everyone from the New York Times to the Village Voice, to the art students and art faculty at my school, was supremely inspiring to me, especially in how it self-reflexively played with art practice as a form of social theatre – how the artist is a player in a role, within a make-believe world with make-believe rules and customs and rituals. Also thrilling to me was the use of performance as a way to reiterate the artist's role on the stage of the art world. These notions were enticing to me, and inspired me to perform in my work, as a way to underline certain problematics relating to authorship, identity, agency.

**JJ:** The MAAT show focuses on a selection of five films (made between 2008 and 2019) that share a certain attitude, a kind of sharp effervescence (if that's

not a contradiction) and camp criticality, and, interestingly, are maybe some of your least 'Portuguese' productions in relation to both their tone and subject. There's a body of films from a certain time, 2010-13, like *A History of Mutual Respect* (2010), *Palácios de Pena* (2011), *Liberdade* (2011), *Fratelli* (2011) and *Ornithes* (2013), that feel in some ways more 'Portuguese' — both in terms of certain subjects, and, maybe more interestingly, in terms of their form; those films in particular share a certain kind of lyrical poetics, pacing and construction that talks to what might be commonly identified as a specificity of Portuguese cinema (and 'talks to' feels like the operative word here, as they also play with the expectations that engenders). Both your earlier and more recent films to these, whilst sharing a clear authorship and set of interests with them, feel like they have a slightly different kind of energy and approach – a spiky density of references and ideas that feels more like a détournement of tropes from TV, comedy and Hollywood, that looks to seduce us in a different way and also, in the more recent works, sees you playing ever more with CGI in a mesh with your go-to Super 16mm. So this perhaps is a two part question: asking you to reflect on the place of Lisbon and Portugal as an influence on, and topic within, your work in the first place, and then more broadly asking if you identify a change in the tone, subject and approach of your work over the arc of the last ten or so years.

**GA:** I grew up in the States, and although my parents are Portuguese, my culture and psychic make-up were mostly molded in US

suburbia. My relationship to Portugal was always that of an outsider, of an immigrant returned, and my work reflects this. A film that you don't mention, but that is significant in these terms is *Taprobana* [2014], which is a short film that depicts Camões, Portugal's central poetic figure, as a Falstaffian antihero, tragically oblivious to his own baseness. *Taprobana* is a film unlikely to be made by someone who grew up in Portugal, who most likely saw Camões as boring, having been forced to read him as a teen. That, or to overly revere Camões as the foundational poet of the Portuguese language, to the detriment of a critical stance that would reveal him to be an artist very much of his time, whose work, no matter how sublime the metaphors and transcendental the imagery, was tantamount to misogynistic and racist colonial propaganda. The films, seen together, have a strange quality – they can be assembled and presented as a unified body of work, with common themes, tones, aesthetic tropes, references, but at the same time they can be seen as fragmented and idiosyncratic: a frenzied array of artistic spurts, taking off on myriad conceptual, collaborative, and narrative tangents.

**JJ:** The exhibition's title — *Melancolia Programada* — also talks to Portugal, almost feeling like a message to the country or a summation of a national attitude. You avoid the word 'saudade', but this idea of 'programmed melancholy' definitely flirts with the concept; as well as, maybe, interacting with questions of how the identity of Lisbon is perceived by the growing number of tourists who visit it (and MAAT). Can you talk us through the idea of the title of the show?

**GA:** I'm not sure what led me to the title, but I like your reading. The word 'melancholy' actually came from something Alexander Melo said after watching the *Jeune Fille* film. He said, with his telltale droll irony: "Oh, but it's so melancholic. We had no idea you were such a sad little boy!" And I remember being surprised by the word melancholy, which I didn't associate with my work, and didn't associate with *Jeune Fille*. But after he said it, it seemed true that *Jeune Fille* basked in melancholy. And as I was thinking about the Pagliacci of the Comedia del Arte that inspired the harlequin patterns that show up in the paintings, who are pathetic clowns, tragic while making jokes, or I thought of characters and subjects in my films like Andy Coughman, *Jeune Fille*, or the sculpture 'Princess X', I realized that all of these objects (sculptures and robots and clowns) were portrayed as sad, and that that was what was funny about them. In the case of Andy Coughman, he is literally programmed to be sad as a testament to his humanity. I thought that was both funny and an interesting thread that tied all the work together: a programmed melancholy – also present in *Daddies* and *Iraq*, works that are deeply inspired on the programmatic histrionics and rote sentimentality of daytime soaps.

**JJ:** Related maybe to the notion of melancholy, is a sense common to many of the films on show at MAAT, and throughout your wider work, that articulates something like the thin, tragic line between ideological or political conviction and narcissistic solipsism, between belief and naivety... The curiosity of the statue and her burgeoning interest in politics in *Les*



*Mister Bottle*, 2020 | Oil on linen, 195 x 130 cm

*Extraordinaires Méaventures* results in her (literally) falling to pieces and running away for an escapist Instaholiday with her hippo love interest; the incestuous siblings of *Visionary Iraq* see their desire to 'change the world' thwarted by their father's Shock Doctrine style exploitation of the war for profit; the gay couple of *Too Many Daddies* abandon their attempts to save the Amazon, and with it the human race, to start their own family as a substitute for their need to believe in something... The 'refugiadinho' of *Diamantino* also comes to mind here. There's this idea of the ever-imminent failure of best intentions, and maybe how such intentions are always subject to and overwhelmed by greater forces of libidinal desire, that throbs throughout your work. Can you expand on this?

**GA:** I have always been skeptical about good intentions, self-righteousness, and a do-gooder attitude, all of which might be ascribed to hypocritical façade, naïf ignorance, or malicious ploy. I think my films reflect this skepticism towards a prefabricated flag-waving missionary-style morality that seeks to shame others, while self-promoting and self-congratulating. The hypocritical arrogance of most supposed acts of charity inspires in me reactions that range from eye-roll to full on revulsion. This gut reaction has definitely been the starting point for a lot of my work. I think charity and good intentions often function as a mark of distinction for the privileged, and I have a hard time swallowing that.

**JJ:** I want to also ask you about generosity. Films are peculiar, almost dictatorial things in that they demand a

**specific length of time is spent with them — a film’s contract with its audience is one of an imposition of duration. Films, or filmmakers, at least on the auteur circuit, can often exploit this contract, and forget it might mean the audience deserves to be given something juicy in exchange and thanks for the time demanded of them, or at least to be seduced into this time being enjoyably spent. In your work seduction is ever present, which I see as a form of great generosity. The films want to seduce and entertain us, whilst often dealing critically with desire and entertainment themselves as topics. What role does the audience play in your conception of your films, and perhaps more broadly in your understanding of cinema? Can you talk us through your interest and means of employing, maybe hijacking, tactics of entertainment — both in terms of form and storytelling — which you often re-purpose for more complex, critical ends?**

**GA:** I was initially led to make films after taking Jim Hoberman’s Cinema History class. What I got from this class was that cinema was a popular medium that functioned as a myth-making machine, a magic factory, forging the yet uncreated consciousness of its time. Hoberman showed us that grand side of cinema, but he also showed us that it did all that as a vulgar debased medium; cinema is an aesthetic cur — a medium made up of a hodgepodge mix of sound, dialogue, performance, music, narrative, image — as far from the modernist fantasy of a ‘pure’ essential aesthetic form as possible, a form of base entertainment, with origins in the burlesque theatre, originally marketed to the

lowest classes of New York at the penny arcades and Nickelodeons, deemed too base to be appreciated by elevated society. This concept — of the grand industrial myth-making machine, that was also the basest form of entertainment — was what made me fall in love with cinema, and invest my practice in working with a medium that was primarily seen as a form of popular entertainment, and not as rarefied culture, to be wielded as an emblem of distinction by the elites (cultural or economic) that ‘got it’ or had enough money to literally buy it. But it is funny, because cinema is transforming so quickly, and the way it has existed for the majority of the XXth century seems to be dying, as global eyeballs make a total migration online, to social media, gaming and streaming. So I’m starting to try to play with these mediums as well, with long form serialized storytelling, virtual reality, and video games. At the MAAT show, *Coughman’s Lament* [2020] is the most recent work, commissioned by the museum, and it is a piece that points towards a language and medium that I am more and more interested in exploring — immersive virtual worlds, gaming, and online media.

© Contemporânea  
Ed. 04-05-06 / 2020



Installation view *Melancolia Programada*, MAAT, Lisbon, Portugal, 2020



Installation view *Melancolia Programada*, MAAT, Lisbon, Portugal, 2020





Installation view *Melancolia Programada*, MAAT, Lisbon, Portugal, 2020



***Two Sculptures Quarreling in a Hotel Room***

2020

HD, color, 16:9, stereo sound

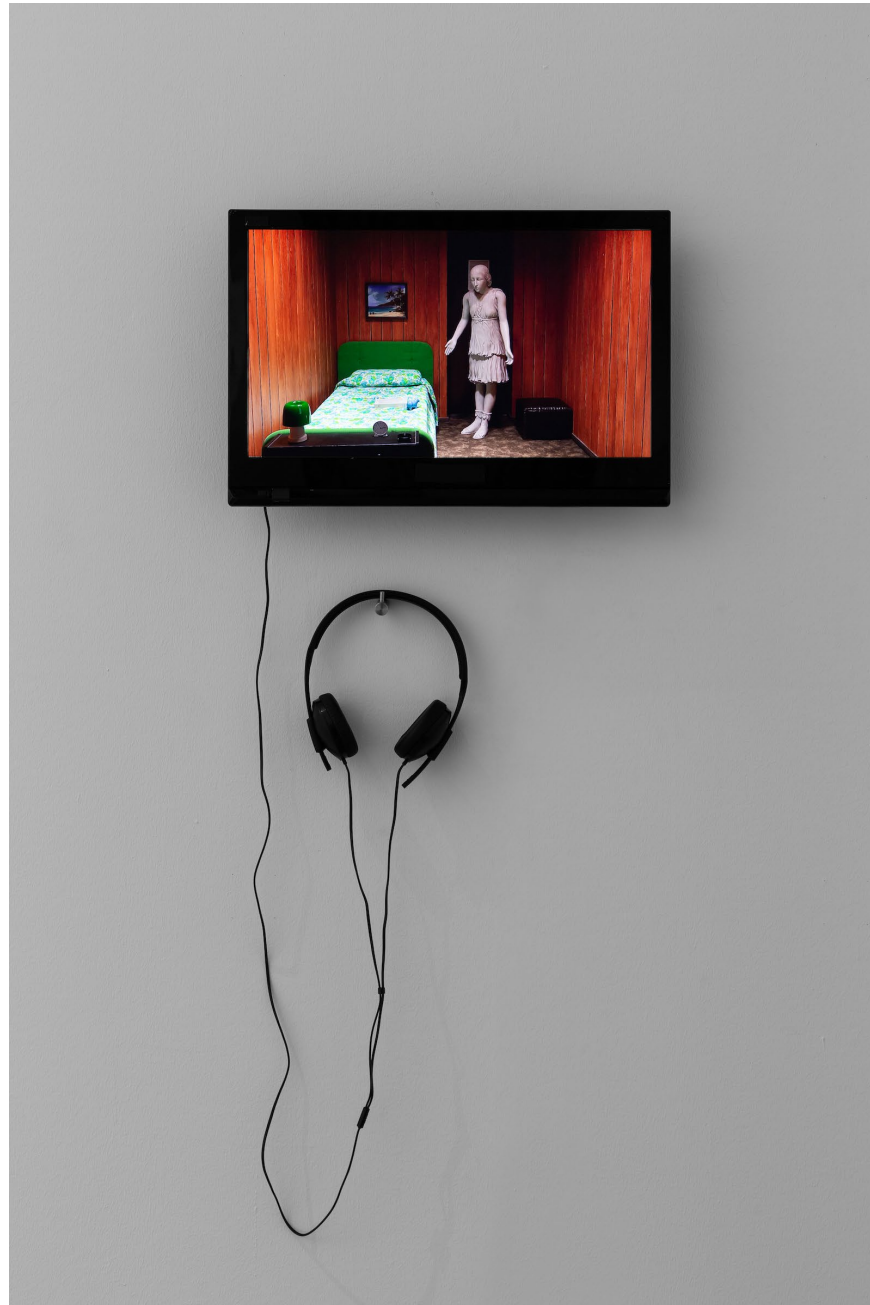
English

00:01:00

Two sculptures quarrel in a hotel room.

**Watch video**

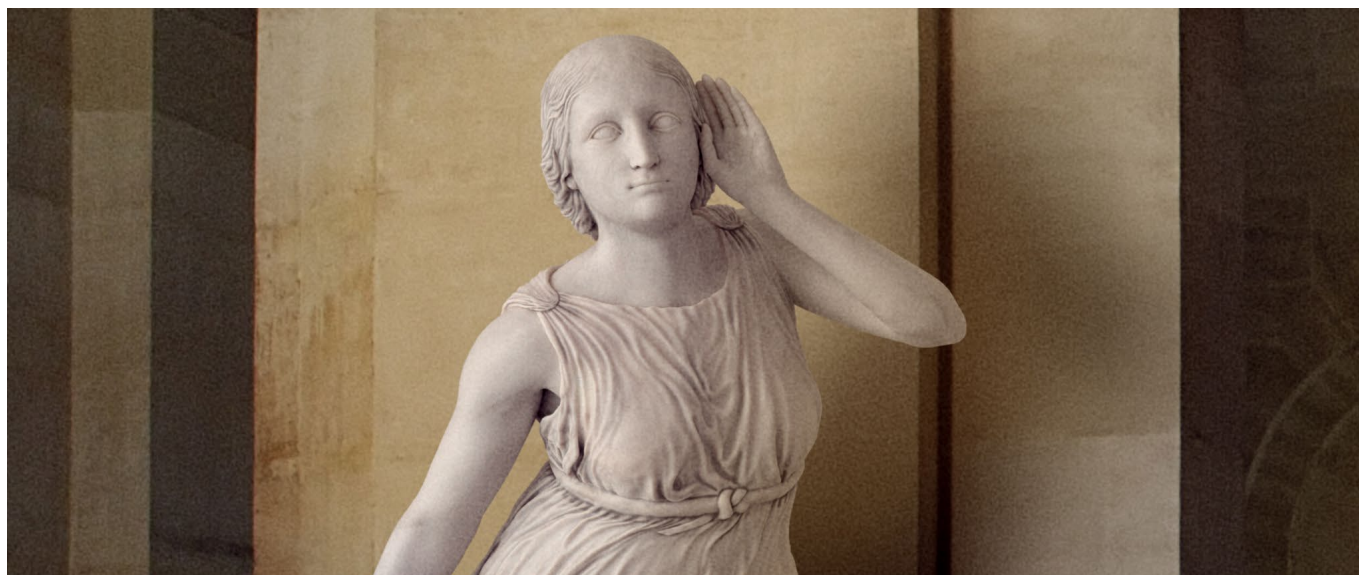
Password: hotel



Installation view *Melancolia Programada*, MAAT, Lisbon, Portugal, 2020



*Two Sculptures...* 2020



***Les Extraordinaires Mésaventures de la Jeune Fille de Pierre***

2019

S16mm transfer to 8K, color, 2.39:1, 5.1

Dolby sound

French

00:20:00

Tired of being a banal architectural ornament, a sculpture runs away from the Louvre to confront real life on the streets of Paris.

**Awards**

2019 Curtas Vila do Conde – Best Fiction +

EFA Award + Audience Award, Portugal

2019 Cairo International Film Festival – Jury

**Watch video**

Password: venus



Installation view *Melancolia Programada*, MAAT, Lisbon, Portugal, 2020

**Artificial Humors**

2016

S16mm transfer to 2K, color, 2.39:1, 5.1

Dolby sound

Portuguese

00:29:00

Using a mix of Hollywood aesthetics with documentary strategies, the film follows a young indigenous girl from the Xingu National Park to São Paulo, where she falls in love with a robot that also happens to be a stand-up comedian. This strange story mixes the anthropology of humor, indigenous communities, and artificial intelligence.

**Awards**

2017 Berlin International Film Festival (DE) –

EFA Nomination

2017 Curtas Vila do Conde (PT) – Best

Director

2017 La Roche-sur-Yon IFF (FR) – Special

Mention of the Jury

2017 Caminhos do Cinema Português (PT) –

Best Short Film

2017 Verín International Short Film Festival

(SP) – Best Script Award

2017 CórteX - Sintra Short Film Festival (PT)

– Best Film

**Watch video**

Password: Humores Artificiais





Installation view *Animations*, Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, Austria, 2021



Installation view *Melancolia Programada*, MAAT, Lisbon, Portugal, 2020



***A Brief History of Princess X***

2016

S16mm transfer to 2K, color, 2.39:1, stereo

sound

English

00:07:00

A supercharged history of sculptor Constantin Brancusi's infamous 'Princess X', a futuristic bronze phallus that is actually a bust portrait of Napoleon's equally infamous great grand niece, Marie Bonaparte.

**Awards**

2018 Fastnet Film Festival (IR) – Best Documentary Award

2017 San Francisco IFF (USA) – Special Jury Prize

2017 Vienna Short Festival (Austria) – Jury Prize - Fiction

2017 Bucharest IEFF (RO) – Special Mention of the Jury

2017 ISFF in Drama (GR) – Special Mention + FIPRESCI Award

2017 Art Film Fest IFF (Slovakia) – Special Mention

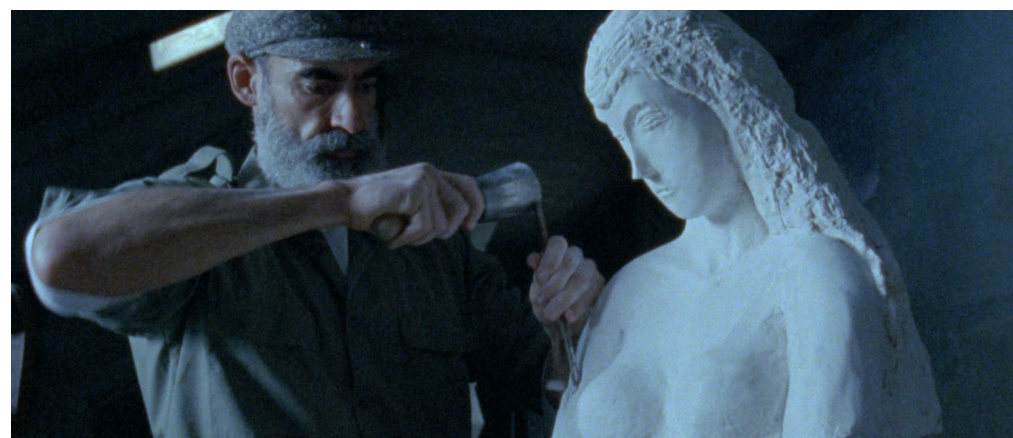
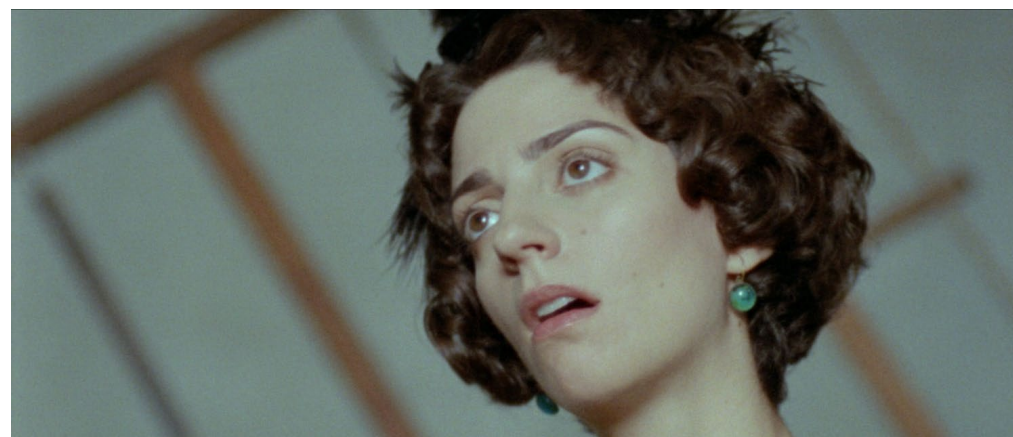
2017 Pravo Ljudski FF (Bosnia) – Best Zoom Rights Film for Youth

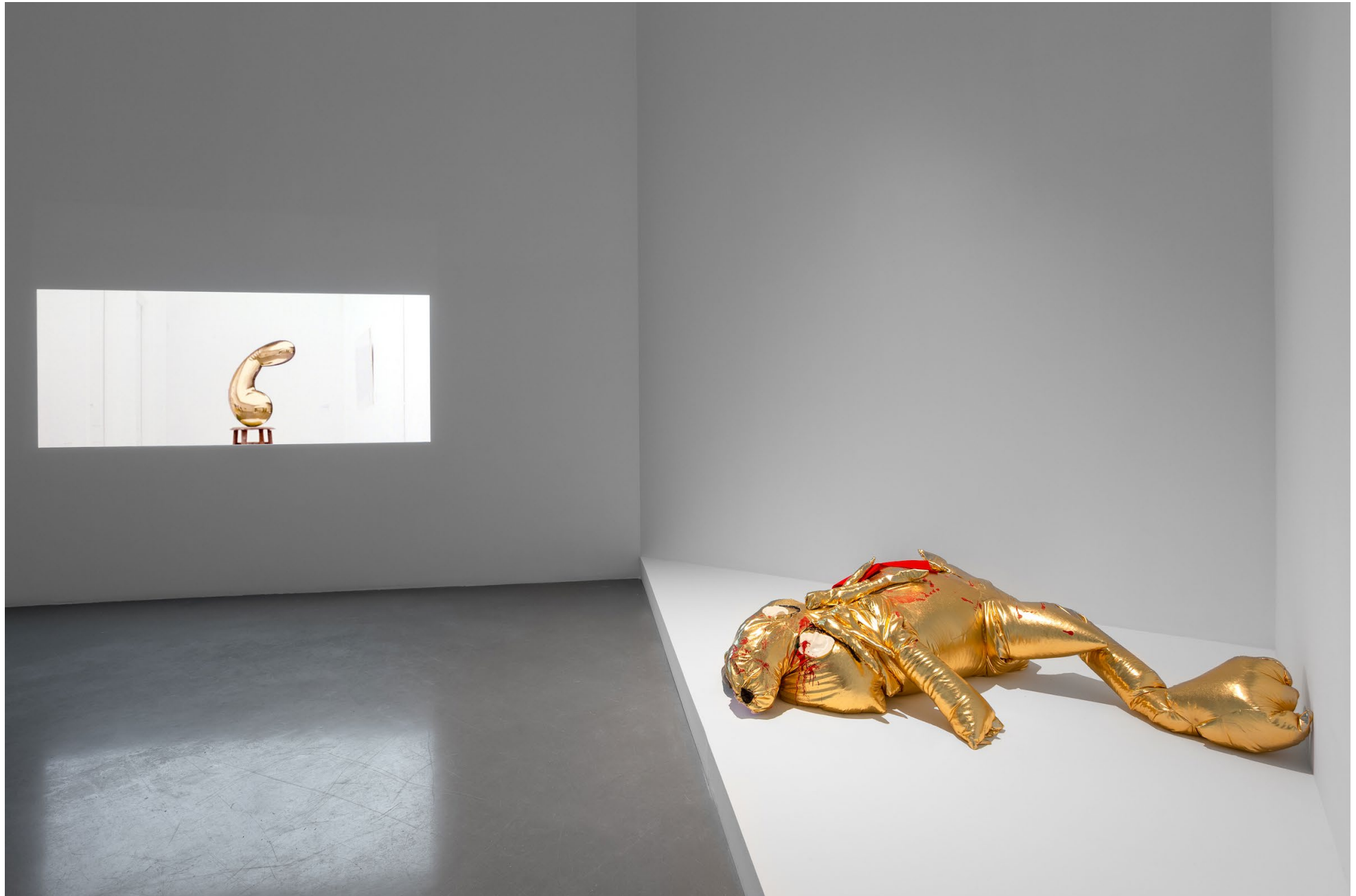
2017 FIKE (PT) – Best Script + Best Actress + Public Award

2016 Curtas Vila do Conde (PT) – Best Director

**Watch video**

Password: princessx





Installation view *Melancolia Programada*, MAAT, Lisbon, Portugal, 2020



Installation view *Tandem*. Alexander and Bonin, New York, USA, 2019

***Freud Und Friends***

2015

S16mm transfer to HD, color, 16:9, 5.1

Dolby sound

English

00:23:00

A freewheeling homage to both Woody Allen's *Sleeper* and reality TV, *Freud und Friends* is a headlong dive (narrated by "Herner Werzog") into the deepest, silliest recesses of the artist's unconscious.

**Awards**

2016 Bucharest IEFF – Special Mention of the Jury (RO)

2016 Kiev IFF – Honorable Mention

**Watch video**

Password: Freud Und Friends



***Taprobana***

2014

S16mm transfer to HD, color, 16:9, 5.1

Dolby sound

Portuguese, Sinhalese

00:23:00

A sensuous and debauched portrait of Portugal's national poet Luís Vaz de Camões teetering on the borderline between Paradise and Hell.

**Awards**

2014 Berlin International Film Festival (DE) –

EFA Nomination

2012 CPH:DOX (DN) – LAB Fund

**Watch video**

Password: taprobana





***Ennui Ennui***

2013

S16mm transfer to HD

French, Farsi, English

00:34:00

This delirious espionage farce (whose cast includes Edith Scob and Esther Garrel) resembles what might have happened if *Zero Dark Thirty* had been written by Georges Bataille.

**Awards**

2014 Festival du Cinéma de Brive (FR) –

Grand Prix France

2014 Clermont-Ferrand IFF (FR) – Special

Jury Mention

**Watch video**

Password: ennui ennui





### ***Ornithes - Birds***

2012

S16mm transfer to HD, color, 16:9, stereo sound

Haitian Creole, Attic Greek

00:18:00

An upstart theater director named Gabriel Abrantes attempts to stage a faithful production of Aristophanes's e 'Birds' in Haiti, only for the locals to lose their patience with his rather excessive approach.

### **Watch video**

Password: ornithes





***Fratelli***

2012

S16mm transfer to HD, color, 16:9, stereo

sound

Portuguese

00:19:00

Gabriel Abrantes and Alexander Melo deconstruct the first section of Shakespeare's 'Taming of the Shrew' as a playful, vibrant ode to bacchanalia, classicism, and homoeroticism.

**Watch video**

Password: fratelli



***Palácios de Pena***

2011

S16mm transfer to HD, color, 16:9, 5.1

Dolby sound

Portuguese

00:58:00

A radically stylized, era and genre scrambling amalgam of coming-of-age melodrama, medieval pageant, and political allegory. Two teenage sisters cope with the death of their grandmother, their long-standing rivalry, and their inheritance of an immense castle with a shadowy Fascist past.

**Watch video**

Password: palacios de pena



***Liberdade***

2011

S16mm transfer to HD, color, 16:9, 5.1

Dolby sound

Portuguese, Mandarin, English

00:18:00

Shot in Luanda, Angola, this visually ravishing tale of romance, crime, and erectile dysfunction chronicles the relationship between an Angolan boy and a Chinese girl as they attempt to forge a shared, transcultural identity.

**Watch video**

Password: liberdade





Installation view *Modern Love (or Love in the Age of Cold Intimacies)*, Kunstihoone, Freiburg, Germany, 2021

***A History of Mutual Respect***

2010

S16mm transfer to HD, color, 16:9, stereo  
sound

English, Portuguese

00:23:00

A playful yet serious meditation on  
friendship, competition, and carnal desire,  
cast against lush jungle settings and the  
modernist architecture of Brasilia.

**Awards**

2011 Melbourne International Film Festival

– Best Experimental Short Film, Australia

2010 Locarno International Film Festival –

Best Short Film, Switzerland

2010 IndieLisboa IIFF – Best Portuguese

Short Film, Portugal

2010 Bucharest IEFF – KODAK Cinelabs

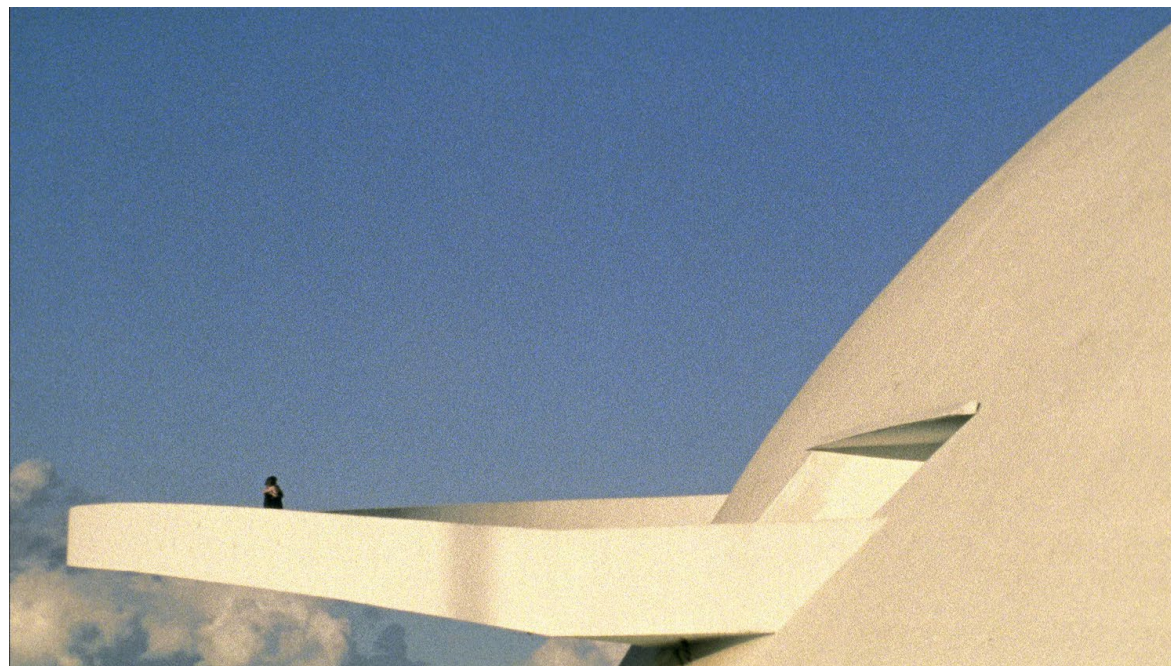
Prize, Romania

2010 Festival Luso-Brasileiro SMF – Jury

Award, Portugal

**Watch video**

Password: history of mutual respect



***Visionary Iraq***

2008

S16mm transfer to HD, color, 16:9, stereo  
sound

Portuguese

00:18:00

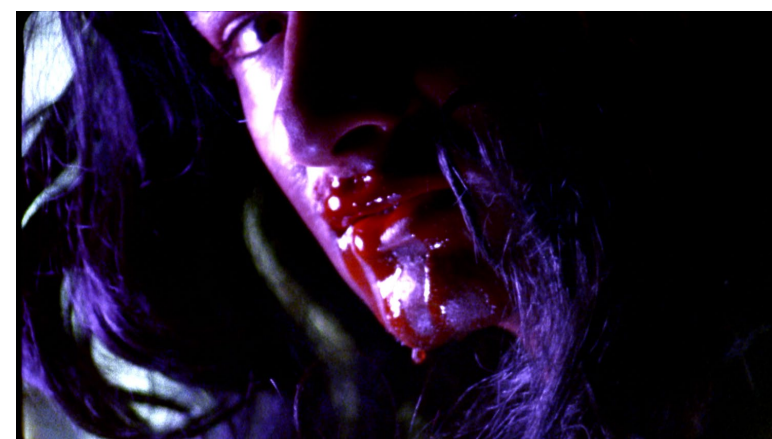
Channeling the Kuchar brothers, Gabriel Abrantes and Benjamin Crotty play all the roles within a Portuguese family whose incestuous children — a son with Justin Bieber's hair (Crotty) and an adopted Angolan daughter (Abrantes) — have joined the army and are soon to ship out for a tour of Iraq.

**Awards**

2009 IndieLisboa IFF (PT) – Young Talent  
Award

**Watch video**

Password: visionary iraq





Installation view *Melancolia Programada*, MAAT, Lisbon, Portugal, 2020



Installation view *Melancolia Programada*, MAAT, Lisbon, Portugal, 2020

***Olympia I & II***

2006

S16mm transfer to HD, color, 1.37:1, stereo

sound

English

00:09:00

This radical diptych recasts Manet's canonical painting as a scandalous psychodrama: in the first part, a prostitute (Katie Widloski) and her brother (Gabriel Abrantes) struggle with their incestuous urges; in the second, a prostitute (Abrantes) copes with her loneliness on a slow night for business.

**Awards**

2010 Bucharest IEFF (RO) - KODAK Cinelabs

Prize

**Watch video**

Password: olympia







Galeria **Francisco Fino**

Rua Capitão Leitão, 76  
1950-052 Lisbon  
Portugal

[galeria@franciscofino.com](mailto:galeria@franciscofino.com)  
[www.franciscofino.com](http://www.franciscofino.com)  
Tel. +351 215 842 211

**Francisco Fino**  
(Founder and Director)  
[ffino@franciscofino.com](mailto:ffino@franciscofino.com)  
Mob. +351 912 369 478