

Galeria **Francisco Fino**

Helena Almeida

Frieze Masters Spotlight
Booth S24

15 – 19 October 2025
The Regent's Park

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Frieze Masters

Spotlight Section

Booth S24

Galeria Francisco Fino's participation in Frieze Masters – Spotlight, London, 2025, is dedicated to presenting a representative selection of works by Helena Almeida from the 1970s.

Drawn mostly from Helena Almeida's studio holdings, this set of works is rare and characteristic of her career and creative process, encompassing photography inhabited by painting, drawing, sculpture, architecture, performance, and above all by her body and her senses.

Her hands, her mouth, her face, her whole body were to be worked on throughout her career and successively incorporated into her work although never as self-portraiture or as a staging or dramatization of other characters or figures but always as the reiterated presence of herself.

The artist's own body is constantly obscured, disfigured, hidden by the painted marks which at times extend it, at other times spill over it, 'enter' or 'exit' it, without ever resorting to masks, accessories, or artificial sets. Clothed in the most neutral of garments, she is photographed in her studio with a minimum of elements, following a concept manifest through drawing.

Much like the separations between artistic genres, the boundaries between the five senses are thwarted in order to stress the plurality of sensory experience, creating unease and placing us on the threshold of sensations and languages that carry a strong communicative appeal.

From minimalism to conceptualism, from performance to photography, Helena Almeida's work addresses all the major artistic movements that have left a mark from the second half of

the Twentieth-century to the present, though in a way that is never derivative but always deeply inventive and personal, creating a vocabulary and inventing a world without parting from her references. In fact, the recurrence not only of series but also of the same title-concepts with which she titled her works over the years confirms this. In her own words: "I move around in circles; the cycles return. The work is never complete, it has to be redone. What interests me is always the same: the space, the house, the ceiling, the corner, the floor; then, the physical space of the canvas, but what I want is to deal with emotions."

In her drawings of the 1970s she used horsehair to grant three-dimensionality to her drawings' lines. In her photographs of the early 2000s, her body was transformed into a sculpture to which mirrors were appended or was made to carry objects. In her exploration of painting, she favoured the colour blue, a mixture of cobalt and ultramarine blue that for her signified energy.

These private, performative acts, conceived in preparatory drawings that are true storyboards for actions, recorded in black and white in her studio, with closeness and intimacy, and rigorously and forthrightly edited and printed, result in these works that are as unique as they are universal.

Isabel Carlos, Lisbon 2025



Drawing

In the drawings made by Helena Almeida in 1970, a cluster of delicately painted vertical lines suddenly projects beyond the paper, its extremities reaching out towards the viewer. Paradoxically, these lines retain a graphic condition while simultaneously indicating spatiality. Almeida achieves this *trompe l'oeil* effect through the use of horsehair: to the viewer, the painted lines appear to detach from the picture plane. With this gesture, Almeida directly engages and challenges our assumptions about the nature of a line (its abstractness, its inextricable link to the idea of design), while granting it a new dimension.

Taking this newly found “space line” as a point of departure, Almeida would subsequently venture into a performative territory, her own body gradually becoming the primary medium and instrument of expression: “It was the drawings with horsehair that brought me the need to be photographed. I wanted to hold the line with my fingers, to demonstrate that the line on the paper had become solid, that it had been freed from the paper, that it could be felt by one’s fingers, and enter through us, through our homes”.

Lilian Tone*

* Excerpt from “The Body is the House: The Space of Intersection between Helena Almeida and Lygia Clark” by Lilian Tone, in *Helena Almeida: Inside Me*, Kettle’s Yard, 2009, p. 23.



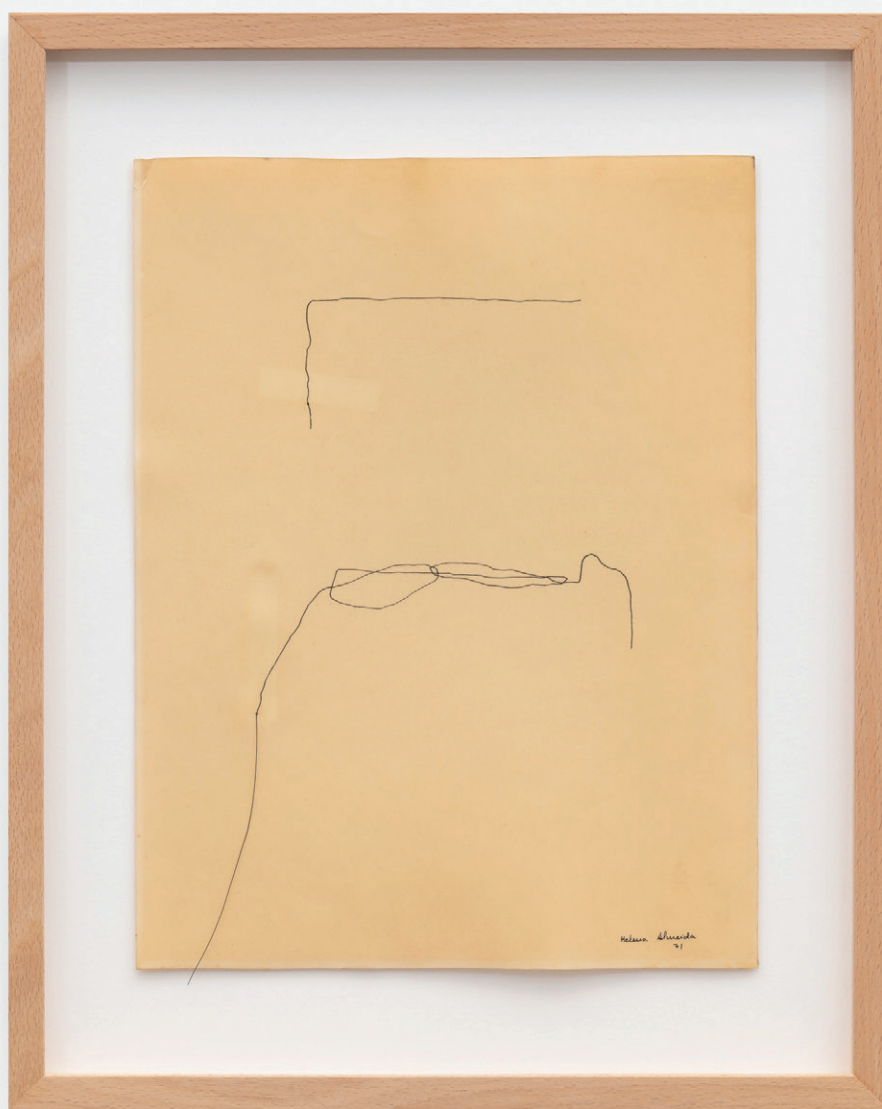
Untitled 1970
Laminated paper, ink with horsehair
47,2 x 38,2 cm



Untitled 1971
Laminated paper, ink with horsehair
43,5 x 35 cm



Detail of Untitled, 1971



Untitled 1971
Laminated paper, ink with horsehair
43,5 x 35 cm

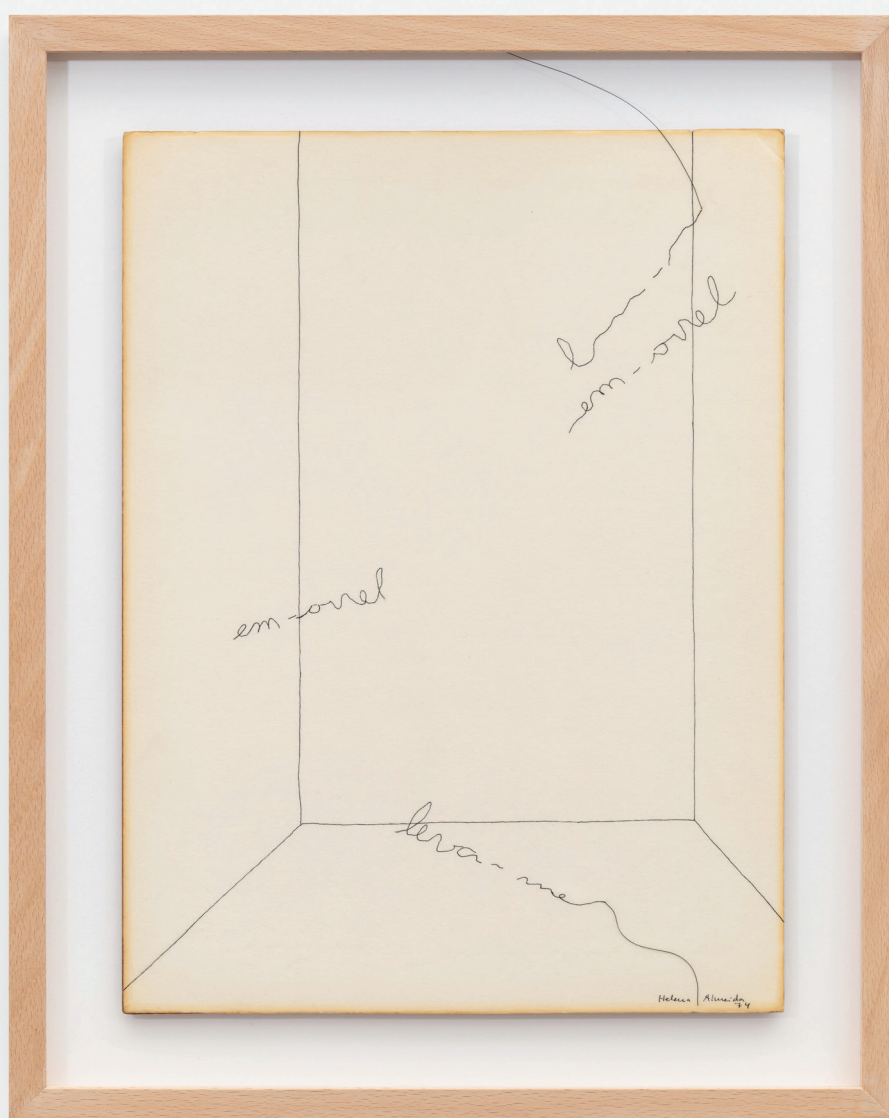


Untitled 1971
Laminated paper, ink with horsehair
43,5 x 35 cm



Untitled 1973
Laminated paper, ink with horsehair
43,5 x 35 cm





Untitled 1974
Laminated paper, ink with horsehair
43,5 x 35 cm



Photograph

From here on, another possibility will be explored in the following years, which derives from the play between two planes: the plane of the photographed image, the artist herself, performing an action, and the consequence, or tool, of such action, which gains a sense of materiality that surpasses the medium that supports the image. Thus, the photographic image is the testimonial space which produces the veracity of the real element that emerges from it, that can be inferred from it. This element of reality — a strand of horsehair — marks, in the space outside the representation, a represented gesture, which, due to the very nature of the photographic process, is perceived by the viewer as having happened sometime in the

past. However, this past gesture emerges as consequence in the present, because the physical element that factually passes onto the space is an actual drawing created by a representation, *i.e.* the past of the photograph invades the present, clarifying the temporal difference between both moments, on the same instant it implodes on the present.

Delfim Sardo*

* Excerpt from "Feet on the ground, head in the sky" by Delfim Sardo, in *Feet on the Ground, Head in the Sky*, 2nd ed., Bial, 2004, p. 18.

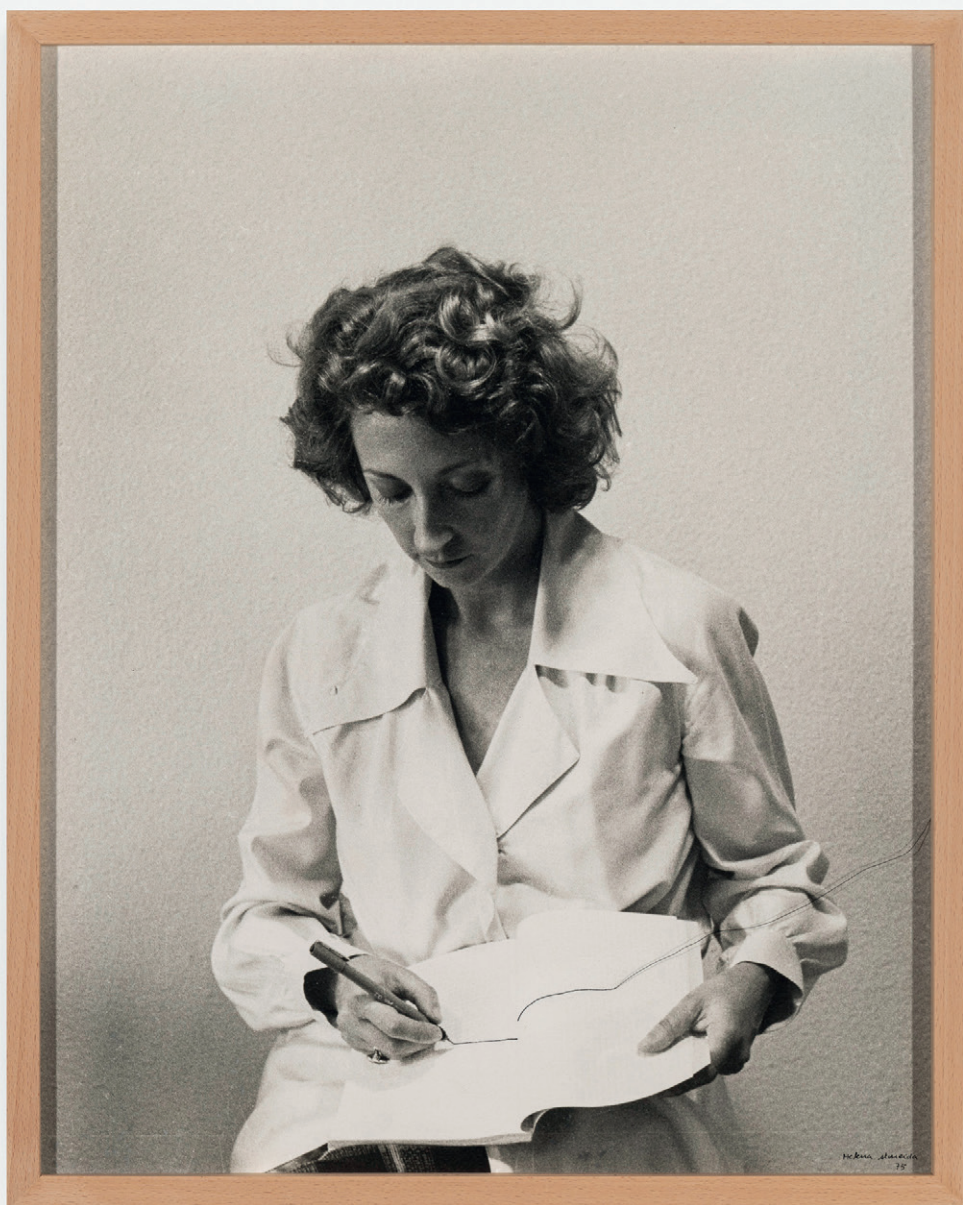


[Desenho Habitado / Inhabited Drawing] 1975

Gelatin silver black-and-white photographic print
with black ink

52,5 x 41 cm

Edition of 3 (#2/3)



[Desenho Habitado / Inhabited Drawing] 1975

Gelatin silver black-and-white photographic print
with black ink and horsehair

52 x 41 cm

Edition of 3 (#2/3)





Untitled 1977

Gelatin silver black-and-white photographic print
with black ink and horsehair

42,5 x 52,5 cm (each)

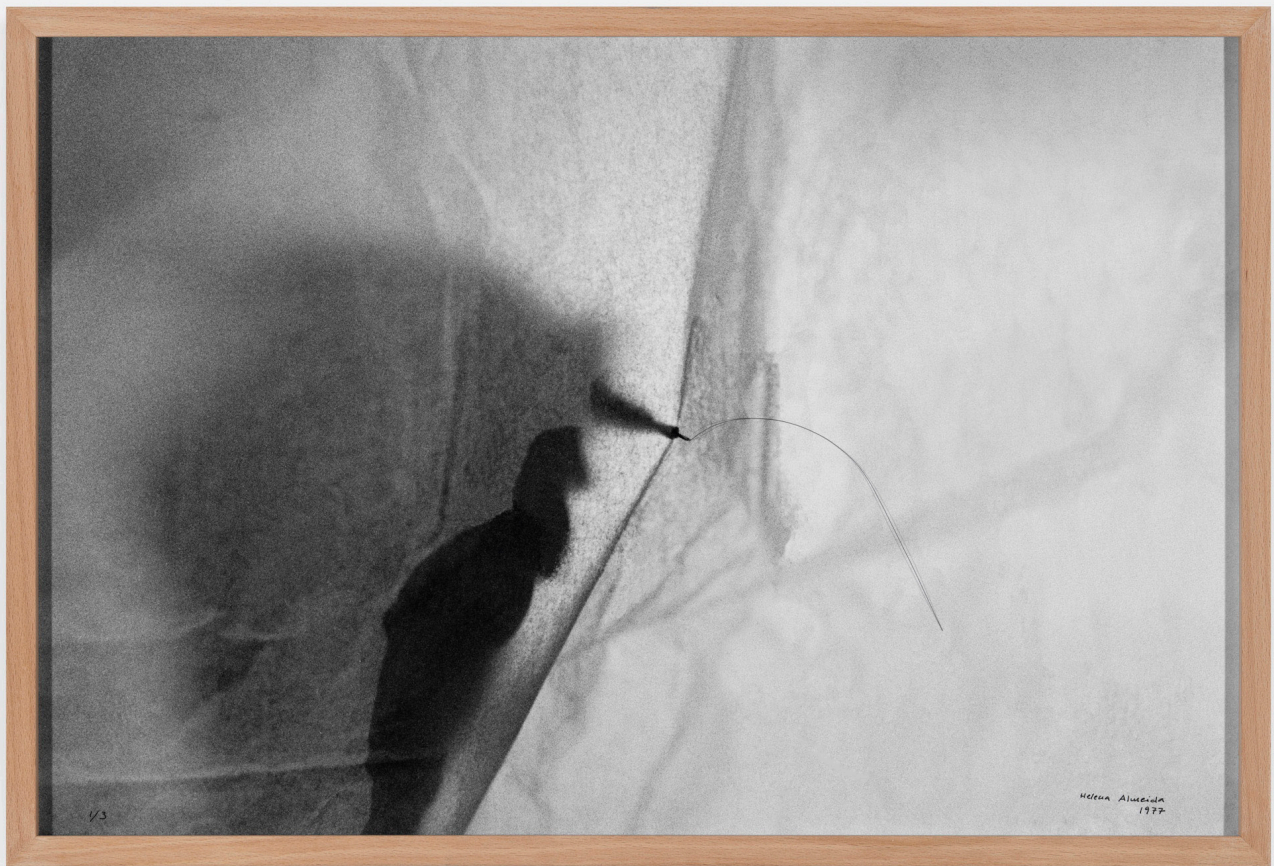
Edition of 3 (#3/3)



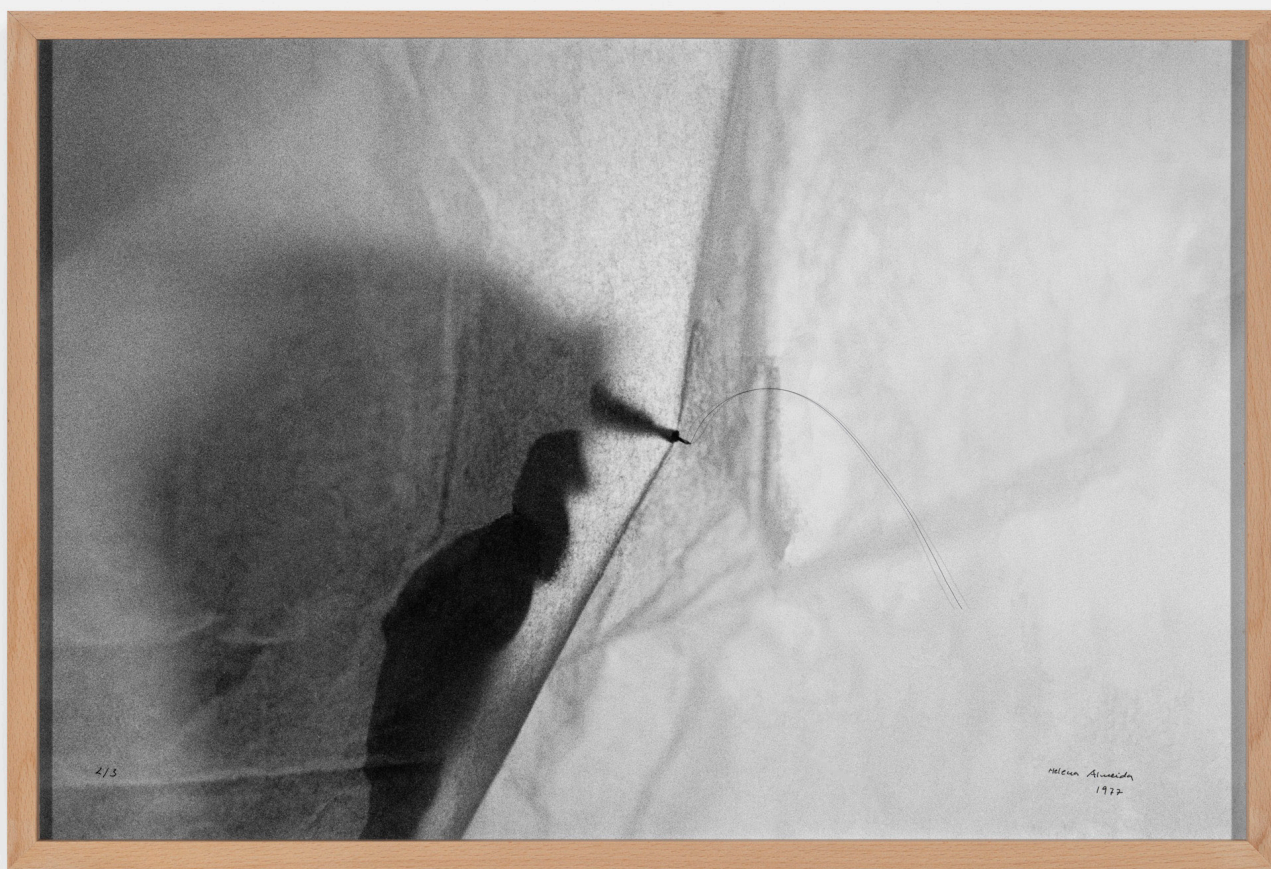
Untitled 1975
Gelatin silver black-and-white photographic print
with black ink and horsehair
24,5 x 54 cm



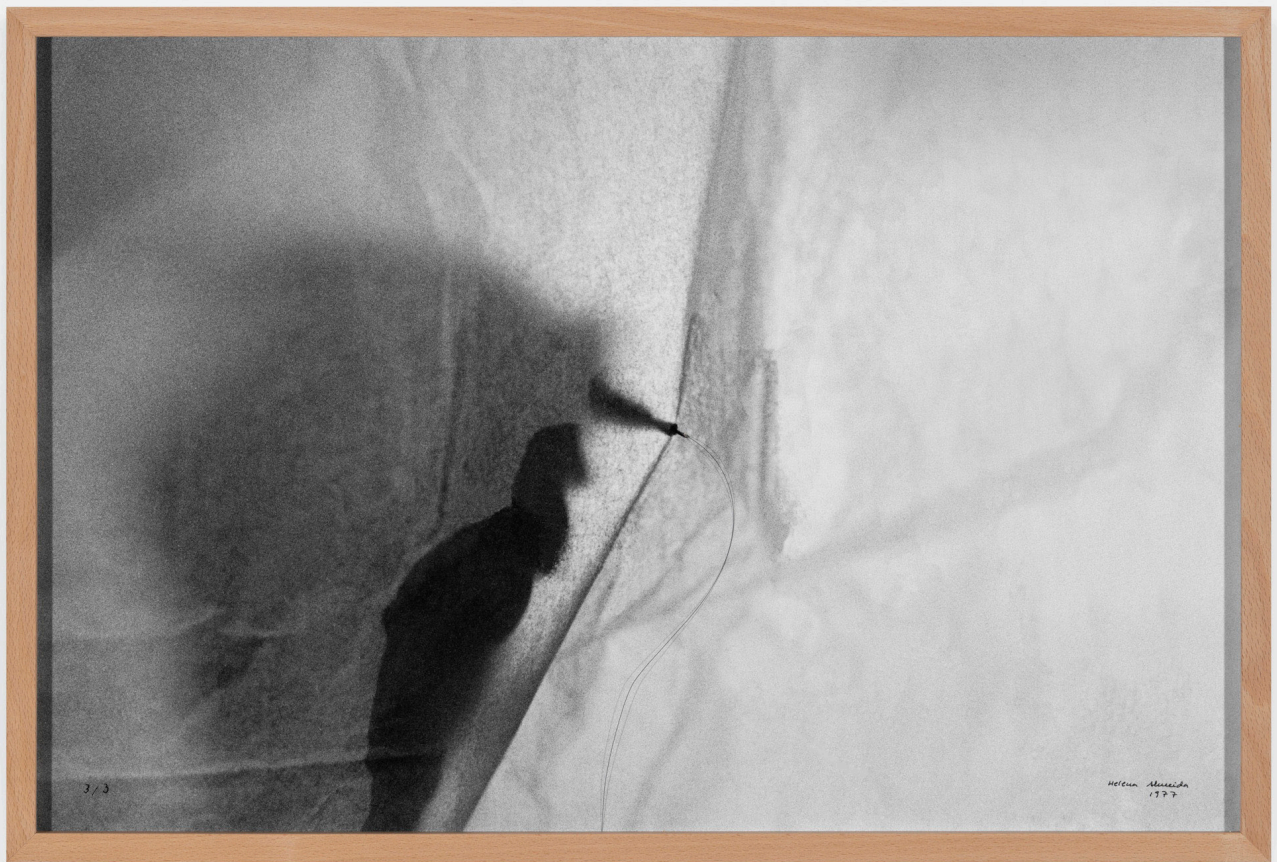
Detail of *Desenho Habitado*, 1975



Desenho Habitado [Inhabited Drawing] 1977
Gelatin silver black-and-white photographic print
with black ink and horsehair
Edition of 3 (#1/3) plus 1 Artist's Proof
42 x 62 cm



Desenho Habitado [Inhabited Drawing] 1977
Gelatin silver black-and-white photographic print
with black ink and horsehair
Edition of 3 (#2/3) plus 1 Artist's Proof
42 x 62 cm



Desenho Habitado [Inhabited Drawing] 1977
Gelatin silver black-and-white photographic print
with black ink and horsehair
Edition of 3 (#3/3) plus 1 Artist's Proof
42 x 62 cm



Painting

The desire for painting and drawing to become body, for the distance between body and work to be abolished, is evident. However, simultaneously one finds out little about her concrete body. The artist's concrete and physical body is constantly diverted, disfigured, concealed by shapes that may prolong or spill it, move "in" and "out" of it, cover or reveal it, as happens with this blue curtain-like shape of painting, grabbed by the hands which first painted it.

For the artist, the blue is synonymous with space and energy: "It's a mixture of cobalt blue and ultramarine blue. It's the most energetic blue I could make and simultaneously associate with space. It couldn't be red, green or yellow. It had to be a color that related to these two concepts: energy and space." Her work is like a permanent appearance of a woman's image that transforms itself into painting or drawing, which is itself painting. Likewise, photography reveals

itself as medium, for it enables (and motivates) the use of series, meta-narratives, of fleeting moments, some almost fictional, marking the different "times" of movement.

Flaubert's prediction that photography would make painting obsolete, with the daguerreotype occupying its place, is completely disregarded in the work of Helena Almeida. The artist combines the techniques of creation (she manually fabricates her blue, mixing the colors; she makes drawing and collages) with those of reproduction (photography and video), contaminating the modernist purity of disciplinary separations. Her work showcases a permanent movement of covering and uncovering, of exposure and hiding, which is equally the movement between personal experience and universality that all artwork should aspire to.

Isabel Carlos*

* Excerpt from *Helena Almeida: Pintura Habitada [Inhabited Painting]* by Isabel Carlos, in CAM – Centro de Arte Moderna, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2010. Available at: <https://gulbenkian.pt/cam/en/works/pintura-habitada-inhabited-painting-156661/>



Pintura Habitada [Inhabited Painting] 1975
Gelatin silver black-and-white photographic print
with blue acrylic paint
50,5 x 59,5 cm



Pintura Habitada [Inhabited Painting] 1975
Gelatin silver black-and-white photographic print
with blue acrylic paint
44,5 x 50,5 cm



Detail of Pintura Habitada, 1975



Pintura Habitada [Inhabited Painting] 1975
Gelatin silver black-and-white photographic print
with blue acrylic paint
49,5 x 51,5 cm

Inhabited Canvas

In *Inhabited Canvas* Helena Almeida uncovers the work's author. This question [...] does not relate to self-portraiture as much as the issue of authorship. Almeida is able to simultaneously be herself, an other and neither. "I am not myself, I am not the other, I am something in between" wrote the poet Mário de Sá-Carneiro. Almeida uses herself as an object, an empty, malleable vessel (in the same way she uses the horsehair, the blue ink, the black pigment or the stool from her studio in later images), which is manipulated in ways that enable the artist to pursue her formal and conceptual interrogation of the image.

Helena Almeida refuses the concept of self-portrait as a transparent reproduction of an individual personality. There isn't an autobiographical aspect in her work; she is not herself. The spectator who attempts to unravel the subject author in her portrait is left wanting. Her images usurp a tautological desire for meaning that the immediate and pseudo-transparent nature of photography seems to allow. She takes on a mask - without ever using disguises or makeup - in order to be photographable. As the main character in her works, Almeida introduces in them a paradoxical element: while she makes the author visible (and never stops being the author), the artist continuously postpones the possibility of knowing her identity. Looking at forty years of work, in which it is possible to see, for example, the artist aging, does not afford any more intimacy, or insight into the artist's personality, than in the first image she appears in. (...)

The stroll she takes wearing her canvas-suit in *Inhabited Canvas*, is not more than an enactment for the camera. As with all other works, it is meticulously prepared through numerous drawings, which constitute a sort of

cartography of the work, and that attest to the artificiality of each gesture. Thus we may speak of a pseudo-performance instead of a 'real' performance. The action never happens, there is no before or after; these moments are only imagined by the observer. Almeida formulates and makes visible several parts of a gesture without it ever occurring in reality. There is, in these works, little space for improvisation or randomness. All is calculated and controlled.

Filipa Oliveira*

* Excerpt from "The inside of the outside of the inside" by Filipa Oliveira, in *Helena Almeida: Inside Me*, Kettle's Yard, 2009, p. 6-7.



Tela Habitada [Inhabited Canvas] 1977
Gelatin silver black-and-white photographic print
62 x 42 cm

Helena Almeida

Helena Almeida (Lisbon, 1934 - Sintra, 2018) was born in Lisbon, where she lived and worked until 2018.

She graduated in Painting from Lisbon's Fine Art School in 1955. In 1964 she was granted a scholarship in Paris by the Gulbenkian Foundation.

Her work covers a wide range of media, including painting, drawing, performance, video, installation and photography. In her first solo show in Portugal (Buchholz, 1967), Almeida presented a group of geometric and abstract paintings that challenged the conventional canvas' limits. Around 1969, the artist started photographing herself, usually performing different poses in her studio, either alone, interacting with objects found in this space (chairs, benches, mirror fragments) or accompanied by architect and artist Artur Rosa, her husband. Helena Almeida's practice is often associated with distinctive blue, black or red acrylic ink strokes painted over these black and white photographs. In series like *Tela Habitada* [Inhabited Canvas], *Estudo para um enriquecimento interior* [Study for inner improvement] or *Desenho Habitado* [Inhabited Drawing] the artist can be seen interacting with isolated painting and drawing materials, such as a canvas, a pen, a brush or ink, exploring the plastic and disciplinary potentiality of Painting.

Her work has been shown in different galleries, museums and institutions, both in group and solo shows, such as: *WOMAN. The feminist avant-garde from the 1970s, Works from the Sammlung Verbund* (International Center of Photography, NY, USA, 2019), *Work is never finished* (The Art Institute of Chicago, USA, 2017), *My work is my body, my body is my work* (Serralves, Porto, 2015 and Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2016), *Dubai Photo Exhibition: a Global Perspective on Photography* (The Hamdan Bin Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum International Photography Award & World Photography Organisation, Dubai, UAE, 2016), *A Needle Walks into a Haystack* (TATE Liverpool, UK, 2014), *Bigger Splash—Painting after Performance* (TATE Modern, London, UK, 2012), *Dance—Walk—Draw* (The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, USA, 2012), *Inside Me* (Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge, UK, 2009), *Pink fabric for clothing* (Fundación Telefónica, Madrid, ES, 2008), *Intus* (Biennale di Venezia, Venice, IT, 2005), *Wack! Art and Feminist Revolution* (The Museum of Contemporary Art, LA, USA, 2005), *Helena Almeida* (Europália, Musée de Charleroi, Charleroi, 1991) and Biennale di Venezia (Venice, 1982).

[More about the artist](#)

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