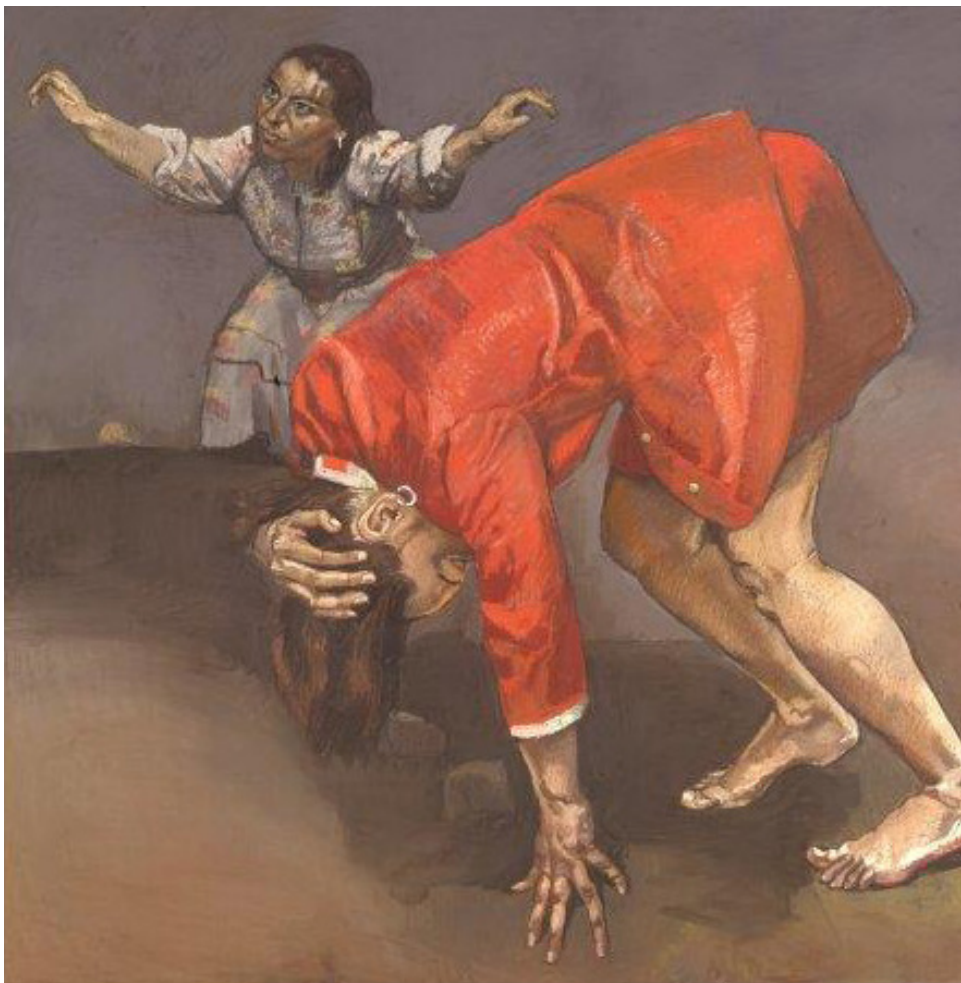


IMMA  
MAIN GALLERIES, EAST WING

# Paula Rego Obedience and Defiance



## Introduction

*Obedience and Defiance* is the first retrospective of Paula Rego's work to be held in Ireland. Rego was born in Lisbon in 1935 and is one of the most influential figurative artists working today. She is celebrated for her intense and courageous paintings, drawings and prints and for her outstanding and suggestive story-telling abilities.

The exhibition spans over 50 years of her international career, from the 1960s to the 2010s. Rego trained at the Slade School of Fine Art and has lived in London since the early 1970s. She is admired for her courageous exploration of moral challenges to humanity, including violence, poverty, political tyranny, gender discrimination, abortion, human trafficking, female genital mutilation (FGM) and grief.

Other works in the exhibition begin with her Portuguese roots and lived experiences, or respond to current affairs and stories from literature, cinema, folklore, mythology and art history. In the 1990s Rego began creating scenes in her studio. She introduced mirrors and windows, hiring furniture and costumes, casting parts and, after 2000, fabricating and introducing 'dollies...creatures that I use as if they are people'; combined with sitters drawn from life, her friends and family, wearing the appropriate clothes and engaged with these stuffed creatures.

Rego's work explores the conflicting emotions experienced in intimate relationships – such as affection and resentment – and behavioural codes within society at large, whilst her work reveals a distinct form of feminism.

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Due to our Covid-safe visiting route, it is intended that the works in the East Corridor (which forms the return route of the exhibition) be considered in relation to the chronology and thematics of the works in the nearby rooms.

Please note that this exhibition addresses challenging subjects and includes images of a suggestive and / or graphic nature. Parental and carer discretion may be required.

## Room One

Here you will find an illustrated chronology of the artist's life and career to date and an introductory video by Christina Kennedy: Senior Curator, Head of Collections and Catherine Lampert, curator of the exhibition *Paula Rego, Obedience and Defiance*.

## Room Two

During the 1960s Rego produced a series of highly subversive, overtly political paintings that express her hatred of the oppressive conditions in Portugal where she grew up, under the dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970). The restrictions on behaviour and the role of women were closely linked to the collaboration between the Catholic Church and the regime. Clippings from newspapers and magazines – 'violent things, cut up' as Rego described them – are included, improvised and interwoven with images from her personal experience and imagination; also informed by the work of French artist Jean Dubuffet (1901-85) whose work she discovered while a student at the Slade School, London.

In *Salazar Vomiting the Homeland* (1960) António de Oliveira Salazar is on the left, bending down, his vomit emerging like a sausage. By being so clear about the subject in her title, Rego was taking a political risk: 'Because really it should be the homeland that is vomiting Salazar.'

In *"...When we had a house in the country..."* (1961) Rego condemns Portugal's brutal colonial exploits in Africa which she made in response to overheard boasts about how the dismembered heads of Angolan fighters were used as footballs. Although difficult for the viewer to decipher, Rego inserted 'sexy girls inside the house' as if during a party and 'the soldiers were killing all the black people as part of the war, but very often as sport, too.'

When exhibited in the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon in 1962, the original longer title was shortened to 'When we had a house in the country...' to prevent the work from being rejected as too overtly political. Today, in the spirit of Black Lives Matter, IMMA uses the abbreviated title.

In the centre foreground of *Exile* (1963), an elderly Portuguese republican wearing a brown pin-striped suit is seen. While resembling the artist's grandfather, José Senior, the republican's blue head in profile also recalls a treasured photograph of Rego's father on the beach. This work was painted at a time of great difficulty, after the artist's husband Victor Willing had suffered a heart attack.

*The Imposter* (1964) critiques the illegitimate regime that Salazar initiated when he entered the Portuguese government in 1928, masquerading as a benevolent Finance Minister capable of solving the country's financial woes. The Estado Novo, the authoritarian dictatorship that he helped create, continued until 1974. Rego suffered on behalf of her father, José Figueiroa Rego, who was highly critical of the political situation. By 1965, he was ill, and he died the following year without seeing the regime's eventual disintegration.

### Room Three

*Centaur* (1964) Rego and her husband Victor Willing read the scholar Jane Harrison's re-writing of Greek myths. She inverts the gender roles of the Centaur narrative, casting a female figure as the mythical creature with the back and hind legs of a horse, which carries a warrior into battle. Rego spoke about her inspirations including caricature, newspaper reports, street events, children's songs, folk dances, desires and fears; her love of comic strips is especially apparent.

*Regicide* (1965) refers to the assassination of the Portuguese King Carlos I and his elder son in 1908, a day when Rego's grandfather, a radical republican, was "suspiciously absent from home". The image of a carriage and the chaos of the scene may also relate to the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy in an open car.

*Manifesto for a Lost Cause* (1965) was dedicated to Rego's father, a frustrated liberal living in a dictatorship. It was shown at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in the same year. The bright colours and vivid cut-out forms suggested the influence of Pop Art collages. Rego commented, 'I never became a Pop artist, but I did like it.'

### Room Four

*The Bride* (1985) was made after Rego discovered the work of Outsider artist Henry Darger (1892-1973), whose fantastical 'Vivian Girls' are assisted by magical animals in resisting occupation by enemy soldiers. In the painting, two girls surrounded by strawberries playfight with toy crocodiles, while another is occupied with embroidery. The work has a lively spontaneity and all-over composition, as if conjured up at speed.

Rego has said that it is difficult to devise scenes that would reveal secrets to people in her private life. So, in the 'Red Monkey' series, seen here in *Red Monkey offers Bear a Poisoned Dove* (1981) and *Wife Cuts off Red Monkey's Tail* (1981), conflicted relationships, love triangles, revenge and castration are played out by a cast of anthropomorphic animals; 'If you make them into animals you can do anything, can't you?'

The initial inspiration for these works was Rego's husband Victor Willing's childhood memory of a toy theatre with three main characters: a monkey, a bear and a dog. In 1967 Willing developed multiple sclerosis. By the 1980s when he was largely bed-ridden, Rego was urged by a friend to re-address her conflicted feelings for her husband through her work. The result was the 'Girl and Dog' series, which includes *Untitled* (1986) and *Sleeping* (1986) with its image of a pelican, referring to the self-sacrificial bird of folktales. The dog may represent Willing, who required nursing as his health declined, with Rego reflecting on an ambivalent feeling of affection and resentment felt by the caregiver.

## East Wing corridor

The exhibition has provided IMMA with the ideal opportunity to display its four Paula Rego prints from IMMA Collection in the current exhibition (ex-catalogue). They date from 1989 to 1992 and are all fairy tale themes: *Little Miss Muffet* (1989); *The Baker's Wife* (1989); *Night Crow* (1992) and *Pirates taking away children* (1992).

Rego's fairytales and nursery rhyme characters offer disconcerting reminders of the difficulties that inhabit childhood. Her 'Night Crow' is a threatening predatory creature. Rego uses a variety of tones to further intensify the dream-like quality of the works and the dark shadows add a new and terrifying dimension to the familiar nursery rhymes.

Jean Genet's play *The Maids* (1987) is a satire of bourgeois life in which the maids murder their mistress. Here, the maids perhaps threaten the daughter and their employer, the mother, a woman with androgynous features sitting at her vanity table. The stuffed boar might be a symbol of the mistress's absent and impotent husband. A man's overcoat hangs on the back of the door, a valise nearby, intimating Willing's withdrawal from family life as his health declined. The background recalls the terrace of the house in Ericeira.

## Room Five

The early drawing *Dog Woman* (1952), was inspired by a childhood spent around pets and dogs and is a precursor of the Dog Woman series. Women crouching in dog-like poses recur in Rego's work across the decades, alongside symbolic animals standing in for the artist's family. Through these depictions, in the artist's words, 'suddenly it's as if a dog were to tell its own story.'

The Dog Women series was made in part as Rego was mourning the death of her husband Victor Willing. A catalyst for the series was a story she had been told about a woman living in isolation who becomes mad, listens to the howling wind and hears a child's voice telling her to eat her dogs. For Rego, 'eating, snarling, all activities to do with sensation are positive. To picture a woman as a dog is utterly believable. It emphasises this physical side of her being... 'Women learn from those they are with; they are trained to do certain things, but they are also part animal.'

In *Lush* (1994) the figure fills the frame, intimately portrayed in a dog-like pose, sleeping restlessly, wearing only a slip; the dirty soles of her feet nearest to us; we might interpret her expression and gesture as an erotic memory linked to her master. The dress in *Love* (1995) is Rego's wedding outfit of 1959, worn by her daughter Victoria. Rego liked the feeling of continuity and thought the dress suited her.

## Room Six

Rego made the Abortion Series (1998-9) after the 1998 referendum to de-criminalize abortion in Portugal failed, partly due to a low turnout. Rego felt compelled to produce this series as a way of addressing the subject of unsafe, illegal abortions. 'In those days there wasn't any contraception or anything and the men didn't care'.

The young women (one in a school uniform), *Untitled No.4* and *Untitled No.5* are depicted alone, in bleak surroundings, but stoical and brave; "...what you want to do is make people look at life'. Also related, in Room 8, is the extraordinary and heart-rending work *Girl with Foetus* (2005), based on a story sent to her by friend and Irish playwright Martin McDonagh. *Two Women Being Stoned*, (1995) is a universal picture of violence against women.

### **Room Seven**

The Abortion etchings series, eight of which are included here were completed after the large works so the images could be more widely disseminated. Some Portuguese newspapers published her pictures in the run-up to the second referendum campaign in 2007 and they were instrumental in the vote being passed. Jorge Sampaio, the country's then President accredited the role of Rego's images as '...a tremendous way to show that we cannot go on with this kind of suffering'. This room and the adjacent link space include outstanding drawings related to the larger works, of women in postures of abjection, endurance and defiance.

### **Room Eight**

The works in this room come from the 'Female Genital Mutilation' series, which Rego began in 2008. They follow the Abortion works and share the artist's concern for the long-term serious health consequences of both. Rego's prints about female genital mutilation (FGM) were intended to support the public campaign against the practice in the United Kingdom – and by default worldwide – as British girls were taken abroad for cutting.

Women are the perpetrators of the violence in *Night Bride* (2009), whilst in *Mother Loves You* (2009), the victim is placed in a kind of trap and the cutter's own sexual organs have teeth. The ambiguity of the human / monster nature of the cutter and the violence of the mother against her child, whom she claims to love, evoke the dark messages and brutal acts that take place under the cover of night in many folk tales.

### **Room Nine**

Rego has long been appreciated as a narrator who can re-invent and re-frame stories. In 1997, she decided to look at Eça de Queirós's famous novel *The Crime of Father Amaro* published in 1875, a story whose underlying refrain is of clerical lust and hypocrisy. *The Company of Women* (1997) depicts a childhood memory of Amaro, aged nine, being pampered by the family maids. However, in Rego's re-telling she used her friend Anthony Rudolf as the model, so Amaro is no child; he is perhaps remembering what it was like to be dressed as a woman. In *Cell* (1997) Rego imagines the novice priest Amaro aroused by sexual fantasies about the Virgin Mary or a saint, represented by the doll-like figure under the bed. Amaro appears as both an adult man and a foetal presence. *Angel* (1998) was Rego's own invention, outside the scope of Eça de Queirós's original novel. She avenges the avoidable death and suffering of Father Amaro's disgraced girlfriend Amélia and her baby and holds a sword and a sponge, Christian symbols.

## Alcove / East Corridor

Drawing studies from the Amaro story are to be seen in the adjacent corridor 'alcove'. Also, in this space are studies inspired by Disney's animated feature film *Snow White*, a major work from this series of which is *Snow White and her Stepmother* (1995), exhibited in the East Corridor. In the latter, adapted from Walt Disney's 1937 film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Rego addresses the complex relationship between mother or stepmother and daughter. Here the daughter appears to be subjected to a humiliating attempt to test her purity and suitability for marriage. The contrast between the glamorous, stiletto-heeled stepmother and the awkward young woman is intended. Other works in the series reference the female characters' competition for the attention of the husband / father.

## Room Ten

In this tender depiction of Rudi Nassauer as slumbering muse *Joseph's Dream* (1990), the archetypal relationship between an active male artist and a passive female model is reversed. The heavy angel hovers above, while the Virgin Mary is hard at work, drawings by her feet. The composition is based on French artist Philippe de Champaigne's *The Dream of Saint Joseph* (1642-43), one of many paintings from which Rego drew during her time as Associate Artist at the National Gallery in London. The room also includes several sketched studies for *Joseph's Dream*.

Also featured in this room are two ink and watercolour studies which Rego made for a large painting: *Study for Caritas III (Latin for 'charity')* in 1993-94, the overall theme of which is fecundity. In this scene, Rego continues a tradition in Western European legend and art, *caritas romana*, which addresses the subject of the nourishing aspect of youth in the face of ageing. While Carlo Crivelli's *Madonna della Rondine*, (1491) is the source of inspiration for a large mural Rego created in the National Gallery London.

## Room Eleven

*Impaled* (2008) combines the 'dollies' or mannequins that Rego makes for the purpose of creating a painting and some of the people who have posed for her. It relates to various prints and drawings of this period in which she denounced female genital mutilation, honour killing and the sex trafficking of women and children.

*Painting Him Out* (2011) reverses the traditional art-historical roles, a male model is manhandled by the female artist, in the process of eradicating his image. Mirrors are used to complicate the pictorial space and to create an ambiguous set of reflections. Rego alludes to Honoré de Balzac's *Gilette, or The Unknown Masterpiece* of 1847, a short story concerning a struggling fictional seventeenth-century painter, who obliterates a failed painting. The story had been translated into English by the model, Anthony Rudolf, in 1988.

*After Zurbarán* (2007) was created in the same year as Rego's exhibition at the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid. Rego was inspired by a work in the Prado's collection, the Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbarán's *The Crucified Christ with a Painter* (1650). In Rego's version, Christ is an underweight, aged female figure, a mannequin supported by a wooden easel.

## Room Twelve

After watching Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* at the National Theatre in London, Rego re-imagined the play's story-within-a-story as a large triptych, *The Pillowman* (2004), transposing it to a Portuguese seascape during World War Two, when many exiles – including fascists – arrived in the country. As in the play, there is a little girl who wants to be Jesus and another who inserts razors into apples to kill her stepfather. Rego also recreated the tall, stuffed personage of the play's title, the 'Pillowman' and associated it with her father who suffered from 'black' depressions. The miniature aeroplane is a reference to the French writer Antoine de Saint-Expéry (1900-44), who visited Portugal during the war and who disappeared on a flight over the Mediterranean in 1944.

### East Corridor:

*The Betrothal; Lessons; The Shipwreck, after 'Marriage à la Mode' by Hogarth* (1999)  
The subject of William Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode* of c.1743, an arranged and unhappy marriage, is transposed into mid-twentieth-century Portugal. In the left panel, two mothers negotiate their children's future marriage while on the left the girl's father acquiesces to the arrangement and a scene of submission is on the right. The middle panel is a beauty-parlour scene entitled *Lessons*, in which the girl's mother tells her how to hold onto a man. The right-hand panel, *The Shipwreck*, portrays a now mature wife supporting the exhausted body of her failed husband. Evidence of bankruptcy lies in the empty drawers of the wardrobe. The triptych is laden with themes of Western European art, such as the Deposition and the Pietà.

*In Dancing Ostriches* (1995) Rego drew upon her memories of Walt Disney's film *Fantasia*, which features a comic sequence of animated ostriches, hippos, elephants and alligators performing the short ballet *Dance of the Hours*. The flightless bird/women struggle to strike ballet poses and to dance. Rego worked directly in pastel on paper without preliminary studies, intuitively developing the composition. The repeated presence of a single recognisable model, Lila Nunes, is enigmatic.

The woman selling cakes in *The Cake Woman* (2004) dominates this beach scene set in Estoril. To her left, a man appears to be making an indecent proposition to a boy, perhaps a reference to men prowling around the priests' school attended by her cousin. Details in this work come from Rego's research into Portugal during and after World War Two – a moment of disruption and unease with both Allied and Nazi spies and refugees in the country. The skull-headed figure contributes to the ominous mood.

### South East Corridor:

All her life Rego has been deeply moved by the effects of war on civilians and children in particular, *War* (2003) was triggered by a newspaper photograph published in the *Guardian* taken after a bomb went off in Basra, Iraq. Its focus was a young girl in a frilly dress. Rego has characteristically substituted 'disfigured and hybridised' animals to convey with great poignancy the harrowing perspectives of such a disaster. Characteristically she adds distracting amusements that lend the work a perverse quality.



**East Corridor: Documentary on Paula Rego's life and work:**

*Paula Rego, Secrets and Stories* (2017) is a unique insight into the life and work of Paula Rego, directed by her son Nick Willing and commissioned by BBC Arts. Notoriously guarded and private, Rego opens up for the first time, with secrets and stories about her life. Winner of The Grierson Awards Best Arts Documentary 2017 and of the Royal Television Society Award for Best Arts Programme 2018.

Rating: 12 (suitable for 12 years and over); running time: 90 minutes (shown on a loop).

## Acknowledgements

### Paula Rego and The Freud Project

In the context of *Paula Rego: Obedience and Defiance*, we invite you to visit the works of Lucian Freud on long-term loan to IMMA's Collection in the Freud Centre. Freud and Rego were acquainted since her Slade School days and in recent years she has been associated with 'The School of London'. Both artists have brought a lifelong, rigorous figurative approach and intensity of observation to their work, in Rego's case her work challenging the hierarchies and power games between men and women. Rego once noted how Freud "captures the suffering of his sitters... he notes down everything those girls have been through". Rego's focus is on the strength and resilience of women and draws our attention to the moral injustices' humanity and women, in particular, still suffer today and in these works calls us to feel empowered to demand change.

IMMA wishes to express deepest thanks to Paula Rego and family for their support and commitment to the exhibition. Special thanks to the exhibition curator Catherine Lampert for her generosity and vision.

Our thanks also to the lenders to the exhibition: Ostrich Arts; Marlborough Fine Art, London; Tate, London; The Whitworth, The University of Manchester, British Council Collection; Calouste Gulbenkian Museum – Modern Collection; Cathy Wills Collection; Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre London; Câmara Municipal de Cascais, Fundação D. Luís I, Casa das Histórias Paula Rego; Josh Lilley, London and to those who wish to remain anonymous.

IMMA would like to thank our invaluable Members, Patrons and Partners for their continuous support.

This exhibition is curated by Catherine Lampert.

### Exhibition Team

Christina Kennedy, Senior Curator: Head of Collections and Chief Curator of the Freud Project at IMMA

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Emer Lynch, Curatorial Assistant: Collections

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Front cover:  
Paula Rego  
*Two Women Being Stoned*, 1995  
Pastel on paper mounted on aluminium  
150 x 150 cm  
Private Collection, courtesy Marlborough Fine Art

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