

Postmodernism of "reaction": decade of the '80s in Portugal

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### POSTMODERNISM OF "REACTION": DECADE OF THE '80s IN PORTUGAL

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### **ABSTRACT**

The phenomenon of "return to painting" of the 1980s is usually linked with emerging neoconservative politics and booming art market. Therefore, historiographical literature frequently presents this international trend as "embarrassment" to art history, synonymous with the term "reactionary postmodernism" (Foster, 1983). However, the analyses of the critical history of the phenomenon allow us to recognize the paradoxical role played by figurative painting in the theoretical debate regarding the exhaustion of modernist discourse. On the one hand painting was accused of a reactionary position and an attempt to return to pre-modernist ideals of representation. On the other hand, it seemed to break with those ideals through hybridisation of painterly discourse and advance in the practices of appropriation and deconstruction.

This dissertation seeks to focus on the postmodern painterly strategies and critical discourse in the works of the artists associated with the "return to painting" phenomenon. The work brings critical and historiographical analyses of the paintings associated with such trends as neo-expressionism, transavantgarde, New Image Painting and return to painting in Portugal. Those premises will allow us not only to develop already asserted ideas, but also distance the "return to painting" phenomenon from its pejorative image.

Simultaneously, the work attempts to contribute to the discussion regarding return to painting in Portugal. The phenomenon that vividly marked its presence on the local artistic scene remains mostly unexamined. Therefore, the dissertation aims to enrich the discussion regarding postmodern painting in Portugal.

**Keywords:** Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, Return to Painting, Neo-Expressionism, Transavantgarde

# PÓS-MODERNISMO DE "REAÇÃO": ANOS 80 EM PORTUGAL

### URSZULA BEATA STASZKOP

### **RESUMO**

O fenómeno do retorno à pintura na década de 1980 é habitualmente associado às emergentes políticas neo-conservativas e ao crescimento exponencial do mercado de arte. Consequentemente, esta tendência internacional é frequentemente exposta pela historiografia como "indigna" da história da arte, sinónimo do termo "pós-modernismo reacionário" (Foster, 1983). Contudo, a análise da história crítica deste fenómeno possibilita-nos reconhecer o papel paradoxal que a pintura figurativa exerceu no debate teórico relativo à exaustão do discurso modernista. Por um lado, a pintura foi acusada de posicionar-se reacionariamente e procurar um retorno a ideais de representação pré-modernistas. Por outro lado, aparentou a existência de um corte com esses mesmo ideais através da hibridização do discurso pictórico e do desenvolvimento de práticas de apropriação e desconstrução.

Esta dissertação procura analisar as estratégias pictóricas pós-modernistas e o discurso crítico presente nas obras dos artistas associados ao fenómeno do retorno à pintura. O trabalho revê as análises críticas e historiográficas das pinturas associadas a tendências como o neo-expressionismo, a transvanguarda, a *New Image Painting* e o retorno da pintura em Portugal. Esta revisão permitir-nos-á não apenas desenvolver ideias já conhecidas, mas também demarcar uma distância em relação à imagem pejorativa associada ao fenómeno do "retorno à pintura".

Simultaneamente, este trabalho procura contribuir para a discussão sobre o retorno á pintura em Portugal. O fenómeno marcou vivamente a cena artística nacional, mas permanece largamente por examinar. Consequentemente, esta dissertação pretende enriquecer a discussão sobre a pintura pós-modernista em Portugal.

**Palavras-chave**: Pós-modernismo, Postestructuralismo, Retorno à Pintura, Neo-Expressionismo, Transvanguarda.

# **Table of contents**

Introduction	7
Methodology and Objective	7
Structure	12
The renewed context in the 1980s	14
Chapter 1: Return to painting – theoretical and critical background	18
Chapter 2: Return to painting – international context	39
2.1 Die neue Wilde in Germany	44
2.2 Italian Transavantgarde	55
2.3. New Image Painting and neo-expressionism in the USA	64
Chapter 3: Return to painting – Portuguese context	73
3.1 "Depois do Modernismo" (1983)	76
3.2 "Os Novos Primitivos: Os Grandes Plásticos" (1984)	86
3.3 "Arquipélago" (1985)	92
3.4 "Continentes" (1986)	98
Conclusions	104
Bibliography	113

### Introduction

## **Methodology and Objective**

This work thinks through and attempts to move beyond the paradigms of "return to painting" which vividly marked the Western art world and its peripheries from the late-1970s to the late-1980s. It outlines the critical history of the phenomenon, simultaneously attempting to distance painting's discourse from its pejorative image created for the most part by "October" magazine editors including Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Craig Owens. The aim of the dissertation is to undermine the "return to painting's" image as regressive, non-critical and non-discursive (Buchloh, 1982; Crimp, 1981) and attempt to subvert the perception of the phenomenon as "embarrassment" to art history, which dominates historiographical accounts (Foster, et.al., 2007). Simultaneously, the dissertation attempts to analyse the phenomenon of "return to painting" in Portugal, placing it among other trends associated with the term of "reactionary postmodernism" (Foster, 1983) which dominated the international painting scene in the 1980s. Hence, one of the aims is to contribute to enrich the discussion regarding postmodern painting in Portugal.

As there is no intellectual paradigm apart from postmodernism which would be more synonymous with the decade of the 1980s, the following work adapts the theory of Hal Foster (1983), who cogently and persuasively argued that there were two postmodernisms:<sup>1</sup>

"In cultural politics today [1983], a basic opposition exists between a postmodernism which seeks to deconstruct modernism and resist the status quo and a postmodernism which repudiates the former to celebrate the latter: a postmodernism of resistance and a postmodernism of reaction."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> I have adopted the theory of two branches of postmodernism in order to outline the critical discourse which focused on valorisation of the photography discourse (postmodernism of resistance), at the same time discrediting figurative painting (postmodernism of reaction) and downgrading it to a mere reactionarism enclosed in an ahistorical use of pastiche. Postmodernism of resistance, on the other hand, was celebrated as an epistemological shift of aesthetics which took on the task of articulating history not only as a set of facts, but as a constructive narrative of identity, regarded not as an ontological condition, but internally bifurcated and structured by language. The reasoning behind those radical distinctions and alignment of critics with the second version will be discussed in detail in the first chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Foster, Hal, "Postmodernism: A Preface", in: *The anti-aesthetic*, Bay Press, Seattle, 1983, pp. xi-xii.

In the dissertation, I will argue that there were dialectical tensions between the two branches of postmodernism, which allows us to have a contentious debate about the possibility of the end of modernism and its dissolution in the postmodernist production.<sup>3</sup> The break with the standardized canon of modernism<sup>4</sup> signalled by the prefix "post" is framed by narratives of death and ending which are typical of the postmodernism discourse. The important notion of postmodernism, broadly related to the theoretical approach to the "return to painting" was the end of metanarratives (Lyotard, 1979),<sup>5</sup> the end of the "real" (Baudrillard, 1981)<sup>6</sup> and the end of art (Danto, 1984).<sup>7</sup>

Most probably, the most important notion of the end of modernism which is essential to understand while analysing postmodern art of appropriation (that is the strategy used by painting and photography in the 1980s) may be traced through the ongoing reception of Roland Barthes' crucial essay "The Death of the Author" (1967). Barthes' essay created a powerful concept which challenged the modernist idea of the art work as a self-sufficient, autonomous object, possessing its own intrinsic meaning, provided by the artist. Barthes' arguments allow us to analyse art works, not exclusively through the artist's intentions, which results from a discursive relation of an art object with the viewer, depending on various historical, economical and sociological preconditions (of both the object and the viewer).

While postmodernism was frequently offered as a notion that breaks with the tradition of modernism, the most important theory for the "return to painting" phenomenon was the "death of painting" theory. Accounts of the "death of painting" introduced an argument with the medium's defenders in a battle held in various journals and publications. The dissertation introduces and enters into a polemic on various accounts of the topic: from vitriolic attacks on the medium (Crimp, 1981) through arguments for its renewal (Lawson, 1981), to defence of neo-expressionist painters (Kuspit, 1984).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The canonized version of modernism linked directly to Clement Greenberg's leading theory (Greenberg, 1960) that "was usually enacted through stylistic approaches tuned to acknowledge formal innovation, and to celebrate the level of abstraction achieved in each work in terms that were strange to the American art critic. (Leal, 2016)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Lyotard's theory is based on distrust of postmodern subject in narratives supporting modernism. The author defines postmodernism as: "*incredulity toward metanarratives*" where incredulity is treated as a result of progress in science (Lyotard, 1979).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Jean Baudrillard asserts that individuals within the postmodern condition are unable to differentiate virtual and authentic reality, "It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes" (Baudrillard, 1981).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> In his theory Danto seems to notice that art has come to a crisis and perceives its concept as internally exhausted, thus coming to the conclusion that theory of art is dead (Danto, 1984).

The non-measurable practices of appropriation, deconstruction and hybridization of artworks in the 1980s emerged in the dissemination of popular discourse terms introduced by Walter Benjamin. The work problematizes postmodern painting which reuses images appropriated from art history and popular culture through the theory of allegorical impulse (Owens, 1980) montage (Buchloh, 1982) and reification of the sign (Foster, 1989). The work relates vaguely to the problem of commodification of culture that was largely relegated to the consumer culture (Jameson, 1982).

Having those premises in mind, the following text emphasizes critical analyses of selected paintings and focuses on their critical edge and possible links with practices of conceptualism and minimalism. As the "return to painting" phenomenon revelled itself in various practices and strategies, difficult to enclose within one trend, the dissertation focuses on four tendencies: neo-expressionism in Germany, transavantgarde in Italy, New Image Painting in America and mostly unexamined return to painting in Portugal. The geographical distinctions allow us to place works in the context of artists' preoccupations with identity matters, as well as establish an intellectual context in which return to painting revolt should be placed. Those divisions are supplemented by the question of centre and periphery. Since the "return to painting" was considered a European phenomenon, it undermined the established position of New York as the centre of contemporary art (Joachimedes, 1979). Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that in the times of easy travel and available information the notion of national tradition must be treated very cautiously and should take into consideration influences of the international art market and politics.

The title of the dissertation refers to the decade of the 1980s. Dividing history into decades is a common practice in art history, but it always brings about many problems. The debate on return to painting in the 1980s refers to the enhancement of figurative painting by the capital market and art institutions in the early 1980s. Internationally, return to painting may be placed between two milestones: exposition "A New Spirit in Painting" at the Royal Academy in London in 1981, which determined the international success of new figurative painting and exhibition "Les Magiciens de la Terre" held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1989, which focused on matters related to multiculturalism and the postcolonial discourse in non-Western art. The exhibitions "Depois do Modernismo" held at Sociedade Nacional de Belas Artes in Lisbon in 1983, which introduced debate regarding postmodernist painting in Portugal, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Foster, Hal, et al., *Art since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2008, pp. 661-5.

"Imagens para os anos 90" organized in 1993 in Serralves Foundation in Porto which allowed to systematize two sensibilities which dominated artistic culture in the artistic field: figurative representation and post-conceptual practices named by António Cerveira Pinto as "artistic bipolarization", may be viewed as the milestones of the decade in Portugal. In practice, however, it is necessary to remember that figurative painting was never entirely abandoned and the protoplasts of the trend of New Image Painting created their images as early as late 1960s. Hence, it may be said that this work attempts to analyse the phenomena which occurred between 1976 and 1986.

Critical and historiographical analyses of the works were possible as a result of various academic research studies, critical texts and catalogues which allowed to analyse various artworks. As there is an acute shortage of monographic publications regarding the "return to painting" phenomena (international and domestic) the research is supported by various monographic, periodical and catalogue publications regarding individual artists. Irving Sandler's book, "Art of the Postmodern Era; from the late 1960s to the early 1990s" (1996), as well as the debate on the phenomena served as the survey which highlights important events and works. Donald Kuspit, in his publication "The new subjectivism: art in the 1980s", criticises the "neo-expressionist" painting of the decade, while Thomas McEvilley attempts to theorize the "return to painting" concept in the context of post-Kantian aesthetics. The troubling positions were presented in a Tony Godfrey's book "The New Image Painting in the 1980s". Although it draws a wide panorama of figurative painters in the decade, it tends to gloss over the important political and sociological context, while dismissing the theoretical approach.

In my investigation, I decided to focus on the painters whose works in the decade were praised by the art market and collectors, since it was believed that a commodity fetish was the driving force behind return to painting. By making an attempt to contribute to overturn this pejorative image, I will try to point out the critical edge of the new figurative representation. However, it is important to remember that the painterly production of the 1980s is much more complex than what is presented in this dissertation, also within the presented trends and geographical regions.

While analysing German neo-expressionism I chose the works which contributed to the extension of the notion of national identity and history, through the prism of contemporary

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Pinto, António Cerveira, "A Imagem Armadilhada", in: *Imagens por anos 90*, Serralves Foundation, Oporto, 1993, p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> See, for example: Foster, Hal, "Postmodernism in Parallax", in: October, Vol. 63 (Winter, 1993), pp. 3-20.

events.<sup>11</sup> Hence emphases were put on the paintings of Berlin-based artists (Georg Baselitz, Jörg Immendorff, A.R. Penck), whose painterly production contributed to the break of the silenced topic of the fascist history and traumatic memory of the Cold War. Although, we should bear in mind that the figurative wave of painting in Germany was not only related to Berliners who lived in the city divided by the wall. Several groups of artists, who lived and worked in various cities across the FRG, including Cologne<sup>12</sup> and Hamburg, were formed as well.<sup>13</sup> The works of the majority of those artists will not be analysed in this dissertation since there is no historiographical literature to support a thorough research study.<sup>14</sup> While dismissing many of those artists from the dissertation, and focusing on the works which, from the perspective of the past four decades, seem most representative for the trend, I recognized that many of the paintings created outside Berlin could enrich the already knotty idea of the German "neo-expressionism" and therefore require further academic evaluation.

While analysing the "return to painting" phenomenon in Italy I put emphasis on the group which earned the greatest commercial acclaim. The research focuses on the representatives of the so-called transavantgarde<sup>15</sup> which was considered reactionary when compared to the practices of the Arte Povera artists whose works dominated the Italian art scene in the 1970s. The dissertation takes into account works of Carlo Maria Mariani whose paintings (similarly to such artists as Luigi Ontani or Salvo) were developed on the basis of their experience with Arte Povera and who may be seen as protoplasts of return to painting in Italy. Undeniably, like in case of the German art scene, what happened in Italian painting during the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> The topics of German culture and tradition were considered "taboo" after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War in Germany. This issue is given the same space in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of this dissertation, but in order to extend the knowledge on the topic one can reach for Hans Belting's *The Germans and their Art: A Troublesome relationship* (1998).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> The 1980s painting in Cologne was centred around the group of artists called "Mulheimer Freheit" founded in 1980 and named after the street in which artists had their studio. The most-known members of the group were Peter Bömmels, Walter Dahn, Jiri Georg Dokoupil, Hans Peter Adamski, Gerard Kever and Gerhard Naschberger. <sup>13</sup> The leading Hamburg painters were Albert Oehlen, Werner Büttner.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Tony Godfrey in his monographic position "The New Image Painting in the 1980s" approaches topics of figurative painting created by Hamburg and Cologne artists. The book, which mainly focuses on the quick analysis of art works and points out the historical and social preconditions that motivated the groups only to a certain extent could not serve as an exhaustive source, or even a survey.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> The term "trans-avantgarde", from the Italian *transavanguardia* (beyond the avant-garde), was coined by Italian curator and critic Achille Bonito Oliva (in an article published in the *Flash Art* magazine (September-October 1979). The group of painters connected to the "return to painting" phenomenon in Italy included Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola de Maria and Mimmo Paladino. The artists' works were presented collectively for the first time during the exposition "Aperto 80", co-curated by Bonito Oliva and Harald Szeemann, and held at the Venice Biennale in 1980. The exposition was followed by two books written by Achille Bonito Oliva, i.e. "Italian Transavantgarde" (1980) and "Transavantgarde International" (1982).

decade of the 1980s is more complex,<sup>16</sup> compared to the group introduced and theorized by Achille Bonito Oliva.<sup>17</sup>

Return to painting in the USA is analysed through the prism of artists labelled as New Image Painters and neo-expressionists. Emphases are put on works of Julian Schnabel, David Salle and Eric Fischl whose painterly expression gained attention of both the art market and critics. The dissertation excludes highly celebrated East Village artists, representatives of the so-called graffiti art, including Keith Harring and Jean-Michele Basquiat, whose figurative, painterly modes were frequently joined with neo-expressionism (Jean-Michele Basquiat) or appropriative strategies (Keith Harring).

Research into Portuguese painting focused on the works exposed at four expositions organized between 1983 and 1986. The choice of works allows us to present the rich image of New Painting in Portugal evoked by various theoretical concerns raised by the expositions and presented paintings. Simultaneously, it demonstrates various types of painterly modes which spread between two generations of artists: older ones, whose works derived from the experience of conceptual art, and younger which entered the artworld in the early 1980s.

### **Structure**

The core of the dissertation is made up of three chapters. The first chapter introduces the critical debate and outlines the most important terms related to the "return to painting" phenomenon as well as the decisive shift in taste in contemporary art in the early 1980s. These analyses are based within the postmodern discourse on the end of metanarratives and the poststructuralist theory of "death of the author". The chapter is meant to contextualize the strategies of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> There are few sources written in/translated to English which may allow to revaluate the complexity of the painting scene in Italy during the 1980s because on the international scene "transavantgarde" became synonymous with postmodern painting in the country.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> There are several voices which claim that transavantgarde was an artificial term, created by Achille Bonito Oliva in order to hit the international market with an established "Italian brand" of contemporary painting. Bonito Oliva who, at first, tried to exclude the above trend, attempted to label every trend related to return to painting with the term transavantgarde in the phenomenon called "eternal transavantgarde" by Francesco Bonami (Mastrantonio/Bonami 2008 Luca Mastrantonio and Francesco Bonami, Irrazionalpopolare; Turin, Einaudi, 2008, p. 19) The debate regarding those topics is partially presented in the Master's dissertation by Stefano Perrini "Beyond Transavantgarde. Art in Italy in the 1980s" (2015).

appropriation, accumulation, deconstruction and hybridisation disputed in the analysis of the selected works in the second and third chapter. Simultaneously, the issues raised in the first chapter allow us to see the "return to painting" phenomenon not as a coherent movement, but rather as part of a larger cultural and social movement. Therefore, the text will include historical preconditions, i.e. the recessions of the early 1970s, a political swing on the West to the right wing and consequent effects on the art market, including the balance of public and private patronage as well as problems of commodification of the culture, which are important for the critical discourse on the phenomenon.

The second chapter focuses on analyses of various artistic movements which arose within the new figurative painting phenomenon. The subchapters are structured upon geographical regions (Germany, Italy and USA), but those divisions do not attempt to classify the movements presented in terms of 'national schools'. Rather, they attempt to explore specific impulses which allowed to emphasise regionalist and national traditions, which made it possible for the 'provinces' to challenge the metropolitan establishment. Moreover, the chapter analyses various iconographical sources used by painters, the persistence of *belle-peinture*, usage of aesthetics masked by new marketizing strategies, practices of "bad" painting and usage of artistic and political irony. All those issues are bound up with a critical debate presented in the first chapter.

The third chapter focuses on the issues related to the occurrence of the "return to painting" phenomenon in Portugal. It attempts to place the Portuguese figurative painting among other trends related to "reactionary" postmodernism outlined in the second chapter. Essentially, the text focuses on critical analyses of the works presented at four expositions ("Depois do Modernismo", 1983; "Os Novos Primitivos: Os Grandes Plasticos", 1984; "Arquipélago", 1985 and "Continentes", 1986) and traces of postmodern strategies used in those works. The examples of the exhibitions allow us to understand the richness and variety of the Portuguese postmodern painting, as well as multitude of artists' concerns which varied from those expressed by the German, Italian or American painters.

### The renewed context in the 1980s

The painterly expression returned after two decades of the medium's critical rejection by practices of minimalism and conceptualism and was frequently bound with a conservative return to order, which view postmodernism as a break with modernism and an attempt to return to the pre-modernist ideals. The break with the modernist discourse, proposed by new figurative painting, took place when Ronald Regan was elected president of the USA. He promised that he would return American values and politics of the times before the tumultuous upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s had occurred. The "dismissal" of emphases put during the decades of 1960s and 1970s on abstraction, and return to figurative and narrative forms in art, allowed critics, who were so engaged at the time, to align return to painting with emerging neoconservative politics.

The USA of the early 1980s, humiliated after the defeat in Vietnam and disgrace of Watergate, chose Roland Regan, who claimed "to make America great again". The end of Vietnam War saw the collapse of political activities in the USA. In Europe the utopian dreams generated by the "revolution" in Paris in May 1968 turned into a nightmare in August when Russian tanks rolled into Prague crushing Czechoslovakia's tentative liberalization of Communism.

The counterculture of the 1960s was dissolved into a "lifestyle" based mainly on the consumerist culture. With the booming real estate and stock market, praised for its *junk bonds* and corporate takeovers, the economy revived in the 1980s. The art market which developed in the USA matched the economy. It began after the recession of 1974-75 and had its own successes. For instance, from 1979 to 1989 Sotheby's gained more than \$10 billion in business. The conception of art as an economically rational investment was implemented by the financial press, and had more coverage in the mass media and art magazines such as "Art News". Provided the success of the succ

"In the '80s, financial institution, which have always looked upon art and collectibles as non-liquid assets not to be taken seriously, began to appreciate that fact that such property is easily

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Molesworth, Helen, "Introduction", in: *This will have been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in association with Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2012, p. 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Sandler, Irving, *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 1996, p. 426.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 236.

convertible, at least holds its value, and, in time of declining returns in other areas, is producing short-term as well long-term profits. The spectacular growth of the industry, moreover, is impelling major financial institutions to stop dragging their feet and to involve themselves with art investment. Investment, which used to be a dirty word in this context, obviously is no longer."<sup>22</sup>

A huge number of new collectors entered the art market. Artworks increasingly resembled stocks and bonds, becoming liquid commodities and their liquidity encouraged trading. Young artists shared in the spoils, e.g. Anselm Kiefer's paintings, which sold from \$7,000 to \$15,0000 in 1981, arose to between \$500,0000 and \$1,000,000 at the end of the decade.<sup>23</sup>

The boom influenced the discourse in the art work. Like never before, matters of money and career were important in the discussion about art. The new type of artists embraced the cult of success.

"Downtown and uptown in the world of contemporary art, one is a likely to catch an artist, dealer or collector talking about 'double shows', 'waiting lists', 'the pressures of the fast track', 'career structuring' and 'market positioning' as about such topical critical issues as 'image scavenging' and 'the return of the heroic'." <sup>24</sup>

The change was marked by Julian Schnabel's first solo exhibition in February 1979 in Mary Boone Gallery and achieved immediate success as all his paintings were sold before the show had opened. Schnabel became an ego monster – a kind of Donald Trump of art of the artists' laureate of the Regan era. Mass magazines, "Times" and "Newsweek", but also fashion magazines such as "Vogue" or "Vanity Fair" improved the status of celebrities, artists and collectors. Such magazines were interested in art because it grew increasingly fashionable and chic; and fashion magazines made it even more popular.

Critic Dan Cameron wrote in 1986 "If the art world five years ago, seemed to be dominated by the galleries – an adjustment that contrasted, for example, to the central role of critics during the 1960s – it now appears that patronage itself is becoming the all-important factor in determining the type of international impact an artist is going to have. Whereas until recently

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Greenspan, Stuart, "Bright Lights, Big Bucks", Art & Auction, (May, 1989), p. 221.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 427.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Nilson, Lisbet, "Making it Neo", in: Art News (September, 1983), p. 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 429.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 430.

artists and dealers talked about the number of works sold from an exhibition, now the emphasis is clearly on who bought them."<sup>27</sup>

Widely recognized as *the* collectors of the 1980s were Charles and Doris Saatchi. The latter was a head of public relation and advertising agencies, who created Margaret Thatcher's campaign that helped her to be elected the prime minister of Great Britain.<sup>28</sup> The Saatchis were famous for acquiring multiple works by the artists they favoured, i.e. Julian Schnabel, Anselm Kiefer, or Francesco Clemente – and many others related to the new figurative painting.

Without a doubt, capitalism had overtaken contemporary art, primarily the contemporary painting, and reduced its status to a commodity. The outcome of the art market boom in the 1980s still remains difficult to evaluate. It is nearly impossible to conclude if the collectors supported lower taste or had impact on art making. Many critical voices claimed that the art taste declined together with the new collectors entering the capital market. The collectors had no use from the more difficult and intellectually charged, conceptual, performance or postminimal art. The demand was to create collectible, figurative paintings. Major museums and institutional shows contributed to the new commercial success of the figurative painting, for example "A New Spirit in Painting" (1981) organized by Norman Rosenthal, Christos Joachimides and Nicholas Serota at Royal Academy in London, or "Zeitgeist" in 1982 in Berlin. A similar event occurred in Paris, in 1981, where Suzanne Page and René Block co-curated a large exhibition in Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris entitled "Art allemagne aujourd'hui" which promoted new German painting. The valorisation of the neo-expressionist images was continued during such shows as "Documenta 7", <sup>29</sup> "German Art of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Painting and Sculpture 1905-85", 30 or "Expressions: New Art from Germany". 31 The aggressive emergence of art from Europe allowed the European Art Market to grow.<sup>32</sup>

Except the omnipresent commodification of the culture the pejorative image of the decade was created partially by the transformation brought about by feminism.<sup>33</sup> The second-wave feminism of the 1970s initiated important changes in a broadly perceived culture and art world, however, during the 1980s feminism found itself attacked from the political right, as well as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Cameron, Dan, *Art and its Double*, Fundacion Caixa de Pension, Barcelona, p. 30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 432.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> "Documenta 7" was organized in 1982 and curated by Rudi Fuchs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> The events were held at Royal Academy in London in 1985 and curated by Christos Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> The exposition was organized by Jack Cowart in 1983 at the St. Louis Museum of Art and went from there to P.S. 1 in New York City.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 450.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Molesworth, Helen, "Introduction", in: *This will have been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s (...), op. cit.*, p. 15.

challenged internally by an increasingly theoretical and psychoanalytical version of feminism that was more interested in strategies of deconstruction of patriarchal forms.<sup>34</sup> Simultaneously, the schism contributed to the rise of the queer theory, identity politics and postcolonial studies: all of which worked to misbalance narratives which were blind to combine the properties of difference that make up our subjectivities.<sup>35</sup> These new formations pressured existing discourses and practices to consider class, sexuality, race and ethnicity in ways which ultimately challenged those categories. The new image painting was frequently seen as an attack on feminism and an attempt to re-establish painting as all-male activity. The challenge of the feminist discourse by re-emergence of female nudes was supplemented by explicit expressions of sexist ideas by two important artists: Georg Baselitz and Enzo Cucchi.<sup>36</sup>

Painting of the 1980s was engaged in the postmodern project of expanding and understanding identity and subjectivity, exploring the possibility of politics while offering an increasingly complicated version of history. The rise of television in the 1980s influenced the art – also painting. As artists worked in order to understand the mass-media driven Western world, decades of modernist emphases on abstraction gave way to figurative imagery. The return to figure caused consternation among critics who felt that painting embodied "return" to traditional forms of image-making. However, figurative painting did not return in the form of classical representation which was consequently used by artists in strategies of appropriation and identity politics.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Georg Baselitz affirmed: "Women simply don't pass the test. [...] The market test, the value test. [...] Women don't paint very well. It's a fact. [...] And despite the fact that they still constitute the majority of students in the art academies." See Beyer/Knöfel 2013 Susanne Beyer and Ulrike Knöfel, *German Artist Georg Baselitz: 'My Paintings are Battles'*, in issue 4/2013 of *Der Spiegel*;

While Enzo Cuchhi explained: "Women have the great privilege not to be artists. [...] This is history. History selects well, calmly. [...] Artists miss something women have, the possibility of procreating. [...] Women have no necessity of making art. That is why they have the great privilege not to be artists." Translation after: Stefano Perrini "Beyond Transavantgarde. Art in Italy in the 1980s" (2015)., from: D'Ercole 2014 Carlos D'Ercole, *Vita sconnessa di Enzo Cucchi*; Macerata, Quodlibet, 2014, pp. 125–126.

# Chapter 1: Return to painting – theoretical and critical background

This work discusses and attempts to move beyond the paradigm of "return to painting" that vividly marked the Western art world and its peripheries from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s. In this chapter I would like to present a critical history of the phenomenon of "return to painting", outline some of the wider terms associated with it, then sketch their relationship with the existing trends of return to painting in the sequence of chapters. The following text examines the concept of reactionary postmodernism associated with contemporary figurative painting and the reasoning behind equating them with neo-conservative politics. The chapter also attempts to identify a possible source of critique in postmodern painting, expanding analyses to the second and third chapter.

The troublesome concept of "return to painting" was dismissed by the preceding theory of the "death of painting" announced by critics in the late-1970s.<sup>37</sup> The "death of painting" theory was a conclusion reached by various critics,<sup>38</sup> after the decade of the seventies, when painting seemed forgotten due to dominating conceptual practices. During the decade, conceptual artists reduced the idea of beauty, which led critics to perceive this period as anti-modernist. The textual turn of art allowed to expand borders between sculpture and painting, dissolving them almost completely. Those factors led to a certain ethical prohibition of painting which was then downgraded and exiled.<sup>39</sup> The notion in circulation was that painting as a form had nothing new or relevant to present, and therefore was retrogressive, no longer viable, in other words – dead. In the realm of art history the formalist view of art as sequences of historically justified developments, return to painting was discredited as anti-modernist and regressive. Moreover, critics frequently favoured photography over painting as a more progressive technology that is able to transmit what painting used to do and does better – capture

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> McEvilley, Thomas, *The Exile's Return: Toward a Redefinition of Panting for the Post-Modern Era*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> The concept of the "death of painting" was discussed by Douglas Crimp in his arguable article "The end of painting". Yve Alain-Bois is his essay "Painting: The task of mourning" (1986) approached the "death of painting" theory, focusing on abstract painting. Bois felt that contemporary artists involved in narratives of the death of painting are engaged in a "maniac mourning", as a way of deferring the more psychologically motivated and linguistically wrong process of "working through".

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem.

likeness. 40 Despite all those facts in the early 1980s such trends as neo-expressionism, transavantgarde as well as "bad" painting started to dominate the art market and many critics announced return to painting which immediately won global popularity.

According to the critics, including Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss and Benjamin Buchloh, return to painting (associated with the term "postmodernism of reaction")<sup>41</sup> stood against the canonized version of modernism championed by the late-modernist critics (e.g. Clement Greenberg). This notion was clearly dominated by the frequent association of modernist painting with a constant search for its essence which was revealed in its anti-representational character and "flatness" of painting. Painting, in order to oppose Greenbergian ideas, needed to "return" to representation, but also stand against the proclaimed "flatness" of the surface. Through addition of various "non-painterly" elements, the artists created an intertextual base for their painting (e.g. works of Anselm Kiefer, Julian Schnabel or David Salle). The notion of anti-representation as a modernist aim dismissed illusionism and narrative sequences. It led to the treatment of painting as a medium which was devoted to the "production of aesthetic effect".42 Formalism, understood through Greenberg's leading theory and supported by other critics, like Michael Fried, was already criticised in the 1960s, when it managed to dominate the theoretical debate on art. 43 By the 1980s, the new concept of painting arose, which allowed to see it not only as a purely aesthetic form. The new painters created certain types of hybrids "the mutant replications of genres, including parody, travesty, pastiche." <sup>44</sup> As Hal Foster asserted, the hybridization of the artistic discourse led to dispersion of art which established a

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Those claims, often expressed by various critics (especially associated with the "October" magazine) were theoretically framed by dissemination of Walter Benjamin's terms into the postmodern discourse, e.g. "aura" of the art work regarded in the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> The term "postmodernism of reaction" associated with the phenomenon of "return to sculpture" and "return to painting" was developed by Hal Foster in his famous anthology *The Anti-aesthetics Essays on Postmodern Culture* (1983; p. xii). Postmodernism of reaction was opposed to "postmodernism of resistance" (called anti-aesthetic) linked with photographic practices of post-conceptual artists. Later, in Foster's works (e.g. *The Return of the Real*, 1996) the terms "neo-conservative" postmodernism (for the reactionary branch) and "poststructuralist" postmodernism (for its resistance form) were dominant. Those distinctions supposed to emphasize the connection of a new type of painting with the art market boom frequently associated with the right wing in the international politics (Reaganism, Thatcherism, etc.) while attempting to implement post-conceptual art in the context of poststructuralist theories which were fashionable at the time. All those topics will be studied in detail in this chapter.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Wood, Paul, "Modernism and the Idea of the Avant-Garde", in: Smith, Paul and Wilde Carolyn, *A Companion to Art Theory*, London, 2002.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Sandler, Irving, *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 1996, p. 332.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Hassan, Ihab, "The Question of Postmodernism", in: *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 6, No.1 (1981), p. 36.

pluralist condition.<sup>45</sup> Paintings, which were implicated in the field of cultural pluralism, seemed to lose their critical power.

Those factors allowed critics to perceive postmodernist painting as a return to tradition, resumption of history, reaction to late modernism which was considered anti-historical. Critics claimed that regression to the pictorial discourse was a nostalgic desire to recover the undifferentiated past. 46 Postmodern paintings were filled with images easily recognizable from history of art and mass culture. "Their enterprise is distinguished by an homage to the past, and in particular by a nostalgia for the early days of modernism. But what they give us is a pastiche of historical consciousness, an exercise in bad faith."47 Practices of the painters related to manipulating with attached signifiers and ahistorical conventions led to the "conventionalist" model, as termed by Hal Foster, where abstraction and painting were reduced to a certain conventional manner: "Not restricted to any one style, conventionalism tended to reduce these practices to abstraction, indeed to simulacra."48 The early 1980s painting emerged as a preservation of aesthetic categories and social distinctions of art, even though it was frequently expressed in a structural implosion of "high" and "low" forms of culture in a new order of exchange. Return to painting acquired an antimodernist concept of the postmodern theory, expressed in the critique of originality and advanced in appropriation of art. Those features created a paradoxical image of the new painting: on the one hand, faith in painting treated as though it was "high art" seemed to be completely restored (mainly because of practices adopted by galleries, curators and collectors). On the other hand, new figurative painting hybridised its discourse through dispersion and inclusion of popular culture elements into a "high" medium. Postmodern painting called for a renewed, different concept of tradition, one that favours continuities and discontinuities in order to "expand past in present". 49 Some critics accused the new painting of making attempts to restore Zeitgeist, historicism in the history of art as well as Walter Benjamin's aura. 50 Others, like Arthur Danto, claimed the end of the art theory,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Foster, Hal, "Against Pluralism", in: *Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Bay Press, Port Townsend, 1985, p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Lawson, Thomas, "Last Exit: Painting", in: Artforum, (October 1981), p. 147.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Hassan, Ihab, "The Question of Postmodernism" (...), op. cit., p. 506.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Huyssen, Andreas, "Mapping the Postmodern", in: *New German Critique*, No. 33, Modernity and Postmodernity (Autumn 1984), p. 5.

celebrating the pluralist condition which allowed artists to liberate from servitude to the art theory.<sup>51</sup>

The main factors, which gave rise to a pluralist cultural ethos of the decade, include social and economic changes. The increased mobility of capital across the international market resulted in the market reinvesting in art<sup>52</sup> and favouring image painting, photography and sculpture in particular.<sup>53</sup> Hence, the epoch of late capitalism was to be seen as synonymous with a "postmodern" epoch, especially by neo-Marxist critics (e.g. Fredric Jameson or Benjamin Buchloh). The age of globalization and mass-communication facilitated appropriation of a high degree eclecticism in most parts of life, also in art. Art objects were treated as cultural products, rather than catalysts or any kind of social, or aesthetic concerns<sup>54</sup>

The loss of any overall sense of avant-garde in the artworld in the late-1970s allowed the term "postmodernism" to gain currency among cultural theorists. Firstly, the term was associated with architecture. It informed about the demise of the austere functionalist ethos of the modernist architecture and defended an eclectic game with pre-existing architectural styles. The primary aesthetic architectural model proposed by Charles Jenks was linked to the neo-conservative rhetoric "which trumpeted the virtues of increased choice in a less socially stratified society". The shift from an aesthetic to a societal model came with the publication of Jean-François Lyotard's seminal work "The Postmodern Condition: Report of Knowledge" (1979). According to the author, the grand narratives of modernism could no longer sustain credibility, therefore postmodernism favoured "les petites histoire", which allowed to preserve heterogeneity of language games. Lyotard's book exposed a particular cultural relativism, a belief in personal or culturally specific truths or facts. Hence, it was engaged in the promotion of pluralism, which is consistent with the postmodern theory.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> See: Danto, Arthur C., *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Hopkins, David, After Modern Art 1945-2000, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p. 197.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Foster, Hal, "Against Pluralism" (...), op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Hopkins, David, *After Modern Art 1945-2000 (...), op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Those features were exposed by architectural critics Robert Venturi in "Learning from Las Vegas" (1972) and Charles Jencks in "The language of Post-Modern Architecture" (1977).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Hopkins, David, After Modern Art 1945-2000, (...), op. cit., p. 199.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Hassan, Ihab, "Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective" (...), op. cit., p 505.

The idea of cultural relativism presented by Lyotard was equated with the neoconservative wing in politics that swept the Western world at the time (especially Thatcherism in Great Britain and Reaganism in America). This political shift heralded the beginning of a policy of economics deregulation and an allied relativism of values. Thatcherism promoted the idea of an entrepreneurial culture based on personal initiative, rather than social cohesion. <sup>59</sup> The equation of Lyotard's theories with neo-conservatism seems rather unreasonable, since his philosophies were derived from the Marxist ideas. But without doubt, the fall of the socialist utopia led to the treatment of Marxism as another grand narrative of modernism which was unable to reflect the condition of the contemporary period. Nonetheless, the publication of "Postmodern Condition" initiated a critical discourse of the 1980s regarding models of knowledge. Together with Baudrillard's discourse on society and simulacrum as well as Habermas' position, which expressed the necessity to continue the project of enlightenment, it established the very core of the postmodern thought during the 1980s.

The political shift, followed by the growing capital market, allowed to develop an idea of "reactionary postmodernism", associated mainly with the "return to painting" phenomenon which is the main concern of this dissertation. Although, primarily, figurative painting was apparent in Europe (namely Germany and Italy), the dominant narrative of postmodernism was created in New York, mainly on pages of the "October" magazine where many critical ideas associated with postmodernism found their first sustained expression. This group of critics was responsible for creating an influential anthology, "The Anti-aesthetics: Essays on Postmodern Culture" (1983), which allowed to indicate the two main branches of cultural politics during the 1980s: Postmodernism of reaction associated with neo-expressionist painting and postmodernism of resistance associated with artists of the so-called "Picture" generation. According to Hal Foster (seconded by Benjamin Buchloh, Douglas Crimp and Rosalind Krauss), neo-conservative (reactionary) postmodernism was supposed to endeavour

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Hopkins, David, After Modern Art 1945-2000 (...), op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Welchman, John C., Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s, University of California, San Diego, 2001, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Foster, Hal, "A preface", in: *The anti-aesthetic*/edit. Hal Foster, Bay Press, Seattle, 1993, p. xii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> "Pictures" was the title of an exposition curated by Douglas Crimp, held at Artists Space, New York in 1977. The show included works by Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith, and went on to spur a loose movement that had since become known as the Pictures Generation. Most recognizable representatives of the "trend" were Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger.

to surpass modernism as a means of criticism, while poststructuralist (resistance) postmodernism believed that modernism was not critical enough.<sup>63</sup>

The re-validation of photography by "Picture" artists correlated with the advent and dissemination of the poststructuralist theories of reproduction and repetition (i.e. Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, etc.)<sup>64</sup> in New York. The French theory swept America, largely influencing the search for criticism in postmodern art. Those means of criticism were largely influenced by Roland Barthes' "The death of the Author" (1968) which claims that the author can only imitate an anterior gesture, and his only power is to "mix writings, to counter the ones with others."65 While every epoch reinvented its own discussion between originality and imitation, modernism was predicated on the triumph of "originality" of art. At first, postmodern appropriation seemed to entail a certain critical edge, which extended to almost every part of culture - from mass media to critical activities of artists. The so-called "postmodern" artists appropriated objects from art, not only from abstract styles. 66 Their images were created on the basis of selected historical sources, allowing to "personalize" the vision. The postmodern artists broke with the modernist myth of originality through appropriation and deconstruction of images which belong to history and mass-culture. This counter-narrative to the modernist cult of originality was practiced by both versions of postmodernism indicated by Foster. The international phenomenon of "return to painting" (unlike re-validation of photography) was accompanied and driven by various ranges of appropriation: stylistic, iconographic, or even theoretical. And although both groups of artists (neo-expressionists as well as "Picture" generation) had a critical, or rather non-reflective reaction to the already pre-existing material, instead of creating a new one, the pictorial form of appropriation was subject to criticism expressed by advocates of its photographic version.<sup>67</sup> According to Sylvère Lotringer: "The only difference between the so-called "progressive" (American) and "regressive" (European) reappropriations is that German or Italian icons still have content – communal, historical, cosmological – whereas American representations squarely belong to the commodity-form, a pure orgy and semiorgy of signs, all the more seductive for their empty formality."68

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Foster Hal, "Wild Signs: The Breakup of the Sign in Seventies' Art", in: *Social Text*, No. 21, Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism 1989, p. 251.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Welchman, John C., Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s (...), op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Barthes, Roland, *Death of the Author*, in: Heath Stephen, Image, Music Text, Fontana, Glasgow, 1977, p. 146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Crimp, Douglas, "On the Museum's Ruins", in: October, Vol. 13 (Summer, 1980), p. 49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Welchman, John C., Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s, (...), op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Lotringer, Sylvère, "Third Wave", in: *Flash Art* (International Edition), Vol. XXIV, No 158 (May/June 1991), p. 92.

Nonetheless, illusionist painting was believed to be regressive, while re-validation of photography was perceived as continuation of the modernist idea of progressiveness.

The "return to painting" phenomenon was conceived as "false spirituality" (Donald Kuspit), a social symptom which functions as a counter-narrative to the artistic innovation and progress (Benjamin Buchloh's Marxist thesis of pre-fascist regression), or as a denial of the rhetorical nature of subjective expression (Hal Foster decoding Barthes through the Lacanian theory). Nonetheless, the statement supported by the majority of the New York critics was clear: figurative painting was dismissed as non-modernist, non-critical and enclosed in the practice of pastiche. The reasoning behind this rhetoric may be found in 1979 "October's" Editorial: "art is not a timeless manifestation of human spirit, but the product of a specific set of temporal and topical, social and political conditions. The investigations of these conditions define for us the activity of postmodernism."69 However, Sylvère Lotringer sees yet another explanation for such a negative stance of the American critics. He argues that the European origin of this worldwide phenomenon of return to painting endangered the position of New York as the centre of contemporary art: "even if the new foreign art happened to be significant, it should be blasted anyway because it threatens New York's cultural supremacy." The majority of critics claimed that New Painting was alienated from history, therefore it contributed to the creation of the myth. Meanwhile, post-conceptual practices which used media signs and consumer codes, which were, in fact, myths of the consumer societies, were praised. The postmodern attempts to oppose the myth and comment upon it transformed into a myth itself.

The popularised poststructuralist view assumed an eruption of language into aesthetic through a text regarded as a multi-dimensional space in which variety of writings clashed together. Roland Barthes indicated a shift in modern linguistics that occurred as a result of a break with traditional branches of knowledge. The shift was revealed in heterogeneity of an artwork, which resulted in a difficulty, or, very often, inability to classify it properly: "What is new and which affects the idea of the work comes not necessarily from the internal recasting of each of these disciplines, but rather from their encounter in relation to an object which traditionally is the province of none of them." In Barthes' concept the work is an object which may be seen, but the text exists only in the discourse because it is held in a language. Hence,

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem, p. 169.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Krauss, Rosalind and Michelson, Anette, "Editorial", in: October 10 (Fall, 1979), p. 3-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Lotringer, Sylvère, "Third Wave" (...), op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Barthes, Roland, "From Work to Text", in: *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation/* Edit. By Brian Wallis, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984, p. 170.

the text is experienced in reaction to a sign, the work, however, is enclosed in a signified.<sup>73</sup> For Barthes the text was not only a symbolic field. He believes that our reaction to symbolism, involves a cognitively dynamic relation rather than dispersion of the meaning. There is no such a thing as a unique configuration of signs, hence poststructuralist representation is merely a shifting game within the sign system regarded as a whole.

Jacques Derrida showed a way in which language conveys both absence and presence of the meaning, creating the so-called "meaning effect" by means of shifting the unstable system of signs. Therefore, writing historical narratives may be considered only as myth creation. Derrida showed that language is unable to convey the type of meaning that is assigned to its historical narrative. He stated that there are two distinct ways of dissolving disparity between the signified and the signifier. The former reduces or prompts the signifier through its identification as such; the latter questions the whole paradigm in which the sign is operating. The second way allows the subject to open up for intertextual references and allusions.

The poststructuralist theory seemed to be appealing to the critics as it provided a new and refreshed approach which allowed to open up for new branches of knowledge and investigation. The poststructuralist theory allowed to disclose the "repressed" material of art which artists could have not been completely aware of. American critics arrived at a consensus that postmodernism of resistance represents the contemporary artistic avant-garde, therefore poststructuralism must be equivalent to the critical theory. Although, if it is true that postmodernism is a historical condition that is sufficiently different from modernism, then it is important to notice how strongly the poststructuralist theory is still connected with the modernist tradition (at least according to the "October" critics) with its displacement of revolution and politics into aesthetics. Realism, representation, mass culture, standardisation and communication are still considered to be "enemies". Despite its links to the tradition of modernist aestheticism, poststructuralism offers a reading of modernism that differs from its canonised version.

The "October" critics rejected the Greenbergian formalism and assumed that they were tastemakers. They created an identifiable aesthetic position, with only a few premises, which was applied to a relatively small group of privileged artists, i.e. "Picture" artists. At the same

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Ibidem, p. 171.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Huyssen, Andreas, "Mapping the Postmodern", (...), op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Ibidem.

time, critics identified and opposed distinct aesthetic positions, attacking them restlessly (as was the case of neo-expressionist painting). For example, Rosalind Krauss' attitude was strictly anti-modernist and pro-postmodernist. She strongly promoted artists who employed a mechanical form of artistic production (emphasizing photography) and opposed painters in particular.

New Figurative Painting was declined the critical power derived from the poststructuralist theory. However, in his book, "Representation, Power and Culture", Craig Owens argued that new figurative painting emerged as a form of critique of representation which challenged its authority. However, in order to identify this critique, one must look at the poststructuralist theory. Reactionary postmodernism uses representation in order to destroy the binding of the superior status of any representation. Hence, the postmodernist representation, whether it is figurative or abstract, will be sustained by cultural representation. he new position of representation is grounded in parting away with a commentary and explanation. It is based on the concept of work, rather than on the examples of arguments, and approaches the object of the study at the level of examples used by it. Return to figuration has its own critical edge that evokes cultural codes with an attempt to acknowledge the underlying ideologies. It reveals naivety and impossibility of creating a neutral representation. The post-Modern form of representation is not to attempt to represent things in the world but to represent modes or styles of representation: the film, the comic book, the classical painting, the advertising mode."

On the one hand, postmodern critics adopted the poststructuralist literary theory, attempting to challenge the exhaustion of the modernist discourse. On the other hand, it encompassed social theories which regarded evolution of the capitalist society from the industrial to the post-industrial stage as parallel with the "progress" of culture from modernism to postmodernism. Those observations were complemented with associating postmodern painting with the advanced capitalist production. Therefore, aesthetics and commodity production seemed to be indistinguishable: "painting has become the commodity par excellence

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Owens, Craig, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture*, University of California Press, 1994, p. 87.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Ibidem, p. 110.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Ibidem, p. 111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Ulmer, Gregory L, "The Object of Post-Criticism", in: *The Anti – Aesthetics* (...), op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>80</sup> McEvilley, Thomas, The Exile's Return (...), op. cit., p. 102.

– a venal symbol of the commercial degradation of art."<sup>81</sup> The new commodity art resulted from the failure of the socialist classical models in Western and Eastern Europe. The Western world seemed to accept the inevitability of consumerism. Instead of formulating "intellectually charged", conceptual and abstract art, the market-orientated artists focused on "easier" figurative and narrative paintings. The commodity painting exposed the cultural fragmentation, and break between the subject and historicism asserted by Hal Foster.<sup>82</sup>

"Whether in the guise of neoexpressionist painting or a multimedia performance, each practice manifests the process of spectacular reification that is so intensive in late capitalism; in particular, each attests to a fetishistic fragmentation of the sign – which poststructuralist theory often valorizes and postmodernist practice often performs – that is fundamental to the cultural logic of capital." 83

A similar mindset accounted for Fredric Jameson's postmodern theory which asserted that technologies of reproduction had replaced technologies of production. Jameson welcomed postmodernism as a renewed Marxist critique of the capitalist production. Postmodernist artistic production was symptomatic of "the dispersed borders, the mixed spaces, of multinational capitalism." Return to painting was perceived as a quest of the capitalist market for historical representation, which emerged due to the crisis in historicity. As Jameson pointed out, postmodern painting did not seem to attempt to recuperate historical representation and rather invested in its deconstruction. However, it tended to treat art history and mass-culture images as fetishes manipulating signifiers attached to them. In this regard, Jameson adapted Jean Baudrillard's theory, evoking the "schizophrenic" effects of an autonomous sphere of a social sign production where signifiers became detached from their referents and existed as derealized simulacra. Jameson became a speaker for poststructuralism, defending the thesis on authorship as a myth and proclaiming dissolution of the postmodern subject in the form of a mere pastiche. It seems clear that Jameson's postmodernist theory identified a shift of artistic mood which was occurring in the early 1980s. Although it is difficult not to agree with Hal

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Kuspit, Donald, *The Rebirth of Painting in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 2 <sup>82</sup> Foster, Hal, "(Post) Modern Polemics", in: *Perspecta*, Vol.21 (1984), p. 153.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> Foster, Hal, "Wild Signs: The Breakup of the Sign in Seventies' Art", in: *Social Text*, No. 21, Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism 1989, pp. 251-2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Foster, Hal, *Postmodernism in Parallax*, in: "October", Vol. 63 (Winter, 1993), p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Ibidem, p. 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Ibidem, p. 99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Jameson, Fredric, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society", in: *The anti-aesthetic*/ edit. Hal Foster, Bay Press, Seattle, 1993, p. 118.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> Ibidem, p. 120.

Foster, who criticized Jameson's view as too totalistic, too spatialistic, and deprived of the sensitivity of dynamics of time and space among postmodern societies.<sup>89</sup>

The critique of neo-expressionistic painting frequently aligned itself with the critique of the art institutions. The argument was often built on the claim that both are disreputable due to the fact that painting's revival was caused by the spectacular growth of the art market - the phenomenon which Craig Owens called "the studio-gallery-museum power nexus."90 Critics alleged that paintings were valued by the bourgeoisie because of their portability, hence it was easy to sell and buy them. 91 Many critics, although sympathetic to new painting, were troubled by the role of the art market and art institutions in promoting neo-expressionists. On the one hand, the booming capital market had its enthusiasts, for example, Diego Cortez wrote: "[the market strategy supports] the most significant art of this time. To the critics who feel that this new painting is mere marketing strategy, let me say that they are only partially correct. It is good marketing in bed with the best art. It is, I maintain, a strategy of the soul."92 On the other hand, Douglas Crimp in his essay "On the Museum's Ruins" argued that the end of painting as an artistic practice emerged as a result of practices employed by the museums. It is alleged that the space for painting was filled by re-validation of photography that "may have been invented in 1839, but it was only discovered in 1970s" and was a decentralizing element of the postmodern museum. As Owens indicated, the reproductive technologies allowed artists to have "the frank confiscation, quotation, excerption, accumulation, and repetition of already existing images"94 limiting the notion of the authenticity, presence and originality of the exposed works which was important for the museum. While Crimp tried to dismiss painting perceived as a medium with "essence", which has a "capacity to materialize images rendered up by the boundless human imagination", he did not seem to notice that postmodern painting engaged in the appropriation and deconstruction practices associated with the critical discourse of photography. Instead, Douglas Crimp claimed that neo-expressionist painting allowed the spectator to return to the uninterrupted continuum of the museum art. Therefore, art institutions appropriated art that fits into its space, in both physical and discursive ways. 95 Similarly, Craig

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Foster, Hal, "Postmodernism in Parallax" (...)., op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Owens, Craig, "Back in the studio", in: Art in America (January, 1982), p. 107.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Sandler, Irving, *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 1996, p. 225.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Cortez, Diego, *The Pressure to Paint*, Marlborough Gallery, 1982, p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Crimp, Douglas, On the Museum's Ruins, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 73.

<sup>94</sup> Crimp, Douglas, "On the Museum's Ruins", in: October, Vol. 13 (Summer, 1980), p. 56.

<sup>95</sup> Crimp, Douglas, "The Postmodern Museum", in: On the Museum's Ruins (...), op. cit., p. 286.

Owens criticized art galleries for dismissing the political discourse. He attacked the art market and collectors restlessly for enhancing and promoting fashion-oriented art in the form of neo-expressionist painting and sculpture, as well as marginalizing political art. However, political art was hardly marginalized, especially as a result of the "October" magazine's promotion of artists such as Sherrie Levine or Daniel Buren.

As stated above, it was implied by the mainstream critical discourse that if art did not have a radical political edge it could only be treated as if it were a commodity. The "October" protagonists opted for creating postmodern art which would substitute production with information, and address the questions of authorship, ownership, and therefore power. 96 Return to painting, in the wake of conceptualism, gave rise to the crucial question of painting styles. Conceptualism made it vivid that paintings were physically redundant objects. It was enclosed by the realisation that probably most of all the figurative styles had already taken place, hence painting could only recycle already existing positions, providing viewers with the experience of inauthenticity. 97 In their assaults critics focused on the so-called neo-expressionism, after it had won surprisingly great acclaim. They claimed that it was a rehash of outmoded styles, although different from historic expressionism which was immediate, antirational and spontaneous. In contrast, neo-expressionists revived ancient languages and cultivated styles. Expressionism was innocent, while neo-expressionism appeared to be self-conscious. 98 Hal Foster asserted that new painters "consciously or not, play at expression. Neo-Expressionism: the very term signals that Expressionism is a 'gestuary' of largely self-aware acts'. 99 Adapting Baudrillard's theory of simulations and simulacrum, Foster regarded neo-expressionism as a simulation of authenticity and originality. 100

Most of the counter-narratives to the "October" discourse of painting disregarded a theoretical approach. The defenders of painterly modes pointed out the long and unbroken tradition of painting, arguing that authority of its history legitimated the current practice. What seemed to count the most was that the painters never stopped to paint and that a sizable public accepted their pictures.<sup>101</sup> A certain defence of new painting was created by Thomas Lawson, who, like Foster, Buchloh or Crimp, saw painting as unable to transmit the expression. But,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Owens, Craig, "Honor, Power and the Love of Women", in: Art in America, Vol. 71, No.1 (January 1983), p. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Taylor, Brandon, *Art Today*, Laurence King Publishing, London, 2005, p. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Foster, Hal, "The Expressive Fallacy", in: *Art in America*, Vol. 71, No.1 (January 1983).

<sup>100</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 224.

unlike other leftist critics, he believed that painting was the most effective means to criticise the contemporary society. In contrast to photography, Lawson argued, the painting maintained its visibility and authority, remaining culturally significant, and therefore important for a politically and socially engaged art. 102 Lawson claimed that critique of the painting may only be continued within painting. The subversive strategy of appropriation allowed painters to place their critical, aesthetic activity in the centre of the capitalist market: "The paintings look real, but they are fake. They operate by stealth, insinuating a crippling doubt into the faith that supports and binds our ideological institutions." <sup>103</sup> Lawson called for re-evaluation of the terms of painting within the context of appropriated photographic motifs. He opted not for abandoning painting for photography, but for allowing painting to engage in photography, and therefore exchange painting for a photographic and photo-based image. His critical attitude extended more toward David Salle, who was dismissed from the critique of appropriation as his references included pictures (appropriated from other contemporary artists), or his own photographic expressions (often consisting of nude, or semi-nude models). Those critical distinctions made between artists, were a sign of a general divide within mass-media references. Those distinctions are extremely important, since they were a criterion according to which some works of art were perceived as critical, while others as reductive in regard to their own present. To sum up, Lawson considered neo-expressionist painting as the "last exit" for radical artists. The appropriative painting model no longer affirms uniqueness of the medium, but rather attempts to decompose the pictorial mode of production, without reaching for mechanical modes of reproduction. Hal Foster believes that new figurative painting was a "strategic inversion" rather than the "last exit": 104" And such inversion contributed to the making of an art in which, without much irony, an art dealer could be presented as a master of deconstruction, a stockbroker could assume the mantle of Duchamp, and an investment banker could cite institution critique as his formative influence", 105 which may be perceived as a crisis of authorship, and criticality as well.

During the 1980s, the national styles, associated with revalorized, painterly signatures became highly desirable products from the perspective of the art market. Painters, especially those related to neo-expressionism in Germany and transavantgarde in Italy, recuperated particular national images. The newly-found preoccupations of painting with the national

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Lawson, Thomas, "Interview", in: *Critical Art Ensemble*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> Foster, Hal, *The Return of the Real*, MIT Press, 1996, p. 120.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>105</sup> Ibidem.

identity were attacked by Benjamin Buchloh in his polemical essay from 1981 entitled "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression". He pointed that return to the nationally distinct artistic modes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century art, including rappel à l'ordre in French art in the 1920s, had frequently followed the shift to the political right. Buchloh regarded postmodernism as a cyclical phenomenon of the collapse of the modernist paradigm, framed in the wide perspective of historical repetitions and their reactionary impulses that exist outside of the aesthetic discourse. His implication was that the return to figuration signalled an attack on earlier avantgarde which had "great potential for the critical dismantling of the dominant ideology". He disregarded painters of return to painting for abandoning the "developments" of the radical aesthetics of the last two decades.

Buchloh's critique tended to generalize non-associated issues: e.g. when Jörg Immendorff uses *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) associated with German painters such as Gorge Grosz, he attempted to manifest Germany's political division, rather than a quest for the trademark of a national style. However, the neo-Marxist rhetoric of the critic require that art is an ideological weapon against "the ruling bourgeois" and it functions in order to transgress, or oppose the bourgeois taste for painting through adoption of mechanical methods of reproduction, including photography, film and text. Buchloh's dismissal of any kind of art, which did not come (at least from his point of view) with an idea of "social progress", did not remain unchallenged. Richard Hertz accused Buchloh of "cultural authoritarianism": "Calling certain pictorial practices (i.e., easel painting) obsolete Buchloh's historical determinism, one which is never argued, never even acknowledged, but which is recurrent motif throughout his article and is the basis for his entire argument." Moreover, the claims made by Buchloh were not derived from his experience of art, but from dogma-bound preconditions, which, above all, indicated that it was the function of art to struggle against capitalism and the modernist culture.

The name of "neo-expressionist" given to the painters of the new wave seems insufficient, considering the stylistic diversity of the artists. Their works embraced various types of narratives, often contaminated with an erotic, or psychological overtone. The label "neo-expressionists" applied to such a diverse and potentially disconnected group of artists was supposed to proclaim a return of the cultural memory and historical representation. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Buchloh, Benjamin, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting", in: *October*, Vol. 16, Art World Follies (Spring, 1981), p. 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> Ibidem. <sup>108</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> Hertz, Richard, "A Critique of Authoritarian Rhetoric", in: *Real Life* No. 8 (Spring-Summer, 1982), pp. 16-18.

"traditional", figurative modes of neo-expressionists, are often examined as an expression of nostalgia for the lost past and attempt to re-establish the position of the author as an *autour*. While some theoreticians, mostly Hegelian, welcomed figurative painting as a return to the course of historicism, <sup>110</sup> others, including Craig Owens, argued that the style in postmodern images was disintegrated and brought to a mere form of pastiche which treated avant-garde as a commodified sign rather than a deeply rooted position:

"Chia, Cucchi, Clemente, Mariani, Baselitz, Lüpertz, Middendorff, Fetting, Penck, Kiefer, Schnabel these and other artists are engaged not (as is frequently claimed by critics who find mirrored in this art their own frustration with the radical art of the present) in the recovery and reinvestment of tradition, but rather in declaring its bankruptcy—specifically, the bankruptcy of the modernist tradition. Everywhere we turn today the radical impulse that motivated modernism—its commitment to transgression—is treated as the object of parody and insult. What we are witnessing, then, is the wholesale liquidation of the entire modernist legacy". 111

Rather than returning to "traditional" representation artists correlated with the "return to painting" phenomenon attempting to re-examine the purpose of painting in the face of proliferation of mass-media. The accusations made in order to recreate the position of the artist as an *autour* seem to be mischarged, and derived from misunderstanding of artworks. For example, Sandro Chia, frequently accused of making an attempt to retrieve the heroic position of artists in the society, seems to ridicule and ironize those concepts (e.g. "The Idleness of Sisyphus", 1981) rather than seriously engage in an attempt to restore the painters' position in the society. Those images, interpreted as ironical, may testify to a certain, although rather difficult to recognize, critical activity of the postmodern painters.

By merging styles, methods and images with a simultaneous treatment of all possible sources as equal, the neo-expressionist painters blurred the border between the "high" and "low" culture practised by modernism. The surprising juxtapositions of images belonging to different sources and contexts allow to read new painting as potentially neutral (e.g. David Salle, or Julião Sarmento multi-panelled paintings). The eclectic, neutral effect, created by appropriated images was termed by Lawson as "cultural cannibalism": *A retardataire* 

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> Danto, Arthur C., *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986, p. 97.

Owens, Craig, "Honor, Power and the Love of Women" (...), op. cit., p. 10.

mimeticism is presented with expressionist immediacy. 112 Postmodern paintings are claimed to be created as subjective images, but, ironically, their strategies are based mainly on practices of appropriation and deconstruction, hence the pictorial discourse of postmodernists is regarded as cynical, fashion-orientated and not without a marketing strategy. As Hal Foster stressed, painting determined by a cynical reason is based on the consciousness of the cynic that his beliefs are false or ideological but he holds to them as means of self-protection. 113 In theory, merges of high and low culture imagery may be perceived as a critical position that expresses the artists' sensitivity to the historical precondition of the profound fragmentation of the contemporary culture. But, if one of the characteristics of what is postmodern is dissolution of art in the wider culture, the artists' mergers may replicate certain assimilations.

The new eclecticism, put into practice by both versions of postmodernism indicated by the "October" authors, avails itself of the entire panoply of art and mass culture forms accumulated throughout the art history. The reactionary attitude toward the institutionalized version of modernism promoted dissemination of Walter Benjamin's theories into the postmodern paradigm. Craig Owens presented a theory in which the late-modernist paradigm of symbolic totality changed into the postmodern paradigm of textual allegory. The theory may be seen as a reaction against the collapse of the sign, or a signal of its indexical shift. Owens was focused on enclosing the visual mode in modern art, which provided a space for textuality of postmodernism. In his text, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism", (1980) he connects postmodern artistic production with the poststructuralist decentring of language. His ideas were based on the allegory conception addressed by Walter Benjamin in "The Origin of German Tragic Drama" (1928).

Craig Owens located the allegorical impulse of postmodernist art in reading and exegesis. Through appropriation of another text or image, allegory replaces the original expression and acquires its own meaning. In this way the artist is the "interpreter" of the original work which provides the viewer with a commentary that constitutes an integral part of the work. Owens suggests that the allegorical mode of postmodernist art takes part in the liquidation of the ruined aesthetic tradition. The introduction of allegory to the field of contemporary art is relevant because avant-garde believed that allegory was an anti-thesis of art. Supposedly, the power of Owens' allegorical theory lies in its ability to retrieve the historically forgotten

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> Lawson, Thomas, "Last Exit: Painting" (...), op. cit., p. 148. <sup>113</sup> Foster, Hal, *The Return of the Real* (...), op. cit., p. 117.

impulses, which are threatened to disappear completely, and rehabilitate them in the present using reinterpretation.

Allegories represent the distance between the present and irrecoverable past, which results in a sensation of alienation from tradition; they function as a gap between the past and present, which expresses a desire to redeem the past in the present. Owens approaches allegory as a representation of attitude, technique, perception and procedure in which focus is given on its ability to deconstruct verbal and visual forms, rearrange stylistic norms and overcome modernist boundaries.<sup>114</sup> Allegory is created when work is doubled, when one piece is read from the angle of the other, that is when interpretation is attached to the *post facto* of an artwork. "The allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them." 115 By means of allegory artists stress the cultural importance of work done and interpret it as de-contextualized from its original source. "However, the manipulations to which these artists subject such images work to empty them of their resonance, their significance, their authoritative claim to meaning." Hence, the postmodernist allegorical structure is not able to transmit any type of expression, enclosing itself in a game of empty signs.

The problem of allegorical mode that Owens proposed lies in a threat that the commentary given by the artist, the creator of an "allegorical structure", will not function as an integral part of the work, but as a supplement, a mere addition to the original work. 117 The appropriation strategies used by postmodernist artists led frequently to reification of reused signs (e.g. David Salle's painting) instead of their engagement to determine a commentary, or deconstruct the original work. Hence, Owen's allegorical impulse theory is unable to transmit the consensus of postmodernist, appropriative art of the 1980s. Other issues of the allegorical theory were presented by Hal Foster who argued that it is hard to oppose the symbolic impulse of modernism by the allegorical impulse of postmodernism because of two imperatives: "the first transcendental, totalistic, often utopian, the second immanent, contingent, somehow fallen - define one another and they do so within modernism." 118 Moreover, Owens based his allegorical impulse conception on the theories addressed by Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire, that is in the very roots of the modernist theory. Owens' postmodernist concept

<sup>114</sup> Owens, Craig, The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, In: "October" Vol. 12 (Spring, 1980), p. 68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> Ibidem, p. 69.

<sup>116</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> Lotringer, Sylvère, "Third Wave" (...), op. cit., p. 93. <sup>118</sup> Foster, Hal, *The Return of the Real (...), op cit.*, p. 88.

seemed to be blind to the historical, economic and political forces which conditioned postmodernist production, focusing on the internal transformation of the sign instead. 119

Benjamin Buchloh applied Walter Benjamin's allegorical conception in its Marxist reading as a critique of commodity. Unlike Craig Owens, Buchloh did not link allegory with textuality, but with Barthes' deconstruction of myth. Buchloh's allegorical structures are montage forms of ideological critique with their strategy based on confiscation, superimposition and fragmentation. Buchloh regards allegory as a tool used against commodification of an object by means of its continued evaluation:

"In the splintering of signifier and signified, the allegorist subjects undergone in its transformation into commodity. The attribution of meaning redeems the object. In the scriptural element of writing, where language is simultaneously incorporated into a spatial configuration, the allegorist perceives the essential site on his or her procedure." <sup>121</sup>

He presents allegorical art as replicate, melancholic and cynical, while insisting on its critical mode. Buchloh's montage works decentralize the authorship and subjectivity matters by being in a constant dialogue with appropriated objects of the discourse and their authorial subjects, which supposedly negates the practice of quotation. According to Foster, Buchloh managed to return allegorical art toward its archaeological beginnings in the capitalist era, but also in its historical subject – reification. Allegorical art seems to be obsessed with a capitalist transformation of objects, events or even persons into consumer images. An allegorical mode is indeed a post-indexical paradigm in which artists, who are unlimited in possibilities of using a style and conventions, retrieve lost images and reproduce them in the form of a simulacrum and meddle in signifiers attached to them. Allegorical art fragments the artistic sign in a fetishist manner.

The postmodern notion proposed by neo-expressionist painting was disputed. The attempt to dismiss painting, and bound it up with neo-conservative politics was a suggestion from the leftist critics that painting's power was finished and the medium enclosed itself in a vulgar kitsch. But they could not notice that through inventive reworking of the well-known,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> Ibidem, p. 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> Buchloh, Benjamin, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and montage in Contemporary Art", in: *Artforum* (September, 1982), p. 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> İbidem, p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> Ibidem, p. 52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> Foster, Ĥal, "Wild Signs" (...), op. cit., p. 263.

historical codes and juxtaposition with popular culture elements, postmodern painting seemed to attempt to break with the autocratic elitism of the "superior taste" imposed by an intellectual minority. The mixture of elements belonging to "high" and "popular", at least in theory, allowed to communicate with both cultural elites and masses. It might have seemed that neoexpressionist painting transformed the "high" avant-garde statements into kitsch production, claiming modernist's "revenge of the philistines". 124 But rather than proclaiming modernist art as a kitsch, postmodern painting manipulated its content in order to deny the cult of originality and the myth of constant progress. Return to painting posits a dialectical negation of its conceptual predecessors achieved through free creation of something new by means of something old. It denies the very idea of innovation, but only at first glance, as every event is an innovation. Many of the postmodern painters (e.g. Anselm Kiefer) did recognise the inescapable link between the visual and conceptual meaning in art, as they criticised not only authentic, but also unique visual experience. Therefore, many works presented in the second and the third chapters will provoke a narrative or synthetic reading without any particular interpretation that fulfils their content (e.g. Georg Baselitz, David Salle, Julian Schnabel). Their works may be seen as a mediating effect, between the context in which it is created and exists and the significance it assumes in the viewer's mind.

Although New Figurative Painting has its obvious social and political connotations, they have been barely examined by the world of art history. Without doubt, art of new painters was critically related to political (e.g. Jörg Immendorff, or A. R. Penck), sociological (Eric Fischl), and racial (Robert Collescott) issues. Those topics, crucial for the discourse had by some "neo-expressionists", will be examined in detail in the second chapter of this dissertation. One of the most troubling concepts of return to painting was its alleged attempt to renew patriarchal figures. As Benjamin Buchloh notices:

"Nor is it accidental that not one of the German neoexpressionists or the Italian Arte Ciphra painters is female. At the time when cultural production in every field is traditional role distinction based on the construction of sexual difference, contemporary art (or at least that segment of it that is receiving prominent museum and market exposure) return to concepts of psychosexual organization that date from the origins of bourgeois character formation. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> Foster, Hal, "Whatever happened to Postmodernism?", in: *The Return of the Real, op. cit.*, p. 205.

bourgeois concept of avant–garde as the domain of heroic male sublimation functions as the ideological complement and cultural legitimation of social repression."<sup>125</sup>

Undoubtedly, exclusion of the female artists (except Susan Rothenberg whose works were presented at the expositions "New Image Painting", 1978 and "Zeitgeist", 1982) seemed to undermine the emerging feminist discourse by means of re-establishing painting as all-male activity.

Painting of the 1980s may be considered as symptomatic of postmodern production (often associated with pluralism) with its stylistic revivalism and cultural relativism. Painting of the 1980s held a certain notion of the "historical entrapment" inherited from the modernist ethical obligation to achieve a critical distance. The preoccupation of the artists with identity resulted from the absence of a social core and their incapability of separating from the art market. The so-called neo-expressionist painting was responsible for initiating the first theoretical debate during the 1980s, although it was not recognized as such at the time because it was entangled in "considerations of national identities, shifting styles and allegiances, or crude cultural prejudice." The contemporary moment of return to painting in the 1980s may be treated as characteristic of the shift from modernism to postmodernism, broadly speaking. However, the postmodern notion recalled by painterly production of the 1980s did not sustain, as Hal Foster asserted: "treated as a fashion postmodernism became démodé". Those dismissals of the postmodernist theory are transcendent by its negation, i.e. through reaction currents including "post-postmodernism" and "metamodernism".

It is important to note that after the initial burst of institutional acclaim in the early 1980s, neo-expressionism "has fared very badly indeed, perhaps worse than any other major 20th-century art movement." Some of the leading neo-expressionist artists still exhibit their works in galleries, but painterly production of the vast majority of neo-expressionists has gone into obliqueness. Moreover, major museums tend to pretend that neo-expressionism never existed, claiming it was a historical mistake. Whatever institutional and critical acclaim the new painters once received, it has long since evaporated.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> Buchloh, Benjamin, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting" (...), op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> Lotringer, Sylvère, "Third Wave" (...), op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Foster, Hal, "Whatever happened to Postmodernism?", in: *The Return of the Real, op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> Rubinstein, Raphael, "Neo-expressionism not remembered", Art in America (February, 2013).

Regarding the "return to painting" phenomenon as an embarrassment to art history, it is regularly supplemented with an exclusionary approach, which grew out of an ideologically motivated rejection of pluralist art. This practice is "especially troubling when it is imposed on authoritative art historical accounts." One may point "Art Since 1900", an important anthology that includes texts written by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloh, among others, which offers an extremely limited view on the contemporary art history, the one which excludes neo-expressionist painting. However, against the backdrop of the recent, heightened interest in contemporary painting, there are organized expositions that highlight painterly production of the 1980s: one may mention David Salle and Richard Phillips' "Your History Is Not Our History" (2010), 130 Helen Molesworth's "This Will Have Been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s" (2012) and a recent exhibition curated by Jane Panetta "Fast Forward: Paintings from the 1980s" (2017). Those events allow to revisit the artworks and relate them to political and social issues, which were crucial for the 1980s. Regardless of those practices, the "return to painting" phenomenon and its wider connotations regarding content and theoretical approach still require academic re-examination.

<sup>129</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> The exposition was held at Haunch of Venison, New York.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> The exposition was held at Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> The exposition was held at Whitney Museum, New York.

## Chapter 2: Return to painting – international context

This chapter analyses the phenomenon of "return to painting" of the first half of the 1980s. The following text focuses on the three most influential trends that achieved the biggest international recognition: German neo-expressionism, Italian transavantgarde and American New Image painting. The subchapters are structured upon geographical regions (Germany, Italy and USA). Those divisions allow us to explore specific impulses which allowed to emphasize the regional and national traditions. Therefore, the analysis is complemented by questions about the phenomenon's social and historical sources.

Simultaneously, the chapter attempts to identify and discuss various postmodern strategies incorporated into figurative painting of the early-1980s and how they attempted to undermine the modernist discourse. It highlights the practices of quotation, appropriation, deconstruction, pastiche, allegory, parody and hybridization. All those issues are bound up with a theoretical debate regarding postmodernism presented in the first chapter. The chapter focuses on the painters whose works in the decade were acclaimed by the art market and collectors, since it was believed that a commodity fetish was the driving force behind return to painting. It emphasizes the analyses of the works which, from the perspective of the past four decades, seem most representative for the movements. Finally, it tries to point out the link between New Figurative Painting and poststructuralist theory.

The radical assault of painting achieved through practices of Arte Povera, conceptual art and performance art arose as substantial resistance to the means of painting. However, many leading artists during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s seemed to rebel against this new orthodoxy and made their attempts to continue to paint. Painting did not become completely oblique, but went through a period of decline during the 1970s when artists devoted themselves mainly to video art, performance, installation and conceptual art. This "new painting" seemed to reflect self-awareness of the cultural and psychological fragmentation of the postmodern era. Artists, who were part of the "new painting" trend, created figurative, subjective images which were mostly related to real experience, although not without using a mythical and dreamy atmosphere. New painting is frequently concerned with experiencing the world – with sexual

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> See, for example: Foster, Hal, "Postmodernism in Parallax", in: *October*, Vol. 63 (Winter, 1993), pp. 3-20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> Taylor, Brandon, Art Today, Laurence King Publishing, London, 2005, p. 60.

desire and sensual experience. And although many artists connected with return to painting, like Julian Schnabel, were strongly criticized as incompetent or opportunistic<sup>135</sup> their works hit the art market with a huge selling success. New Painting was widely acclaimed by critique as essentially fashion-orientated, anti-intellectual and anti-modernist.<sup>136</sup> Enthusiasm for a new figuration trend was expressed among American critics by Donald Kuspit,<sup>137</sup> while his positive reviews were strongly countered on pages of the "October" magazine by Douglas Crimp, Benjamin Buchloh, Craig Owens and Rosalind Krauss among others. They verified tendencies related to New Image Painting and neo-expressionism as retrogressive (equals unsuitable), dead, and no longer viable.<sup>138</sup> For committed left wing critics during the 1980s New Painting was, at its best, apolitical and dialectical: "October was at times implacable. In any event, it maintained a highly selective perception of which painters were worth supporting or even mentoring. The suspicion generated was that painting per se could no longer be avant-garde."<sup>139</sup>

During the 1980s the Western world became aware of the significance carried by the contemporary art developments in Europe. In the decade of the 1970s international art was primarily connected with the New York artistic scene, while European art, pushed away from the mainstream discourse was, for the most part, regarded as peripheral. At the time when return to painting was proclaimed, many European artists and critics were not adverse to suggest that the center of artistic production shifted to Europe. Italian critic, Achille Bonito Oliva, addressed aggressiveness of the American art market, as "imperialist invasion" of the art world which had created a perceptive illusion that American art is of "higher" quality. Those preconditions led to the fact that artistic hegemony was determined by economic hegemony. The economic recession of the mid-1970s initiated a shift in attitudes of the financial markets toward contemporary art. Collectors, private companies and banks began to perceive art as a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> See: Shone, Richard, "Schnabel at Tate Gallery", In: *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 124, No. 956 (Sep., 1982) pp. 572-75.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> See, for example: Buchloh, Benjamin, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting", in: *October*, Vol. 16, Art World Follies (Spring, 1981), pp. 39-68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> See: Kuspit, Donald, ""Flak from the "Radicals": The American Case against Current German Painting", In: *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Edit. By Brian Wallis, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> This debate was, at some length referred to in the first chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> Taylor, Brandon, Art Today (...), op. cit., p. 70.

Nasgaards, R., "Foreword", in: Celant Germano, *The European Iceberg: Creativity in Germany and Italy*, Art Gallery of Ontario Mazzotta, Toronto, 1985, p. 9.
 Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> Oliva, Achille Bonito, "American Scenes", in: Art dimension (Jun., 1979), pp.7-9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 283.

reliable means of acquiring assets.<sup>144</sup> Western politics, shifted toward the right, resulted in a transition of the art market which seemed to be booming at the time.<sup>145</sup> Internationally, the national culture boundaries became almost completely irrelevant. The appeal of national, started to function like a sign of recognition, a trademark.<sup>146</sup> Artists related to neoexpressionism in Germany and transavantgarde in Italy seemed to rediscover their own roots while reproaching the concepts of the European history. "By the time of the Venice Biennial of 1980, it was clear that the curatorial community was wholeheartedly committed to the new painting, which was nevertheless treated with skepticism by those for whom a return to "narrative" and "expression" could only mean a retreat from serious critical engagement with the politics of the image."<sup>147</sup>

The new generation of European artists' way of thinking and seeing things was completely opposed to the last three generations of avant-garde, especially those related to action painting, pop art and minimal art. Initially, those groups of the artists "responded to this enormous pressure from the New World in small, private circles, without public posture." And although directions and interconnections between those artists varied, they bridged the most divergent ideologies. It was expressed throughout their effort to represent various worldwide catastrophes, wars and economic crises perceived as forms of discontinuation and fragmentation of the history. The first responses to this notion of brokenness of cultural continuity came from Vienna, Berlin, Düsseldorf, Rome and Turin. Those places, spheres of the rich cultural history, which had suffered under the restoration of fascism for many years, were deprived of cultural development. According to Johannes Gachnang return to painting was a direct consequence of American art dominance in Europe: "It was forced to redefine itself against the American challenge and the American aesthetics, which attempted, naively and seductively, to conquer and claim for itself all outposts of the avant-garde in the name of progress and freedom, whether in the political, economic or cultural sphere." 150

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> Regarding condition of the art market in the 1980s see the intersection "The renewed context in the 1980s" of the introduction.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Faust, Wolfgang Max, "Shattered Orthodoxy: The Energy of Transformation", in: *American Art in the 20<sup>th</sup>Century: Painting and Sculpture 1913-1993*/ Edit. By Joachimides, Christos M. and Rosenthal, Norman, Prestel, 1993, p. 41.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> Huyssen, Andreas, "Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth", in: *October*, Vol. 48 (Spring, 1989), p. 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> Taylor Brandon, *Art Now*(...), *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> Gachnang, Joachimedes, "German Paintings: Manifestos of a New Self-Confidence", in: *The European Iceberg: Creativity in Germany and Italy (...), op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>149</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> Ibidem, p. 62.

The important moment that marked the atmosphere of return to painting was the exhibition "A New Spirit in Painting" held at the Royal Academy of Arts in London from January to March 1981. The exhibition was co-curated by Christos M. Joachimides, Norman Rosenthal and Nicholas Serota. The curators chose works of 38 artists, who were all men, and therefore reestablished this way of painting as all-male activity in the wake of the ambitious feminist discourse. The catalog text makes an attempt to view the exhibition as a form of manifesto which rediscovers painting as a lively medium in the era when its death was already proclaimed. The exposition argued for a renewal of figurative, imaginary and individualistic values within the medium of painting, as well as a change in cultural politics, and therefore suggested "a shift of the center of momentum across the Atlantic from New York." New Spirit in Painting" claimed that painting in the decade of the 1950s was dominated by the New York scene, which led to marginalization of European art, and that the ambitions of the 1960s counter-culture needed reviewing. And although the curators did not deny that the tradition of abstractionism is important and should be continued, they saw a necessity to restore the values of figurative painting.

For Joachimides the new concern of painting is related to subjectivity of the artistic vision and his self-awareness as "an individual engaged in a search for self-realization and as an actor on the wider historical stage." <sup>153</sup> He argues that again subjectivity and creativity started to be considered esteemed and important values of an artwork as a result of the need of an individual in the postmodern society to react to daily life matters, talk about herself or simply to express her emotions, needs and desires. Joachimides, while praising subjective values of the postmodern painting disregarded its theoretical approach. He did not point how the new painterly discourse broke with the modernist paradigm, and why this break was culturally important. Moreover, he did not attempt to outline connecting thread between practices of presented artists (e.g. strategies of quotation, appropriation, or deconstruction) besides individual merits of their works.

The curators used the possibility of reevaluating some older artists in terms of what younger painters were doing at the time. Firstly, canvases of abstract painters, who practiced variations of minimalism, including Robert Ryman, Brice Marden and Alan Charlton, were shown. Abstract expressionist paintings of Wilhelm de Kooning and Cy Twobly were also

<sup>151</sup> Taylor, Brandon, *Art Now* (...), *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> A New Spirit in Painting, London, 1981, In: Biennials and Beyond – Exhibitions That Made Art History, 1962-2002, Phaidon Editors, London, 2013, p. 203.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> Ibidem, p. 209.

displayed, as well as pop art works of artists like Andy Warhol and David Hockney. The exhibition displayed works of artists related to figurative painting, but not aligned with any particular artistic trend, including Francis Bacon, Balthus and Lucian Freud. Although "New Spirit in Painting" included works of artists from the older generation the emphasis was put on the emergence of the neo-expressionist trend that was strictly identified with the group of young artists who originated from the Federal Republic of Germany. The show was also an attempt to promote awareness about so-called national tradition. "Germans were held to be angst-ridden and obsessed in the manner of Northern Expressionism, the Americans were paraded as confident and pluralist, the British were classified as Northern Romantics concerned with the figure, and Italians were greeted as having survived the sad episode of arte povera to return to even earlier national roots." 154 The exposition within the frame of the national, traditional value evoked national stereotypes and geopolitical clichés. Moreover, the show failed to point out what did it signify in terms of the state and status of painting at the time. The exhibition seemed to lack some central, permeating belief in and understanding of its intentions. Despite its essential conservatism, significant pluralism and variable quality the exhibition "New Spirit in Painting" predicted the direction that visual art would take in the following decade. Immediately after the London show European painting became popular, generating a huge commercial success across the Western World.

Although emphasis was usually put on the younger generation of artists, works of many older painters were suddenly validated and they were regarded as progenitors of the New Wave of painting. Paintings of Balthus, Guston, Hélion, Matta and Morely, whose works were in circulation, were distinctly low profile in the previous two decades. Many of those artists, even without sharing any special preconditions with the younger generations, suggested that rather a certain change in taste, or maybe even fashion, but not a change in art occurred. Painting during the decade of the 1980s was not reinvented, as the curators of "New Spirit in Painting" suggested, but rather rediscovered by the public and some artists.

In order to talk about many strands of the "return to painting" phenomenon it is necessary to channel different iconography sources used by painters, the political and artistic irony used by some of them, as well as the strategies of "bad painting" and aesthetic persistence to *belle-peinture*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> Tylor, Brandon, *Art Now* (...), *op. cit.*, p. 68.

## 2.1 Die neue Wilde in Germany

The phenomenon of "return to painting" during the decade of the 1980s is associated with German artists more than with any other national group or school. Neuen Wilden (i.e. new Fauves), or neoexpressionists, as they were commonly called due to their painterly strategies, seemed to redeem this particular moment of German modernism. There was a rise of a group of painters, many of them Berlin-based, who had been painting since the 1960s when late abstraction, minimalism, conceptualism and performance art were dominant, but who were recognized by the art market only in the early 1980s. The label "neo-expressionists" given to New German Painters by critics served to classify their art as non-progressive and conservative. 155 The artists were accused of making an attempt to redeem the strategies of German expressionism through bright, intense colors, quick, broad brushstrokes, as well as "immediacy", and spontaneity of painting. 156 Many critics, including Craig Owens, accused neoexpressionists of creating only an illusion of spontaneity and reduction of historical expressionism to the conventional form of codified signs, <sup>157</sup> while others, like Donald Kuspit, argued that critical potential of neo-expressionism lies in its ability to reveal artificiality of contemporary art and society. 158 Despite the fact that many New German Painters reached for a subjective, expressionist representation, differences between historical expressionism and neo-expressionism remained vague. While emphasizing what was natural, innocent and unmediated expressionism centered the figure of self in art, which was represented by means of spontaneous painting and subjective image. 159 Neo-expressionism proved itself to be decentered, multiple and shifting; its subjectivity reveals reification and fragmentation of postmodern art. 160

*Neue Wilde* are often associated with engagement in recovery and reinvestment of tradition. <sup>161</sup> Undoubtedly, New German Painters linked their production with the specific context of the recent German history, or rather, certain *tabula rasa* of the cultural heritage which emerged after the defeat suffered by the Third Reich. Post-1945 German art was determined by

<sup>155</sup> Kuspit, Donald, ""Flak from the "Radicals"" (...), op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>156</sup> Foster, Hal, "The Expressive Fallacy", in: *Art in America*, Vol. 71, No.1 (January, 1983), p. 80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> Owens, Craig, "Honor, Power and the Love of Women", in: *Art in America*, Vol. 71, No.1 (January 1983), p. 11.

<sup>158</sup> Kuspit, Donald, "Flak from the "Radicals" (...), op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>159</sup> Sandler. Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., 1996, p. 228.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> Foster, Hal, "The Expressive Fallacy" (...), op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> Foster, Hal, *The Return of the Real*, The Mit Press, 1996.p. 72.

the crisis in representation related to the politics of extreme, including World War II, the fascist and communist regimes and the Cold War. Under the extreme political circumstances the Germans were unable to create a constant narrative, or a national tradition. As a result, 20<sup>th</sup> century art in Germany was displayed as sets of ruptures, fractures, returns, multiplications and repetitions. The 'German art' as a study topic was considered a taboo during many years after Second World War. As Hans Belting asserted: "The subject was so discredited that scholars in Germany entertained the hope that it would be completely absorbed by the international modern movement." There existed studies about individual German artists or specific periods, but nobody addressed those matters within the larger frame of German tradition. 164

Artists deprived of references to "degenerate art" looked for a source of inspiration in abstract art of Paris and New York. Those tendencies seemed appealing due to their international dimension and transcendence. Moreover, cultivation of abstraction distanced the German artists from the realistic styles imposed by the Nazi and Communist regimes. "German history came to be symbolized by the division of [its] cultural and political traditions during the post-war period." 167

The beginnings of neo-expressionism are in the German protest culture of the 1960s. <sup>168</sup> During that time a debate on fascism, national guilt, Holocaust and the recent German history was introduced by New Left activists who spread the agenda of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* across West Germany, i.e. coping, or coming to terms with the past. <sup>169</sup> Early neoexpressionists such as Georg Baselitz, Markus Lüpertz or even Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke took up Nazi imagery with a critical intent, but Holocaust imagery was non-existent in their works. Anselm Kiefer was an exception. By the time of the 1980s German historians initiated a debate over the so-called *Historikerstreit* <sup>170</sup> - the Germans' responsibility for Holocaust - and proclaimed the need to "historicize" and "normalize" the recent German history. <sup>171</sup> All those

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>162</sup> Huyssen, Andreas, "Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth" (...), op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> Belting, Hans, *The Germans and their Art: A Troublesome relationship*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1998, p. 6.

<sup>164</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> "Degenerate art" (German: *Entartete Kunst*) was the title of exhibition held by the Nazi party in Munich, in 1937. Displayed on the exhibition modernist works were discredited by Nazi regime as essentially anti-Germanic, communist and Jewish.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>166</sup> Buchloh, Benjamin, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression" (...), op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> Belting, Hans, The Germans and their Art: A Troublesome relationship (...), op. cit., 1998, p. 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> Huyssen, Andreas, "Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth" (...), op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>169</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>170</sup> There was the whole issue of the *New German Critique* magazine dedicated to 'Historikerstreit' - *New German Critique*, no. 44 (Spring/Summer, 1988).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> Ibidem, p. 27.

questions arose as a result of the conservative turn in the politics of the Federal Republic of Germany, Bitburg controversy,<sup>172</sup> public debate related to the erection of national monuments, as well as opening of the National History Museums in Berlin and Bonn.<sup>173</sup> Those were the first attempts in the post-war Germany to liberate German nationalism from the shadow of the fascist history. Therefore, we can consider neo-expressionist painting as a product of specific sociopolitical situation of the German artists who seemed to protest against the circumstances and restrictions which forced them to "forget" about the national painting tradition. Those premises allow us to perceive New German Painting as a reaction against modernist canon. The reactionary position was emphasized by reification of a historical subject (Foster, 1989).

German neoexpressionists proved to be artists with a strong historical consciousness.<sup>174</sup> New German Painting accumulates spiritual and literary dimensions with a historical sign, blurring borders between myth and history, as well as fascination and criticism. German iconography and mythology appropriated by neoexpressionists was diminished to the role of a symbol, national stereotype. *Neuen Wilden* put us closely to the ruined field of references and exacerbated sensibilities, make us face the uncomfortable dimension of the recent German history. Neo-expressionism did not proclaim return to *Zeitgeist* in art, rather to locality and local reactionarism.<sup>175</sup>

Georg Baselitz is often considered the pioneer of neo-expressionism. His provocative, figurative images were a reaction against avant-garde and international abstraction from which he wanted to "distance himself through a bluntly figurative style of painting". <sup>176</sup> Trees, eagles and cows dispersed over canvases were a pretext for formal and stylistic explorations. Baselitz's concern was to create "an abstract, autonomous painting, though one in which object is still recognizable"; <sup>177</sup> his works do not function solely in the regional context, but represent certain universals for the Western culture concepts. <sup>178</sup> Baselitz paints in series, using repetition as a tool that allows him to undermine individuality of his subject and deprive it of any emotional

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>172</sup> Bitburg controversy is related to visit of the U.S. president Ronald Regan to German military commentary in Bitburg, in May 1985 to commemorate the end of World War II in Europe. Controversy around the visit arouse due to the fact that many burials on the site were dedicated to members of the Waffen-SS and, originally Regan did not plan to visit the sites of former Nazi concentration camp.

<sup>173</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>174</sup> Faust, Wolfgang Max, ""Du hast keine Chance. Nutze sie!" With it and Against It: Tendencies in Recent German Art" (...), op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>175</sup> Foster, Hal, "The Expressive Fallacy" (...), op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>176</sup> Belting, Hans, The Germans and their Art: A Troublesome relationship (...), op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>177</sup> Calvocoressi, Richard, "A Source for the Inverted Imagery in Georg Baselitz's Painting", in: *The Burlingtone Magazine*, Vol. 127, No. 993 (Dec., 1985), p. 894.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>178</sup> Pinharanda, João, "Georg Baselitz: Problemas da Marcha e da Visão no Exercício da Pintura", in: *Georg Baselitz*/coord. Santos, F., Galeria Fernando Santos, Porto, 2003, p. 7.

connotations. The repetition and emptying out of the established motifs allowed Baselitz to move away from an art which was focused on the 'signified' towards the one focused on 'signifier'. The example of "Strasenbild" cycle from years 1979-80 represents a shouting figure at a window which slightly varies from image to image. It is a distinct exemplar in which Baselitz recalls both Monet and his successors in minimal art. Although Baselitz refused to connect his art with expressionism, he often quotes works of Munch, Van Gogh and Nolde, while a series "Strasenbild" reminds of Kirchner's erotic urban encounters. Baselitz appropriated historical material in order to deconstruct it and empty of its meaning. The strategies of appropriation and deconstruction frequently bound up with a photography were exploited by various postmodern painters. Baselitz's paintings seem to support Craig Owen's argument that neo-expressionist painting reduced historical expressionism to the conventional form of codified signs. Therefore, it creates certain illusion of spontaneity and simulation of reality (Foster, 1983).

Georg Baselitz was one of the first artists who in the post-Holocaust Germany questioned the national identity under traumatic preconditions of the history. His mid-1960s series "Heroes" repetitively put forth a figure of a lumbering male placed against a demolished landscape. The artist broke with the stereotypical image of warrior, while playing with its semantic charge. His heroes have disintegrated bodies and exposed, flabby genitals; Baselitz creates an image of the antithesis of a hero. "They are heroes devoid of their traditional powers and attributes", their heroism had been called into question by war. Baselitz in this series seems to reflect on the German "crisis of identity, screen through these absent, lost or discredited fathers" and his own position, as an artist in relation to society. The postmodern sensibility in Baselitz's work differs from modernism and avant-gardism. It raises, rather exploitatively questions about the cultural tradition as an aesthetic, but also political issue. Therefore, it seems to expose a new type of crisis in the modernist culture, reveled in the postmodern crisis in authorship and historical subject (Foster, 1996).

Another neoexpressionist who reflected on the position and identity of an artist in the post-1945 Germany was Anselm Kiefer. His works have intertextual bases, contain mixed imagery from various sources, such as technological references, historical and mythological

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>179</sup> Calvocoressi, Richard, "A Source for the Inverted Imagery in Georg Baselitz's Painting" (...), op. cit., p. 894.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>181</sup> Owens, Craig, "Honor, Power and the Love of Women" (...), op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>182</sup> Saltzman, Lisa, Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>183</sup> Ibidem, p. 53.

signs, symbols of war and destruction with symbols of regeneration and hope. He appropriates historical material, deprives it of its original context and mutates it in order to achieve a conflicted position that questions the contemporary culture. <sup>184</sup> The postmodern perception in Kiefer's works shifts away from deterministic, scientific, rational and indivisible toward fragmentary and pre-scientific. As a result, we can face a pluralistic identity that favors myth over history and religion over science. <sup>185</sup>

Kiefer's painterly production of the 1970s and the 1980s was embedded in a very specific context of the post-Holocaust German culture "out of which it grew and to which it gives aesthetic form, which energized it during long years of little recognition." In his works Kiefer uses themes, icons and motifs related to the German tradition that emerged in the fascist cultural synthesis. Kiefer's referential imagery indicates his perception of the power of a simulacrum in the postmodernist discourse (Baudrillard, 1981). Moreover, Kiefer's appropriation of historical symbols creates a setting in which that history can be reassessed. Therefore, it may contribute to demystify various mythologies. In "Occupations" (1969) - one of his earliest works, Kiefer photographed himself, wearing a Nazi uniform while reenacting Sieg Heil (illegal act) in various European cities. This work signalized the direction of his artistic efforts in the following decades.

In the series "Margarete/Shulamite" (1980-3) based on the Paul Celan's poem "Death Fugue" (1947), Kiefer attempts to capture the terror of Auschwitz through structured images. The cycle avoids figuration, or any form that would directly present the Nazi violence. The figure of Margarete, based on both the Celan's poem and Goethe's "Faust" (1832) is materialized and metaphorized in a conceptual form as curvature of a German woman's hair conjured up with a bow of straw that is imposed on the center of a barren. The same straw reminds of the German landscape, as well as the Nazi ideological fixation with Arian race purity. Colors and brightness of the painting "Margarete" (1981) contrast with the dark canvas of "Shulamite" (1983). The painting representing Shulamite – a Jewish girl of dark, "ashen hair" is placed in a mythical, poetic environment that evokes recessional architectural spaces. Without a doubt Kiefer searched for his inspiration in the Nazi architecture, in its monumental scale enclosed by low arches and paved with massive stones. The name "Shulamite" is inscribed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>184</sup> Dunning, William V., "Post-Modernism and the Construct of the Divisible Self", in: *The British Journal of Aesthetics* Vol. 33, No.2 (April, 1993), p. 137.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>185</sup> Ibidem, p. 139.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>186</sup> Huyssen, Andreas, "Kiefer: The Terror of History, he Temptation of Myth" (...), op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>187</sup> The final line of Paul Celan's poem, "Death Fugue," published in 1947 (trans. Jerome Rothenberg).

with white paint in the upper left corner, allowing to literalize the non-literal and non-figurative painting. The linguistic inscription of the dead brings us straight to the Celan's "Fugue of Death", and, supposedly, to the Adorno's proscription of the barbarity of creation of poems after Auschwitz. The lack of a human figure, its metonymic substitution gives way to pure absence. Kiefer's inscription re-contextualizes techniques of conceptual art such as those of Art&Language Group. Conceptual art frequently introduced a written word into painting, but often did so in an ahistorical, arbitrary convention.

Representation in "Margarete/Shulamite" does not return to the pre-modernist tradition. Kiefer's mixed media imagery had a critical edge in the refusal to follow the canonized version of modernism that saw even remotely representational painting as retrogressive. Imaginative incorporation of a straw and written word into canvases proves rather hybridization of painterly discourse reveled in a dispersion of arts (Foster, 1985). His painting used representation, without, however being grounded in its ideology. <sup>191</sup> Drawing from above, we can conclude that Kiefer's painting places itself consciously after conceptualism and minimalism.

In a woodcut collage, "The Paths of World Wisdom: Hermann's Battle" (1982–93), Kiefer creates a pantheon of the German luminaries in philosophy, literature, military, as well as semi-legendary heroes, including such figures as Friedrich Klopstock, Carl von Clausewitz and Martin Heidegger. All of the images, recreated from old portraits and photos are placed against a forest and linked by superimposed rings of tree trucks. The painting fabricates and fragmentizes historical images, reproducing them in the forms of partial simulacrums (Foster, 1996). The title alludes to Hermann (or Arminius), a legendary military who successfully led Germanic tribes against the Romans in the Battle of Teutobur Forest. The Hermann's myth was used as symbol by the 19<sup>th</sup> century German nationalists, and later by the Nazis, in order to proclaim the racial superiority of the Arians. Kiefer's collage presents idealized spiritualistic and intellectualistic roots of the Germanic inheritance. His choice of medium, experimentation on the threshold of painting and photography opposed Greenberg's idea of medium's purity. Kiefer's work on German national tradition can be seen as an "art of individual mythology" as it was called at Documenta V (1972). However, it seems rather to attempt to demystify particular modernist mythologies, while advancing in the practices of appropriation. The artist

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>188</sup> Saltzman, Lisa, Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz (...), op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>189</sup> Ibidem., p. 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>190</sup> Fugmann, Nicole, "The Gestalt Change of Postmodern Critique: Anselm Kiefer's Spatial Historiography", in: *New German Critique*, No. 75 (Autumn, 1998), p. 102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>191</sup> Huyssen, Andreas, "Kiefer: The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth" (...), op. cit., p. 35.

abstractly recreates the German history through a set of stereotypes, approaching the Fredric Jameson's concept of postmodern history understood as "a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum." Kiefer's works seem to challenge emphasis placed by some scholars, including Lyotard and Baudrillard, on unpresentability of historical reality. Baudrillard's simulation impairs any contrast to the real – imploding the real within itself. Accordingly, Kiefer's work disassemble the negative turn toward the hyperreal and fictionalization of forms of representation. He counterpoints those tendencies through insistence on objecthood.

The political and geographical division of Germany after the war broke the German art community, with West joining the international modernism and East social realism. Both sides sought to base their works on a principle that conformed to their respective political systems. <sup>195</sup> During the Cold War period, relations between West and East Germany remained largely absent from visual arts. <sup>196</sup> The only exceptions were the works of A.R. Penck and Jörg Immendorff who addressed subject matters related to the terror of living in a divided country. As Hans Belting pointed out, it was a radical choice back then, as it transcended the intellectual division between East and West Germany. <sup>197</sup> Penck's works related to his personal experience as an individual in contrast with the Immendorff's socially orientated, critical attitude. Both of them tied their art with a specific moment of the cultural and socio-political reality of Germany.

Penck's paintings reflect the social circumstances that he experienced living, firstly, under the communist regime of East Germany and, later, in the capitalist West. He attempts to present the East and the West as mirror stages during the time of the Cold War: 198 both places are contradictory sources of illusions, dreams and fake promises (e.g. "What is Gravitation? III", 1984). Penck's identity is an expression of his reality of an artist living in a divided country, an identity of solitude, alienation and isolation. He is concerned with scientific, contemporary developments and postwar advances in the world. His works are allusions to the shifting complexities of the contemporary world, but without placing his art "at the foot of an aesthetic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>192</sup> Jameson, Fredric, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso, London, New York, p. 66. <sup>193</sup> Fugmann, Nicole, "The Gestalt Change of Postmodern Critique: Anselm Kiefer's Spatial Historiography (...), *op. cit*, p. 102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>194</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulacra and Simulations*, Selected Writings, ed. Poster, M., Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, p. 168.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>195</sup> Belting, Hans, The Germans and their Art: A Troublesome relationship (...), op. cit., 1998, p. 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>196</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>197</sup> Ibidem, p. 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>198</sup> Yau, Joh, A. R. Penck, Harry N. Abrams, Inc, Publishers, 1993, New York, p. 62.

or a political ideology, something very few contemporary artists have been able to do." 199

Immendorff's works from the decades of the 1970s and 1980s are representations of the tense and isolated atmosphere that the culture of West Germany was experiencing at the time. Immendorff, a radical Marxist, seeks to put his art in the service of the revolution. <sup>200</sup> His subject matters were primarily related to the cultural and political events in the recent German history and the schism between the capitalist West and the communist East. The "Café Deutschland" series, which started in 1977 as a quotation of Renato Guttuso's "Caffé Greco" (1976) portrays, discredited national symbols and figures, in a satirical way, sweeping away the taboos of the German history.<sup>201</sup> The ironic appropriations in Immendorff's painting can be perceived as an allegorical structure which deconstructs verbal and visual forms, rearrange stylistic norms in order to overcome the modernist boundaries (Owens, 1980). However, the painting seems rather to engage in interplay with the appropriated historical symbols, assuming indeterminacy and multivalence of the postmodernist condition. Therefore, it demonstrates a radical vison of multiplicity and randomness, which can be perceived as a form of critical pluralism (Hassan, 1986).

Large, content-filled canvases reflect on the cultural and political disaster of the Berlin Wall which caused alienation and isolation of the society and individual.<sup>202</sup> Four versions of "Café Deutschland" were gestures of a protest against the restrains inflicted by the divided world and divided artistic tradition. 203 "Seen today, paintings like this already seem to be witnesses to a different era, to a period when two very different kinds of German art revelled the tradition they shared by their antithesis to one another. In protesting against this antithesis, Immendoff's paintings transcend it."204 Immendorff portrays inhabitants of West Berlin, their night life, creating a set of images in which autobiography, myth and history are all mixed up. The break between the subject and historicism is revealed in fragmentation of the sign (Foster, 1989). In "Café Deutschland" Immendorff portrays himself sitting between two columns which can symbolize divided Germany, <sup>205</sup> or function, like in the tradition of expressionism as a symbol of universal alienation. <sup>206</sup> In "Café Deutschland I" he places his image twice: first as a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>199</sup> Ibidem, p. 71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>200</sup> Sandler, Irving, *Art of the Postmodern Era* (...), *op. cit.*, p. 311.
<sup>201</sup> Schmitz, Rudof, "Jörg Immendorff: The German Crows", in: *Flash Art* Vol. XXVI, No. 170 (May, 1993), p. 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>203</sup> Belting, Hans, The Germans and their Art: A Troublesome relationship (...), op. cit., 1998, p. 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>204</sup> Ibidem, p. 102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>205</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 311.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>206</sup> Huyssen, Andreas, "German Painting in the Cold War", in: New German Critique, No. 110, COLD WAR CULTURE (Summer, 2010), p. 215.

figure dancing at a disco, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt with a leather top, and second, standing in the centre of the picture breaking through a wall towards Penck, whose reflection can be seen on the pillar placed behind Immendorff's back.<sup>207</sup> He positions himself as a commentator of the society, but also as a vivid part of its struggle. The themes of wound and trauma are frequently emphasized in his work, including "Seam" (1981) in which the Brandenburg Gate, a symbol of divided Germany renders a scar, red and bleeding, placed against the surface of five-pointed stars.

A certain shift of paradigm occurred in the Immendorff's series "Café de Flore" (1987). The artist steps away from political subject matters, his painting seems to be more detached, lighter and more precise. "These works, reminiscent of waiting rooms and creating an atmosphere of emptiness by means of overcrowding, are evocative ideals on the part of a painter who sees our present age as characterized by the loss of utopia, the bankruptcy of the collective, by lethargy and aggravated ego trips." Rudolf Schmitz argues that the shift in Immendorff's painterly production is a certain unconventional appropriation of Duchamp's readymades, in other words Redymade de l'histoire. Immendorff uses the German history as a source of readymades which, in their absurdity, do not need any kind of artificial production.

Berlin-based artists distance themselves from the mainland as they often address subject matters related to the history of their city. Younger artists of *neue Wilde*, such as Reiner Fetting, Helmut Middendorf, Salomé and Bernd Zimmer, are concerned with their own, personal experiences and involvements. Unlike Kiefer, they do not emphasize subject matters of World War II and Holocaust, but they rather focus on experimentation, trying to achieve possibly most eclectic effects by means of combining various techniques, materials and styles. Paintings of Fetting, Middendorf, Salomé and Zimmer were considered to be "violent" (*Heftige Malarei*), <sup>211</sup> realistic, aggressive and often satirical in relation to the middle-class lifestyle. Many topics addressed by them relate to the urban lifestyle of West Berliners. According to Max Faust, "violent painters" demanded an immediate change, and were not willing to sacrifice individualistic expression representing a "productively anarchic" attitude toward society. "*It includes personal idiosyncrasy and the esthetic signs and gestures that render it visible to* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>207</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 311.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>208</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>209</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>210</sup> Kuspit, Donald *The New Subjectivism: art in the 1980s*, Da Capo Press, New York, 1993, p. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>211</sup> Term "Heftige Malarei" relates to the title of exposition held in 1980, in Haus am Waldsee, Berlin.

Faust, Wolfgang Max, ""Du hast keine Chance. Nutze sie!" With it and Against It: Tendencies in Recent German Art" (...), op. cit., p. 36.

others, granting a new quality of tension to the relationship between style and subjective view."<sup>213</sup> Heftige Malarei reached for subjective, expressionistic representation, manipulating with symbols and attached to them signifiers. Unlike historical expressionism they do not emphasize natural, innocent and spontaneous, supporting rather Donald Kuspit's theory that neo-expressionism attempts to demonstrate artificiality of postmodern art and society.<sup>214</sup> The strategies of appropriation and deconstruction of historical styles and languages revealed reification and fragmentation of postmodern art.<sup>215</sup>

An important date that marked the development of new Berlin painting was the opening day of the gallery Moritzplatz in 1977 by Reiner Fetting, Helmut Middendorf, Salomé and Bernd Zimmer. "The Moritzpltaz artists' decision to return to the traditional medium of painting was a decision in favor of a sensual, tactile medium in which results are rapidly obtained and immediately verifiable."216 During the opening of the gallery, Zimmer showed his five-part canvases entitled "The Flood" (1977).<sup>217</sup> Flood, represented by a magnitude of huge waves metaphorically enclosed the idea of unleashed emotions, while the sea, as a symbol of unlimited promises, refers to the expressionist tradition in poetry and literature. <sup>218</sup> This symbolism of desires and passions was quite unique in art of the late 1970s with the exceptions of works of artists such as Willem de Kooning or Francis Bacon. Zimmer seems to work as a "revivalist", who aims to reanimate the spirit and updates the accomplishments of historical styles. Appropriated cultural signs do not serve as catalysts for originality, as influences to be assimilated and recreated in a process of experimentation. They are presented in order to communicate to us their meanings and implication. Nevertheless, Zimmer's appropriation strategies express asserted by Hal Foster break between historicism and subject, fragmentation of a cultural sign which contributes to commodification of a culture in postmodern era (Foster, 1989).

Middendorf, Salomé and Fetting use erotic and homoerotic content presented in the media-related, domesticated forms of commodities. The escapist dimension of the pursuit of nature and sexuality is regarded as an urban life phenomenon. Salomé who takes up painting in the mid-1970s portraits gay nightclubs and homosexual orgies. His sensitivity and

<sup>213</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>214</sup> Kuspit, Donald, "Flak from radicals" (...), op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>215</sup> Foster, Hal, "The Expressive Fallacy" (...), op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>216</sup> Schwarz, Michael, "Hints of Utopia: Art in Berlin since 1977", in: *Berlinart 1961-1987*/edit. By MxShine Kynaston, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Prestelm Munich, p. 84.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>217</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>218</sup> Ibidem.

expressiveness is public – orientated, Salomé's paintings are often the direct outcome of his performance actions.<sup>219</sup> The extension of painting practice in performance (which we will observe in the third chapter on the example of Albuquerque Mendes' works) allowed the artists to transgress genres. The postmodern indeterminacy elicits participation (Hassan, 1985) and dispersion of arts (Foster, 1985) implicated in the field of critical pluralism.

Fetting also takes homosexuality as a subject of his paintings. His erotic paintings present men, objects of painter's desires. Figures of men are often dressed as Indians or gangsters playing with concepts of primitive heroes. Fetting makes continual changes in his themes, which, through constant repetitions, creates certain variations in him. He approaches self-expression shown as a fragile and fragmentary subject. This is an important part of his creation since through it the "real" person can emerge. Middendorf often uses images of Berlin nightclubs, and like Immendorff attempts to represent alienation of citizens living in a divided city. The figures in Middendorf's paintings dance next to each other. They are dispersed through canvases without touching one another. Both Fetting and Middendorf use fragmentation as a painting strategy. Hence, their works favor montage, collage while criticizing idea of "totalization", or rather any synthesis. Their position is neither ironic nor demystifying. It relates to the Foster's "fetishistic fragmentation of the sign" and its further reification (Foster, 1989).

Neoexpressionists created a new realism, using abstraction against itself in order to create new imagery. "Self-repressed by reasons of their pursuit of purity, and socially repressed by the reasons of "anti-social" behavior, this led them to, painting and the spirit combined in the new German painting to create a new kind of "spiritual painting." They adapted foreign influences and the German symbolism and nationalism which were treated with mockery and irony. Abstraction was reduced to a decorative role, with symbols and signs detached from it. Neo-expressionism did not suspend the referent, but rather attempted to problematize the reference. It reused historical styles in a process of demystification which supported Derrida's theory that behind every representation there is another (Derrida, 1967). German neo-expressionists questioned the national identity and social preconditions showing resistance to figurative painting. They did not proclaim a "return to tradition", but they rather declared its bankruptcy, expressed through simulacrum. This reactionary position had a critical edge in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>219</sup> Godfrey, Tony, *The New Image Painting in the 1980s*, Phaidon Press, Oxford, 1986, p. 41.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>220</sup> Ibidem, p. 44

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>221</sup> Kuspit, Donald, The New Subjectivism: art in the 1980s, (...), op. cit., p. 6.

refusal to follow pieties of a theologically constructed modernism. Hybridization of the painterly discourse allowed New German Painters to create a new type of representation that distanced itself from its classical version.

## 2.2 Italian Transavantgarde

The transition between modernism and postmodernism in Italy was philosophically and aesthetically characterized by a certain need to rethink modernism<sup>222</sup> "in the oblique light cast by the finis Europae, the idea that Europe as a construct was coming to an end". <sup>223</sup> The crisis of modernist criteria of rationality, <sup>224</sup> which was repressed for a long time, exposed the negative side of the 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism. This was the approach that Pier Aldo Rovatti and Gianni Vattimo used when they were constructing their highly popular anthology "Weak Thought" ("Il pensiero debole" 1983). It was an attempt made by the Italian culture to understand the transformation that was taking place in the light of the manifested "crisis of the universal claims of the Eurocentric vision and of the utopias of emancipation." <sup>225</sup> The pensiero debole was based on criticism of scientific rationalism and the idea of "overcoming" modernity. It did not call for "return to history", but rather re-examination of unexplored potentialities within the "modern project". <sup>226</sup>

This was an intellectual context in which the transavantgarde revolution should be placed. By taking up painting in the late 1970s, transavantgarde artists chose to challenge themselves with a medium that was considered "dead". They put into examination the statements of painting and subjectivity in experiencing the art history. Those inquiries cannot be understood as a search for what is personal through the choice of a medium, but rather as a reflection on matters of the artistic ego, society, art and their interconnections. Transavantgarde works raise questions related to the originality of painting, authority of representation,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>222</sup> Those ideas were nourished by the growing popularity of various, especially German, authors such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer and Habermas.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>223</sup> Chiodi, Stefano, *Not Nostalgic. The Italian Transavantgarde*, at <a href="http://en.doppiozero.com/transavantgarde/">http://en.doppiozero.com/transavantgarde/</a> access 1st of March 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>224</sup> McEvilley, Thomas, *The Exile's Return (...), op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>225</sup> Chiodi, Stefano, Not Nostalgic. The Italian Transavantgarde (...), op. cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>226</sup> See: Habermas, Jürgen, "Modernity – an Incomplete Project", in: *The anti-aesthetic*/edit. Foster, Hal, Bay Press, Seattle, 1993, pp. 3-15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>227</sup> See: Crimp, Douglas, "The End of Painting", in: *October* Vol. 16, Art World Follies (Spring, 1981), pp. 69-86.

individual style, aesthetic dispersion, as well as the process of symbol-making in art.<sup>228</sup>

In 1980 Achille Bonito Oliva published his book entitled "The Italian Transavantgarde", a certain form of manifesto through which he presented the new generation of Italian artists. Five Italian transavangardists, including Sandro Chia, Francisco Clemente, Enzo Cuchhi, Nicola de Maria and Mimmo Paladino, returned to the pictorial discourse by means of what is symbolic and private. Their return to painting indicated a crisis in modernist art and opposed the idea of progressiveness of art using archaeological modes of history addressed by Foucault.<sup>229</sup> Transavantgardists within their works mix every possible notion of avant-garde, crossing those experiences by means of creating paintings motivated by a creative impulse. 230 They favor first avant-gardes, but also "lesser ones, like crafts and the minor arts". 231 Transavantgarde reached for the anthropological roots, mixing disconnected styles and procedures, overcoming the necessity of constant progress in the contemporary art production. Those series of returns presented by various artistic tendencies broke with the utopian narrative of modernism. Transavantgardists attempted to fragment the unitary conception, disintegrate the vision of the world, overcoming the modernist myth of unity. This type of fetishistic fragmentation of image allows to create work piece by piece, without using any logical strategy or internal structure.<sup>232</sup>

Like German neo-expressionists, the Italian painters exploited the practices of appropriation and deconstruction in order to problematize reused references. The juxtaposition of various elements in transavantgarde paintings allows us to read them as allegorical structures made up of confiscated images (Owens, 1980). Imagery, appropriated from various sources reflected a deliberate strategy, to separate the transavantgarde works from the practices of modernism. The referential imagery indicates a use of well-known images for a different purpose than its original reference. This phenomenon was described by Donald Kuspit:

"It is not merely of reaffirming referentiality and the hierarchy of figure-ground relationships. Rather, it is a matter of creating a fictional reference, of which the figure is the instrument, to create the illusion of being-natural." <sup>233</sup>

Transavantgardists use ancient myths, historical themes and scenes from nature, without

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>228</sup> Faust, Wolfgang Max, ""Du hast keine Chance. Nutze sie!" With it and Against It: Tendencies in Recent German Art" (...), op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>229</sup> Oliva, Achille Bonito, *The International Trans-avantgarde*, Giancarlo Politi Editore, Milan, 1982, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>230</sup> Oliva, Achille Bonito, *The Italian Trans-avantgarde*, Giancarlo Politi Editore, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Milan, 1983, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>231</sup> Ibidem, p. 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>232</sup> Oliva, Achille Bonito, *The International Trans-avantgarde(...)*, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>233</sup> Kuspit, Donald, "Flak from Radicals" (...), op. cit., p. 139.

reducing them to the objective references.

Achille Bonito Oliva positions transavantgarde as antagonistic in relation to Italian Arte Povera. He opposes impersonality of Arte Povera with a personal and private experience that he relates to transavantgarde.<sup>234</sup> Undoubtedly, ideological differences between those two groups were essential. Artists related to Arte Povera used classical fragments which functioned as bearers of the previous historical period which had been smashed, but did exist once and can be recuperated in a new form.<sup>235</sup> For trans-avantgarde "the ideal realm is ahistorical, or transhistorical; it never existed in the everyday historical sense yet always exists in a metaphysical or archetypal sense, and recovering it is a matter not so much of a social change as of shifts in individual psychological awareness."<sup>236</sup> Arte Povera appropriates images belonging to the historical past in order to realize the objective reality while transavangarde appropriates images in order to create a subjective vision of an artist.

Carlo Marian Mariani's art is often placed between Arte Povera and transavantgarde generations. Mariani started to create his classically influenced paintings in 1973, before the idea of transavantgarde proclaimed by Achille Bonito Oliva started to circulate in Italy and beyond. Mariani "returns" to the medium of painting using appropriations from various artistic styles in his works, but he shares the realm of historical realism and critical concern with Arte Povera. His art is a summed up effect of various allusions toward the Western art history; he adapts elements of the Greek antique sculpture (e.g. naked bodies without any symbolic attributions), and certain parts of Renaissance art. But in particular his references focus on neoclassicist art of the end of 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. His artistic interests seemed to be particularly eccentric bearing in mind the fact that the premodern style was identified with academism favored by the fascist regime. Mariani motivates his choice of the subject with a particular interest in social and political matters of the years between 1790 and 1810. His fascination reaches a neoclassical attempt to retrieve aesthetic categories and nostalgia for the past during that period.<sup>237</sup>

Modern and classical references and styles coexist within Mariani's painting creating a dialogue between decontextualized fragments retrieved from their original sources (Owens, 1980). Instead of concealing appropriated models Mariani acknowledges them and appropriates through a direct incorporation into his work. Postmodern images of Mariani are

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>234</sup> Oliva, Achille Bonito, *The International Trans-avantgarde* (...), op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>235</sup> McEvilley, Thomas, *The Exile's Return* (...), op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>236</sup> Ibidem

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>237</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 294.

produced from selected historical sources, creating a certain "personalized" vision which does not refer to abstractly understood historical styles (Crimp, 1993). He reuses historical and cultural signs by combining them subjectively and manipulating with their signifies (Foster, 1983). This type of quotations, which is characteristic of almost all trends incorporated into the "return to painting" phenomenon, entails a certain critical edge regarding a modernist obsession with originality of artwork. "Mariani's Neo-Neoclassicism indicated that the academic project of sublimating history into form of universality – a project that was abandoned by the earliest modernists – has returned."<sup>238</sup>

Mariani quotes works of Canova, Ingres, Dürer, Beuys, Cader, Duchamp and Chirico. "Rather than introducing chaos into the inherited patterns of thought or rejecting them outright, he presents a visual argument for reconsidering inherited ideas about cultural history and shifting their emphases, which leads to a qualified reaffirmation of some of them."<sup>239</sup> Classical figures of Mariani seem to respond to the classical idea of beauty, but they are often presented as suspended, dreamlike, or falling into sleep. More recent paintings by Mariani are dominated by references to Duchamp's works. The figure of Duchamp seems to represent the beginning of the end of humanistic art. In the painting "Scolateste" ("Headrack", 1990) heads "retrieved" from classical sculptures are impaled on the spines of Duchamp's "Bottle Rack" (1914) in the same way as on a butcher's device. 240 Mariani seems to present a humanist ideal as shattered, sacrificed and exchanged into a commodity by the mechanical, consumerist world symbolized in his work by the figure of Duchamp. The artist's head is presented with a gilded laurel wreath, may proclaim the end of the era of beauty. However, the ironic character of the painting may indicate a different reading of the work. Mariani's painting is far from making modernism obsolete. On the contrary, it appropriates many of its strategies inserting them and making them work in new constellations (i.e. "Bottle Rack" and classical figure). Ironically, those normative and reductive codifications empty used references of their significance (Owens, 1980).

Mariani's dialogue with the history inclines various directions. His work involves the tradition of the ideal, art and tradition as well as critique in art. His works possess a certain amount of irony, with their dreamy figures which dream of something that would never be really possible.<sup>241</sup> Affirmed by the humanism of Greek art and sentimental nostalgia of the romantic cult of fragment, Mariani's works create a certain link between Arte Povera and transavantgarde,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>238</sup> Owens, Craig, "Honor, Power and Love of Woman" (...), op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>239</sup> McEvilley, Thomas, *The Exile's Return* (...), op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>240</sup> Ibidem, p. 143.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>241</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 294.

between a qualitative, objective reality of the Renaissance and bourgeois subjectivity of Romanticism.<sup>242</sup>

Sandro Chia, who created installations close to Arte Povera's, turned toward painting in the late 1970s. His images evidence a pictorial procedure enclosed in the internal structure of crossed references and shifted images. Chia operates within various artistic tendencies, sustained in the technical values of painting and drawing, depicting pneumatic figures, the offspring of de Chirico, Alberto Savinio, Leger, Malevich, Chagall and late Picasso. Like Carlo Maria Mariani, Sandro Chia appropriates various modernist aesthetic strategies and techniques inserting them in a renewed context. The objective is to manipulate its stereotypical semantic charge, to deny the modernist cult of originality. Chia does not invent visual resources, but creates new images through the free use of the old ones. He reuses abstract and cubist forms and reduces them to the form of standard, iconographic devices. Chia's references to modernism seem to assimilate and domesticate those forms as one technique, among many used to achieve an expressive effect. Therefore, it seems that Chia's work attempts to transform the "high" avant-garde statements into a kitsch production, claiming modernist's "revenge of the philistines". <sup>243</sup> That is why Chia's postmodern representation posits a dialectical negation of its conceptual predecessors. He creates a certain anticlassical classicism, proposing a new type of heroism in art presented by an increasingly prolific outpouring of his painting. Chia's art is a parody version of classical myths ("The Idleness of Sisyphus", 1981) and compositions and established quotations from old masterpieces. Frequently, he uses autobiographical elements, placing himself as a protagonist of the present narrative. His art includes self-awareness regarding the place of an artist in the contemporary society rather than the actual melancholy to redeem the artist's position (of what he was often accused). 244 "Artists like Chia construct their works as pastiches derived, more often than not, from the "heroic" period of modernism. Chia favors Boccioni's dynamic Futurist line in particular, but he plunders a wide range of antimodernist sources as well – late Chagall, reactionary Italian painting of the '30s. The modern and the antimodern exist side by side in his work; as a result, they are reduced to absolute equivalence."245 In "The Idleness of Sisyphus" Chia seems to oppose the modernist belief in art progress. The figure of Sisyphus may symbolise repetition, which opposes modernist progressiveness. "Chia counters modernist demystification with an antimodernist

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>242</sup> McEvilley, Thomas, *The Exile's Return* (...), op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>243</sup> Foster, Hal, "Whatever happened to Postmodernism?", in: *The Return of the Real, op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>244</sup> Buchloh, Benjamin, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting" (...), op. ci.t, p. 39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>245</sup> Owens, Craig, "Honor, Power, and the Love of Women", op. cit., p. 9.

remystification. Progress is exploded as (a) myth; Chia's painting is a joke, then, at the modernist painter's expense."<sup>246</sup>

Francesco Clemente moved restlessly between Rome, New York and India, which created his heterogeneous base of sources in his poetically allusive images. He reflects on being a European artist after World War II in a completely different manner than, for example, Kiefer. Clemente does not relate himself to the recent history, favoring references appropriated from the works of antique, Renaissance, expressionism and Indian art. He uses mixed symbols and practices related to alchemy, astrology, cabala, tarot, mythology and Roman Catholicism.<sup>247</sup> "He evades his Italian background by diffusing attention worldwide and escapes history by entering the occult."<sup>248</sup> He frequently returns to older traditions combining human and animal elements in his imagery ("Map of what is Effortless", 1983; "Self-portrait with Bird", 1980). Clemente's appropriative works seem to deal with a split between signifier and signified (Foster, 1989), what allows us for multiple interpretations of his works. Appropriation distorts rather than negates a prior semantic charge. It maintains, but at the same time shifts the former connotation in order to produce a new sign. The term appropriation in Clemente's works seems to replace the term "influence" what allows us to emphasize historical context of appropriated reference.

The strategies of appropriation were exploited by Francesco Clemente in his numerous self-portraits. Clemente often portrays his own (or surrogate's) body in various orifices, often androgynous. He "decapitates himself", gets devoured by fish, lays an egg, gives birth through his mouth or penis. His "self-portraits" contain fragmented signs and symbols that have their origin in art and heraldry. For the most part Clemente's paintings are based on disconnected and discontinued experiences which are expressed through fragmented narrative. His work repeatedly treats about the circularity of life approaching such subject matters as: generation, birth, death, regeneration and sacrifice. His paintings are self-obsessed, but not necessarily self-revealing. They are often intimate, but rather distant like a cold observation and mocking approach toward his own body and image. "Above all Clemente explored polymorphous sexuality, often auto-erotic and occasionally aberrant." The painting "This Side Up" (1980) celebrates death, castration and sacrifice. Clemente's self-portrait presents him naked, but without genitals; his heart is displayed on his chest. Behind him is a book that seems to have

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>246</sup> Owens, Craig, "Honor, Power, and the Love of Women", in: *Beyond Recognition (...), op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>247</sup> McEvilley, Thomas, *The Exile's Return* (...), op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>248</sup> Ibidem, p. 98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>249</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 291.

just fallen out of his left hand. His right hand points at himself in the gesture related to the Ecce Homo figure in iconography.<sup>250</sup>

Francesco Clememente uses pre-existing images that are recycled and reused in new configurations. Images are created at the meeting point of repetition and difference. He recreates the idea of conventional in art through repetitions, redeemed stereotypes, references and stylizations. Those images are not result of a mechanical reproduction, but they are rather a creation of the widely posed variations which creates a movement within the image, freeing reused images from their primary references and obligations. It creates a falsely conventional atmosphere of images that are stripped off their historical context. <sup>251</sup> Drawing from above, we can say that Clemente's postmodernist discourse launches an attack on the modernist art through strategies of pastiche and critique of originality (Jameson, 1982). Brandon Taylor argues that: "What post-modernism claims is that the humanist paradigm of the artist as a "subject" who can "act" on his environment is ideologically unsound, bourgeois, a mystification, a capitalist deviation, and so forth." Transavantgardists, who questioned this modernist stress on originality, became critics of a progress and modernization.

Enzo Cucchi uses drawing in order to transmit images related to matters of time and history. His primary subject was related to life-destroying forces such as earthquakes and other natural cataclysms which serve as metaphors for an upcoming apocalypse (e.g. "Paesaggio Barbaro", 1983). Cucchi's inspirations vary between Masaccio, Caravaggio and El Greco. Later, in the early 1980s, he turned toward more expressionistic sources such as Van Gogh, Baselitz and Chirico. As Irving Sander noticed Cuchhi proved to be "the neoexpressionist of the transavantguardia". His canvases reveal a euphoric melancholy presenting an imaginary life, integrating recognized aspects of the wide nature: mountains, oceans, trees, home, fire, farm animals, etc. Atmosphere of his paintings is unreal and pneumatic. Enzo Cucchi "accepts the movement par excellence of art, inscribing the ciphers of his own personal language under the sign of inclination, where no stasis exists but rather a dynamic of figures, signs and colors which reciprocally cross and drip into the sense of a cosmic vision. The painting chews up and absorbs the crash of various elements into the picture's microcosm. "255"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>250</sup> McEvilley, Thomas, *The Exile's Return (...), op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>251</sup> Ibidem, p. 100.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>252</sup> Taylor, Brandon, *Modernism, Post-modernism, Realism*, Winchester School of Art Press, Winchester, 1987, p. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>253</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 292.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>254</sup> Ibidem, p. 292.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>255</sup> Oliva, Achille Bonito, *The Italian Trans-avantgarde* (...), op. cit., p. 17.

Mimmo Paladino's prime concern was related to the matter of silence. His painting "Silent Red" (1980) was presented among others during the exposition "New Spirit in Painting" (1981). It displays a huge, red curtain which was surmounted by a small mask-like head belonging to an archaic, enigmatic figure. The painting seemed to "invite the audience to share in a secret drama of cultural memory, as yet unrevealed." The use of the word "silence" in the title of the work breaks with the very same silence to which it refers "so in this silence it says and yet releases their untranslatability." The colors used by the painter are luminous, rich, primary colors. Palladino's iconography is partially made up of sign elements and expressionistic figurations which include linguistic and cultural conventions within the composition.

During the 1980s Paladino approached the subjects related to the cultural history of his native region, Province of Benevento, located in southern Italy. He correlates his subjective world vision with the collective memory which defines the identity of Benevento's inhabitants. His paintings favor imagery retrieved from the Christian iconography and classical mythology, but his influences are in ancient, Egyptian and modern art. As a result of crossed influences strongly eclectic, enigmatic works filled with mysterious rituals and imaginary figures emerge. Mimmo Paladino "exercises a painting of surfaces in the sense that he tends to deliver all sensitive data even the most internal, to a visual emergency. The painting becomes a meeting and expansion place, in the range of vision of cultural motives and sensitive data. Everything is translated into terms of painting, sign and matter. The painting is crossed by different temperatures, hot and cold, lyric and mental, dense and rarefied, which surface at the end of the color's gauging." 258

Transavantgarde attempts to transform the diachronic nature of the history into a critical synchrony, creating a certain manner in which everything has the same value, there is no such a thing as "high" and "low" art.<sup>259</sup> Those procedures call for quotation, pastiche and eclecticism resulting from accumulated styles. On the one hand appropriation was welcomed as a source of parody in opposition to the myths of canonical modernism. On the other hand critics wanted postmodernists to stop celebrating the commercial world, which resulted in deepening of the commodity fetish and seemed to descent into vapidity and bad taste.<sup>260</sup> "Painting could afford"

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>256</sup> Rosenthal, Norman, "C.C.C.P: Back to the Future", in: *Italian Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Painting and Sculpture*/ Edit. By Emily Braun, Prestel, 1989, p. 371.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>257</sup> Sallis, John, *On Translation*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2001, p.118.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>258</sup> Oliva, Achille Bonito, *The Italian Trans-avantarde* (...), op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>259</sup> Chiodi Stefano, Not Nostalgic. The Italian Transavantgarde (...), op. cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>260</sup> Taylor, Brandon, Art Now (...), op. cit., p. 80.

to adopt an ironic mode – to be painting, but also something else – but it should be wary lest that irony evaporate into sarcasm or mere camp."<sup>261</sup> Douglas Crimp was one of the first who noticed that even practices which were not extensively mercantile were exposed to appropriation by the same institutions that discredited their approach as "false normativity".<sup>262</sup>

Works of Italian transavantgarde can be read through the prism of an allegorical impulse addressed by Craig Owens. 263 Allegory is the effect of an individual, idiosyncratic creative practice which has to function within a split between the signifier and the signified in unlimited interpretations and repetitions. Transavantgarde artists chose allegory in order to express alienation both from the tradition and the contemporary world. As Owens noticed allegory within a postmodern condition functions as a substitution that leaves only the most recent meaning alive. 264 "In the case of the Transavantgarde movement, the historic dimension was discredited by a lack of trust in the hermeneutic constructive potential of the artistic endeavor." 265 Artists attempted to redeem tradition with a renewal appropriated to their needs. Transavantgarde manipulation with the historical content, emptied images from their original meaning and function.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>261</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>262</sup> Crimp, Douglas, On the Museum Ruins (...), op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>263</sup> Owens, Craig, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism", in: *October* Vol. 12 (Spring 1980), pp. 67-86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>264</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>265</sup> Chiodi, Stefano, Not Nostalgic. The Italian Transavantgarde, (...), op. cit.

## 2.3. New Image Painting and neo-expressionism in the USA

Italian transavantgarde and German neo-expressionism were hailed in the USA, where their commercial success, joined with the general financial euphoria of the Regan era led to a boom on the art market, and, consequently, "the link between art and commerce grew closer than ever before."<sup>266</sup> New Image Painting followed supposedly the same path as that European dynamics related the phenomenon of "return to painting" with an addition of a certain national touch, but it also refused to deny its European origins. <sup>267</sup> American art started to create its own form which was an eclectic mixture of historical appropriations and the American attitudes. All accomplishments of the artists related to the new wave of figurative painting were supported by means of marketing and public relation strategies which attempted to build an image of young painters as "stars". <sup>268</sup>

New Image Painting did not achieve recognition until the late 1970s. The term gained currency by the exhibition entitled "New Image in Painting" (1978) curated by Richard Marshall at Whitney Museum, New York. The choice of artists included Nicolas Africano, Jenifer Bartlett, Denise Green, Michael Hurson, Neil Jenney, Lois Lane, Robert Moskowitz, Susan Rotenberg, David True and Joe Zucker. Philip Guston, who during the 1960s abandoned abstract expressionism for cartoon-like imaginary figuration, which included pop art and kitsch references, was considered a progenitor of the New Image Painting trend. The exhibition emphasized abstract elements and minimal art references in recent figurative painting; the goal was to present images which analyzed tensions between abstraction and figuration. Roberta Smith divided the presented works into two groups: color field related and conceptual. Roberta Moskowitz and Susan Rothenberg presented simple shapes of figures which were contrasting with a monochromatic background, creating an atmosphere of simplicity mixed with personal symbolism. Barlett, Jenney and Zucker showed "more or less dissected painting and put it back together again, reassembling the components of their work

<sup>266</sup> Faust, Wolfgang Max, Shattered Orthodoxy: The Energy of Transformation, in: American Art in the 20th

Century: Painting and Sculpture 1913-1993/ Edit. By Joachimides, Christos M. and Rosenthal, Norman, Prestel, 1993, p. 41.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>267</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>268</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>269</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p.196.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>270</sup> Smith, Roberta, "The Abstract Image", in: *Art in America*, (March-April, 1979), p. 102.

in ways that give each aspect own conceptual point and separateness."<sup>271</sup>

Concerns of works exposed during the "New Image Painting" were often derived from minimal, postminimal and conceptual art. Absorption of various techniques, unrelated to painting, allowed artists to work on the midfield between abstraction and figuration. Childlike images of Neil Jenney are reactionary to photorealism.<sup>272</sup> Narratives used by him were naïve, continuing to reinforce childish awkwardness. All of his sketchy images were placed against a monochromatic, painterly field enclosed with a black frame with a title printed on it. His choice of images, brushwork imitating fingerprints and the frame with the text were a commentary to the childlike, expressive painting. In her paintings, Susan Rotheberg, approached a certain kind of primitivism which was supposed to be recognized as a source from Palaeolithic art. Her reputation was established by her horse paintings which were the first to be close to Palaeolithic art. Later she painted bones, human parts, and finally landscapes. Robert Moskowitz in many of his paintings, including "Cadillac/Chopsticks" (1975) and "Swimmer" (1977), uses architecture elements which are limited to the form of silhouettes and therefore emphasize contrasting colors. During the 1980s he appropriates references from modern sculpture masters, such as Rodin's "The Thinker" (1880) and Brancui's "Bird in Space" (1923), transforming those into a form of painting with a single-colored plane on a single-colored ground.<sup>273</sup> Nicolas Africano, on the other hand, emphasizes a narrative content of his painting through an added caption printed throughout the surface of the canvas. His paintings focus on miniature figures placed on a monochromatic background. Figures are usually participants of unresolved, emotional, domestic issues. The spectator is introduced by the captions into a personalized, often autobiographical storyline.<sup>274</sup> Artists of "New Image Painting" were discredited by both the formalists, because in their view they betrayed the values of traditional painting, and the avant-garde for employing the medium of painting. Their simulations of abstraction, implementation of a narrative and choice of medium can be seen as a reaction against the modernist paradigm. Although, the artists, whose works were presented during "New Image Painting" did not advance in postmodern practices of appropriation, deconstruction and fragmentation, the exhibition was one of the first steps which allowed to understand the aesthetic shift that was occurring in American art.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>271</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>272</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p.196.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>273</sup> Ibidem, p. 202.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>274</sup> Ibidem.

Another important event that marked the development of new figurative painting in the USA was the exhibition "Bad Painting" (1978) curated by Marcia Tucker at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. "Bad" painters searched for an inspiration in "low" art, popular and commercial culture, graphic novels and book illustrations. They dismissed conventional painting as too academic, but they maintained to use the medium as a means of expression. Marcia Tucker insisted that artists whose works were displayed during the show could not be regarded as "new primitives", but she also admitted the existing affinity between "bad" painting and folk art, although she considered it limited to the emotional content and the choice of subject matter, rather than to the actual, idealistic commitment, or to a personal vision.<sup>275</sup> Like neo-expressionists and transavantgardists, "bad" painters juxtaposed various familiar references deprived of their original contexts. The images were further deconstructed through shifts in scale and perspective. The painters mixed images of the "high art" with mass culture, what resulted in a highly eclectic, kitsch production revealed in a particular form of primitive art. "Bad" painters did not attempt to recover the figure of historical representation. They, rather tried to incorporate into historical images kitsch references what resulted in deconstruction of those images and fragmentation of their signifiers.<sup>276</sup> And although term "Bad" Painting started to circulate in the art discourse, the exhibition was "memorable more for the title of the show, the ideas presented in the catalogue by Tucker, and their timely entry into the art discourse then for the work of the fourteen artists exhibited."277

One of the important artists related to the new wave of figurative painting in the USA was Robert Colescott. He appropriated images and motifs, well-known from art history, which he mocked by replacing white characters with figures of Afro-Americans. Those paintings give a satirical comment to the exclusion of black people from art history, while, parallelly, they ridicule racial stereotypes. In his quotations he reaches for Western modern painters, turning figures of Van Gogh's "Potato Eaters" (1885) into a group of cheerful Africans in "Eat dem Taters" (1975). In "I Still Get a Thrill When I see de Koo" (1978) he replaces the head of de Kooning's "Woman I" (1950-52) with the face of Aunt Jemina – a trademark of the brand producing pancake mix that popularized the image of a black woman as "Mammy" related to southern racism.<sup>278</sup> Colescott links some of his paintings to the taboo of interracial, sexual

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>275</sup> Tucker, Marcia, et al., "Bad" Painting, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1978.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>276</sup> Foster, Hal., "Wild Signs: The Breakup of the Sign in Seventies' Art" (...), op. cit., p. 252.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>277</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p.198.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>278</sup> More about racist stereotypes in U.S. media in: Jardim, Suzane, *Recognizing Racist Stereotypes in U.S. Media*, available at: <a href="https://medium.com/@suzanejardim/reconhecendo-esteri%C3%B3tipos-racistas-internacionais-b00f80861fc9/">https://medium.com/@suzanejardim/reconhecendo-esteri%C3%B3tipos-racistas-internacionais-b00f80861fc9/</a> accessed 20<sup>th</sup> March 2017.

stereotypes. For example, in "Beauty Is in the Eye of the Beholder" (1979) he portrayed himself – an Afro-American painter sited in the studio, in front of the canvases with "The Dance" of Matisse, partly finished, turning his head toward a half-dressed white woman. In "At the Bathers' Pool" (1984-5) he examined the types of white and black bodies by placing together different, competitive types of beauty in forms of the nudes of black and white women. "Colescott's satires were problematic because it was not always clear just how they were meant to be taken. In causing viewers to laugh at stereotypes was he perpetuating them or making viewers aware of their prejudices?" 279

Colescott's ironic subversions of images known from art history attempted to decanonize culture, demystify knowledge and languages of power (Lyotard, 1979). Derision and revision were the main methods used by the artists. His appropriations and deconstructions are well-placed interventions which allowed him to supplement appropriated works with critical comment regarding race and gender matters. Robert Colescott reused modernist works as a critique of modernist "primitivism" period (i.e. Pablo Picasso's "Les demoiselles d'Avignon", 1907, reused by Colescott in "Les demoiselles d'Alabama", 1985). Colescott did not deny modernist myths of progress and originality, but rather seemed to point at a historical context of appropriated work in order to redirect our attention to the limitations and failures of a period in question.

Among American artists who "returned to painting" during the 1980s the most celebrated ones were Julian Schnabel, David Salle and Eric Fischl. Their paintings were labelled by critics as neo-expressionism and quickly linked with the works of the German *neue Wilde* and Italian transavantgarde. Although many critics disconnected New Image Painting and American neo-expressionism<sup>280</sup> these two tendencies were linked, through expressiveness and return to the narrative. In their works Schnabel, Sale and Fischl incorporated more references to art history and mass culture while employing more complex pictorial means, e.g. overlapping images and multiple canvases. They seek inspiration in the neglected figures of 20<sup>th</sup> century art, especially de Chirico and Picabia. Critics accused both of them of a cynical betrayal of the modernist ideals – for example, de Chirico in the late phase of his career copied his own works while Picabia frequently used "bad" painting strategies through incorporation of kitsch subjects in his works.

In the early 1980s Julian Schnabel was encumbered with a high international reputation,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>279</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p 206.

in spite of low or at least mixed critical feedback from art critics. Schnabel's earlier works stood strongly against modernist flatness of painting, emphasized by Clement Greenberg, with various materials attached to the surfaces of paintings, including velvet, linoleum, carpet, or animal skin. Implementing new materials into painting allowed Schnabel for experimentation on a threshold of painting and sculpture. Therefore, he created certain hybrids, mutations of genres that may be seen as a pastiche of painting and representation itself which supports the poststructuralist "death of the author" theory (Jameson, 1982). In his six-panel work "King of the Wood" (1984) canvases are covered with broken ceramics attached to them. Using long, dragged marks Schnabel painted images of trees and a crown figure, standing and holding a sword. "The figure represents the priest-king of the wood at Nemi, a sanctuary of the goddess Diana. The golden bough taken be Aeneas into the underworld for protection supposedly came from that sacred tree. The legend continuous that should a runaway slave break, a branch from that tree, he might challenge the king to single combat and, if victorious, take his place." <sup>281</sup> The broken plates may symbolize the brokenness of history, or fragmentation of contemporary experience. From the other hand, it may be seen as a technique that allowed Schnabel to mock the idea of classical representation, to create particular parody of a painting.

In another Schanbel's "plate painting" "Blue Nude with Sword" (1979) fragmented classical columns are torn out from their architectural settings and seem to restate the rise and fall of the civilizations. The figure of a naked warrior inspired by Antonio del Pollaiuolo's "Battle of the Nudes" (1465-75) is mocked by being positioned on two columns in an awkward squat position and placed in a chaotic sequence next to the oil-burning column copied from a paper coffee cup. His quotation from an old master alongside with the inconclusive and unfinished passage seem not to cohere, creating an infantile, collage-like image. Schnabel's accumulation of artefacts and elements belonging to different historical phases seem to reflect on the postmodernist relation between the self and fragmented history. Schnabel, like other postmodernists seems to always disconnect. Hence, he favors montage (Buchloh, 1983) and collage forms which break with the linearity of introduced narrative. Schnabel's paintings often reassemble archaeological sites, where figures of people are painted with putrescent colors of the dead or dying. Rather than using a sensation of color Kiefer approaches the visual experience of the spectator with material, texture and associates it with topicality of the history, myth and literature. His dialogue with appropriated art forms assumes indeterminacy of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>281</sup> Godfrey, Tony, The New Image Painting in the 1980s (...), op. cit., pp. 136-137.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>282</sup> McEvilley, Thomas, *The Exile's Return (...), op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>283</sup> Godfrey, Tony, *The New Image Painting in the 1980s (...), op. cit.*, p. 137.

postmodern condition (Hassan, 1985).

Although David Salle's works are often paired-up with paintings of Julian Schnabel, concerns of those two artists vary significantly. Salle's images weren't focused on material, or heroic and mythological subjects. They were rather sets of images appropriated from the popular culture (e.g. Donald Duck images, soft-core pornographic figures) and the history of art images (e.g. a Caravaggio male figure). Like Schanbel, Salle also often adjusted objects to surfaces of canvases, hybridizing the painterly discourse. His concerns and interests were closely related with conceptual artists: Sherrie Levine, Tomas Lawson, and Barbara Kruger whose photos he incorporated into his works. Salle was focused on self-expression, his choice of images was critical and subjective. He attempted to elaborate rather than reverse the deconstructive techniques of conceptual art, retaining critique as a value (Foster, 1996).

Salle's mixture images play with signifiers attached to them - practice of fragmentation borrowed from pre-existing visual phenomena. His works are open to interpretation and unlike the works of transavantgarde the artist seemed to deconstruct the modernist demand for unified work. 286 Salle's paintings seem to lend a support to Derrida's theory that behind every representation there is another (Derrida, 1967). His representation exposes conflicted positions, an original relationship which classical ideas of representations overshadowed. Salle's surprising juxtapositions of images belonging to the different contexts and sources allow us to read them as potentially neutral. Moreover, his idea of artwork's textuality does not accord priority to the signified over signifier. Salle uses and interprets cultural signs, creating multiplicity of the surfaces (Jameson, 1991). In "Fooling with Your Hair" (1985) Salle lined up the images of Giacometti's sculptures with two lamps, modern in their design, above the representation of three female nudes reminding of soft-core pornographic images. By positioning those images together Salle's suggestion was that all of them are equal, and that there is no hierarchy in the sources for his images. The use of pastiche measures allowed Salle for incorporation of the past themes and styles into a contemporary context. He implies that art of "high Modernism" was only the other type of kitsch. 287 Salle's imaginary figures of nude females, who aesthetically resemble pornographic magazines, often return, but they are not created in order to comment or reflect on the sex-obsessed popular culture; they function rather as bearers of what is personal and private. Salle's nudes are frequently pornographic, but rarely

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>284</sup> Hopkins, David, After Modern Art 1945-2000 (...), op. cit., p. 201.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>285</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p 235.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>286</sup> Ibidem, p. 238.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>287</sup> Ibidem.

erotic, they seem more distant, blurred by the mysterious and private in eroticism. Inspired by the art of Picabia and Polke he set elliptical fragments of the 1950s textile design into the field of soft-core porn imagery with references to the classical painting above them.

David Salle's paintings challenge the semiotic model of selfhood, as a temporary situation that is created by the impossibility of transparent code-bearing overlays. In painting "Miner" (1985) the left panel presents an image of a woman superimposed on something reminding a series of architectural columns, while on the right panel is a figure of a title miner, an exhausted worker.<sup>288</sup> There are couple of garden tables attached to the surface, framing fatigue of the minor. The painting could be understood as a subtle commentary on the economic reality of the post-industrial society, but a completely surprising juxtaposition of panels that have no implication of connection with each other make us wonder about the idea behind joining those two images. "The title Salle uses, and the images that he retrieves from print and film media, create a powerful set of expectations in viewers, based on their social and political perspectives. But these expectations are likely to be countered, if not wholly contradicted by Salle's disconcerting juxtapositions." 289 Salle works present disturbing clashes of conflicted images that are unresolvable by rational method. The diptych and triptych forms frequently used by the artist in order to juxtapose different, completely contrasting images, which do not bear any kind of relation with one another, create an environment of eclecticism within the work, leaving the viewer with the question about the artist's intentions.

Like Salle's Eric Fischl's images are improvised with fragments and appropriated from photographs. Although he juxtaposes fragments with different conjunctions than Salle, he creates scenes which give the spectator a sensation of familiarity with the presented imagery of bedrooms, patios, swimming pools and beaches filled with figures of ordinary types, occupied with their daily activities. His works abounds with examples of *staging* which make use of scenes related to everyday life of the American middle class and their suburban lives. His images reintroduce narrative and its content is psychosocial, psychosexual and frequently related to psychoracial behavior of their heroes. <sup>290</sup> Fisch used advertisements and pictures found in books and magazines, often incorporating his own snapshots. He seems to reevaluate painting within the context of appropriated photographic motifs (Lawson, 1981). He does not abandon painting for photography, but engages painting in photography. Hence, he trades painting for

 $<sup>^{288}</sup>$  Benezra, Neal, "Means/Understand Meaning: Social Content in the Art of the 1980s", in: *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter, 1988), p. 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>290</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p 241.

the photographic and photo-based image. In "Digging Children" (1982) he portrays some children on a beach as a repressed sexual material. The children are preparing to bury someone or something that they have just sacrificed. He often uses camera-like angles introducing semiotics of a film. The majority of Fischl's representations contain a sexual and psychological repression of the Hollywood classical cinema. <sup>291</sup> In his best known images created in the early 1980s the protagonists are often boys reaching puberty, confronting themselves with the sexobsessed adult world while dealing with their own sexual urges. <sup>292</sup> His painting "Bad Boy" (1981) presents a young boy who is looking at a crotch of a naked woman, who spreads her legs, lying in a seductive pose on the bed while at the same time he is reaching behind his back toward her purse. "Bad Boy was shocking – and Fischl meant it to be. It was also compelling because of its authenticity and intensity and because it dealt with sex and money, both American obsessions." <sup>293</sup> Fischl's paintings were socially and psychologically disturbing. "His affluent types appear to have realized the American dream but have repressed the primal realities in life and have failed to develop public rituals to deal with them." <sup>294</sup>

Despite many differences between particular figurative painters related to such trends as neo-expressionism, transavantgarde and New Image Painting, all of them, in many ways, rebel against conventions and proscriptions of modernism, regarding all aspects of practice which seem to be inconvenient for the modernists. They rather include than exclude, favoring painterliness over uniformity, regression over progress, vernacular over cosmopolitan, stereotypes over design, semantic contra syntax and function, obsolete more than up-to-date, emotional more than rational, pluralism more than monism, and reworking through existing codes more than invention of the new ones.<sup>295</sup> Postmodern painters break with the idea of a "superior" taste created by modernism, creating works which belong to the high and popular culture at the same time. Standing in contrast with pop art, for example, which originates from the mass culture which used productive features of consumerism and advertising in order to get its artistic potential, postmodernism rather seeks to recycle forms of statues of the "low culture" which gained its fame due to the orthodoxy of modernism. "It might seem that postmodernism transformed "high" avant-garde art into kitsch, but in reality, it has managed only to incorporate kitsch as one of the raw materials of the avant-garde. In effect, postmodernism is an avant-garde that operated within the customary networks of "high" art which do not

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>291</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>292</sup> Sandler, Irving, Art of the Postmodern Era (...), op. cit., p. 242.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>293</sup> Ibidem, p. 243.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>294</sup> Ibidem

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>295</sup> Mosquera, Gerardo, "Bad taste in Good Form", in: Social Text, No. 15 (Autumn, 1986), p. 56.

maintain any real social communication with mass culture. Thus, it continues to be an elitist art, quite separate from mass culture and genuine popular art."<sup>296</sup>

Postmodern painters do not make an attempt to renew the historical style, its *Zeitgeist* and accomplishments, or, as pop artists, to present objects appropriated from mass culture. "*Rather, the postmodernist uses sources as cultural signs, the object trouvés of culture, and creates by combining them subjectively and manipulating their signifiers.*"<sup>297</sup> They attempt to communicate with the viewer by way of possible meanings and implications of the used historical style or motif. Postmodernists deny the modernists' cult of originality by means of a stereotypical semantic charge manipulation.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>296</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>297</sup> Ibidem, p. 58.

# Chapter 3: Return to painting – Portuguese context

At the outset of this chapter the phenomenon of "return to painting" and the resultant debate on the possible exhaustion of the modernist discourse are analyzed for the first half of the 1980s in Portugal. Simultaneously, it intends to identify and discuss artists' strategies associated with reactionary postmodernism (Foster, 1983) revealed in the practices of appropriation, deconstruction, quotation and hybridisation of the discourse. Those questions are supplemented with an attempt to indicate preconditions which led to the artists' abandonment of conceptual practices and the development of the reactionary position. Finally, it searches for correlations between international trends studied in the previous chapter and the pictorial languages of Portuguese artists.

The following text focuses on the analysis of four collective expositions ("Depois do Modernismo", "Os Novos Primitivos Os Grandes Plasticos", "Arquipélago" and "Continentes"), organized between 1983 and 1986, and the painterly discourse of the artists whose works were presented during those shows. The subchapters correspond to each exposition respectively, evoking concerns related to reactionary postmodernism which are emphasized by the works displayed at the expositions. Those divisions allow us to see highly diversified painterly production of the early-1980s in Portugal. The matters and strategies included in Portuguese painting serve to demonstrate how return to painting in Portugal enriches the international scene of "reactionary" postmodernism.

The decade of the 1980s in Portugal was, without a doubt, a time of alterations in the artistic and aesthetic field. The period, which followed the Revolution of 25<sup>th</sup> of April, changed the perspective to some extent and initiated the process of socio-political transformations whose repercussions were visible in the visual arts only during the decade of the 1980s.<sup>298</sup> The disqualification of the socialist utopia of the Revolution<sup>299</sup> was compensated by the reactionary position of the artists who abandoned ideological and political matters and shifted toward exploration of individual impulses.<sup>300</sup> The end of the political and cultural isolation allowed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>298</sup> Almeida, Bernardo Pinto et al, "A situação Portuguesa", in: *Anos 80: Uma Topologia*/ Edited by Ulrich Loock, Museu de Serralves, Porto, 2006, p. 97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>299</sup> Lapa, Pedro, "Poética e Política no Fim do Século XX em Portugal", in: *Arte Crítica Política*/ Crespo, Nuno (coordination), Tinta da China, Lisbon, 2016, p. 217.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>300</sup> Anacleto, Ana, "Arquipélago da Insularidade Como Prática", in: L+arte, No. 74, (August, 2010), p. 44.

new generations of Portuguese artists to search for the international affirmation of their works.<sup>301</sup> The desire for internationalization brought artist to assimilation of external trends related to return to painting which were evoked in the previous chapter (i.e. neo-expressionism, transavantgarde, "bad" painting).<sup>302</sup>

The art scene of the 1980s is perceived from the perspective of "return to painting", "return to sculpture" and market-orientated art associated with those phenomena. Similarly, in Italy and America it was a contradiction, or even a break with conceptual art of the previous decades. Artists returned to more "conventional" means of artistic production in the form of painting and sculpture. Those factors created a pejorative image of the decade, which seemed to establish a condition of pluralism in visual arts that suggested randomness and impotency of artists and curators. At that time the phenomenon of "return to painting" seemed to be no more than pure reactionarism serving to disprove the legitimacy of avant-gardes, which silenced the art of the 1980s in the following decades.

Simultaneously, in the international debate on the topic of postmodernism, which was mentioned in the first chapter, the Portuguese art world at the time was a field of discussion on the possible exhaust of modernist discourse within which a shift in perception arose. Bernardo Pinto de Almeida argued that the postmodern paradigm in Portugal was strictly anti-modernist and reactionary to the discourse of historian and critic of art - José-Augusto França whose thought dominated the modernist discourse in the country. Bernardo Pinto de Almeida was not averse to suggesting that in order to create an alternative paradigm, artists needed to oppose and deconstruct França's discourse and recuperate traditions which were marginalized during modernism. Hence, the postmodernism of the 1980s in Portugal needs to be defined in relation to the categories of modernism in which its mainstream thought functioned.

The discourse of José-Augusto França, analysed carefully by Marian Pinto dos Santos, indicates that art history in Portugal is in the state of constant delay. <sup>309</sup> The theory of "delay"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>301</sup> Lapa, Pedro, "Poética e Política no Fim do Século XX em Portugal" (...), *op. cit.*, p. 217. <sup>302</sup> Ibidem, p. 218.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>303</sup> Anos 80: Uma Topologia/</sup> Edit. by Ulrich Loock, Museu de Serralves, Porto, 2006, p. 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>304</sup> Jürgens, Sandra Vieira, *Instalações Provisórias*, Documenta, Lisbon, 2016, p. 311.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>305</sup> Gil, José, "Confusion as a Concept" in: *Anos 80/* coord. Machado, Rosário Sousa, Culturgest, Lisbon, 1998, p. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>306</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>307</sup> Almeida, Bernardo, Pinto et al., "A situação Portuguesa" (...), op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>308</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>309</sup> Santos, Mariana Pinto dos, "O legado de José-Augusto França na escrita da História da Arte em Portugal: caracterização crítica o cânone e de exemplos da sua persistência", in: *Práticas da História, Journal on Theory, Historiography and Uses of the Past* 1, no. 1 (2015), p. 72.

was based on the comparison of contemporary art production in Portugal with the exterior model of Parisian modernism treated as an epicentre of modern art.<sup>310</sup> On the other hand, the critique of "retardation" of art in Portugal was supplemented by valorisation of certain "national peculiarities". Those "strictly" Portuguese characteristics could be categorised by França as negative, when they were interpreted as incapacity of artists to adjust to the Paris model, or positive (i.e. in the case of some artists like Viera da Silva, Almada Negreiros) when they seemed to retrieve national mythologies embedded in the images of melancholy, poetry and *saudade*.<sup>311</sup> As Mariana Pinto dos Santos points out, França considered a particular "lyricism" of art, as one of the Portuguese characteristics, treated as an aesthetical category which was never closely determined in his theoretical work.<sup>312</sup>

And although art theoreticians and critics, whose works were prominent during the 1980s (namely Bernardo Pinto de Almeida, João Pinharanda and Alexandre Melo), criticised the discourse of José-Augusto França and signalised the need to create an alternative paradigm, the historiographical and interpretative model introduced by França continued in works of the younger generation of art historians. The idea of Portugal as a country in a constant, historical delay in relation to exterior models was continued, particularly when Bernardo Pinto de Almeida valorised return to painting in Portugal and the "Depois do Modernismo" exhibition as contemporary with similar trends and events in other parts of the world.<sup>313</sup> In the same manner critics glorified the "Portuguese specificities" of artworks, e.g. through valorisation of the Graça Morais' discourse as "combining Modernism with what is essentially Portuguese", 314 or "embedded in a Portuguese culture of which she is an excellent representative." The same category of "lyricism" continues to be used in the critical and historiographical discourse. All those issues are important to be recognised while analysing theoretical work which accompanies visual arts production in Portugal in the 1980s. The absence of an alternative model unable art theoreticians to deconstruct categories and concepts sustained in the França's modernist discourse.

<sup>310</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>311</sup> Ibidem, p. 73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>312</sup> Ibidem, p. 78.

<sup>313 &</sup>quot;Se pensamos que os movimentos chegam a Portugal com dez anos de atraso, neste caso estamos a falar de uma iniciativa que é absolutamente contemporânea com o que está a acontecer em termos de iniciativas curatoriais no outras partes do mundo Almeida, Bernardo Pinto, "A situação Portuguesa" (...), op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>314</sup> Chicó, Sílvia, in: *Graça Morais evocações e êxtases*, Galeria 111, Lisbon, 1987.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>315</sup> Chicó, Sílvia, "Graça Morais in Retrospective", in: *Graça Morais Pinturas 1982-1992*.

#### 3.1 "Depois do Modernismo" (1983)

The absence of official cultural politics obliged artists to create alternative circles which allowed to promote and expose art works. The desire for international affirmation, supported by the economic euphoria, which was related to the excitement of the revolutionary period, allowed the art world to emancipate itself from its institutionalized image, paving the way for a new phase on the national scene, marked by practices related to return to painting. The of the most important characteristics of the decade were various collective expositions (including "Depois do Modernismo", 1983; "Os Novos Primitivos", 1984; "Arquipélago", 1985, etc.) in which new pictorial languages were affirmed, to the detriment of conceptual languages whose mannerist academisation became evident. The collective expositions did not serve as an aesthetical manifest and did not have a collective character (with the exception of "Continentes", 1986). The artists adopted a new, renovative strategy which included dynamization of the discourse, support for the new generations and internationalization of Portuguese art.

The passage between the modernist and postmodernist discourse was led by the group of artists named *Grupo de Belém* by António Cerveira Pinto. The group included figures of Ernesto de Sousa, Julião Sarmento, Leonel Moura as well as Zé Carvalho and Helena Almeida. The artists took part in the "Alternativa Zero" exposition (1977) curated by Ernesto de Sousa and created *Arta* – an alternative, expositive space placed in Belém. Later, in 1983, António Cerveira Pinto, Julião Sarmento and Leonel Moura, alongside with Luís Serpa were responsible for the "Depois do Modernismo" exposition. 322

The exposition, coordinated by Luís Serpa, was composed of various sections including visual arts, architecture and fashion. "Depois do Modernismo" reunited more than ninety artists, critics, architects, designers and performers whose creative efforts were aimed at questioning the exhaust of the modernist discourse, and its inability to reflect the contemporary condition. <sup>323</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>316</sup> Machado, José Sousa, "Atitudes Litorais", in: *Artes & Leilões*, (February – March, 1990), p. 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>317</sup> Anos 80: Uma Topologia (...), op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>318</sup> Fernanades, J., in: *Homeostética* 6=0/coord. Ramos, Maria, Serralves Foundation, Oporto, 2004, p. 274.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>319</sup> Machado, José Sousa, "Atitudes Litorais", op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>320</sup> Pinto, António Cerveira, in *Anos 80 (...), op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>321</sup> Ibidem.

 $<sup>^{322}</sup>$  "Depois do Modernismo" was held at Sociedade Nacional de Belas Artes (National Association of Fine Arts) in Lisbon, between  $7^{th}$  and  $30^{th}$  January 1983.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>323</sup> Depois do Modernismo/coord. Serpa, Luís, Sociedade Nacional de Belas Artes, 1983, p. 10.

The program of the event consisted of various spectacles, conferences and discussions, related to the postmodernist discourse, included the presence of international guests including Rudi Funsch and Germano Celant. The exhibition, as a result of the emphasis put on various pictorial languages, is often compared with other curatorial initiatives which spread across Europe at that time (e.g. "Documenta 7" curated by Rudi Funchs, "New Spirit in Painting", "Zeitgeist", etc). 324

The curators initiated a discussion on the topic of the postmodernist paradigm within the national field. They attempted to analyse and diagnose tensions between modern and postmodern while approaching questions of the exhaustion of the modernist discourse and an ability to create a new one. The idea was born at the beginning of 82. When it was chosen it immediately became clear that it was not exactly a question of defining a particular tendency in Portuguese cultural creativity, since from the beginning there was certainty that, let's say generative, point had been reached, marking an independent standpoint on the dominant modernism. The postmodern claims of the exposition were largely based on the cultural relativism addressed by Lyotard in Postmodern condition. The curators attempted to locally clarify a certain trend that would have been able to function parallelly to the trends related to return to painting (e.g. Italian transavantgarde which Luís Serpa had an opportunity to observe while studying in Italy). Therefore, the exposition emphasised various pictorial languages which supported the paradigmatic rupture against conceptual practices, followed by the growing disconnection between the artistic and political discourse.

At the "Depois do Modernismo" the debate regarding the fall of the grand narratives (Lyotard), simulacrum (Baudrillard) and possibility of continuation of the "modern project" (Habermas), which was fundamental for the early 1980s, was therefore adjusted to the local context. As a source of inspiration the catalogue indicated exemplars of neo-expressionist and transavantgarde painters who initiated the break that allowed artists to separate their practices from the conceptual ideology revealed in "proliferation, banalization, obsolescence, of every kind of epigones." The curators dismissed the ideology of the post-structuralist utopia as incapable of serving for "any other safe point of reference for our creativity and for our sight:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>324</sup> Almeida, Bernardo Pinto, in: *Anos 80 (...), op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>325</sup> Depois do Modernismo (...), op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>326</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>327</sup> Serpa, Luís, interview, in: *Arquivo L+ Arte* <a href="http://arquivolarte.blogspot.pt/2009">http://arquivolarte.blogspot.pt/2009</a> 02 01 archive.html/ accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>328</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>329</sup> Jürgens, Sandra Vieira, *Instalações Provisórias (...), op. cit.*, p. 330.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>330</sup> Pinto, António Cerveira, "Rewriting for an exhibition", in: *Depois do Modernismo, op. cit.*, p. 16.

human – social reality is concreate: it has color, exterior and interior, and an appearance and an essence equally of interest."<sup>331</sup> Consequently, the postmodernism proposed by the exposition abandons experimentation and the critical discourse for "subjectivity of consumption".<sup>332</sup>

Having those premises in mind, it is necessary to recognize that "Depois do Modernismo" did not provide theoretical and practical answers to the questions of how and to what level the modernist paradigm got exhausted? The curators, who used the term "postmodernism", and associated it with the explosion of "new subjectivity" rather than with the critical attitude toward the mainstream modernist thought (which, as asserted in the first chapter of this work, was frequently associated with the poststructuralist theory), used the term which became plausible in the Western art market in an attempt to internationalize Portuguese works of art. The complete de-ideologization of the presented works resulted in reification of the culture asserted by Hal Foster, which was symptomatic of the advanced capitalist production of commodities (Foster, 1989).

Those features led to the establishment of the pluralist condition, the end of ideology that may have marked the advent of the post-historical period.<sup>333</sup> The artists, like the protagonists of neo-expressionism and transavantgarde, assimilated the quotation, appropriation and deconstruction strategies which may be read as establishment of reactionary postmodernism (Foster, 1983). All those practices in the Portuguese context may be illustrated by the pictorial works of artists whose images were presented at the expositions "Depois do Modernismo", "Os Novos Primitivos Os Grandes Plasticos", "Arqipélago" and "Continentes".

Sixteen visual artists took part in "Depois do Modernismo", <sup>334</sup> majority of them known from "Alternativa Zero" (including Álvaro Lapa, Ângelo de Sousa, António Palolo, José Carvalho, Julião Sarmento, Leonel Moura, Mário Varela and Vítor Pomar). Some of those artists surpassed conceptual practices (Sarmento, Moura, Palolo, Pombo) in order to establish a dominant affirmation of pictorial languages. The concerns presented by the artists during the exhibition varied significantly, which created a pluralistic image of the event. Nonetheless, the artists of "Depois do Modernismo" were considered progenitors of return to painting in Portugal. Their art is often placed between the post-conceptual practices of the 1970s and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>331</sup> Depois do Modernismo (...), op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>332</sup> Lapa, Pedro, "Poética e Política no Fim do Século XX em Portugal" (...), op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>333</sup> Danto, Arthur C., "The End of Art", in: *The Death of Art*. New York: Haven Publications, 1984, p. 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>334</sup> "Depois do Modernismo" exposed the works of Álvaro Lapa, Ângelo de Sousa, António Cerveira Pinto, António Palolo, Carlos Rocha Pinto, Gaëtan, José Barrias, José Carvalho, Julião Sarmento, Jwow Basto, Leonel Moura, Luís Serpa, Lurdes Robalo, Mário Varela, Pedro Calapez, Sérgio Pombo and Vítor Pomar.

pictorial practices of the 1980s.<sup>335</sup> The hybridisation of practices of those authors suggested that a certain change in aesthetics occurred.

Julião Sarmento started his career with formal and technical options of conceptual art; however, in the early 1980s his interest turned toward painting. The leitmotiv of Sarmento's works is body – painted, filmed, drawn or photographed. <sup>336</sup> The body, a symbol of sexuality, is placed in a situation of emptiness and excess at the same time: emptiness is created by the absence of the body, excess by addition of various unrelated images. The pornographic imagery of Sarmento's paintings seems to be constantly questioned by juxtaposition of contradictory, supporting or affirmative images. <sup>337</sup>

Those features of Sarmento's painting are represented in the pictures from the cycle of "Noites Brancas" (1982) exposed at "Depois do Modernismo". Images, painted on the brown, wrapping paper<sup>338</sup> included collage elements and were placed on various panels, where every single one carried a separate narrative. In the "Noites Brancas (Vígilia)", the main, upper panel is a representation of a naked, faceless man caught in motion, carrying an unidentified, red stick on his shoulder. The upper "screen" is supplemented with three smaller ones, placed below, which present a head of an animal in the moonlight scenery, two masks and a hand holding a knife respectively. The brutalist approach and the colour pallet of red (blood), brown and black (ground), white (body) recall the strategies used by Heftige Malarei. The fragmentation of the narrative may illustrate, what is symptomatic of reactionary postmodernism, favouritism given to "les petites histoire", 339 which opposes a modernist claim for totality. The relational interplay between objects is not always easy/possible to follow in Sarmento's works and is the source of discontinuity and fragmentation of the narrative. The juxtaposition of various elements in Sarmento's paintings allows us to read them as an allegorical structure that favours the practice of montage (Buchloh, 1982) where each and every represented element breaks the continuity and linearity of the discourse. Those strategies may lead to the necessity of double-reading. Consequently, Sarmento's painting did not return to the classical representation, and functions rather as a certain illusion of representation because every fragment of the composition belongs

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>335</sup> Pinharanda, João, "O declínio das vanguardas dos anos 50 ao fim do milénio", in: *História da Arte Portuguesa Vol. III*/ coord. Pereira Paulo, Circulo de Leitores, 1997, p. 618.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>336</sup> Pinharanda, João, *Alguns Corpos*, EDP, Lisbon, 1998, p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>337</sup> Tarantino, Michael., "The Figure in the (...), op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>338</sup> Melo, Alexandre, Julião Sarmento: As Velocidades da Pele, Galeria Cómicos, Lisboa, 1989, p. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>339</sup> Hassan Ihab, "Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective" (...), op. cit., p 505.

elsewhere. "Like a rebus, or an inventory of images which form an intricate web of tangential relationships, Sarmento's multi-panelled paintings also reveal all and nothing."<sup>340</sup>

It is on purpose that Julião Sarmento reaches for contemporary trends, reusing the fragmentation and "bad" painting strategies.<sup>341</sup> His pornographic imagery complemented with contradictory images recalls David Salle's multi-panelled paintings in which affirmation of the erotic content by images retrieved from art history and mass-culture enables the works to be read neutrally. Sarmento's appropriation strategies include a dialogue with the photography, literature and montage practices. For example, in "Descem Por Ela as Mãos da Noite" (1987), the photographs of a running woman and a wooded area are separated by a black square. The grey panel underneath represents a multiplied image of hands with chopsticks. The black frame functions as a break in the narrative, a sign of separation between the subject and the place of action. The image of hands creates another type of break which combines painted imagery with a mechanical image. The set of images, which are difficult to classify, proves a certain mutation of the discourse which may be categorised on the basis of confusion, indicated by the poststructuralist theory, related to the idea of the interdisciplinarity (Barthes, 1984). A postmodern artwork, a multi-dimensional space, in which a variety of writings clash together, 342 is emphasized in Sarmento's works with the inclusion of various references, i.e. literary references, related mainly to Raymond Carver and American "dirty realism" <sup>343</sup>. Sarmento's paintings often have a very direct relation to a film through appropriation of its title or citation of its particular images, e.g. "The Space Between Things" (1989) is a direct quotation appropriated from Luis Buñuel's "Subida al Cielo" (1951). 344 In his painting from 1980s, he reappropriated his former photographs juxtaposing them in various, new configurations, retrieving their original context and meaning. Sarmento's images drawn from a wide range of sources invoke the ultimate depletion of experience and its absorption into representation.

Paintings of Leonel Moura may be placed between figuration and abstraction. Their phantasmagorical character is supplemented with the presence of a brutalist effect and primitive inspiration.<sup>345</sup> Although, he returns to a means of pictorial expression, his paintings continue to serve as a field for experimentation.<sup>346</sup> In a similar manner to Julião Sarmento's paintings,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>340</sup> Tarantino, Michel., "The Figure in the (...), op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>341</sup> Almeida, Bernardo Pinto, *Pintura Portuguesa no Século XX*, Lello & Irmão, Oporto, 1993, p. 187.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>342</sup> Ibidem, p. 170.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>343</sup> Almeida, Bernardo Pinto, *Pintura Portuguesa* (...), op. cit., p. 187.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>344</sup> Tarantino, Michel, "The Figure in the (...), op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>345</sup> Almeida, Bernardo Pinto, *Pintura Portuguesa* (...), op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>346</sup> Silva, Raquel Henriques da, "Leonel Moura", in: *50 Anos de Arte Portuguesa*/ Silva, Raquel Henriques da, et.al, FCG/CAM, Lisbon, 2007, p. 53.

Moura's pictorial works function as mutations, hybrids (Barthes, 1984). A diptych "Africa I-II" (1983) exhibited at "Depois do Modernismo" and composed of two canvases of disparate dimensions (50x35 and 179x239cm)<sup>347</sup> included figurative representation and elements of assemblage. The smaller canvas is a painterly representation of a ritual, African mask that evokes the pre-colonial African past, and, simultaneously, the Parisian avant-garde of the 1900.<sup>348</sup> Bright colours (red, yellow, blue) of the mask contrast with the white background. The grey, monochromatic background of the "Africa II" is broken by a fragmented imagery, placed in the top right hand corner, representing arrows, a hand and probably a slingshot. In the bottom left hand corner, the artist attached a stuffed Egyptian mongoose (ichneumon). The paintings may be read as an evocation of concerns related to the identity, recreation of the cultural history of the African continent approached with a set of clichés and stereotypes (Buchloh, 1981). Leonel Moura's paintings, understood in this way, focus on the mythological and mystical dimension of the culture interpreted as a set of cult objects. The use of the mongoose may be read through the perspective of Egyptian mythology according to which Ra, the sun-god, would metamorphose into a giant ichneumon to fight the evil-god snake *Apopis*. The use of a dead animal may be related to the ceremony of sacred animal mummification, or just be an indirect appropriation of the Ancient Egyptian Art (plenty of representations of the standing ichneumon were created during the Ptolemaic era). Leonel Moura, like a few neo-expressionists (e.g. Anselm Kiefer in "The Paths of World Wisdom: Hermann's Battle") and transavantgardists (e.g. Mimmo Paladino), approaches the Fredric Jameson's concept of postmodern history understood as "a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum." <sup>349</sup> The manipulation of the author with appropriated, historical material leads to reification of the history asserted by Hal Foster.<sup>350</sup>

The other reading of the work may be implemented using the postcolonial theory, or, I would say, the postmodern openness for the figure of the "other", previously discriminated in the Western history (or in art history). From this point of view, the work entails a critical concept of the image of African culture as a folklore, a set of stereotypes (i.e. a colourful, ritual mask), or maybe reflects nostalgically on the African identity lost in the process of colonization of the continent. This form of representation may be committed to the process of decanonization of the culture, "delegitimation" of the mastercodes in the society (Lyotard, 1979).

<sup>347</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>348</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>349</sup> Jameson, Fredric, *Postmodernism* (...), op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>350</sup> Foster Hal., Wild Signs: The Breakup of the Sign in Seventies' Art (...), op. cit., p. 251.

Postmodern self-multiplication, or self-reflection (Hassan, 1986) may be found in Gaëtan's imagery. His vocabulary emphasises the questions of identity and subjectivity. Drawings and paintings are mainly self-representations juxtaposed with various daily-life objects: lamps, chairs, amulets, etc. Gaëtan's self-portraits function as fragmented images of identity. They are always incomplete and constantly reinvented. In postmodernist representation the painter attempts to recover the 'romantic ego' which "remains under dire suspicion in post-structuralist circles as a "totalizing principle"." 351 His portraits retrieve the topic of figurative representation that was abandoned in previous decades.352 "In terms of working methods we may classify his process as basically naturalist, carried out through long sessions of drawing from the model (he himself or someone else), and only using natural light. However, the results reflect a process of de-naturalization of the gaze: through these images the artist comes out of himself more than he shows (to be seen) of himself."353 As João Pinharanda states, Gaëtan's portraits are not of introspective nature, but they are rather examples of theatralization, a certain type of masquerade where "the person lives in a different character which it is impossible to pin down to a model – or the essence (a definition which Sartre applied to the human being)."354 Gaëtan plays with a well-known language in order to construct self-representation which diffuses itself in a depthless style, revivalism, elusion and interpretation.

Abstract concerns were elaborated on in the works of Ângelo Sousa and Vítor Pomar. In their abstract paintings - minimalistic (Ângelo Sousa), and expressionistic (Vítor Pomar) - both artists reuse concerns which were related to their photographic experiences. <sup>355</sup>

Ângelo de Sousa started his career as an artist in the early 1960s. The period (often linked with a new-figuration, or pop art trends) are childlike, naïve, contaminated

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>351</sup> Hassan, Ihab, "Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective" (...), op. cit., p 505.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>352</sup> Pinharanda, João, *Modos Afirmativos e Declinações – Alguns Aspectos do Desenho na Década de Oitenta* Departamento de Artes Visuais/IAC, 2001.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>353</sup> Pinharanda, João, "Cavaterra", in: *Gaëtan Cavaterra* (1981-1998), Museu de Arte Contemporânea do Funchal, Fortaleza de São Tiago, Funchal, 1999.

<sup>354</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>355</sup> Pinharanda, João, "O declínio das vanguardas dos anos 50 ao fim do milénio" (...), op. cit., p. 618.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>356</sup> Almeida, Bernardo Pinto, *Ângelo Sousa*, Casa da Moeda, 1985, p. 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>357</sup> Pernes, Fernando, "Angelo Between Joy and Melancholy", in: *Angelo 1993 Uma antológica*, Fundação de Serralves; Centro Cultural de Belém, 1993, p. 134.

with primitivist contours and colours. Those images are expressionistic in their spontaneous, immediate, simple figurations which present common objects and shapes, often related to daily life.358 In his paintings from the 1980s (presented, among others, during "Depois do Modernismo") figurative elements disappeared and gave way to abstract, shiny surfaces with geometrical lines. Those large-scale, the so-called "monochromatic" paintings, became less playful, and more structuralised images.<sup>359</sup> His minimalist, abstract paintings focused on the elementary, geometrical lines, which allowed the author to transform the space of the canvases. The colours marked the contrast between different spaces of canvases emphasising the variety of textures.<sup>360</sup> Vítor Pomar's painting may be considered as re-experimentation with certain forms of American painting of the 1950s. His painterly production, often contaminated by photography and cinema, may be connected directly with the figure of Franz Kleine.<sup>361</sup> Those features of Pomar's painting may be seen as typical of a passage between structural linguistics and poststructuralist semiotics, which reveals itself in the process of abstraction where "in the first instance the referent is bracketed; in the second signifier is loosened, redefined as another signifier."362 His paintings are expressive, with the images of gestural, Pollockian violence, controlled through the use of a monochromatic pallet composed of black and white.<sup>363</sup> Those premises allow us to inscribe Sousa's and Pomar's painting in the trend of simulationism<sup>364</sup> of abstract art which was derived from appropriation art (like neo-expressionism, or "Picture" photographic production). The works of both artists function as a quotation of modernist abstractions (geometrical and expressionistic), which positions historical styles in an analytical form, draining it rather from its aesthetic values. The treatment of modernist abstraction as a source of "ready-made" turns their paintings into certain types of simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1981) calling into question the issues derived from the model and copy treatment.<sup>365</sup> Those very "generic" abstractions seem to be neither originals nor copies. They abstract a modernist referent in order to dissolve it in postmodernist painterly production. Both works, even though they do not "return" to figurative representation, become part of, inasmuch

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>358</sup> Rodrigues, A. "Ângelo de Sousa", in: *Entender a Pintura*/ed. Artes Leilões, Arte Iberica, 1998, p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>359</sup> Gil, José, "The experimenter of chance", in: Angelo 1993 (...), op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>360</sup> Ibidem

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>361</sup>Sardo, Delfim *Vítor Pomar 1965-2002 Coincidência Auspiciosa*, António Henriques Galeria de Arte Contemporânea, Viseu, 2002'3, p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>362</sup> Foster, Hal, "The Passion of the Sign", in *The Return of the Real*" (...), op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>363</sup> Pinharanda, João, "O declínio das vanguardas dos anos 50 ao fim do milénio" (...), op. cit., p. 623.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>364</sup> The simulationism trend in abstract art, widely associated with the artists related to neo-geo trend, was described by Hal Foster in chapter 4 of his publication *The Return of the Real* entitled "Art of Cynical reason"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>365</sup> Foster, Hal, "The art of Cynical Reason", in *The Return of the Real"* (...), op. cit., p. 104.

as other paintings, the trace of reactionary postmodernism which manipulates with signifiers and styles (Foster, 1989).

Álvaro Lapa's works represent his interest in the synthesis of forms, fragmentation and emptiness. His discourse insists on various formal, strongly individualized elements consisting of figures - visual signs and words - titles of works, or inscriptions on the surfaces of paintings. Lapa's imagery is subjective, often autobiographical with literary references which are especially visible in his series "The Writer's Diaries" ("Cadernos de Escritores", 1976-1990)<sup>367</sup> consisting of nineteen paintings and nineteen drawings. "Cadernos de Escritores" exposed Lapa's cultural, selective affinities, approached through citations, references and implications. <sup>369</sup>

Fragmentation is one of the fundamental compositional strategies in Álvaro Lapa's painting. <sup>370</sup> The autonomy given by the painter to the fragment shows his strong resistance to the modernist idea of totality. The values of composition, harmony and visual balance depend on each element which may be subtracted from the image. Forms are closed in relation to one another, the boundary lines of the coloured areas do not separate the figures from their background, but reveal a certain segregation and separation of forms. <sup>371</sup> The inscriptions included in Lapa's painting articulate both philosophical and poetical concerns. The artist plays with used words visually, uses them as a mere sign ("words that did not become images or other words"). This sign is presented as the non-pictorial "other" which establishes the difference between pictorial and linguistic context of the painting. The incorporation of painterly imagery and word together functions as expression of irreducibility of the fragments and autonomy of the languages. Word and image do not support each other, or attempt to clarify each other's meaning. The text incorporated into painting is not integrated with imagery, it rather constitutes its autonomous part. The image does not illustrate the word, nor does the word describe the image, they approach each other through their mutual irreducibility.

Formal aspects of colour, light, geometry and positioning in space are the main concerns of António Palolo's paintings. His imagery is non-discursive and more with regard to visual

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>366</sup> Dias, Fernando, *A Nova-Figuração na artes plásticas em Portugal (1958-1975) Volume 2: Parte III-IV*, Faculdade de Belas Artes Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, 2008, p. 717.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>367</sup> Melo, Alexandre, Arte Plásticas em Portugal: Dos Anos 70 aos Nossos Dias, DIFEl, Lisbon, 1998, p. 116.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>368</sup> Han Shan, François Villon, Marquês de Sade, Donatien-Alphonse-Françoi, Max Stirner, Jean-Arthur Rimbaud, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Fernando Pessoa, Henry Miller, Céline, Antonin Artaud, Henri Michaux, Witold Gombrowicz, Samuel Beckett, Malcolm Lowry, William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac and Gregory Corso.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>369</sup> Dias, Fernando, A Nova-Figuração na artes plásticas (...), op. cit., p. 730.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>370</sup> Ibidem, p. 733.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>371</sup> Ibidem.

experience than word or written text.<sup>372</sup> Unlike Lapa or Sarmento, Palolo's works do not bear intertextual references, have titles or carry any further meaning or narrative.<sup>373</sup> Only visual experience is approached by his references and appropriations. In the early 1970s Palolo was elaborating on Duchamp's references which seem to have influenced his interest in symmetry and the use of formal geometry which lasted through the decade.<sup>374</sup> In the early 1980s, after various experimentations with video-art and photography Palolo returned to figurative painting, taking human figuration as his main subject, and focusing on the male figure in particular. His images reveal a certain artificiality: in industrial colours used and deconstructed faceless human figures.<sup>375</sup> And again he did not reach for the narrative representation creating a type of "metaphysical" paintings. Painted, disfigured bodies function as pictorial elements, part of imagery, rather than actual representation of the human body, its objectivization, or sexualisation. Space in his paintings was created by means of expressive colours, and through the movement of figures, as well as free expressionistic-like brushstrokes.

The event and pluralism of the exposed works caused various, mainly ambivalent, reactions from critics. "Depois do Modernismo" and its curators received the strongest criticism from the generation of theoreticians who dominated institutional circles, championed by Rui Mário Gonçalves. His article published in the *Colóquio Artes* magazine entitled "Bad Painting, Bad Criticism" describes the event and its participating artists as "mediocre". The strongly criticised pluralism and absence of collective thought in the exposed works calling the exposition an "empty sign" which was used to mean "everything and nothing." Those attempts to reduce the meaning of the event to an empty symbol ignored the potential change that the exhibition presented.

"Depois do Modernismo" was anti-modernist and anti-avantgarde in its nature, which was mirrored in the loss of criticality, irony and reflectiveness. The presented strategy endeavoured to surpass modernism as a means of criticism. The exposition chose to abandon the avant-garde's crucial concern for new art in an alternative society, but it pretended to be avant-garde in its presentation of current trends. The condition of pluralism, constituted by the event seemed to celebrate (in Arthur Danto's terms) liberation of art from enslavement of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>372</sup> Freitas, Maria Helena, "The Palolo System", in: *António Palolo 1963-1995*, CGF, CAM, Lisbon, 1995-6, p. 166.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>373</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>374</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>375</sup> Ibidem.

Gonçalves, Rui Mário, "Carta de Lisboa: Bad Painting Bad Criticism", in: *Colóquio Artes*, (March 1983), p. 64.
 "A exposição apresentou-se como um signo vazio esperando que, com as reacções do público, ela se tornasse significativa. Quereia a exposição ser utilizada para significar tudo e nada." Gonçalves M. R., op. cit., p. 64.

theory, and it did lack a historical conception or correctness within different pictorial languages. The means of the exposition could have been used to investigate even further the influence and the role of the visual representation within the postmodern cultural politics, but its critical potential was completely ignored by the curators. The appropriation/simulation of art practices by some of the painters presented during the exposition demonstrates the obsolescence of the traditional idea of conceptual art and material experimentation, diminishing what was once the most important notion of the avant-garde. The exposition was the very first sign of reactionary postmodernism in Portugal which continued through the first half of the 1980s and will be analysed in the following parts of the chapter.

### 3.2 "Os Novos Primitivos: Os Grandes Plásticos" (1984)

The "Os Novos Primitivos: Os Grandes Plásticos" exposition was held in Cooperative Árvore, Porto, in January 1984. The short catalogue text written by the curator, Bernardo Pinto de Almeida, affirmed "new primitivism" as reintroduced to the visual art field. <sup>378</sup> Supposedly, the primitive content in artistic production served as a reaction to the excess of intellectualization of art, and emerged as a return to subjectivity, abandonment of perfectionism in favour of expressionism in a search for formal and theoretical redefinition. <sup>379</sup> All those features of the "new primitivism" were, according to the curator, expressed in figurative paintings of Oporto-based artists: Albuquerque Mendes, Carlos Carreiro, Fernando Marques de Oliveira, Fernando Pinto Coelho, Gerardo Burmester and Luís Calheiros. Bernardo Pinto de Almaida invited Álvaro Lapa, Paula Rego and Mário Cesariny to represent the progenitors of Portuguese primitive painting. <sup>380</sup>

The "Novos Primitivos" proposed works which approached subjective and expressive imagery revealed in revalorization of national/local characteristics. According to Rui Mário Gonçalves, the "Os Novos Primitivos: Os Grandes Plásticos" exposition glorified a certain Portuguese tradition of expressionism.<sup>381</sup> Those attempts were established by the creation of a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>378</sup> Almeida, Bernardo Pinto, Os Novos Primitivos, Os Grandes Plásticos, Cooperativa Arvore, Oporto, 1984.

<sup>379</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>380</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>381</sup> Gonçalves, Rui Mário, Vontade de mudança: cinco décadas de Artes Plásticas, Caminho, Lisbon, 2004, p. 168.

historical parallelism between the works of Álvaro Lapa, Paula Rego, Mário Cesariny and the group of younger artists. Bernardo Pinto de Almeida, like the curators of "Depois do Modernismo", adopted postmodernism in the version of "the end of masternarratives" (Lyotard, 1979) which promised to open history to 'other', excluded voices, also peripherical, rather than mark the triumph of westernization (like in Francis Fukuyama's account). Those 'other' voices were constituted by pictorial traditions which, according to the curator, were marginalized during modernism in Portugal. <sup>382</sup> The search for a "new national tradition" revealed a certain motivation for creating a local trend that would function as a parallel to the German neoexpressionism and Italian transavantgarde. Those attempts seemed to be rather artificial: not only due to the absence of interrelations between practices of both generations, but also due to the cynical and reactionary position which was presented in works of artists including Carlos Carreiro, Albuquerque Mendes and Gerardo Burmester.

The majority of the artists (Burmester, Mendes, Carreiro and Coelho), whose works were presented during the exhibitions, were former members of the Puzzle Group.<sup>383</sup> Their collective actions were strictly interventional, frequently performative and focused on the analysis of pressures between individual and collective, painting and performance, document and work of art.<sup>384</sup> The group fell apart in the beginning of the 1980s along with the exhaust of the political debate in the public space and reconstruction of the art market in Portugal. The exmembers of the collective committed themselves to searching for subjective, pictorial languages.<sup>385</sup>

For Carlos Carreiro, Albuquerque Mendes and Gerardo Burmester the Revolution of 25<sup>th</sup> of April served as the origin of the idea of utopia and persistency of national mythologies. The artists reached for the myths in order to deconstruct them by means of juxtaposition with images related to the technological development, or popular culture. Eclectic imagery, consisting of pictures appropriated from the history of art and mass–culture, exploited the gap between the signifier and the signified (Foster, 1989) through the redefinition of conceptual categories, consequently challenging the modernist ideal of totality. All the presented works functioned as deconstructive, allegorical structures (Owens, 1980) which privileged appropriation, accumulation, discursiveness and hybridisation strategies.<sup>386</sup> The images deemed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>382</sup> Almeida, Bernardo Pinto, in: *Anos 80 (...)*, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>383</sup> The Puzzle Group was established by Dario Alves, Armando Azevedo, C arlos Carreiro, João Dixo, Albuquerque Mendes, Graça Morais, Fernando Pinto Coelho, Pedro Rocha and Jaime Silve.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>384</sup> Pinto, Paula, *Grupo Puzzle* (1976-1981) Pintura Colectiva = Pintura Individual, p. 2.

<sup>385</sup> Ibidem

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>386</sup> Owen, Craig, "The Allegorical Impulse" (...), op. cit., p. 70.

historical by Bernardo Pinto de Almeida were rather melancholic in their political resignation and fascination with the images from the past and national mythologies. Being more of a retrieval of history they represent replications produced by the advanced-capitalist transformation (as asserted by Foster), reflected in reification of the historical sign, or ahistorical conventions.<sup>387</sup>

Carlos Carreiro's painting approaches the Portuguese myths with a great dose of irony. 388 His surrealist imagery is filled with representations of princesses, harlequins, flying carpets that seem to be inspired by the mythological and fairy-tale sources. All of the "mythological content" is juxtaposed with the symbols of technological development and consumer society (e.g. television, fridge, etc.), treated as "mythologies of the modern way of life". 389 The main characteristics of his paintings include excess of the narrative, a form of game with the academic representation, and theatralization of the presented scenes.<sup>390</sup> Carreiro accumulates appropriated images in the forms retrieved from the original context of historical and mythological material which is reused in the form of multiple narrative images. The aggregation of various elements throughout the surfaces of the canvas reminds of a certain horror vacui. His imagery is fulfilled with human figures ("Paisagem muito habitada", "George Orwell", 1984), animals ("A ilha antes das descobertas", 1985) or architectural elements ("Cenário para uma alegoria", 1988). Carreiro's works resemble Hieronymus Bosch's codes of gothic representation of the simultaneous scenes which take place within one canvas.<sup>391</sup> His allegorical images, although not without a certain dose of irony tend to treat society and historical images with melancholy and nostalgia. Hence Carreiro's painterly modes attest to the fetishist fragmentation of the sign, valorised by the poststructuralist theory (Barthes, 1984), and performed by many postmodern painters, including Anselm Kiefer, Julian Schnabel and David Salle. The "collage" created by Carreiro from appropriated images may be addressed using the Benjamin Buchloh's montage theory described in the first chapter, based on Roland Barthes' theory of counter-appropriation which asserts that in order to reconstruct the myth, one must rewrite it in a critical montage, creating a certain type of artificial myth in turn.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>387</sup> Foster, Hal, "The Passion of the Sign", in *The Return of the Real*" (...), op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>388</sup> Sousa, Rocha de, "Carlos Carreiro", in: *Colóquio Artes* No. 38 (Sep., 1978), p. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>389</sup> Pernes, Fernardo, *Carlos Carreiro*, Galeria Zen, Oporto, 1973.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>390</sup> Gonçalves, Ruí Mário, "Carlos Carreiro", in: *100 Pintores Portugueses do Século XX*, História de Arte em Portugal, Edições Alfa, 1989.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>391</sup> As Fernando Pernes called Carlos Carreiro "Jeronimus Bosch na sociedade de consumo! - Pernes, F., *Carlos Carreiro*, Galeria Zen, Oporto, 1973.

The pictorial language of Gerardo Burmester seems to reveal a certain nostalgia for the romantic models of ideals of beauty and emotion. The aesthetical concern in Burmester's paintings from late 1970s, e.g. "Flowers" (1978) and "Still Life" (1978), may lead us directly to the traditional representation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century painting. Nonetheless, his paintings include a humourist accent in the form of small aeroplanes which seem to function *as trompe l'oeil*, or a neo-pop collage.<sup>392</sup> The canvases are a cross between painting and the object, ironizing their decorative function. "In Flores (Flowers), the picture as object is reaffirmed by the structuring use of an elaborate gilded frame, a support which Burmester often combines with his paintings, conferring on it an excessive Baroque dimension which is not independent of the irony of its fake decorativeness." Paintings may be read as a form of critique of representation which used it against itself in order to challenge its authority (Owens, 1994).

Gerardo Burmester's painting invests in "recuperation" of the Portuguese national mythologies, particularly at "Mitos Portugueses" exposition (Eng. Portuguese Myths, 1984). Burmester attempts to deconstruct myths, but at the same time, he attempts to hold a fascination for them<sup>394</sup> His painting, presented during "Os Novos Primitivos" exhibition, entitled "D. Sebastião ou o prazer na ausência" (Eng. "D. Sebastião or Pleasure in absence", 1984) refers to the historical and legendary dimension of the Portuguese culture. The figure of D. Sebastião, considered by some historicists as the beginning of the Portuguese decadence, revealed in the Portuguese submission to Catholic obscurantism, traumatic deception of imperial pretension and fragility of the Portuguese sovereignty.<sup>395</sup> On the other hand, 'sebastianism' and the figure of Sebastian who was defeated and died in Africa transposed a certain messianism, creation of the legendary, "ideal" figure that would reappear one misty morning. 396 The "desired" (Portuguese "desejado") Sebastian "fulfils (paradoxically) by his absence the longing for the unattainable. And it is this longing which in its excesses consubstantiates myth. And this is unattainable, take another step further, becomes the heart of artistic creativity." Like in the German neo-expressionism the romanticism and "national" subjectivity of Burmester's painting are inseparable. Gerardo Burmester, like Anselm Kiefer,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>392</sup> Fernandes, João, "Exercises of Seduction", in: *Gerarardo Burmester*, Serralves Foundation, Oporto, 1998, p. 146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>393</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>394</sup> Burmester, Gerardo in conversation with Almeida, Bernanrdo Pinto, in: *Gerardo Burmester*, Espaço Luistano, Oporto, 1985.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>395</sup> Melo, Alexandre, Arte Plásticas em Portugal: Dos Anos 70 aos Nossos Dias, DIFEI, Lisbon, 1998, p. 152.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>396</sup> Burmester, Gerardo in conversation with Almeida, Bernardo Pinto, in: *Gerardo Burmester*, Espaço Luistano, Oporto, 1985.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>397</sup> Ibidem.

asserts what is quintessentially romantically "national" (Portuguese in this case). He presents a certain, privileged relationship between what is subjective and the Portuguese spirituality retrieved from mythology. But, the meaning of an agitated spirit is rather topical, it may be treated rather decoratively, reflecting the postmodern crisis in history revealed in reification and deeper commodification of the historical topic.

Albuquerque Mendes appropriates images related to the art history and mass-culture in order to question the iconographic myths of the Western culture, especially those embedded in the Portuguese popular culture.<sup>398</sup> His quotes and references include mainly modern authors such as Francis Picabia ("Self-portraits" from 1988 and 1989), Marcel Duchamp ("The Portraits of Marcel Duchamp", 1982), Pablo Picasso ("Cubist self-portrait", 1984; "Self-portrait with a beard", 1981), and many others. The strategy of auto-quotation is especially visible in various self-portraits.

Like Salomé, Albuquerque Mendes hybridizes his painterly production through contamination by the Fluxus-related practices. He treats performance as an extension and integrative practice of his pictorial work. In his two exhibitions, "The portraits of Marcel Duchamp" (1982) and "The frequenters of the Cabaret Voltaire" (1984), Mendes approaches mythological references retrieved from the history of the modernist art established as fundamental references to his works.<sup>399</sup> In both cases, the inauguration of the exposition was accompanied by a performance. 400 "The portraits of Marcel Duchamp" are a painterly simulacrum of fourteen pictures taken by Man Ray, who, in 1921, photographed Marcel Duchamp in drag as Rrose Sélavy, his female alter ego. 401 The exhibition opening was complemented with a performance in which the artist, dressed up as a beggar, was playing the accordion. 402 During the inauguration of "The frequenters of the Cabaret Voltaire" visitors were encouraged to dance in the space surrounded by canvases which were creating a "full of glamour and nostalgia"403 vision of waiters and patrons of an invented cabaret. Those images, re-appropriated from the statements of high modernism, reveal a certain cynical position which accepts what appears, creating a rather conscious façade, a mere sign with nothing behind it. Albuquerque Mendes mastered modernist languages, but he was not able to reuse them

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>398</sup> Cudell, Ana, A pintura de Albuquerque Mendes, (...), op. cit., p. 187.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>399</sup> Fernandes, João, "Albuquerque Mendes: On Painting as a Ritual of Transfiguration of the World.", in: *Albuquerque Mendes Confesso.*, Serralves Foundation, Oporto, 2001., p. 34. <sup>400</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>401</sup> Cudell, Ana, A pintura de Albuquerque Mendes (...), op. cit., p. 189.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>402</sup> Ibidem

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>403</sup> Fernandes, João, Albuquerque Mendes (...), op. cit., p. 34.

experimentally. He presented a revivalist position, but did not clarify what the revival exists for. The visible break between the language used and its meaning, reveals a postmodernist, chaotic position.

Mendes' works manipulate recognizable images belonging to the popular and "high" culture in order to "transgress the horizons of expectations of their possible readings." <sup>404</sup> In the "Oporto Notes" (1981-1982) series he presents provocative images of nuns placed in seductive poses. The images of nuns are juxtaposed with tea services, vases with flowers, packs of the "Porto" brand cigarettes and large-scale blow-up images of one thousand escudos notes. Each canvas has the emblem of FC Porto as an ironical association of identity. 405 Those images constitute an explicit paradox in the contemporary art of the 1980s: artists who find themselves under continuous pressure to be modern (this pressure was addressed by various, especially leftist, critics whose works were analysed in the first chapter), but understand that to be modern means to be traditional. Those contradictions created an identity crisis revealed in the renewed interest in the national identity in art, which results in rather pastiche production.

The references given by the presented artists seem natural and may be placed as reactionary to conceptual practices. The artists who, in a conventionalist manner, took up complex historical practices reduced them to the form of a mere sign. By assimilating tendencies related to transavantgarde and neo-expressionism, the authors mixed images of the "high art" with mass culture, which resulted in a highly eclectic, kitsch production revealed in a certain form of primitivism. The eclecticism of works came as inability, in the age of globalization, to create a personal or individual discourse. Although the artists did not manage to recover the figure of historical representation – their attempts resulted in deconstruction of those images and fragmentation of their signifier. 406

Through emphasis put on the national art, artists implemented a cynical position based on the historical and geopolitical clichés. 407 The exposition did not recuperate the tradition of "Portuguese expressionism", but it rather evoked national stereotypes. In theory, "Novos Primitivos" was proclaimed by the individuality and autonomy of the artists, but the curator did not notice the preconditions which influenced the inclusion of those kinds of historical clichés.

The signs used by the artists, which belong to the Portuguese mythology and history,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>404</sup> Ibidem, p. 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>405</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>406</sup> Foster, Hal, "Wild Signs: The Breakup of the Sign in Seventies' Art" (...), op. cit., p. 252.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>407</sup> Buchloh, Benjamin, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression" (...), op. cit., p. 45.

treated sarcastically with regard to their spiritual, national, or cultural power, were reduced to an empty abstraction which did not convey any particular social location or political resonance to such an extent that it became socio-politically contextless. The use of painting may be seen as a tool for demythologizing the medium itself. While "high" abstraction could be praised as heroic, the figurative painting of "new primitives" allowed to demystify what could easily become mythological – identity images related to the history, religion or popular culture.

There is a certain difficulty in tracing the Portuguese "school" indicated by Bernardo Pinto de Almeida in the catalogue text. While, according to the Barthes' theory, artists influence each other's works (even unconsciously), it is almost impossible to label Álvaro Lapa's conceptualised painting, Paula Rego's expressionist images and Albuquerque Mendes hybrid paintings as enclosed within one expressionistic tradition. The "naïve" content was, without a doubt, reactionary to the conceptual art, but the trivial terminology which was adopted by the curator to praise the new, expressive subjectivity did not reflect upon the methodology and historical specificity and remained blind to other fields of research, including semiology and criticism of ideology.

The frame of "new expressionism" given by the curator to the exposed works, as it was pointed out above, may have had functioned as a certain parallelism between the Portuguese paintings and neo-expressionist images of German and American artists. It would rather be supplemented by an attempt to deconstruct the modernist paradigm of José-Augusto França, by linking Portuguese production not only to the French model, but also to the broadly conceived European and American art.

# **3.3** "Arquipélago" (1985)

"Arquipélago" was the third and the last collective exposition of Ana León, José Pedro Croft, Pedro Calapez, Pedro Cabrita Reis and Rui Sanches. Like "Depois do Modernismo" and "Novos Primitivos", the exhibition was extremely eclectic and anti-collective in its nature. As Bernardo Pinto de Almeida explains, the very title "Archipélago" served to illustrate fragmentation of the contemporary culture and subjectivity of the discourse of each artist who

functioned as separated from the other "island". The exposition analysed tensions between individual and plural as well as cross-references between individuality and multiplicity of images. This creation of collective with no shared ideology created a certain paradox, which drove the Portuguese art scene in the 1980s, which could be seen during "Depois do Modernismo". The Arquipélago's program, which emphasised the pluralist condition of the contemporary culture, did not allow to fully present a theoretical potential of works and contributed to a rather pejorative image of art in the decade.

Although Maria Filomena Moler attempts to group works accordingly to common factors (e.g. returning subjects of architectural space, physical and material space, human factor, etc.)<sup>410</sup> those distinctions seem rather artificial. All the presented works seem to cover different concerns and function separately within their individual discourse. However, a certain type of dialogue between works is not excluded.<sup>411</sup> And although the works presented during the exhibition vary significantly, their importance lies in the demonstration of painterly concerns approached by the younger generation, whose production during the 1980s left the mark on the widely understood trend of return to painting. Pictorial languages were represented by works of Rosa Carvalho, Pedro Calapez and Pedro Cabrita Reis.

The paintings of those artists are rather reactionary in nature, dissolved in the postmodern idea of "new subjectivity" which mimics painterly productions of artists related to German neo-expressionism and Italian transavantgarde. The artists exploited "traditional" artistic positions and made an attempt to explore a new art in them. This introverted approach to extroverted material implies a rather critical relation to the reused material which becomes a method of performing an artistic operation. From this point of view, the "subjectivity" of the artists presented below may be regarded as a break-away strategy against what seemed dogmatically given.

In their paintings, Pedro Calapez and Rosa Carvalho use appropriation and deconstruction strategies which are closely connected with practices of reactionary postmodernism. Their works are based on direct quotations of images retrieved from art history, which may be seen as "retardataire mimeticism" and "wider cultural cannibalism" <sup>412</sup>, or as a postmodern expression which is unable to create anything else than a mechanical simulacrum

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>408</sup> Almeida, Bernardo Pinto, "6 Derivas", in: Arquipélago (...), op. cit.

<sup>409</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>410</sup> Molder, M., Arquipélago (...), op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>411</sup> Anacleto, Ana, "Arquipélago da Insularidade Como Prática" (...), op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>412</sup> Lawson Thomas, "Last Exit: Painting" (...), op. cit., p. 145.

(Lawson, 1981). The position of both artists reflects on the postmodern crisis of authorship, (Foster, 1996) or rather on the poststructuralist treatment of an individual subject as a cultural myth (Jameson, 1991).

The practice of deconstruction in Rosa Carvalho and Pedro Calapez's painting was adopted through difference and imbrication. Appropriation, however, was achieved by sameness and implication of the quoted image. Deconstruction complemented appropriation, allowing it to create a parallel narrative that it would not be able to create otherwise. Through the practice of deconstruction both authors attempted to empty the quoted work from its previous meaning and context.

Rosa Carvalho favours easel painting, *belle peinture* strategies, figurative representations which emphasise the technique of light, perspective and colour. Her paintings are citations, appropriations from the old masters' paintings (e.g. Velázquez, Rubens, David) which are stripped from the "meaningful" elements of the original work. She moderates volumes, plays with the original colours and perspective. Landscape, and, frequently, still-life as well as portraits remain the central topics of her paintings.

As Isabel Carlos points out, the spectators' relation to Rosa Carvalho's painting is created even before they are able to see it. 416 As a result of prior looking at the works, from which her images are derived, this relation is established. As Carlos stresses, they are a "representation of representations" mediated by the "museum effect". 417 Rosa Carvalho's works tend to define their own commentary that is a result of reinterpretation attached to post facto of appropriated work (Owens, 1982). Her works are not ironical quotations. The painter is engaged in a search "for a root in tradition itself, from a package of selected affections that the history of painting and of art places at the disposal of the creator and the spectator, in a game of recognition and returns, in accordance with an intensely worked ludic scheme." Those strategies are visible in the "Paisagem de Interior" series ("Indoor Landscape", 1992). The cycle's imagery appropriates four female portraits created by Rembrandt ("Danaë", 1636), Bucher ("Odalisque", 1745), David ("Portrait of Madame Récamier", 1800) and Velázquez ("Rokeby Venus", 1947) respectively. Rosa Carvalho attempted to deconstruct and empty those

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>413</sup> Welchman, John C., *Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s*, University of California, San Diego, 2001, p. 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>414</sup> Carlos, Isabel, "The Suspension of history" in: *On Sublime*, Sociedade Lisboa, Lisbon, 1994, p. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>415</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>416</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>417</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>418</sup> Ibidem, p. 46.

images from their original meaning by erasing the central figure of a woman from every portrait. Instead, she recreates a scenery, entitled "indoor landscape" which surrounds the female figure in the original painting. Only Velazquez's Venus left traces of her previous existence by showing a reflection of her face in the mirror. During the "Indoor Landscape" exposition (Galeria Alda Cortez, 1992), the paintings were labelled with a description of every painter's relationship with the model and/or the relation between art history and those female representations. This intervention may be read as a Carvalho's subtle comment on the role of the woman in the history of painting, <sup>419</sup> or just a melancholic reflection on the inability to fully recuperate, or deconstruct historical representation. The practice of pastiche is emphasized by the break between the subject and historicism – typical of postmodern fragmentation (Foster, 1996). Rosa Carvalho's paintings appear in fabrication and fragmentation of historical images which are reproduced in the forms of partial simulacra (Foster, 1996).

Fragmented imagery is one of the main strategies used by Pedro Calapez. Separated images of various daily-life objects, landscapes and architectural fragments constitute the artist's elementary vocabulary. Calapez quotes and freely appropriates images known from art history, and like Rosa Carvalho, he attempts to deconstruct them, alternating relations between the volumes, perspective, space, architecture and original colours. 420 Calapez uses Proto-Renaissance images as a source of references, including direct quotations of the painting fragments appropriated from Fra Angelico and Giotto's imagery. 421 All of Calapez's works are various and mixed quotations which create an eclectic effect, although he admits: "Their starting point is no longer a set of concrete references (Pre-renaissance, Persian, Byzantine) but what remains of them, not what is left over, but what is fundamental in them. Their autonomy on the surface of a painting is comprised of an amalgamation of situations which are in contrast or which are absorbed by each other."422 His paintings' structure is based on a geometrical form which may resemble certain masses, spaces, or shapes representing walls, frescos, country walls graphite, transparencies or overpainting. "The intention, now, is for these component parts not to lose their terms of reference and to interplay with each other in a new situation on the surface of the painting."423 Articulation of colours of lines, or colours of planes takes the prime place in the construction of all his images which are progressively granted with an autonomous

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>419</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>420</sup> Freitas, Maria Helena, "Princípio de Transparência", in: *Pedro Calapez Histórias de Objectos*, CAM/FCG, Lisbon, 1991.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>421</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>422</sup> Calapez, Pedro, "Statement by the Artist", in: Melo, Alexandre, *Pedro Calapez O Tesouro no Céu*, Casa da Moeda, p. 67.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>423</sup> Ibidem.

space. He creates multiple ways of space representation by means of various colours, lines, textures and volumes. Pedro Calapez's position is neither ironic nor demystifying. It relates to the Foster's "fetishistic fragmentation of the sign" and its further reification.<sup>424</sup> It approaches the Owen's allegorical model using exploitation of the gap between the signifier and the signified through redefinition of conceptual categories (Owen, 1982), therefore, it challenges the modernist ideal of totality.

In the early 1980s, Pedro Cabrita Reis created acrylic paintings which favoured expressive, figurative forms. 425 However, figurative forms disappeared from his imagery quickly and, as a result, paved the way for mere abstractionism. His works from the beginning of the decade focused on the topics of war and combat ("Cenas da Caça e da Guerra", Diferença Gallery, 1983; "Os Discretos Mesnagerios", Cómicos Gallery, 1984), and religion in general, obsession with death, rituals and cult objects ("A Anunciação", Cómicos Gallery and ARCO, 1985; "De um santuário e certos lugares" JN Gallery, 1985). 426 During those years, he disciplined a certain expressive, formalist language of his own. His painting started to present geometrical forms, architectural elements: walls, stairs, arches, etc. The cycles including "Da ordem e do caos" and "Da Luz Como da Noite" (1983) are characteristic of his painterly production of the 1980s.

Unlike images of Carvalho and Calapez, Cabrita Reis' paintings do not include quotation and deconstruction strategies. 427 He does not cite already established positions. "What had characterized the art of the previous generation – the immediate, mute presence of things on the one hand and the improvised handling of materials and emphatic rhetoric on the other – formed Cabrita Reis' contradictory reference points, and his work responds to them in a sophisticated fashion." Some of his abstract paintings may be seen as simulations (Foster, 1996) of suprematists and constructivist forms (i.e. re-use of the cross and the square forms). Manipulation with the surfaces of the painting and detachment of "non-painterly" elements from the surfaces hybridised the painterly discourse, placing Cabrita Reis among postmodern painters including Anselm Kiefer or Julian Schnabel.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>424</sup> Foster, Hal, "Wild Signs: The Breakup of the Sign in Seventies' Art" (...), op. cit., p. 252.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>425</sup> Ley Sabrina van der; Richter, Markus, "After all, constructing an artwork is still building a dream", in: *Pedro Cabrita Reis One after another* (...), op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>426</sup> Melo, Alexandro., "O quadrado de ouro", in: Melo, A., et al., *Cabrita Reis Da Luz Como na Noite*, Casa da Moeda, Lisbon, 1988, p. 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>427</sup> Schwarz, Dieter, "Favorite Places: Works by Pedro Cabrita Reis", in: *Pedro Cabrita Reis One after another, a few silent steps*, Hamburg Kunsthalle, Carré d'Art-Musée d'at contemporain de Nîmes, Museu Colecção Berardo, Hamburg, Nîmes, Lisbon, 2010/2011, p. 10.
<sup>428</sup> Ibidem.

As Dieter Schwarz notices, the influences in Cabrita Reis' works are various. "His romantic concept of the painterly, which suits his disposition was sharpened by the objectification of the painting that he encountered in the works of Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Robert Ryman and Brice Marden. At the same time, in the Italian art of the nineteensixties, he encountered an incisive revolt against the object of nature of the work, the shift toward an instable, theatrical pictorial language." <sup>429</sup> Pedro Cabrita Reis' paintings are abstract and non-narrative. The square is used as an elementary geometrical shape which is supplemented with repetitive themes and symbols which are mainly geometrical. 430 "Da Luz como Da Noite" series includes constant repetitions and multiplications<sup>431</sup> of geometrical elements created from golden fields "destroyed" by contrasting, black zones. Golden leaves attached to the painting are read by Alexandro Melo as "Gold, in a metaphorical sense, is evoked here in two ways. On the one hand, it is the most precious of precious metals extracted from the earth by the labour of the human hand, calling to mind the notion of origins. On the other hand, it is a mythical material in which teleological utopias take shape - 'The golden age' – evocation of the end of time."432 The sets of forms and colours used by Cabrita Reis are reductive and repetitive. Geometrical and orthogonal shapes create lines, crosses, squares, labyrinths and stairs evoking minimalist concerns of the painting. His monochromatic pallet includes blacks: matte and shining, various shades of brown. The choice of colours allows to create a certain dramatism and mystical atmosphere.

His works, which were at first expressed in more conventional techniques of painting and drawing, started to use more mixed techniques. He attached golden leaves, wood, metal and glass to his painting, and then moved from painting to practices of collage, assemblage, various mixed techniques, and finally, installation. At the end of the decade, it is sculpture that replaced painting as a central medium used by the artist, however, the sculptures of Pedro Cabrita Reis are painterly in nature and may be treated as object paintings.

<sup>429</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>430</sup> Melo, Alexandre, *Cabrita Reis Da Luz Como na Noite*, Casa da Moeda, Lisbon, 1988, p. 79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>431</sup> Power, Kevin, "Cabrita Reis: geada tardia em feridas nocturnas", in: Melo, Alexandre, et al., *Cabrita Reis Da Luz Como na Noite*, Casa da Moeda, Lisbon, 1988, p. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>432</sup> Melo, Alexandre, Cabrita Reis Da Luz Como na Noite (...), op. cit., p. 79.

#### 3.4 "Continentes" (1986)

A completely different image of return to figuration in painting was drawn by the group of young artists who labelled themselves *homoaestethics*. The *Homeostética* Group consisted of students of ESBAL (Escola Superior de Belas Artes) in Lisbon included Fernando Brito, Ivo, Manuel Vieira, Pedro Portugal, Pedro Proença and Xana. The constitution of the collective was dictated by the desire of those young artists to create an alternative circle that would position itself against the mainstream discourse in Portugal, established mainly by the critics belonging to AICA (Rui Mário Gonçalves, Sílvia Chicó, Fernando de Azevedo), who "*only supported artists from their generation and with an anti-fascist curriculum*." Their pluralist, interdisciplinary artistic production was supplemented with an elaborated theory that revealed a critical and ludic approach.

The group recuperated the tradition of manifesto. Between 1983 and 1988 *Homeostéticos* produced more than three dozen of manifestos, majority of them written by Pedro Proença, but also by Manuel João Vieira and Fernando Brito. 435 "*However, and in contrast to what happened with the modern movements, for the homoaestethics artists the manifestos strictly served the need to produce and consume a joint sustenance.*436 The innovatory character of the collective lied in theorization of their discourse, which brought them very near to the practices of conceptualism and minimalism, combined with a paradoxical celebration of practices of quotation, pastiche and appropriation connected with a reactionary, postmodern production. As for artists who consciously used practices of appropriation, even their forms of "manifestos" were rather simulations of the earlier critical statements of ideologically and critically engaged artists. Their theoretical work, supported by artistic production, was determinate to demonstrate that art is entirely a matter of external necessity of style management – those statements suggested the *retardataire* character of criticality in the art of the 1980s (Lawson, 1981) and entailed the critical attitude of the group.

For the collective, history was understood as a whole, without beginning or end. "We are sure that art is always at the end of its cycle, in the exact point of its own movement, with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>433</sup> Brito, Maria Silva de, *Homeostética Anos 80 nas Artes Plásticas em Portugal*, Faculdade de Belas Artes Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, 2000, p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>434</sup> Xana, in Ramos, Jorge do Ó, "Homeostética Movement or the staging of complexity (in 5 brief outlines)", in: *Homeostética* 6=0 (...), op. cit., p. 280.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>435</sup> Ibidem, p. 277.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>436</sup> Ibidem.

Hegelian sunsets and other crepuscular illusions. It's identical to saying that everything is in its beginning". 437 The concept of history formulated by the group approaches the post-structuralist archaeology. Their theoretical and artistic work proposes to replace the existing measures of tradition and evolution by discontinuity, breaks and series which allow us to place them within postmodern production. Those beliefs are expressed through practices of accumulation which allow for simultaneous reinterpretations, as well as in series of breaks and returns in the group's artistic discourse (e.g. use of neo-conceptual strategies in "Spartan Education" and return to painting in "Continentes").

One of the most important principles of the group was the concept of "cannibalism" (like "cultural cannibalism" indicated by Thomas Lawson)<sup>438</sup> understood as appropriation of external languages. "The question of cannibalism can be put as such: we fed on another but it was for homoaesthetic purposes, not for practical purposes. We used each other's titles, each other's poems, each other's forms."<sup>439</sup> Homeostéticos believed that new languages may be built only on the base of the old ones. The group indicated falsification, repetition, construction and deconstruction, reproduction, style mixing and eclecticism as their main strategies.<sup>440</sup> The practice of citation did not serve to deconstruct only, but also to create a parody of images which belong to the past (myths, iconic figures), or present (politics, theory and critical discourse).

The appropriation strategy privileged by the collective takes the form of pastiche described by Fredric Jameson.<sup>441</sup> Not only does their attitude reveal the postmodern crisis in authorship (Foster, 1989) but also the post-structuralist treatment of an individual subject as myth, cultural mystification (Jameson, 1982). The stylistic innovation within the postmodern condition is no longer possible, the only strategy which an artist may apply is appropriation, mixture and accumulation of various languages within one work.<sup>442</sup> Their work (particularly images presented during the exposition "Continentes") reached for the practice of montage - ideological critique in the form of allegorical structure whose strategy is based on confiscation, superimposition and fragmentation (Buchloh, 1982).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>437</sup> Statement of Proença, Pedro, in Ramos, Jorge. "Homeostética Movement or the staging of complexity" (...), op. cit., p. 278.

<sup>438</sup> Lawson, Thomas, "Last Exit: Painting" (...), op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>439</sup> Fenando Brito in: Ramos, Jorge do Ó, "Homeostética Movement or the staging of complexity" (...), op. cit., p. 278.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>440</sup> "Of the Generalised Counter-in-duction (2 Manifesto notes) (1985-6?), in: *Homeostética* 6=0 (...), op. cit., p. 279.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>441</sup> Jameson, Fredric, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society", in: Anti-aesthetics (...), op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>442</sup> "Of the Generalised Counter-in-duction (2 Manifesto notes) (1985-6?), in: *Homeostética* 6=0 (...), op. cit., p. 279.

Irony and parody were practices used by all the members of the collective: for Pedro Portugal it was a practice of quotation, Pedro Proença and Fernando Brito included graphical languages from comic books in their works, Ivo created an eclectic mixture of primitive images with graffiti elements, Manuel Vieira mixed imagery belonging to the high and low culture.

The group has never put emphasis on the figure of "self", and neither was it driven by intimism, nor by the unconscious impulse of modernism. 443 Their production stresses the inconstancy of the subject and rhetoric of social legitimisation during the 1980s. The ironical and critical stances of *Homeostéticos*, which are visible in their painterly production, differed vaguely from all concerns presented by the painters whose works were referred to early in this chapter. The Homeostética group reflected on paradoxes existing within the Portuguese society at the time, incorporating them irreverently into their works. 444 One of the frequently touched subject matters addressed by the collective was the critique of the inferiority complex borne by many Portuguese artists in relation to their dependence on the exterior models. 445 The topic of the condition of the national culture was addressed in the text "Neo-Cannibal Proclamation" ("Proclamação Neo-Canibal") where the cultural stagnation was blamed on the persistence of the romantic cult as well as search for originality at every cost. 446 The homoaestethics reused statements of convictions conveyed by that anthropophagy group which were partially presented in the "Cannibalist Manifesto" by Oswald de Andrade. Andrade's text, usually interpreted as a contra-colonial statement, proposed to "produce national culture beyond the anxieties of influence."447 Meanwhile, most of the manifesto lines refer to the issues of harm caused by the capitalist culture, reactionary opinions voiced by the Catholic church, the oppressiveness of science and obsolete claims of the Romantic thought in Brazil. The relevant concept of "cultural cannibalism" presented in various publications became synonymous with the anthropophagy and constituted the very core of the homoaestethic theory embedded in the postmodernist strategies of appropriation and deconstruction.

The elaborated theoretical work of the group was supported by five collective expositions held between 1982 and 1986. The exhibitions may be presented as a set of breaks, discontinuities and returns. "A Country Bumpkin in New York" (1983) – the 2<sup>nd</sup> Homeostética

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>443</sup> Ramos, Jorge do Ó, "Homeostética Movement or the staging of complexity" (...), op. cit., p. 277.

<sup>444</sup> Brito, Maria Silva, Homeostética Anos 80 nas Artes Plásticas em Portugal (...), op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>445</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>446</sup> Ibidem, p. 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>447</sup> Jáuregui, Carlos, "Antropophagy", <u>www.academia.edu/6998258/Antropofagia\_Cultural\_cannibalism\_</u> - accesed on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>448</sup> Brito, Maria Silva de, *Homeostética Anos 80 nas Artes Plásticas em Portugal (...), op. cit.*, p. 14.

exhibition was an attempt to mirror discursive contradictions emerged in the post-revolutionary period, 449 as well as "satirize the condition of the newest Portuguese intelligenzia who had not even had time to digest the effects of the backlash of the revolution and already had dropped everything, at a stunning pace." The "Spartan Education" exhibition (1986) which called for the return to conceptual practices, and claimed that painting was dead, 451 was discursively opposed by the spectacle of painting organised during the fifth, and the last Homeostética exhibition – "Continentes" (1986).

"Continentes" (Continents) with its dose of irony typical of the *Homeostética* attempted to create a counterpoint to the "Archipélago" and "Costal Attitudes" expositions<sup>452</sup>, marking their position as certain "continentality". 453 "This exhibition affirmed, with a rare degree of coherence, the capacity of this group of young artists to implement a carefully thought out initiative to test he permeability of an artistic system in the throes of establishing its own maturity."454 The works presented during the show were claimed to be "the biggest paintings in history of Portuguese art" (five equal panels with five modules each, corresponding to a unit surface area of 10 x 2.5 m). 455 Each painting, accordingly to the exhibition's title, corresponded with a certain continent: Manuel Viera "portrayed" Europe, Ivo – Africa, Pedro Portugal – the Poles, Fernando Brito – America, and Pedro Proença – Asia. The only installation displayed during the exhibition was created by Xana and it corresponded with Atlantis. The works were an expression of the bigger, collective effort which allowed the artists to accumulate "all possible traditions within their works." 456

In order to "represent" continents artists search for certain cultural universals which may be referred to widespread cultural forms and systems. 457 They adapt a hermeneutic view of the culture which is fundamentally interpretative. The interpretation of specific cultural forms that are embedded in various webs of significance, does not allow to extract those forms from their context, or formulate generalizations about them. The multitude of interpretations recalls

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>449</sup> Almeida, M. Morreira, "6=0?", in: *Homeostética* 6=0 (...), op. cit., p. 275.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>450</sup> Ramos, Jorge do Ó, "Homeostética Movement or the staging of complexity" (...), op. cit., p. 280.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>451</sup> Brito, Maria Silva de, Homeostética Anos 80 nas Artes Plásticas em Portugal (...), op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>452</sup> "Atitudes litorais" (English "Costal attitudes") was an exposition curated by José Miranda Justo, held in Faculty of Arts, University of Lisbon 1984

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>453</sup> In the introduction to her master's dissertation, Maria Silva de Brito regards a certain "continentality" of the art as an important strategy of Homoaesthetics. Supposedly, Continentality served as a metaphor for opening of the art to the Other, understood as various branches of knowledge and practice. Brito, Maria Silva de, 2004

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>454</sup> Almeida, M. Morreira, "6=0?" (...), op. cit., p. 275.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>455</sup> Ramos, Jorge do Ó, "Homeostética Movement or the staging of complexity" (...), op. cit., p. 281.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>456</sup> Ibidem, p. 281.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>457</sup> McCauley, Robert N. and Lawson , E. Thomas, "Who owns 'culture'?", in: *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1996, p. 177.

Roland Barthes' "death of the author" theory which states that the meaning of a text is not inherent, but emerges from how people read or react to it. The Homoestetics inhabit a world of "texts" in which they propose to subordinate explanations to interpretations minimally.

Manuel João Vieira executed his "Europe" painting in a kitsch manner, recovering figuration and classical quotations. He implemented a pseudo ironic narration within the neosurrealist landscape. Parodied motives retrieved from the Greek mythology were supplemented with fragments of neo-classist architecture and antique sculpture. Ivo's "Africa" piece mirrors the neo-primitive approach, contaminated with a certain amount of brutalism. The painting may be positioned between abstract and figurative representation. The fragmented narrative is created with various elements scattered throughout the canvas. They may be associated with animal and human figures. In his "Ásia", Pedro Proença creates a caricature of traditional painting by producing bizarre, mutated figures supported by the quotation of his own works. His language is metamorphic, expansive and ornamental. He favours small, fragmented narratives which create an eclectic effect if juxtaposed randomly. The central panel of "Ásia" has a narrative and cerographic imagery; the left panel consists of a fragmented composition; the right panel includes various emblematic symbols, overlapped chaotically. In "The Poles", Pedro Portugal erased figures in order to give a space to various quotations from different works of art, creating a certain decorative structure from the painting. The work includes quotations from the works of Ângelo de Sousa, Jorge Pinheiro, Jorge Martins, Lanhas, Rodrigo, João Vieira, Batarda, Pedro Cabrita Reis, Pedro Calapez, Pedro Proença and others such as Barnett Newman. 458 Fernando Brito's landscapes labelled by him as "colonial neo-post-modernism" 459 were filled with triumphal arches, bridges, obelisks, pyramids and Olympic stadiums. In his "América", Brito created a geometrical composition with architectural evocations, similar to pre-Colombians pyramids, possible altars of rituals. 460

Undoubtedly, the exhibition contributed to the diversified, cultural climate characterised by multiple ambiguities when the Portuguese art scene was evolving from the post-revolutionary period. Parodical production, which conveyed a highly critical content supported by the theoretical approach and collective thought, makes the Homeostética Group unlike every artist presented in this work or a trend linked to return to painting. And although the strategies used by the artists are embedded in reactionary postmodernism, they may be treated as a critique

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>458</sup> Santos, R. A., "A Revolução Homeostética", in: *Homeostética* 6=0 (...), op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>459</sup> Ramos, Jorge do Ó, "Homeostética Movement or the staging of complexity" (...), op. cit., p. 282.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>460</sup> Santos, R. A., "A Revolução Homeostética" (...), op. cit., p. 90.

of reactionarism, its pastiche form revealed in the postmodern crisis of authorship (Foster, 1986). During the 1990s, some artists belonging to the group took a more definite position in terms of cultural critique, social commentary and political interventions.<sup>461</sup>

In summary, the various concerns evoked by the exhibitions and artists presented here in different ways and with specific assumptions surpassed the mainstream discourse established by the conceptual practices. The complexity of discourses and dynamics created through the artists' retrieval of pictorial languages proceeded to ruptures, continuities, returns and rediscoveries, advances and eliminations. The "tradition of the new" appeared in the first half of the 1980s through coexistence of tastes, trends and styles. Those features supplemented with the desire for international affirmation of the works lead to the creation of a new type of commodity images revealed in reification of a historical subject.

The inability to create a coherent movement and establish "pluralism as an institution" could not sustain. Not only did the strictly reactionary works function as anti-modern, or anti-avant-garde productions, but also as a certain type of anti-postmodernism, because they abandoned any reflection on the problems which the exhaustion of high modernism brought in the first place. The postmodern pictorial practices proved to be incapable of creating an alternative to the modernist discourse. Their critical potential was almost completely ignored. In this light, it is important to acknowledge the change in the critical perspective which arose at the end of the decade. Artists returned to the neo-conceptual practices (e.g. Pedro Proença, Leonel Moura), defending the necessity to continue the "modern project". To some extent, it is important to recognise that return to painting was a type of a "transition phase" or just a trend which went out of fashion.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>461</sup> Melo, Alexandre, Arte Plásticas em Portugal: Dos Anos 70 aos Nossos Dias, DIFEl, Lisbon, 1998.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>462</sup> Imagens por anos 90, Serralves Foundation, Oporto, 1993, p. 65.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>463</sup> Jürgens, Sandra Vieira. *Instalações Provisórias (...), op. cit.*, p. 350.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>464</sup> Moura, Leonel, "Boomerang", in: Depois do Modernismo (...), op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>465</sup> Foster, Hal, The Return of the Real (...), op. cit., p. 88.

### **Conclusions**

The postmodern procedures, including appropriation, deconstruction and fragmentation, which are characteristic of a number of major transavantgarde and neo-expressionism artists, are exploited by the Portuguese painters extremely effectively and in their own, unique way. Although dialogues and influences among artists are inevitable, we should not perceive return to painting in Portugal as a local appropriation of those international trends.

As I wrote in the third chapter of this dissertation, return to painting in Portugal was not revealed in any coherent trend. Therefore, little may be said about new figurative painting in general terms, apart from the fact that it celebrated the textual implosion into aesthetics, as was the case with many postmodern artists during the 1980s. There are historical preconditions which are useful in understanding the turn toward figurative painting in Portugal. After the 25<sup>th</sup> of April Revolution the need to "catch up" with the contemporary art world seemed important. After decades of political and cultural isolation the artist were allowed to explore art using new forms of expressions, renewed information and new media. The desire for Portugal to reconnect with the rest of the Europe becomes visible in the artistic production: firstly through a collective explosion of conceptual practices, and secondly through a painterly expression which followed the international trend of return to figurative painting. In the 1980s Portuguese art went through a process of internationalization which allowed to homologate it in a wider scene of the European culture. The debate prompted by José-Augusto França regarding "national characteristics" lost its overall sense, if it ever had any. The pluralist condition of the Western art scene at the time influenced the Portuguese artists. Therefore, New Painting in Portugal may sensibly be seen as part of a larger cultural and social movement which may be connected with the phenomenon of reactionary postmodernism described by Hal Foster. The painterly modes of Portuguese artists aimed at being open to the figure of the Other and insisted on international influences in their works rather than emphasised the regional and national traditions which proved to be vital in German and Italian painting. The new figurative painting in Portugal was a reaction to a hermetic isolation of the local art scene from the influences of international avant-garde under Salazar's dictatorship, and was also a reaction against the opposition to this state art in the form of a blend of surrealism and Taschisme imported from Paris and promoted by J.-A. França. Those oppositions did not bring a counter-proposition to modernism, but they did challenge the exclusionary notion of modernism and the position of Portuguese art as "peripherical", which is sustained in the Portuguese historiography. The emphasis put on cosmopolitan rather than vernacular by the majority of artists presented in the third chapter contribute to the enrichment of the image of reactionary postmodernism.

Those attempts to reconnect with the figure of the Other may be analysed using the examples of paintings by Julião Sarmento and Pedro Proença. Julião Sarmento was one of the first Portuguese artists whose works came to the forefront at international exhibitions after the 25<sup>th</sup> April Revolution. His painting came to fulfil the desire for internationalization presented at various exhibitions. The desire to connect with a broadly understood Western culture is a very important aspect of Sarmento's works from the early-1980s. His return to representation points toward an intertextual representation, and expressive imagery in his works reflects a conception of emotive forces which are not grounded in a unified subject. The theoretical work of postmodernists such as Barthes and Derrida, or Jameson who interpret culture on an intertextual basis allows to clarify the central issues raised in Sarmento's works.

The paintings on paper which were created by Sarmento between 1981 and 1986 exploit the fragmentation of the narrative strategy which was typical of reactionary postmodernism. Those procedures, so characteristic of the works of neo-expressionists (e.g. David Salle), or transavantgardists (seen in the works of Julião Sarmento) reach a new level, making them one of the most interesting examples of postmodern fragmentary painting. The cycle "White Nights" (1982) is a type of fragmentary montage which allows us to understand the fragmentary experience of the contemporary world (Power, 1991). Those images are inclusive, rather than exclusive and eclectic in their imagery. The fragmentation used as a methodology of oppositions allows Sarmento to tune up emotional tensions through juxtaposition of images that justify and intensify each other's meanings, or using contradictory, ambiguous images which introduce imbalance. The fragmented imagery consists of juxtaposed images, graphic symbols and words dispersed in sequences on various screens. All the imagery creates a certain subversion of traditional narrative model, privileging the practice of montage (Buchloh, 1982), where every element breaks the linearity and continuity of the narrative. Sarmento's focus is rather on possible tensions between isolated images, which forces the viewer to believe that underneath the layers and scrapings may lie another store of images, which, on the other hand, implies infinite multiplications of possibilities of interpretations of the work (Barthes).

The montage technique in Sarmento's works is related to the semiotics of the film. The artist attempts to surpass restrictions of a singular image. He creates affirmative or negative

narratives which allow the artist to isolate and fetishize represented images, or objects. Those indeterminacies include all manners of ambiguities and displacements which are affecting knowledge and society (Hassan, 1986). The cinematic notion of sequentiality and, in particular the practice of image cutting allows Sarmento to extend his imagery beyond its formal limits. 466 The challenging correlation between fixed imagery of painting and motion of the cinema serves to analyse tensions between dynamics in various types of images. The openness of cinematographic image, which Sarmento reuses in his painterly modes, was a concept on the basis of which Roland Barthes constructed the theory of the death of the author. This very specific method of composing an image in Sarmento's works, analysed by many art scholars and critics, allows us to identify hybridisation of his works as one of his main methods revealed in heterogeneity of the painting.

The use of representation imagery within Sarmento's paintings/collages is fundamental to understanding the way in which he structures his original representation. The conflict presented by means of referential features in "Noites Brancas" (1982) approaches the use of familiar images for a purpose different to a realistic reference. Sarmento uses pornographic scenes, representation of various objects and animals without reducing them to objective references. In particular, our understanding of a potentially expressive subject in Sarmento's works is altered by the author's complex use of textual strategies. The accumulative, referential imagery testifies to the fact that in Barthes' terms the text is a field in which various writings clash with each other (Barthes). The vocabulary of Sarmento, consisting of his abundant use of both pictorial and literary quotations, seem to suggest a certain narrative, but it does not define the meaning of his work. The title itself is a certain narrative and constitutes an inseparable part of the work. The name "Noites Brancas" ("White Nights") is appropriated from the title of a Fyodor Dostoevsky's short story about loneliness and a failed romance. The white nights are a time of solitude and insomnia, but also include the idea of "wet dreams", which indicates the erotic content dominating Sarmento's imagery.

The series consists of six collages – variations which relate to the very same topic: loneliness, sadness and isolation. The reappearing images are violent, erotic and frequently contradictory. Those ambiguous images create a series of connotations, and structure a certain type of relationships. All fragmentary images of the series are grouped around the central panel

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>466</sup> More about specific interrelations between cinema, photography and painting in Julião Sarmento's works may be found in: Mesquita, Miguel and Marques, Bruno, "Narrativas de Imagem e (Anti)Expanded Cinema em Julião Sarmento" in: *aniki Portuguese Journal of the Moving Image*.

with erotic imagery. Sarmento uses genres of sexual representation appropriated from pornography, advertising and commercial filmmaking. Representations of female nudity dominate the upper section of the collage and are usually incomplete, demonstrated in close-ups, with the erotic scene difficult to read and rather abstract to the viewer. Those are compelling images that constitute the sensual character of the work that is supplemented with additional, violent or neutral images. Those "supplementary images" extend, contradict, or even neutralise the dominant sexual expressiveness of his imagery. Sarmento's own artistic practices may appear to lend support to Derrida's idea of original representation which produces spacing (espacement) that the viewer is unable to comprehend due to her inability to unify conflicting "texts" (Derrida, 1967). The result is disturbing clashes unresolvable by a rational method. Sarmento manipulates with images, exploits various languages in order to introduce various, multiple readings. His vocabulary consists of art history references, autobiography and the language of primary forms. With the written captions, which are either quotations or his own inventions, it constitutes the material of his painterly discourse.

Images from the cycle "Noites Brancas" may be considered an example of Sarmento's postmodern representation. The first two collages/paintings are rather expressionistic in their imagery and the colour pallet used. The first painting consisting of three panels is dominated by a pornographic scene which is rather abstract in its imagery. The screen below represents a headless female nude with a caption "The Tiger springs in the New Year. As he devours, think at last" by T.S. Eliot. There is a caption which reads "ALCAME" placed on the crotch of a depersonalized female figure. Both images are supplemented with image of a foot in high heel shoe – most likely a symbol of an erotic encounter, or just a fetishist object which reappears in various works of Sarmento. The second painting from the series includes a pornographic scene in the top panel complemented with two smaller ones: an archaic imagery of a lying stick figure painted in red and a hand holding a knife – the image which Sarmento reuses in different works of the cycle. The images, although fragmentary and incomplete, are complemented with an inscription: "Se te rasgo o corpo dele só sobrará o tempo que do tempo ainda houver" ("If I tear your body it will only remain the time that remains of time"). The sexual and violent content refers to sex and death as well as establishes tensions between images using contrasting colours that refer to blood (red), death (white) and the human figure (grey and black line). Connotations to rituals, sadomasochistic acts and sex games dominate the imagery of "Mordaça" where the dominant image of a masked man, a knife and a gagged woman is juxtaposed with a close-up image of a female with her legs spread, a shawl and sentences written in red paint on the white background: "When sometimes resistance seems no longer to know any limits, stoicism can be confused with madness." The knife and the legs are an integral part of Sarmento's picture repertoire which repetitively returns in various Sarmento's images in the form of fetishist images, a metaphor for sexual encounter and a symbol of violence, even death.

Those images allow us to observe Derrida's phenomenon of "spacing". The disturbing power of Sarmento's images lies mainly in their placing between vantage points, which makes sense in isolation, but when conjoined, it produces conflicted positions (Derrida, 1967). This characteristic of Sarmento's works supports the postmodern discourse which challenges the modernist discourse rather than overcomes modernism. His intertextual strategies based on fragmentation and eruption of text as well as semiotics of cinema and photography have more to do with exposition of the modern myths than their negation. The procedures reflect collective sources derived from the new media which govern the postmodern time.

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In Pedro Proença's paintings the postmodern condition was reflected in a completely different way. The critical discourse included in his imagery supported by various theoretical texts (written by Proença on behalf of the Homeoasthetics group) allows us to read his fragmented, eclectic images as a postmodern position which aims to undermine the modernist tradition. He writes in the "National Culture" manifesto of 1985:

"The Modern Tradition denies in order to affirm, the Homeoaesthetics Tradition affirms in order to deny." 467

The criticality which is the main aspect of his works extends beyond critique of the modernist discourse and implements social, historical and political matters. In the absence of a modernist paradigm, the main method used by Proença is irony which turns to some eclectic game with various languages, a dialogue with appropriated works, allegory and finally self-reflection. The irony of his work assumes stylistic and narrative indeterminacies and multivalence of the works which is an attempt to achieve clarity of demystification (Derrida). Those features lead to the hybridization of the discourse: parody, travesty, or pastiche, which reflects the postmodern crisis in authorship (Foster). Those replications of genres call for a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>467</sup> All translations of Pedro Proença's text after Dale, Martin and Kundert, Thomas in: *Homeostética* 6=0/coord. Ramos, Maria, Serralves Foundation, Oporto, 1993, pp. 285-293.

"different concept of tradition, one in which continuity and discontinuity, high and low culture, mingle not to imitate but to expand the past in the present." 468

Proença's pictorial and representation practices, which may be observed in the example of "Ásia" (1986), deliberately point toward an intertextual basis for representation. He mixes imagery from several different domains: Early Christian, byzantine art and primitive painting. Mannerism, religious, mythological and historical motifs are gathered together in paradoxical works which express admiration for modernist tradition, with a simultaneous inclusion of the trends marginalized by it. The subjects touched in "Ásia" (1986) are mythology and religion oriented. The direct influence of the work was Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" which was revealed in a large canvas and fragmentised narrative. The work theoretically opposes the modernist idea of an artist as an "outcast" from society as well as attempts to undermine the notion of territoriality in art (also the notion of periphery) by larger masses of contacts, interinfluences, debates and collective thought (manifested by appropriation, quotation and plagiarism). The work testifies to the postmodern globalisation, a certain submission of cultural models to randomness of the capital market which leads to comparison and assimilation of various cultural models (Jameson, 1996).

In the central panel of his fragmented imagery Pedro Proença creates a narrative scene where various images belonging to the "high" and "low" culture are incorporated in the form of language games, in the differences that "reality" is made pluralistically, making it impossible to distinguish between simulation and reality (Baudrillard, 1981). The dark skinned human figures represent a yogi, Sapera (snake charmer) and a fakir. The figures are staged in stylized architectural spaces which include references to the classical architecture, ornament, Kamasutra and graphic novels and are surrounded by various plants and attributes. The orthogonal imagery of the left panel includes various references to the works of other Homeoaesthetics, including Fernando Brito's "neo-colonial" architecture, Ivo's abstract paintings or Xana's sculptures. The left side of the painting contains a fragmented image which finds its "another half" in the right panel. The imagery of both parts refers to warfare, soldiers and barricades affirmed by drips of red paint and a caption which reads "ACTION JÁ SION". The right panel includes a stereotypical figure of an Asian man with a Fu Manchu moustache wearing a conical hat and something resembling a mawashi (sumo belt). The man is attributed with "emblematic"

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>468</sup> Hassan, Ihab, "Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective", in: *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, No. 3 (Spring 1986), p. 506.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>469</sup> Proença Pedro/ interview by Oliveira, Filipa in: *Pedro Proença*, Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon, 2001, p. 36.

symbols which include a gong, a mallet, a "Chinese" vase and an opium pipe, which emphasises the ironic character of the image. The "unlimited" two-colour squares imposed on the image remind of Ângelo de Sousa's monochromatic paintings (which were referred to in the third chapter of this dissertation).

Those conflicting images represent a form of eclectic confusion, or reflect a strategy, on the artist's part, to separate his work from practices of modernism. By means of reworking the past codes and "vernacular" imagery mixed with "popular" elements, it breaks with a high modernist convention of painting. Proença does not act as a revivalist aiming to revalue the status of historical representation, but rather uses his sources as "cultural signs", combining them subjectively and manipulating with their signified, denying the cult of innovation. The critical pluralism of Proeça's works may not only be seen as a reaction to modernism. To some extent it was a reaction against cultural relativism, and a shortage of theoretical support for the postmodern condition of the 1980s. The artist exploits the practices of appropriation which call for re-interpretation of an appropriated artwork which functions as an allegorical structure (Buchloh, 1982). This allegorical and symbolical dimension of imagery is emphasised by its critical character. The critique of the work is pointed at the colonialist past of Portugal and imperialist nostalgia of the Portuguese.

The quote "Da Datta: what have we given? Da Dayadhvam: I have heard the key Da Damyata: The Boat responded...Shantih Shantih Shantih" imposed on the yellow square above the human figure in the right panel of "Ásia" might be crucial for understanding the critical edge of Proença's painting. It originates from a poem by T.S. Eliot, "The Wasteland" (1922), which, because of its complexity, is prone to multiple interpretations, but, in general, expressed disillusionment with the industrialized modern world and the idea of modern "progress", suggesting that the modern world was a wasteland. In his poem T.S. Eliot uses various forms of appropriation and quotes from "high" and "low" literal forms, which is one of the main strategies used by Pedro Proença (explained explicitly in his text On Generalised Counter-*Induction*, 1985/6 and pointed out in the third chapter of this dissertation). Simultaneously, both Proença and Eliot treat fragmentation as a theme and technique applied in their work. Eliot uses fragmentation because the place which he describes is broken. The fragmentation of "Ásia" might mean both fragmentation of the contemporary experience in the era of advanced capitalism, or serve as a source of critique for colonial and postcolonial practices of ex-empires. Hence, he presents Asia as a land which was broken, destroyed by imperial colonialist forces, which may be symbolised by a broken, yet glued, vase placed in the right panel. Those critical ideas were supported by Proença in "Les Animacules Homeosthétiques" (1986). "We are guilty of colonialism, yes indeed, but we decided to forget them and hand over the territories to the indigenous revolutionaries, to their civil wars and consequent economic ruin. Mea Culpa is not enough! (...) The Portuguese diaspora was naïve and evangelical. We are neither naïve nor evangelical." It is followed by: "This exhibition [Continentes] is the cartography of an imaginary imperialism, without territories, intended, if you like to animate French-speaking intellectuals, nomads." The "megalomania" of the work aims to mock the very idea of the empire. The subversion in Proenca's work comes with a derision of authority and revision of the historical material which demystifies knowledge, decanonizes culture and deconstructs languages of power (Lyotard, 1979).

The expressions Da Datta, Da Dayadhvam and Da Damyata are from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, which is an ancient philosophical text rooted in the Buddist and Hindu concepts. They mean "give", "compassion" and "control" respectively – an ethical responsibility for each and every person. "Shantih" – means peace, rest and calmness is a mantra in the Sanskrit language. On the basis of the above, we may say that apart from profound criticism Proença's painting expresses a potential hope for individual and social improvement. The painting expresses a potential for peace which was not achieved through the process of decolonization.

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The works presented above allow us to demonstrate a diversity with which Portuguese artists used the postmodern appropriation, quotation and fragmentation strategies. The examples of Julião Sarmento's "Noites Brancas" and Pedro Proença's "Ásia", although disparate in the way they break with the tradition of modernism, exploit intertextual practices which lead to the fetishist fragmentation of the sign and historical subject proposed by the poststructuralist theory and practiced by many postmodern painters. Depth models in those paintings are replaced by multiple surfaces which allow to read the works in various ways (Jameson, 1986). Those premises enable a certain radicalization of representation: when the original relationship of references is only related to a game of differences, and each of them has some claim on our attention that it is nearly impossible to comprehend how various fragments

 $<sup>^{470}</sup>$  In "Les Animacules Homeothétiques" (1986), Pedro Proença claimed that "The CONTINENTES Exhibition has a whiff of megalomania".

acquire the significance— anything that could go beyond their emotive power. Postmodernist painting, as was the case with poststructuralism, returned to representation in order to challenge its image as a critically neutral activity which was sustained in the accounts of art historians. Those features, demonstrated with various examples throughout this dissertation, support the conclusion that intertextual strategies used by "reactionary" painters had more to do with exposing and demystifying modernist myths than contributing to the new era in art. Nevertheless, postmodern painting of the 1980s could not be dismissed from historical accounts as a culturally unimportant creation of the capitalist market. At last, it is worth remembering that many works presented in this dissertation, despite their qualitative differences, reflected topical, social and political preconditions of the contemporary world. Therefore, we may claim that painters did not limit themselves to the role of revivalists assigned to them by critics, but rather dissolve their pictorial practices in the form of critical pluralism which may be seen as a radical reaction against cultural relativism and indeterminacies of the postmodern condition.

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