

Ana Jotta: Skeleton of a Life

by Miguel Wandschneider

Ana Jotta was born in Lisbon in 1946.

In 1963-1964, she attended the Escola Superior de Belas-Artes de Lisboa. There she met Gäetan, who many years later would become one of her accomplices in the art world, conceiving a joint exhibition with her, collecting her work and writing an indispensable text about it.

In the Spring of 1965, she moved to Brussels, where she attended the École Supérieure d'Architecture et d'Arts Visuels de La Cambre for a few months, spending a great deal of her time in the tapestry studio.

By the end of 1966, she was back in Lisbon.

Between 1970 and 1972, she had her first and last job with regular hours and a salary at the end of the month, working as a graphic artist at Publicações Europa-América, where she designed book covers.

From late 1974 to 1976, she lived in Funchal, putting her body and soul into painting.

In 1977, she designed the costumes and the set for the play *The Mistress of the Inn* by Carlo Goldoni, produced by Teatro Hoje and directed by Carlos Fernando. She would again collaborate with the same theatre group two years later, being responsible for the costumes, set design and lighting for the play *Miss Julie* by August Strindberg, directed once more by Carlos Fernando.

Her involvement with the Produções Teatrais group, which is to say with the stage director, researcher and teacher of Theatre Studies, Osório Mateus, was one of the most defining chapters in her life. In 1978, she participated not only as a set and costume designer, but also as an actress, in the group's first play *Jacques the Fatalist and his Master* by Denis Diderot, adapted by Luiza Neto Jorge. The following year, she designed the sets and the costumes for *Spring Awakening* by Frank Wedekind. And, in 1980, she spent several months in Venice, working with Osório Mateus and Helena Domingues on recovering the oral tradition of the plays that compose the *Trilogy of the Ships* by Gil Vicente and on their transposition into three separate theatrical actions set in atypical locations in that city.

The theatre led her, in turn, to the cinema: she designed the sets for the films *The Other One* (1980) by João Botelho and *Silvestre* (1981) by João César Monteiro.

Before this, however, she had already made her debut in the world of art. In 1979, she participated in the drawing biennale *Lis'79 – Lisbon International Show*. The jury (which included Achille Bonito Oliva, Georg Jappe and Fernando Pernes) accepted the three pieces that she submitted to the competition. The exhibition was held at Galeria Nacional de Arte Moderna, in Lisbon, and was then presented at Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis, in Porto. Two years later, she competed in the second edition of that biennale, which was, however, to be cancelled when Galeria Nacional de Arte Moderna was destroyed in a fire, together with the works for the exhibition, which were stored there. On this occasion, besides competing under her own name, she also submitted for the appreciation of the jury (composed of Rudi Fuchs, Donald Kuspit and Fernando Pernes) three pieces created by a heteronym, Al Cartio, who, according to the information published in the catalogue, was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1951, and studied Art History at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, in Halifax, Canada. In both cases, the jury selected one of the three pieces submitted to the competition.

Her collaboration with Osório Mateus continued with the same intensity as before. In 1982, she designed the sets and the costumes for *Konflenz*, a production by Teatro da Cantina Velha, which took the form of a lecture given by the character Jakob Lenz; and she was one of the actors in *Irrivir*, an impromptu performance of the play *Come and Go* by Samuel Beckett. In 1984, she worked as a set designer, costume designer and actress in the play *Garrettismos*, composed from a collage of texts on the life of the writer Almeida Garrett made by Luiza Neto Jorge. Finally, in 1987, she interpreted the female character in *The Two-Character Play*, by Tennessee Williams, the last production by Produções Teatrais, and consequently marking the epilogue of her activities in the world of theatre. In 1985, in conjunction with Gäetan, she conceived the exhibition *Gäetana, Living-Room*, which brought together pieces by both artists, at Galeria EMI – Valentim de Carvalho, in Lisbon.

It was at Galeria EMI – Valentim de Carvalho that she also held her first two solo exhibitions: *May I Be Dog*, in 1987, and *Lassie's Courage*, in 1988. In 1989, two simultaneous exhibitions followed at Galeria Diferença, in Lisbon: *Portraits* and *Drinks*, resulting from an invitation by the critic and curator Manuel Castro Caldas.

Then, and also later, Manuel Castro Caldas selected many of her pieces for the collection of the Fundação Luso-Americana para o Desenvolvimento. It was also through Manuel Castro Caldas that, in 1989, she began to work with the newly-created Galeria Alda Cortez, in Lisbon, where she was to hold four solo exhibitions: *Firmness I and II*, in 1990; *Painting*, in 1991; *Mon Petit Crochet*, in 1992 (which travelled in the following year to Galeria Berini, in Barcelona); and *Lesson 11 and 12*, in 1995. Also worth mentioning here is the exhibition in collaboration with her friend Pedro Casqueiro in 1994, entitled simply *Jotta & Casqueiro*.

The second half of the 1990s was a period of creative crisis for her, during which she produced only a few pieces. Consequently, there were no solo exhibitions during those years.

This did not prevent her from responding positively to a public commission, conceiving two works for the area of the Lisbon World Exposition – Expo '98. Neither of those pieces ever came to be made.

In 2000, she conjured her prolonged creative crisis into a painting, in which one sentence taken from a film of the time stands out in particular: we can cut with the past, but the past cannot cut with us; and where it was also possible to read the following question, written in the bottom left corner: is there life after work?

In 2001, she did an exhibition at Galeria Módulo, in Lisbon, which was to bring an end to the above-mentioned interregnum. *Is There Life After Work?* was to be its title.

That same year, Loja da Atalaia, in Lisbon, showed a series of pieces created in collaboration with the designer Filipe Faísca, at an exhibition entitled *Jotta & Faísca, Collection*.

As always, her solo exhibitions came one after another in keeping with the rhythm of her successive series of works: in 2002, *Monoparental*, at Galeria Quadrado Azul, in Porto; in 2003, *Amor Vacuí*, at Lisboa 20 Arte Contemporânea; in 2005, *Painting, Painting*, at Galeria Filomena Soares, and *Elsewhere*, at Galeria João Esteves de Oliveira, both in Lisbon.

In 2005, a large retrospective of her work over the course of twenty-five years, *Ana Jotta Street*, was organised at Museu de Serralves, in Porto, curated by João Fernandes.

Following that exhibition, João Fernandes, then the museum's director, incorporated into its collection a vast and thorough selection of the artist's works. At that same time, another large and diverse group of her pieces was to find its way into the Collection of the Caixa Geral de Depósitos bank, at the suggestion of Miguel Wandschneider.

From 2006 onwards, she exhibited regularly at Lisboa 20 Arte Contemporânea, later renamed Galeria Miguel Nabinho – Lisboa 20, which is located in Campo de Ourique, the neighbourhood where she has lived since 1980. Since then, she has held eleven exhibitions at that gallery, namely: *Luna Park*, in 2006; *21 Artistes pour demain*, in 2008; *Pontinha, Rat Station*, in 2010; *Great Masters of Crime Literature*, in 2010; *Red Desert*, in 2014; and *Fala-Só [The One Who Speaks to Himself]*, in 2017.

S/he is Her/e was the title of her exhibition at Chiado 8 Arte Contemporânea, in Lisbon, in 2008, curated by Ricardo Nicolau, who since then has been a very active interpreter of her work.

In 2012, her site-specific intervention at Praça do Toural, in Guimarães, was completed, a work commissioned by the organisers of the European Capital of Culture in that city.

In 2013, through the mediation of Ricardo Nicolau, the Parisian gallery gb agency organised her first solo exhibition abroad, *Encore!* The following year brought an exhibition at Culturgest, in Lisbon, curated by Miguel Wandschneider, revisiting her work since the retrospective at Museu de Serralves. The artist called it *The Conclusion of the Precedent*.

While that exhibition was taking place, she was awarded the EDP Foundation Art Prize (the jury was composed, among others, of Gloria Moure, Frédéric Paul, João Pinharanda and João Fernandes). The following year, *The Conclusion of the Precedent* would earn the artist the AICA Award 2014 (Bruno Marchand and Catarina Rosendo formed part of the jury).

In 2016, Culturgest presented the exhibition *Cassandra* in Porto, which would be significantly transformed, some months later, at Etablissement d'en face, in Brussels, receiving the title *Portuguese handicraft*. Both exhibitions were the fruit of an ongoing dialogue between the artist and Miguel Wandschneider.

Between those two exhibitions, there were multiple signs of a growing interest in her work in the international context: she had a solo exhibition at Crédac, in Ivry-sur-Seine, *Ti re li re*, curated by Claire Le Restif; she took part in the Liverpool Biennale; and she had her first exhibition at the ProjecteSD gallery, in Barcelona, *Before I Forget*.

In 2017, she was awarded the Rosa Schapire Art Prize by the Hamburger Kunsthalle, a decision which in that edition was entrusted to Penelope Curtis, director of the Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, in Lisbon.

That same year, her exhibition *Das-ist-Das?* took place at the Temporary Gallery, in Cologne, orchestrated by Regina Barunke and Miguel Wandschneider.

In 2018, subverting the expectations associated with the EDP Foundation Art Prize, she held a small exhibition in a vacant space near the Museu de Arte, Arquitectura e Tecnologia, in Lisbon, instead of the expected retrospective or anthological exhibition in that museum. She called it *Bonus*.

In that same year, she briefly returned to the theatre, designing the costumes and the set for the choreographic play *Where is the Coat?*, by João dos Santos Martins and Cyriaque Villemaux, performed at the Circular festival, in Vila do Conde, and at the Temps d'Image festival, in Lisbon.

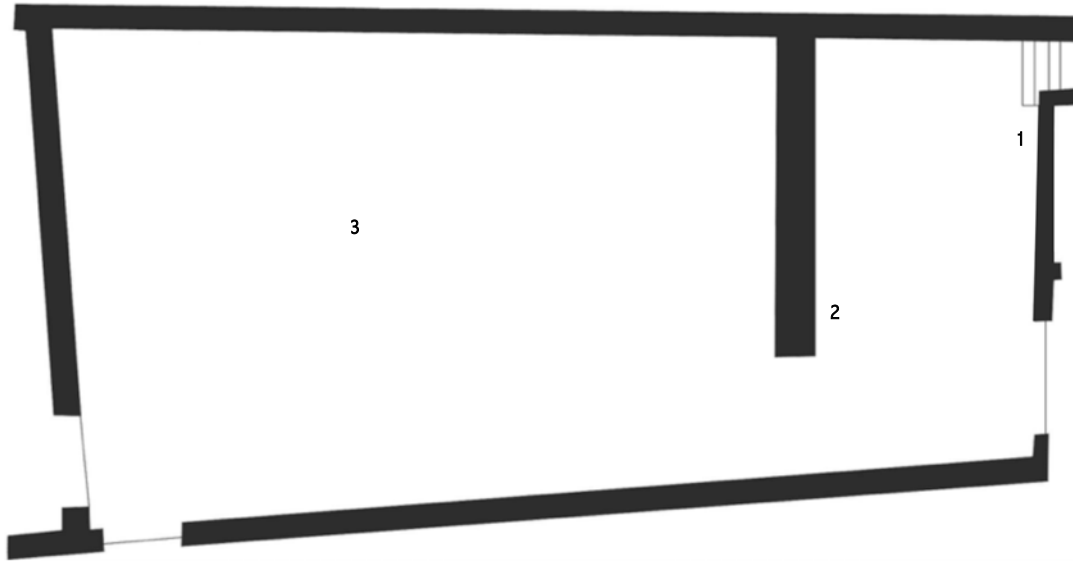
Also in 2018, Al Cartio enjoyed a second incarnation at the hands of the artist Ricardo Valentim, while she invented a second heteronym, Constance Ruth Howes, born in Baltimore in 1947. The two fictional artists shared the exhibition *Al Cartio and Constance Ruth Howes from A to C*, at the Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, in Lisbon.

In 2019, she participated, alongside Joëlle de La Casinière and Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, in the exhibition *Three Moral Tales* at Konsthall Malmö, resulting from a proposal made by the curator François Piron.

This year is ending in a relentless cycle of solo exhibitions: *Parterre*, at Guimarães, in Vienna; *Inventória*, at Casa São Roque – Centro de Arte, in Porto; *Don't flinch, don't fall, leave the light on*, at greengrassi, in London; and the last one at ProjecteSD, in Barcelona.

Ana Jotta

Don't flinch, don't fall, leave the light on



All work 2019

1 *Je dors, je travaille / I sleep, I work*

bronze

2 *Levamos tempo, mas chegamos / It took a while, but we made it*

pyrex, table, tray and candles, ashtray and ostrich egg

3 *Composição / Composition*

mirror, painted iron coat stand, clamps, bamboo, yarn, plastic bottle, twig