



# FUNDAÇÃO CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN

## CENTRO DE ARTE MODERNA JOSÉ DE AZEREDO PERDIGÃO

### **JOAQUIM BRAVO** (1935-1990)

Joaquim Bravo was born in Évora, Portugal, in 1935. A self-taught artist, he attended the Faculdade de Letras de Lisboa (Humanities School of the University of Lisbon) where he received a solid education in literature and philosophy. Beginning in the 1960s he established friendships with Álvaro Lapa, Charrua, Palolo and Areal, which contributed to defining a field of cultural intervention marked by surrealist literary values and dadaist innovation.

In 1963 he had his first one-person show at Galeria 111 in Lisbon, which was characterised by the direct influence of Pollock's Abstract Expressionism, and also by unexpected critical approval. As a consequence of this easy success he decided to travel to Germany where he remained for two years. 1964 could be considered a year of rupture, and at the same time, a fundamental milestone in the evolution of his work. Without having any sort of professional artistic support, Bravo was still able to transform his stay in Germany into a reorganisation of his work and his references. He visited museums and galleries and went to Kassel to see Documenta IV. In Kassel he made contact with the international avant-garde, and from this exposure to new ideas, reevaluated the path he was following. He also encountered the emerging artists of New Abstraction and the first expressions of Pop Art. Bravo singled out the artists that influenced him – on one hand Ellsworth Kelly and Morris Louis, and on the other hand Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, artists whose formal register he recognizably appropriates, only to later subvert.

Bravo definitively abandoned the formal paths of Expressionism, but remained faithful to some of its principles – the total rejection of the illusionist traditions of European painting, the idea of myth and the ritual meaning of making, art seen as adventure.

Starting from these premises, the artist proceeded with his personal research. Defined by an attitude of refusal towards the established visual arts world, and deviating from aesthetic movements and styles, he built a kind of territory of exclusion.

His work developed as a mental balancing act that sought the renovation of an abstract poetics. Paul Klee, Malevitch, Duchamp, and Picabia were artists that he used as a base for his particular – and particularly unclassifiable – discourse on instabilities.

When he returned to Portugal in 1966 he settled in the city of Lagos. During the period 1966 to 1971 he exhibited rarely and then only in group

shows. But he worked intensely, especially in the area of drawing, which he developed rapidly and in continuous series – sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory and often unpredictable. This was a period of pure creativity and total freedom of action. Two key sculptures from these years include *Pato* (Duck, 1967-69) and *Bota Romana* (Roman Boot, 1969). At the same time, he established his area of personal research as a draftsman. An activity of introspection and isolation, drawing allowed him to establish “scape itineraries”, through the making of successive series wherein he tried to deconstruct his references. This was a creative process consisting of the systematic search for unknown formal solutions. For Bravo painting represented a turning inside out of this pictorial line of thought, the clarified information of these previous states.

The beginning of the decade of the 1970s was characterised by a return to exhibiting.

In 1971 he had a one-man show at Galeria Quadrante in Lisbon where he exhibited paintings, drawings and one sculpture, a group of works that are close to a Hard-edge aesthetic of simplified geometrical structures and well defined colour planes. During the next two years he exhibited paintings at the Galeria Buchholz at Rui Mário Gonçalves’ invitation, which have a strong sense of operating in terms of visual information, yet all the same, are evidence of the consolidation of a personal vocabulary. Joaquim Bravo used the full power of the gesture, together with the skillful manipulation of geometry and a powerful material energy to counter the tranquil discourse of New Geometry.

Between 1973 and 1982 he did not exhibit by himself. It represented another long period of withdrawal and introspection, interrupted only by occasional participation in group shows.

His return was at António Cerveira Pinto’s personal invitation to exhibit at the Galeria Municipal de Artes Visuais de Setúbal (The Setúbal Municipal Gallery of Visual Arts). It marked the end of Bravo’s tendency towards isolation and withdrawal. The demand of the market became implacable and in 1984 he accepted Maria Nobre Franco’s invitation to join the future Galeria EMI-Valentim de Carvalho, where he had one-person shows in 1986, 1987 and 1989.

Without metaphors or narratives the work of Joaquim Bravo progressed with ease at this time. He used his references freely and reworked much of his previous vocabulary. There was also a manifest poetic tendency which is reflected in the titles of his work.

The entirety of his production, which autonomously articulates literary and visual values, was a fundamental reference for some of the emerging artists of the 1980s, artists with styles as divergent as Pedro Cabrita Reis, Xana or João Paulo Feliciano.

Joaquim Bravo died in Lisbon in 1990, during a fertile period of creation and of public and institutional recognition.

In the year 2000 CAMJAP organised his first retrospective exhibition with a vast group of paintings, drawings and sculptures.

HELENA DE FREITAS

## **Bibliography**

*História da Arte Portuguesa*, 3rd vol., Lisboa, Círculo de Leitores, 1996.

*Joaquim Bravo*, Lisboa, CAMJAP – Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2000.  
(Catalogue)

*Trinta e Cinco Desenhos de Joaquim Bravo*, Lisboa, CAMJAP – Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1988. (Catalogue)

**Works in the CAMJAP collection**

3 paintings, 1 sculpture, 18 drawings