

There goes Luisa...

A house is a house, not only for its architecture or its furniture, but especially for what takes place in it, for those who live there, for those who visit or pass through, i.e., for those who know it. Casa de Serralves was a house before, and today it is a site where exhibitions take place. However, when we visit there is the sense that it was not merely a house for those who had it built or lived in it. The nature of its spaces is a fusion of the palace tradition and the wealthy bourgeois house that which both share as a desire for representation. Such representation could be of an economic or social nature, but it never ceased to be intimate and personal as well. A house is often also the expression of the desire of whomever lives in it. An exhibition is also always an exercise of representation. Artists are invited to exhibit at Casa de Serralves if their works provide the motives for the challenge of a confrontation with the nature of the spaces and memories of a house.

During the last half-century, countless artists have taken the world as a place of exhibition beyond the gallery or museum spaces. Luisa Cunha is, precisely, an artist who has always resisted the traditional conventions of presentation and representation of the work of art within the circles instituted towards that purpose. Her trajectory is singular, in terms of the regularity of exhibitions her work is rarefied, despite the extraordinary unity that her work programme depicts at every presentation. For almost two decades, Luisa Cunha has been exhibiting mainly in schools, toilet facilities, greenhouses, abandoned factories, church cloisters, and gardens. Therefore, at the moment when the artist, the curator, and the institution met to plan an exhibition that could account for two decades of work, Casa de Serralves immediately came to mind as the appropriate place. At the Casa, it would be possible to reconstruct and adapt a whole series of previous projects, realised for specific contexts, which would lose a great measure of their efficiency or would simply prove impossible to show at the more neutral galleries of the Museum.

Thus, this exhibition is the outcome of a transfer operation between different times and places, filtering memory in the situation presently at hand. A previous work will be able not only to find another space and another time, but it may even be presented in the same space as it was realised, albeit being perceived in a time frame and in a context that differ from its original presentation. Such is the case with the works that the artist presents again at the old chapel of Casa de Serralves, and which repeat the exhibition the artist had shown there

in 1999. In any retrospective or anthological exhibition the moment of a work that has been previously shown is lived at least twice. One of the strategies explored by some conceptual artists, namely by Michael Asher, to interrogate the situation of the presentation of the work of art consists precisely of the repetition at the same place, but in a different time, of the exhibition previously shown therein. It will be particularly interesting to evaluate how the repetition of a previous exhibition within the current exhibition will give way to a new context for the interpretation of the pieces that are now shown.

Especially when, in a work such as Luisa Cunha's, it has always been relevant to challenge the spectator and his/her expectations in that drama which posits him/her as the idealised partner of a performative action in which he/she is challenged to participate in each of the artist's exhibitions. In fact, there is an implicit theatricality in every one of Luisa Cunha's projects. Her works resort to a variety of supports that represent an equally varied set of sensory stimuli so that the presence of the spectator may activate them according to their specific conditions of interpretation. Drawing, sculpture, photography, text and sound take on not just the performative nature of their realisation (many of the works issue from bodily identifiable actions such as the reading of a text, the making of a drawing, of an object or of a photograph, according to a specific action program), but they often invite the spectator to re-evaluate his/her conditions of confrontation with such manifestations, between visibility and invisibility, attention or distraction, their perceptibility or un-perceptibility. To question the situation where the spectator is involved, in an acute awareness of space, of time and of the characters that may appear therein, is an exercise that this work constantly proposes. In this way, Luisa Cunha's works locate us in the place and time of their occurring with the irony of someone who knows that the things of the world always depend on the complicity that we may build or share with them. As a matter of fact, in many of Luisa Cunha's projects the co-operation principle inherent to any context of communication is questioned through a transferring of the circumstances of their enunciation, which are liable for appropriation by every spectator insofar as they are transferred into an action or situation induced by the artist. Those actions or situations are as simple as seeing, listening, being, and they introduce an obvious provocation to the recognition and detection of the everyday life that each spectator may manifest through his/her universe of beliefs or life experience.

In 1996, Luisa Cunha participated in a group exhibition curated by myself and titled "Modos de ver" [Ways of Seeing], with a piece called Ali vai o João [There

goes João], in which she presented a space exactly as it was except for a chair placed in front of windowpanes that had been replaced by mirrors, and a sound-work describing in minute exactness the spatial features of the space where the work was installed. Then, as now, repetition in her work contradicts redundancy, demonstrating how the world never repeats itself in the same way, deconstructing the speculative meanings of all coincidences, proving that no one can live the same moment twice, in the same way that a river does not flow twice through the same banks. That critical deconstruction of the moment of the exhibition, that distancing which warns the spectator of the sensory and cognitive exercise of his/her condition as spectator, beyond the rules that posit him/her as a spectator, was equally implicit at the time in the title of the piece, which was a gentle and ironic comment to the fact that the exhibition's curator was always hastily passing through the sites where the artists were installing their pieces, as is often the case with curators of group exhibitions.

It is an honour and a pleasure to return the compliment after more than ten years, as I verify, at this moment when the Serralves Museum presents an anthological show of her work, that "there goes Luisa" with some of her most significant projects, which came as a surprise in my work as curator, and which certainly will now surprise those who, for the first time, find the opportunity to know one of the most singular works developed in these last two decades in the Portuguese arts context. I would like to thank the extraordinary dedication and enthusiasm with which the artist accepted the challenge of this exhibition. I would also like to thank the relevance and objectivity of the outcome of this show to its curator, Miguel Wandschneider, who was invited to realise this project with the Museum at a time when he was yet an independent curator, and who today develops one of the most stimulating artistic programming in Portugal at Culturgest, an institution where the artist will also present a new project which, somehow, will continue this exhibition.

The gratitude of the Serralves Museum extends also to the EDP Foundation, which is once more by its side – with the courage and foresight to support the presentation of the work of one of the least obvious artists in the *sic transit gloria mundi* which sometimes has an excessive bearing upon the very nature of sponsor-provided support – thereby contributing decisively to the presentation of the work by an artist whose sobriety and rigour demonstrate how the significance of a work may be upheld independently of the ephemeral and mediatic strategies of marketing and legitimation recognisable in so many moments of culture in our time.

João Fernandes
Museum Director