

[ ENG ]

## The appropriation of artificial time

Artificial Paradises reflects João Bragança Gil's social concern and spatial interaction. The title has been appropriated from the symphonic poem by Luís de Freitas Branco;<sup>1</sup> which was in turn appropriated from Baudelaire's book *Paradis Artificiels*<sup>2</sup>; in response to Thomas de Quincey.<sup>3</sup> More than a bibliographical reference, *Artificial Paradises* seeks to deconstruct the modern desire to exalt artifice as paradise.

In this, which is the artist's second solo exhibition, Bragança Gil inhabits the MUHNAC museum space with a tripartite installation, organized between *Paradise*, *Lost Paradise* and *Artificial Paradises*, symbolically recovering the typology of the techno-scientific spectacle: the diorama. The spectacle, as a present social organization of the paralysis of history and memory, of the abandonment of history, built on the foundation of historical time, is the false consciousness of time.<sup>4</sup>

The *Paradise* diorama and the *Lost Paradise* diorama refer to *Tabu: A Story of the South Seas*, the last film directed by Murnau<sup>5</sup>, in 1931. Filmed in Haiti and divided into two parts that entitle these first two dioramas, a gesture also appropriated from Miguel Gomes in *Tabu* (2012). The repetition of this gesture appears here as an allusion to cinema, the artistic expression of 'falsified' time, which also produced and diffused exotic and tropical imagery.

In João Bragança Gil's *Paraíso*, the reference to cinema also appears in the form of sound. In *Foley [Kookaburra]* (2023), two Surround columns — an immersive sound technique diffused by cinema — emit the sound of the Kookaburra bird, which, although practically only found in Australia, was recurrently used as sound design in Hollywood productions to simulate generally tropical environments. In the same diorama, *Condition Report* (2023) is a composition of four lenticular images that compare photographs by Mário Novais<sup>6</sup> in the Tropical Botanical Garden of Belém — after the 1940 Portuguese World Exhibition — with photographs of the artist captured in Lisbon's Parque das Nações. Still in this diorama, we find *No Escape* (2023); on a computer server, used for capturing and recording video, we watch a scene of a car chasing a group of fleeing zebras, in a parallelism between the photographic capture and the violent chase. Finally, on a plinth, the skin of a wild cat appears packaged for conservation [UL-IICT-MAM-42/009], having been captured in a colonial and scientific mission, later deposited in an archive and repositioned here; a record of the registry.

The *Lost Paradise* diorama, appropriation of the title of book by John Milton<sup>7</sup> includes a representation of the Dodo [MNHNC.MOD: 000127], built by Pedro Andrade, taxidermist at the museum, based on the imagined idea of this animal, extinguished by human hand. A tangential representation to the idea of fiction referring to the reproduction of obsolescence, decay and ruin. Sometimes we believe we know ourselves in time, while what we know is only a series of fixations in the spaces of stability of the being, of a being that does not want to pass in time, that in the past itself, when it goes in search of lost time, wants to 'suspend' the flight of time. In its thousand alveoli, space holds compressed time. Space is good for that.<sup>8</sup> Then, in *Rooted Ruins* (2023), Bragança Gil presents us with a photograph taken in Jardim da Estrela, in Lisbon, of a tree that,

according to the artist, grew around a ruin. On the ground, *Science Fiction* (2023) represents technological obsolescence, but also autobiography. Two sound speakers with futuristic details, in vogue in the 90s, transport us to the universe of Sci-Fi. These, connected to an MP3 player, produce the sound of a recording made by Bragança Gil at the Lisbon's Oceanarium, where loudspeakers emit the simulation of a soundscape.

Finally, *Artificial Paradises* appears at the back of the room, mediating the relationship between the dioramas. In this diorama, sound and video are articulated in an asynchronous way to create indefinite durations and readings in space. Departing from the 1913 symphonic poem by Luís de Freitas Branco, considered the “introducer of modernism in Portugal”<sup>9</sup>, João Bragança Gil works music within music, deconstructing it and digitally manipulating it, extending time. The sound piece lasts for one hour and fifty minutes.

In turn, the video projection records the *Magical Garden* exhibition, a pseudo-cultural event that inhabited the Tropical Botanical Garden in 2021, during the research process by the artist and researcher Beatriz Medori. The film unfolds in a succession of plants illuminated by different colors, fictional sculptures, and technical devices used in the exhibition, producing apparently seductive images, which do not fail to confirm the power of illusion in the simulation of these romanticized territories. Between the foliage, the spectacle: science and entertainment.

In the shot that restarts the loop, a ball of mirrors refers to the circularity of time; the time of the Tropical Botanical Garden which, since 1940 until today, is used for a series of events and exhibitions simulating the exotic imaginaries discussed here.

Get rid of yourself wherever that may be, don't place yourself among the protagonists of your novel, renounce yourself even for half an hour.<sup>10</sup>

*Artificial Paradises* questions an implicit idea of modernity, deconstructed here. Distinct and anachronistic historical times meet and intersect in the exhibition space, where the narrative is structured in a web of references, displacements and repositioning.

We believe that this exhibition can also be the target of appropriation.

— Sofia Marçal, 2023

#### Notes:

1. Portuguese Composer (1890-1955). *Paraísos Artificiais* de 1910. He was the first Portuguese modernist composer and later deputy director of the National Conservatory.
2. Published in 1860.
3. *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, 1862. English writer (1785-1859).
4. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 2012, p.127.
5. Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, German director of the expressionist movement, *Kammerspiel* (1888-1931).
6. Portuguese Photographer (1899-1967), responsible for the photographic coverage of the Portuguese World Exhibition (1940), as well as various propaganda initiatives of the Estado Novo.
8. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 1993, p. 202.

9. Rui Pereira, Artificial Paradises (2013), [www.casadamusica.com](http://www.casadamusica.com) (Consultado em 12/04/2023)
10. Anton Tchékhev, Sem trama e sem final (99 conselhos de escrita), 2019, p.3

## **Artificial Paradises**

João Bragança Gil

With Beatriz Medori, Curated by Sofia Marçal

15 April to 4 June 2023

MUHNAC — National Museum of Science & Natural History

