Antonio Trinidad Muñoz

**Almada Negreiros, José Sobral de (1883—1970)**

**José Sobral de Almada Negreiros** was a Portuguese artist (mainly writer and painter) and a most dynamic and multifaceted figure in early 20th-century Portuguese culture. Moving constantly between literature and the visual arts, he produced a multidisciplinary oeuvre. Both in his literary work, which includes poetry, short stories, drama and essays, and in his painting and graphic work, Almada Negreiros took a rebellious and combative stance towards traditional academism and aesthetic conservatism. One of the main advocates of avant-garde in Portugal, he also championed the modernisation of the country, motivated by the ideal of “educating the people through scandal” (Moisés 1998:83).

Born in the then Portuguese African colony of São Tomé e Príncipe, Almada Negreiros lost his mother at the age of three. Because his father was organising the Pavilion of Portuguese Colonies for the 1900 World Fair in Paris, he spent his childhood and adolescence in a boarding school in Lisbon. Later on he attended a secondary school in Coimbra and the International School in Lisbon. Almada Negreiros would never obtain a university degree; he was a self-taught artist, and a fervent reader and drawer from a very young age. In 1911 he started his career as a collaborator of the newspaper *A Sátira*; a year later, he participated in the I Salão dos Humoristas (1st Salon of Humorists), an exhibition of caricatures and graphic humour in Lisbon.

The years between 1913 and 1917 were a period of frenetic work. His first individual exhibition in 1913 brought him into contact with Fernando Pessoa, laying the foundation for a friendship which would be particularly stimulating for the development of the avant-garde in Portugal. In 1915, he wrote the novel *A Engomadeira (The Starcher)*, which would be published in 1917, and the poem *A cena do ódio (The Scene of Hatred)*; he collaborated with the journal *Orpheu (Orpheus)*; he staged the ballet *O sonho da rosa* (*The Rose’s Dream*) and he published the *Manifesto Anti-Dantas e por extenso (Manifesto Anti-Dantas and extensively).* This manifesto, written as a reaction to the premiere of the play *Soror Mariana Alcoforado (Sister Mariana Alcoforado)* by Júlio Dantas, was overtly aggressive towards the literary conventionalism Dantas, one of Portugal’s most celebrated playwrights, represented. The verse “Morra o Dantas, morra! Pim” (“Death to Dantas, death to him! Pim!”) would turn into a motto of Portuguese modernism.

In May 1917, Almada Negreiros played a central role in the *First Futurist Conference*, which, according to the organisers of the event, officially inaugurated futurism in Portugal. Dressed in a workman’s overall, he presented the *Futurist Manifesto for the Portuguese Generations of the 20th Century*, pleading for a rupture with tradition, singing the praises of intensity, the virile strength of youth, vitalism and war. Foreign manifestos were also read, and patriotic projects for a new Portugal were proclaimed. The Portuguese press was offended and shocked by what was considered an extravagant and excessive event.

After having acquired a certain fame as a dancer, Almada Negreiros moved to Paris. This experience abroad paradoxically made him ‘discover Portugal’ and imbued his work with a ‘national conscience’. Back in Lisbon, apart from his literary publications, he was involved in so many different artistic activities, ranging from acting in a film by Afonso Gaio to interventions in the decoration of café *A Brasileira do Chiado* and *Bristol Club*, that his friend Pessoa referred to him as “o poliapto”, or “the multifaceted artist” (França 1991:128).

In March 1927, disenchanted with the Portuguese art scene, Almada Negreiros settled in Madrid, where he collaborated in *La Gaceta Literaria (The Literary Gazette)*, organised an individual exhibition and drew cover pages and illustrations for a number of Spanish newspapers and journals. He was also in charge of the mural decorations of the *Fundación del Amo* in Madrid’s brand new university campus (*Ciudad Universitaria*) and several other buildings. In 1932 he returned permanently to Lisbon to dedicate himself to an intense artistic activity, without abandoning his literary career. In 1934, he married the painter Sarah Affonso (1934). These were years of emotional and economic stability and public recognition. Having left Spain in a period of political and social effervescence, Almada Negreiros thrived under Salazar’s dictatorial regime : he received regular official commissions but was able to pursue his experimentalist aspirations.

Almada Negreiros received the greatest public recognition for his visual work. Apart from his famous self-portraits, the following works have to be mentioned: *Banhistas (The Bathers)*, *Nu (Female Nude)*, *A sesta (The Nap)*, *Maternidade (Maternity)* and the much celebrated portraits of Fernando Pessoa (1954 and 1964). His work as a muralist in the harbour stations of Alcântara and Óbidos (Gare Marítima de Alcântara, 1943-1945; Gare Marítima da Rocha do Conde de Óbidos, 1946-1948) deserves particular attention. Almada’s paintings of the 1930s and 1940s combine the visual strength of geometric figures with the extremely theatrical gestures of the represented persons.

As a writer, he is the author of a vast but disperse oeuvre, in which the search for a poetics of ingenuity, between myth and children’s world-view, is a constant feature. This literary oeuvre was first compiled in 1970-1972 in six volumes of *Obras completes (Complete Works)*, which were subsequently reedited and expanded upon. Criticism has highlighted above all the novel *The Starcher* (1917) for being the only Portuguese work to keep up with European avant-garde, or even get ahead of it, as its *pastiche*-like form and the novelty of its contents announce surrealism (Júdice 2001:233). Other important titles are *Nome de guerra* (*War name*, a novel written in 1925 and published in 1938); the stage plays *Antes de* *Começar* (Before Starting, 1919), *Pierrot e Arlequim* (Pierrot and Harlequin, 1924) and *Deseja-se Mulher* (Wish to be a Woman, 1928); and the poem *The Scene of Hatred* (1915, dedicated to Pessoa’s heteronym Álvaro de Campos). Almada Negreiros’ work has not been translated into English.

**References and further reading**

Cabral, M.V. (1989), ‘The Aesthetics of Nationalism: Modernism and Authoritarianism in Early Twentieth-Century Portugal’, *Luso-Brazilian Review* 26 (1): 15-43.

Dix, S. and Pizarro, J. (eds.) (2011), *Portuguese Modernisms. Multiple Perspectives on Literature and the Visual Arts*, Oxford: Legenda.

França, J.-A. (1991), *Arte em Portugal no século XX*, Lisboa; Bertrand.

Júdice, N. (2001), ‘Uma ideia de literatura para um século de ficção de ficção” inFernando Pernes (ed.), *Século XX: panorama da cultura portuguesa.* vol. 3, Oporto: 315-348.

Moisés, M. (1998), ‘Almada Negreiros: agitador cultural’, In *Almada Negreiros: a descoberta como necessidade: actas do coloquio internacional*, Porto, 12, 13, e 14 de dezembo 1996. – Porto: Fund. Eng. Antonio De Almeida: 83-94.

Vieira, Joaquim (dir.) (2006). *Fotobiografias Século XX — Almada Negreiros*. Lisboa: Bertrand Editora.

**Literary works**

*The Scene of Hatred* *,* 1915

*Manifesto Anti-Dantas and extensively*, 1915

*The Starcher,* 1917

*K4,The Blue Square,* 1917

*Pierrot and Harlequin,* 1924

*War Name,* 1938

*The Question of the Panels*, 1926

None of these works are translated into English.

**Paratextual material**

Portrait of Fernando Pessoa (1964)

<http://www.cam.gulbenkian.pt/index.php?langId=1&visual=2&article=70764&ngs=1&queryParams=,autor|Jose%20de%20Almada%20Negreiros&queryPage=7&position=1>

Self-Portrait in Group (Decorative Painting- Café "A Brasileira" in the Chiado), 1925

<http://www.cam.gulbenkian.pt/index.php?langId=1&visual=2&article=70767&ngs=1&queryParams=,autor|Jose%20de%20Almada%20Negreiros&queryPage=7&position=5>

Maternity (1935)

<http://www.cam.gulbenkian.pt/index.php?langId=1&visual=2&article=70758&ngs=1&queryParams=,autor|Jose%20de%20Almada%20Negreiros&queryPage=4&position=6>

The Bathers ((Decorative Painting- Café "A Brasileira" in the Chiado), 1925

<http://www.cam.gulbenkian.pt/index.php?langId=1&visual=2&article=70784&ngs=1&queryParams=,autor|Jose%20de%20Almada%20Negreiros&queryPage=8&position=3>

Self-Portrait (1948)

<http://www.cam.gulbenkian.pt/index.php?langId=1&visual=2&article=63311&ngs=1&queryParams=,autor|Jose%20de%20Almada%20Negreiros&queryPage=2&position=8>