



## ALL SOLIDS DISOLVE IN AIR

Nobody (least of all the artist herself) will believe that I spent a fair proportion of my of my holidays mentally going round in circles trying to think of the best way to keep my promise ( made sonme three or four months ago) to write a text for this catalogue.

As soon as I touched and saw (in natural light and against the white walls of the Museum) a small selection of the pieces exhibited for the first time here, I felt that I could not waste this opportunity to draw the attention of the public in general and my own more specific public (my students) to a topic which is very dear to me – the close but not always obvious relation between Art and Science.

I think that exhibiting these works in this place serves the mutual objectives of these two aspects of modern being and feeling – Art and Science.

I must confess that I was immediately drawn by the elegant and solid beauty of these pieces.

When the artist gathers and orders the various materials she uses, they never lose their intrinsic nature. While demonstrating sensitivity and respect for their visible properties, she simply uses creative metamorphosis to make them into artistic and modern products which it is a pleasure to exhibit and see.

There is an apparent simplicity, as it were, a certain rigidity or coldness in the composition and installation of the components in each module. Scrap metal (reworked to a greater or lesser degree), bones and rotting wood or the fibrous skeleton of dry stems and leaves are found together here. They are not put together in chaotic fashion, but rather *éta/ées* in reliquary boxes. One feels that each choice is mediated. There is always a web of threads that Teresa Pavão uses in each piece like a signature or mark of possession.

Each world thus gains a tense force generated by the subjection of these threads which mould and maintain the chosen shape.

Contemplation of each work is likely to evoke sensations and emotions which are recognizable from real life: one experiences the tension felt at the sudden opening of a rose-bud or the pulse bursting from an egg, given off by the energy of the being about to hatch from it.

But in spite of this, each piece also exudes solidity and stability, calm and balance. It is as if the precise moment of creation was left hanging from each work – the precise gesture of Teresa's hand and mind, tying with precious thread or balancing with weights the contained dynamics and natural tension of bent forms, spirals and the interweaving of natural webs.

Using that was dead and wasted, the artist is able to show the tellurian forces hidden in each material. One feels that from these forces are born the structure and form which can be seen in the threads and metal plates, the fibrous tissue of the remains of the leaves, the fraying or plaited sackcloth, even in the bones which, obviously, in other contexts we feel to be very much dead.

Just as Life sprang forth from material forces in the primeval world – fortunately or unfortunately we still do not really know how - this Artist's work also holds something of the life-force. But like scientific development, which does not take place essentially as a matter of luck, but rather by perseverance, in repeated acts of serious research and investigation, the artist develops her work with persistence and permanent modernity.



I hope you will forgive me if I somewhat prosaically (if not pretentiously) refer for a moment to science, even if my attention is focused only on my beloved area: the celebrated and repeatedly discussed area of Botany.

It must be pointed out (and I intend to keep this in mind) that the type of Botany I am referring to has little to do with what ordinary people confuse with the work of herbalists, and more the cultured or arts-minded associate either with the hyper-realistic flowers and petals surrounding the Mystic Lamb (in the paintings of Josefa de Óbidos, for instance) or the profuse leafy decoration to be found in Baroque ceramic tiles and gilt carving.

Modern Botanical Science (and I believe the same is true of art) is practised and created in a thousand different directions, from the most theoretical and fundamental that may be imagined to the almost money-grubbing areas of cold utilitarian application. At the theoretical and fundamental that may be imagined to the almost money-grubbing areas of cold utilitarian application. At the theoretical end, Botany encounters other disciplines from which it can hardly be distinguished, for instance, chemistry, physics and mathematics. As for applied botany, it links up with food, wood and fibre production, current and future drug production, environmental conservation and management, habitat restoration, etc.

It is bearing this outlook in mind that I think it makes sense to reformulate traditional Botanical Museums, some of which are as dead as some of the components used by our Artist. They must be reoriented and developed as scientific conservatories and observatories open to an infinity of themes and problems revolving around the world of plants. Such museums and their counterparts in Natural History are tools and venues par excellence to raise awareness of Life Sciences. They are also act as strategic magnets attracting young people to consider a career in scientific research.

Returning to the theme of the Teresa Pavão exhibition and the fact that it is being mounted in a Science Museum, it should be pointed out that:

- I. The nature, colour and texture of the botanical materials which predominate in the composition of the artistic objects themselves and the frames which both surround and conserve them, evoke other objects, which are only natural, equally beautiful and diverse: this Museum's collection of woods, fruits, seeds, fibres and vegetable oils and waxes;
- II. As the person currently responsible for the Botanical Museum, I have been especially touched by the creative and logical *art of ordering* obvious in the development of Teresa Pavão's work.

In the academic context, we call this logical ordering Taxonomy, indeed, it has been said that all Science is a matter of Taxonomy. If we were restricted to an academic coterie, there would be doubts as to how to catalogue the *work* the artist has produced: as Scientific Art or as Artistic Science.

If only we could exhibit the natural objects in the museum's collection with such knowledge, dignity and functional usefulness, and indeed, with the artistry similar to the qualities shown in this exhibition. The Museum's collection includes some manufactures of an ethno-botanical nature. These have been rarely (and even then only partially) exhibited, in spite of their great scientific and historical value.

The best of our collections (some of them over two hundred years old, especially fruits, seeds and wood) come from Africa, above all Angola. It is highly probable that some of these materials contain remains of organisms which have since become extinct and of



which it is now practically impossible to find specimens, due to their rarity brought about by their disappearance as a species and the destruction of natural habitats. This Museum's eagerness to host this exhibition is therefore understandable. The underlying intention was to take advantage of the enthusiasm, inspiration and experience to be able to fulfil the obligations, projects and ambitions that museums are called upon to perform in society.

In the recent words of a sociologist (\*Berman 1989), there is now a type of vital experience which is the experience of time and space, of the self and others and the possibilities and dangers of this life. This experience is common to the whole of humanity. The author calls this range of experiences modernity and puts forward the idea that it is modern to live in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth and the transformation of surrounding objects, but that at the same time threatens us in everything we have and are. He even speaks of the "environmental experience of modernity" in the sense that all barriers, geographical and others, are broken down at that level, and concludes that within such a perspective, modernity, ends up being a factor of unity for humanity.

I am happy to end by underlining the importance of the object of Botanical Science – plants – the most obvious indication of environmental quality and, just like the human race, an integral part of the dangerous dynamic and fragile balance of our environmental modernity. After all, plants sustain the biosphere and continue to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration for scientists, poets and artists like Teresa Pavão.

If only in the form of dry fibres, they are integrated into minutely and painstakingly worked pieces, reminding us of the work of mediaeval weavers and goldsmiths. They are thus transformed into new and living objects, made of waste material, one of the most pervasive products of modern life.

There is a modernity in Teresa Pavão work which promises to last, since it is so joyful and full of light. It breathes optimism and strengthens Hope.

*Fernando Catarino*

\*1989. Marshall Berman, *All solids dissolve in air*,  
Edições 70, Lisbon.