

## **Politics, Diplomatic Relations and Institutional Promotion through Modern Art – the *British Art of the Twentieth Century* Exhibition in Portugal, 1962**

**Leonor de Oliveira**

Instituto de História da Arte, FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

### **Editing and peer review managed by:**

Begoña Farré Torras, Instituto de História da Arte, FCSH, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

### **Reviewers:**

Nuno Crespo, Filipa Lowndes Vicente

### **Abstract**

In 1962, the British Council and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation organised in Portugal an exhibition of modern British art, which had an impact not only in the artistic context, but also in the political, institutional and diplomatic spheres. This article analyses the organisation of this event, framing it in a network of artistic, institutional and political determinants that contribute to convey the multi-dimensional nature of exhibitions.

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[1] In 1959 the British Council and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation decided to organise in Portugal an exhibition of British art from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was not supposed to be a difficult enterprise, but the political circumstances in which the Portuguese and the British governments were involved made the organisation of the exhibition a true challenge.

[2] Indeed, the political backdrop played a significant role in the course of the events. It was mainly rooted in the emergence of ideological and violent movements against Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia<sup>1</sup>. And significantly enough, the timing of the exhibition's organisation also coincided with an anti-colonial climax that also took a toll on the diplomatic relations between Portugal and the United Kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> The political and colonial events that frame the organisation of the British Art Exhibition concern particularly the Portuguese colony of Angola in Africa and its Indian territories of Goa, Daman and Diu.

[3] This context, although not directly related, did influence the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the British Council plans for the British art exhibition. In fact, suggestions were made to cancel the event but, as the director of the British Council delegation in Lisbon, John Muir, reported, the "stoutness" of Azeredo Perdigão (the Foundation's chairman) "in refusing to be awayed by the political events"<sup>2</sup> led to the exhibition opening not only in Lisbon, but also in Coimbra and Oporto.

[4] But, besides the external factors affecting the exhibition arrangements, there were also intrinsic goals at stake that went beyond artistic statements. Therefore, the British art exhibition in Portugal can also be meaningful in terms of diplomatic affairs and institutional promotion. Ultimately, it encapsulates the relationship between an exhibition and its historical context.

[5] The lack of a significant number of studies in Portugal focused on exhibitions of modern art explains how this type of event has not contributed yet to a more comprehensive portrayal of the Twentieth century. I will attempt to put forward a network of artistic, institutional and political determinants that eventually will contribute to convey the multi-dimensional nature of exhibitions.

[6] This essay will initially consider the Portuguese artistic context and the two institutions involved in the planning of the exhibition, the British Council and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. A considerable amount of attention will be given to the political framework and to the way it interfered with the organisation of the exhibition, which will be amply described. Finally, I will analyse the impact of this international display on the Portuguese artistic and cultural scene.

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### **Exhibitions, modernity and propaganda in Portugal – the late fifties**

[7] The exhibitions that had a direct connection with the Portuguese dictatorship's propaganda have benefited from a more comprehensive reading in recent years. Sérgio Lira and Susana S. Martins, among other authors, have pointed out how the celebration of historical dates and figures through exhibitions served a political agenda. And even in more modern and sophisticated displays, History, that is the remembrance of the glorious past connected with the Discoveries, was always the main guideline to display a certain image of Portugal and its colonial empire as an historic, cultural and peaceful unit.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Letter from John Muir to British Council's 'Fine Arts' Department, dated 9 April 1962, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

<sup>3</sup> See Sérgio Lira's PhD thesis, *Museums and Temporary Exhibitions as means of propaganda: the Portuguese case during the Estado Novo*, Leicester 2002, <http://www2.ufp.pt/~slira/>; Susana S. Martins's PhD thesis, *Portugal as seen Through Foreign Eyes: Photography and Visual Culture in the 1950s*, Leuven 2011.



1 Inside view of the Portuguese Pavilion at the Brussels Universal Exhibition, 1958. Architect: Pedro Cid (© Horácio Novais, FCG–BA)

[8] In her analysis of the Portuguese representation at the Brussels Universal Exhibition in 1958, Susana S. Martins indicates the strategies set up to portray the Portuguese identity and modernity:

[...] perhaps what characterizes this official modern language is the fact that it is not extremely modern. Or, to put it differently, it consists of a modern formulation in permanent negotiation with traditional elements. Venturing a simple generalization, it could be stated that the modern reformulation of tradition occurred at different levels: it was about a decorative stylization of figurative elements on the one hand, while it was also about refashioning traditional aspects like folk dances or costumes, or, on the other hand, it could also be about promoting the use of traditional crafts and techniques. This modernity extremely connected to history became a current language, and an extremely efficient solution to make "portugueseness" aesthetically more appealing.<sup>4</sup>



2 Inside view of the Portuguese Pavilion with a copy of the Fishermen panel of Nuno Gonçalves' *Saint Vicent Panels* (Fifteenth century). Brussels Universal Exhibition, 1958 (© Horácio Novais, FCG–BA)

<sup>4</sup> Martins, *Portugal as seen Through Foreign Eyes: Photography and Visual Culture in the 1950s*, 251.

[9] There is another good example of the way politics, diplomacy and art interplay in an artistic context – the *Portuguese art, 800–1800: winter exhibition*, held at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1955–56.<sup>5</sup> The organization of this event was an initiative of the Royal Academy, which was well exploited by the Portuguese regime as a means of promoting the country's image and reinforcing political and diplomatic relations through artistic and cultural artefacts. This event was actually integrated in a much broader diplomatic campaign – the official visit of the President of the Republic, general Craveiro Lopes, to London. As a consequence (and as a propaganda strategy as well) the Royal Academy of Arts held another small exhibition, which comprehended the historical documents related to the Alliance between Portugal and Britain<sup>6</sup>.

[10] As for the arts exhibition, it was mainly focused on the golden period of the Portuguese Empire, particularly the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries. The whole layout of the display conveyed different historical environments where the master works of Portuguese art took pride of place. But along with the artistic discourse there was a subtext which was firmly embedded in the political context of the time.



3 *Portuguese art, 800–1800: winter exhibition*: at the centre, Belém Monstrance, produced with the first gold brought from Brazil (Sixteenth century). London, Royal Academy of Arts, 1955-56  
(© Estúdio Mário Novais, FCG-BA)

[11] The symbolic value of the works displayed provided material proof of the historical relationship between the Portuguese people and other peoples and geographies from all over the world, thus constructing a narrative where the management of the colonial possessions was implicitly justified. Particular attention was given to the situation of

<sup>5</sup> For more information about this exhibition see the English catalogues, *Portuguese art, 800-1800: winter exhibition, 1955-56*, London 1955 and *Portuguese art, 800-1800*, London 1956, and Maria Amélia Fernandes's Master dissertation, *A Exposição de Arte Portuguesa em Londres 1955/ 1956: 'A Personalidade Artística do País'*, Lisbon 2001.

<sup>6</sup> See Amélia Fernandes, *A Exposição de Arte Portuguesa em Londres 1955/ 1956: 'A Personalidade Artística do País'*, Lisbon 2001.

Portuguese India in a room that marked the end of the exhibition by invoking through art the Portuguese impact on the Orient.



4 *Portuguese art, 800–1800: winter exhibition: "Portugal in the Orient"* room with the portraits of two Viceroys of Portuguese India, Afonso de Albuquerque and D. João de Castro (mid-Sixteenth century). London, Royal Academy of Arts, 1955-56 (© Estúdio Mário Novais, FCG-BA)

[12] Taking into account the discursive strategies implicit in these exhibitions and their direct connection with history, it seems that exhibitions of modern art were less suited to convey a nationalistic statement. The "control" over modern art meanings was more problematic – it could escape from a given narrative and go in other directions since it often offered dubious readings. Moreover, the conservatism of the Portuguese regime and Portuguese public kept modern art exhibitions away from general interest.

[13] But this did not mean that modern art would not find a place in propaganda. In international events small exhibits of modern production were arranged as a sample of the cultural and artistic modernity of Portugal.

[14] For instance, in the Portuguese pavilion at the Brussels Universal Exhibition there was a small section devoted to the modern arts. Since the works displayed in this showcase were replaced periodically, it is not possible to indicate exactly which artists were presented in Brussels. Nevertheless, the photographs show that there was an evident similarity with other small displays of modern art in other exhibitions with strong propagandistic purposes. Indeed, the use of the same artworks and arrangement indicate a pre-arranged scheme and point out the intention to control the impressions and messages conveyed by such displays so that they would not contradict the overall image that the regime aimed at communicating. Their only function was to provide one more example of Portugal's modernisation.



5 Inside view of the Portuguese Pavilion with a small display of Portuguese modern art. Brussels Universal Exhibition, 1958 (© Horácio Novais, FCG-BA)



6 Arts section at the exhibition *30 years of Portuguese Culture, 1926-1956* (*30 anos de cultura portuguesa, 1926-1956*). Lisbon, Foz Palace, 1956 (© Mário Novais, FCG-BA)

[15] When integrated in such events, the artistic products did not carry the same strong meaning as the historic artworks, which established a sense of causality between the origins of the Portuguese empire and the Salazar regime. In other words, modern art did not played a role in the great narrative of the Portuguese 'spiritual' and 'material' achievements and 'aspirations'. It was a mere parenthesis in the historic continuum portrayed at the Brussels' pavilion.

[16] In other contexts, however, modern art events created a space for diplomatic dialogue or institutional cooperation.

[17] This last point was clearly the case of the British art exhibition held in Portugal in 1962. But the complex and troublesome organisation of this event excludes any simplifications.

### Portuguese and British Artistic Parallels in the 1950s: *Help for the Arts*

[18] The idea of organizing an exhibition of modern British art in Portugal probably emerged in a November 1959 meeting between the chairmen of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and of the British Council. José de Azeredo Perdigão (1896–1993) and Lord Edward Bridges (1892–1969) had met two years before when the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation decided to take action on the British artistic and cultural *milieu*.<sup>7</sup> In order to plan its intervention in accordance with the real necessities of this field, the Foundation commissioned from Lord Bridges a report on that subject – *Help for the Arts*.<sup>8</sup>

[19] This document aimed at assessing "the needs of the arts in Britain so that the Foundation might formulate a policy for their support".<sup>9</sup> It recommended actions that should be adaptable to the specificities of contemporary production, while directly supporting artists and promoting regional artistic institutions. In this regard, from 1959, the Foundation provided monetary assistance to provincial museums and galleries, namely for the acquisition of contemporary art.<sup>10</sup>

[20] As for the needs identified by Lord Bridges's committee, after analysing their report the Foundation's trustees concluded that the artistic situation in Britain did not differ from the Portuguese one.<sup>11</sup> Although in Portugal there was a museum dedicated to contemporary art, the National Museum of Contemporary Art, in Lisbon, lack of funds together with government indifference prevented the museum's management from accomplishing its mission. One could say that, like in Britain, there was little state investment in modern art in Portugal. Here, however, such investment only happened if it served the propaganda purposes of the regime. In addition, there was neither an art

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<sup>7</sup> The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation was founded after the bequest of Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian (1869–1955), an oil businessman of Armenian origin, who was naturalized British in 1902, but lived his last years in Lisbon. After his death, the Foundation was instituted according to Portuguese law, in 1956. Nevertheless, its activity had an international scope, being particularly connected with the countries that were related to Gulbenkian's life. Therefore, the Foundation set up a branch in London in 1956 in order to carry out in Britain the same missions established by its statutes, which concerned the fields of education, science, arts and charity.

<sup>8</sup> *Help for the Arts: A Report to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1959*, London 1959. The main goal of this report was "to review the needs of the arts in Britain so that the Foundation might formulate a policy for their support". This document focused particularly in the patronage issue, British museums and galleries, visual arts, broadcasting, music, ballet, drama, opera, arts centres and arts clubs.

<sup>9</sup> *Help for the Arts*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of the Bridges report and the involvement of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in the British art scene see "Editorial: The Gulbenkian Foundation and the visual arts," in: *Burlington Magazine* 709 (April 1962), 137–138 and Andrew Stephenson, "Painting and Sculpture of a Decade '54-'64 Revisited," in: *Art History* 2 (April 2012), 420–441. See also, about the Foundation's UK Branch activity, *Experience and experiment: the UK Branch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1956-2006*, London 2006.

<sup>11</sup> José de Azeredo Perdigão, *Relatório do Presidente: 20 de Julho de 1955 – 31 de Dezembro de 1959*, Lisbon 1961, 208–209: "Moreover, the lesson that the study of the mentioned report provides concerns also the policy that should be followed in Portugal, given the universal character of many of the findings and recommendations that it contains" (my translation).

market nor collectors in Portugal, and, with few exceptions, the buyers tended to privilege the production that continued the naturalistic painting of the late Nineteenth century.

[21] It was not unreasonable to claim, as the art historian José-Augusto França did, that emigration was the only solution for Portuguese artists: "our painters need to belong [to Europe] – otherwise they die".<sup>12</sup>

[22] The constitution of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 1956 and its immediate intervention in the artistic sector gave an answer to the aspirations of artists, critics and intellectuals by supporting with grants their attendance at international artistic schools, mainly in Paris, but also in London. The Foundation organised in 1957 a major exhibition aimed at providing "an overview of the current situation of the arts in Portugal, thus constituting a real survey to clarify certain issues"<sup>13</sup> This event contributed to a critical reflection on the deficiencies of the Portuguese visual arts and public institutions that should promote them<sup>14</sup>. The Foundation also sponsored exhibitions organised by its sponsored artists and, in December 1961 opened in Lisbon the second edition of its Exhibition of Fine Arts.

[23] However, despite the initiatives of the new institution, some critics and artists did not consider its action effective, recalling that the basic needs of the Portuguese artists were still not fully addressed. The Portuguese painter of Greek ancestry, Nikias Skapinakis, pointed out those needs:

[...] the lack of workshops, which is extremely serious given the discouragement it causes; the lack of appropriate galleries; the constraints that result from the weak purchasing power of museums and of individuals – the middle class –; the difficulties related to the organisation of the same exhibition in different locations, which would grant it a wider audience.<sup>15</sup>

[24] The lack of a real art market and of public or private patronage left Portuguese artists, particularly the younger ones, without any other solution but to emigrate or to develop their artistic activity at the same time they searched for other jobs in order to survive.

[25] Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, the younger modern artists were in fact quite energetic in promoting their production and the new artistic trends. Many of them

<sup>12</sup> José-Augusto França, *Cem exposições*, Lisbon 1982, 49–51.

<sup>13</sup> My translation. *Exposição de Artes Plásticas*, exh. cat., Lisbon 1957.

<sup>14</sup> This critical reflection was mainly published in newspapers' articles, particularly in the pages that the *Diário Popular* devoted to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's exhibition. See C.L., "A Exposição de Arte da Fundação Gulbenkian," in: *Diário Popular*, Quinta-feira à tarde, 53 (12 December 1957), 1 and 6; José-Augusto França, "A Exposição Gulbenkian vista por artistas e críticos. Um golpe terrível no academismo novecentista," in: *Diário Popular*, Quinta-feira à tarde, 54 (19 December 1957), 1; Abel Manta in: *Diário Popular*, Quinta-feira à tarde, 57 (9 January 1958), 6.

<sup>15</sup> My translation. Nikias Skapinakis, "Situação Cultural das Artes Plásticas," in: *Seara Nova* 1361 (March 1959), 74-75.

decided to organise their own exhibitions, where they stated their independence from ideological programmes, that is, from the regime, defending instead their creative autonomy <sup>16</sup>.

[26] In reality, during the fifties the Portuguese artistic milieu became particularly dynamic in terms of exhibitions of modern art, although they took place mainly in Lisbon and Oporto. On the other hand, the Portuguese international representations in industrial and universal exhibitions or biennales, which required a more modernised arrangement, also contributed to this new environment.

[27] The institutions connected with artistic promotion and education created new periodic events and prizes for the modern artists<sup>17</sup>. Art critic Adriano de Gusmão, examining retrospectively artistic events occurred in 1958, claimed that this year "was under the sign of modernity". In the end of 1959 Gusmão also observed that modern art, particularly modern painting, achieved a preponderant position.<sup>18</sup> But the dissemination of modern art exhibitions did not mean that the conservatism of Portuguese society had been broken and that the Portuguese regime would turn its attention to contemporary artists. On the contrary, the government never really invested in the National Museum of Contemporary Art<sup>19</sup>.

[28] The contact with new international artistic trends was another positive aspect of this period, thanks to Gulbenkian's grants, which enabled many artists to continue their education in foreign artistic centres, namely Paris. The organisation of exhibitions also contributed to the reception in Portugal of international modernity. In this sense, the activity of the British Council in Portugal was particularly significant as we will see.

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<sup>16</sup> The most significant exhibitions organized by the Portuguese artists with the support of a few art critics were the First Salon of the Today's Artists (1956) and the 50 Independent Artists (1959). Both events took place at the Sociedade Nacional de Belas-Artes (National Society of Fine Arts), in Lisbon.

<sup>17</sup> The National Society of Fine Arts and the National Secretariat of Information created new salons and prizes particularly targeting the younger and modern artists partly stimulated by the activity that the Calouste Gulbenkian was developing in the artistic field. In 1958 the National Society opened in its headquarters the First Salon of Modern Art (I Salão de Arte Moderna), and, in 1959, the National Secretariat inaugurated the first Salon of the Very New Artists (Salão dos Novíssimos) while restoring and establishing new prizes that distinguished the most relevant productions in the different artistic fields (Painting, Sculpture, Drawing, Print and Ceramics).

<sup>18</sup> See Adriano de Gusmão, "O ano artístico," in: *Diário de Notícias* (25 December 1958), 19 and Adriano de Gusmão, "O ano artístico," in: *Diário de Notícias* (25 December 1959), 19.

<sup>19</sup> This museum was created after the establishment of the Republican regime in Portugal, in 1911, to portray Portuguese artistic production from 1850 until the present. However, it was never able to update its collections and its directors had to deal, immediately after its creation, with financial constraints and poor facility conditions.

## The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the British Council

[29] In 1959, three years after the constitution of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the British Council and the Portuguese institution initiated a partnership that would be particularly significant in the artistic sphere.

[30] In that year, as I mentioned above, the idea of setting up an exhibition of British painting and sculpture was put forward. Another meaningful decision occurred also in 1959, when the Portuguese Foundation involved the Council in the constitution of a collection of contemporary British art.<sup>20</sup>

[31] Forming this collection was understood as a strategy to support the British visual arts, but, undeniably, it also served to reinforce the Foundation's international *status*. Tellingly, the British Council, to which the Foundation gave a grant for the acquisitions, was allowed to display the works acquired in its own exhibitions all over the world. Therefore, as the owner of some of the works exhibited, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's name would be inscribed wherever the Council set its displays, granting it international exposure<sup>21</sup>.

[32] This was not a minor issue, considering the potential conflict that was implicit in the double nature of the Foundation – its activity had an international focus but it was created as a Portuguese institution.

[33] Since 1926 Portugal had been under a dictatorship, which put the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in an uncomfortable position internationally speaking<sup>22</sup>. The possibility of the Portuguese government, headed by António Oliveira Salazar, interfering with the new institution undermined its establishment. Fearing this, Lord Radcliffe of Wermeth (1899–1977), who was appointed by Calouste Gulbenkian as the first president of the Foundation, imposed a number of conditions to accept that position. And they clearly aimed at preventing the influence of Salazar's regime altogether. Lord Radcliffe

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<sup>20</sup> In 1959 the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation established a first grant of £10,000 for the purchase of British paintings, sculptures and drawings. The Fine Arts Department of the British Council, headed by Lilian Sommerville, was responsible for the acquisitions, which should take primarily into account the works of young artists. The selection of works received specialist guidance through the Commission for the Fine Arts, which integrated Alan Bowness, Philip Hendy, Philip James, Norbert Lynton, Roland Penrose, Norman Reid, J.M. Richards, John Rothenstein and David Thompson, among others. The British Council and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation agreed that the Council would have the works at its disposal for a period of ten years, not only to incorporate them in its exhibitions, but also to decorate its offices. The Foundation's collection of British art is particularly rich in the artistic production from 1959 to 1965, having a strong pop art nucleus. For the Foundation's British art collection and its history, see *A Ilha do Tesouro = Treasure Island*, Lisbon 1997 (texts in English).

<sup>21</sup> These works were exhibited in major artistic events such as the Sao Paulo, Venice and Paris Biennials, from 1961 to 1965. They were also shown in the United States within the exhibition *London: The new scene* (1964), in Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa, from 1966 to 1969. See the exhibition catalogue concerning the Foundation's collection of British art, *100 obras de arte britânica contemporânea da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian*, Lisbon 1971.

<sup>22</sup> The background to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's establishment is provided by José Medeiros Ferreira, "A instituição," in: *Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian: Cinquenta anos, 1956-2006*, Lisbon 2007, 69-163.

demanded that the Board of Trustees had an international composition and that only 15% of the global budget should be spent in Portuguese affairs. Azeredo Perdigão, in the role of the former lawyer of Calouste Gulbenkian, together with the governmental authorities, refused these impositions, which led to Lord Radcliffe's renunciation of the presidency, occupied subsequently by Azeredo Perdigão.



7 FCG's first *Exhibition of Fine Arts*. Lisbon, Sociedade Nacional de Belas-Artes, 1957 (© Abreu Nunes, FCG-BA)

[34] However, this problematic start of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation did determine its activity in a very meaningful way. The urge to establish a reputation not only in Portugal but also abroad drove the Foundation to initiate a number of actions that would grant it a forceful visibility. In this regard, organising exhibitions provided the public impact required, and the Foundation made a special effort in their layout and design.

[35] As Azeredo Perdigão stated in a letter to the Portuguese ambassador in London, the Foundation had to do "new and better" than other institutions<sup>23</sup>, when arranging its first exhibition in Lisbon. The Foundation's president was particularly concerned with the image of the institution – with a careful and modern showcase, the exhibitions should portray the institution's economic and management autonomy and cultural patronage. The proposal for the organisation of the British art exhibition in Lisbon responded, therefore, to the Foundation's designs in its first years of existence.

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<sup>23</sup> Letter from Azeredo Perdigão to Pedro Teotónio Pereira, dated 4 December 1957, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation archive, PRES 108.

[36] For their part, the British Council had a particular interest in this enterprise as well.

[37] In the beginning of 1960 Lord Bridges sent a letter to Azeredo Perdigão which further developed the idea of the British art exhibition. In it the author also pointed out how the show would be useful for the Council:

I am told that we sent an exhibition of 18th and 19th century painting to Lisbon in 1949, and have more recently sent exhibitions of modern sculpture (Henry Moore at Lisbon and Oporto last year) and of 20<sup>th</sup> century watercolours (Oporto now, Lisbon 1955). We think that it might be worthwhile to complete the survey of British art with an exhibition of oil paintings of this century, and we are looking into the possibility of sending a collection of about sixty paintings to Portugal in the spring or summer of 1961. Our aim would be to send representative works of twenty artists of this century (about three apiece). We would also take the opportunity to show how the Gulbenkian grant is being spent and the practical purpose it serves. About half of the painting in an exhibition on these lines would be representational in the traditional sense and about half would be abstract.<sup>24</sup>

[38] In spite of the political situation in Portugal and the restrictions that official censorship and the conservatism of the Portuguese public imposed, the British Council remained particularly active, promoting a number of activities especially in the field of literature. As for the arts, Alison Roberts in her book about the history of the Council's delegation in Portugal, points out the difficulties in showing modern British art. This might be explained by "the fact that the Portuguese elite proved to be intolerant of 'annoying eccentricities', as one newspaper stated in 1945, referring to the more disturbing examples of modern art".<sup>25</sup>

[39] Nevertheless, in the second half of the 1950s, as Lord Bridges' letter testifies, the British Council was able to bring to Portugal significant exhibitions of British modern art with the cooperation of Portuguese public institutions. If, on the one hand, these events indicated a growing attention paid by the Portuguese authorities and institutions to the promotion of modernity, on the other hand, they also point out the British Council's commitment in making an impact in the Portuguese public sphere through its own exhibitions.

[40] The British Council established its office in Lisbon in 1938, after Italy, Germany and France had already set up their own cultural institutes in Portugal. During the war, from 1939 to 1945, the Council developed an important role in promoting the British influence against Germany's close relation with the Salazar regime. The Portuguese dictator never chose one side of the war, supporting both the Allies, through the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance, and the Axis powers, particularly the Nazi regime, with which he shared ideological affinities. Therefore, Portugal became an espionage and propaganda

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<sup>24</sup> Letter from Lord Bridges to Azeredo Perdigão, dated 26 January 1960, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation archive, SBA 15339.

<sup>25</sup> My translation. Alison Roberts, *Um toque decisivo: a small but crucial push: British Council, 70 anos com Portugal*, Lisbon 2007, 120.

centre, with British and German agents fighting a silent war for information, resources and geostrategic superiority<sup>26</sup>.

[41] A fundamental means to achieve prominence over the opponent was cultural propaganda. In this sense, cultural propaganda became a priority particularly after the fall of France to the Germans, which led to a significant increase in the British Council's budget devoted to the organisation of cultural events in Portugal. The Council also expanded its activity in the country with the creation of centres in Oporto and Coimbra (1940).

[42] After 1945 the activity of the Council concerning the promotion of British culture in Portugal did not decrease. This was not the case in Spain, where Franco, like Salazar, continued to rule. The importance of Portugal in the first Cold War years will be discussed below. However, it is important to stress now the connection between the British Council's cultural activity and Britain's political agenda.

[43] In the fifties, the British Council actions, particularly its exhibitions, continued to convey more than an artistic message. As Geoffrey Grigson's introduction to the catalogue of the *British Watercolours and Drawings of the Twentieth Century* exhibition (1954–55) clearly puts forward, it was now time to raise awareness about the collapse of the authoritarian and nationalistic ideologies: "although there are still hostile forces of another kind – the ideological fanaticism – the time of the aggressive nationalism is approaching its end".<sup>27</sup>

[44] In Grigson's mind was the understanding of artistic production as an international phenomenon rather than an exclusively national one, given the exchange and influence of artistic trends from different parts of the world and the meeting of artists from several nationalities in arts schools, galleries, and so on.

[45] Surprisingly, this display was presented in the headquarters of the National Secretariat of Information<sup>28</sup>, the official body responsible for the regime's propaganda. The introduction's discourse is, therefore, contrary to the nationalist ideology defended by the dictatorship and is at odds with the Portuguese art display that was set up in the Royal Academy of Arts in 1955. The tone of each display was arguably set by the political and diplomatic interests behind it.

[46] This interpretation may sound too restrictive. It is, however, interesting to note that the more conservative discourse (*Portuguese art, 800–1800: winter exhibition*) was conveyed by an exhibition focused on what we may call "ancient art". While the more

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<sup>26</sup> Portugal had an important geographic position in the North-Atlantic region thanks also to the Azores islands, which allowed control over the maritime traffic in the Atlantic ocean.

<sup>27</sup> *Aquarelas e desenhos ingleses do século vinte da coleção British Council*, exh. cat., Lisbon 1955. This exhibition was presented in Oporto, in 1954, and in Lisbon, in March 1955.

<sup>28</sup> Secretariado Nacional da Informação. Its headquarters were located in the Foz Palace, Lisbon.

progressive and controversial one stemmed from a modern art display. Although Grigson's analysis is extensive to all History of Art, the fact that the exhibition was centred on the Twentieth century art enabled it to go on without scandal.

[47] Furthermore, the regime pursued now a more modernised image with a view to renew the country's international standing. These two goals came together in the 1955-56 exhibition as in the show analysed here.

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### **The Exhibition Arrangements**

[48] It is not clear who proposed the organisation of the British art exhibition. The documentation related to this event doesn't provide a definitive answer to this question, but implicitly indicates that Lord Bridges was the author of the proposal. It is the chairman of the British Council who firstly justifies and presents a sketch of the display. Lord Bridges's letter cited above was based on the information provided by Lilian Sommerville, the director of the Council's Fine Arts Department.

[49] By November 1959, Sommerville had already been working out some of the exhibition's logistical details:

It may prove possible to offer an Exhibition of Contemporary British Painting to Portugal during 1960 or early 1961 if the Portuguese can provide funds to cover shipment, catalogues, and local expenses. This exhibition, which is now on its way back from Australia, has already been offered to Israel (January to May 1960) and later to Mexico, on the same terms. [...] It is [...] an already-assembled exhibition and the packing cases are available.<sup>29</sup>

[50] However, Azeredo Perdigão and the board of trustees of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation had more ambitious prospects about the exhibition, which should not be merely a prearranged display:

[...] the Board decided that it would be of wider interest and of greater cultural importance that the exhibition would have the highest standard possible and be representative of all currents of contemporary British art, both in the realms of painting and sculpture and in those of watercolour, drawing and engraving. This exhibition should include both abstract and realist art, in the traditional sense. We can select here in Lisbon a suitable place for this purpose and it would also be very interesting that, during its duration and in the exhibition hall, lectures on British art should take place, as well as concerts of British music by a string orchestra. [...] I deem it very rewarding, whenever possible, in order to increase the significance of exhibitions of fine-arts and at the same time attracting the largest audiences possible, to stage in the exhibition halls appropriate concerts and lectures.<sup>30</sup>

[51] The idea of the exhibition thus developed from a display of paintings to a broader event. Nevertheless, in October 1960 Lilian Sommerville replied that "to add watercolours

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<sup>29</sup> Letter from Lilian Sommerville to the Assistant Controller Arts and Sciences, dated 9 November 1959, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Azeredo Perdigão to Lord Bridges, dated 30 March 1960. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation archive, SPG/MISC-P031.

and prints would not be possible in the time and these aspects of British art have already been fully covered by us [the British Council] in previous exhibitions in Portugal".<sup>31</sup> The exhibition would then integrate only painting and sculpture, having its inauguration been scheduled for the summer of 1961. As for all the arrangements concerning the exhibition, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the British Council agreed to share responsibilities: the Portuguese institution would be in charge of all the expenses in Portugal (mounting, publicity, catalogue) and the British Council would supervise the selection of works, their packaging and shipment to Portugal, as well as the insurance.

[52] However, this plan would not go without important changes. The first and most significant one was related to the opening of the exhibition. Originally scheduled for the summer of 1961, it was subsequently delayed to October of the same year. But as the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation had an important display of Portuguese fine arts to open in December, the trustees of this institution decided to delay once again the British Art event to January 1962. Yet, this would not be the final date...

[53] Despite these apparent indecisions about the exhibition dates, its organisation went on throughout 1961, mostly in the hands of the British Council. Lilian Sommerville, after a previous selection of some works carried out by a prestigious selection committee: Sir Philip Hendy (director of the National Gallery), Alan Bowness (professor at the Courtauld Institute of Art), Roland Penrose (president of the Institute of Contemporary Art), and John Rothenstein (director of the Tate Gallery), among others.

[54] In November 1961, with most works for the exhibition already assembled, John Muir, the representative of the British Council in Portugal, was pessimistic about preparations in Portugal. Muir's report is particularly relevant to understand how the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation was run:

As you know, all the arrangements at this end are the responsibility of the Gulbenkian Foundation, which is the despair of almost everyone who has to deal with it. Though the Foundation is benevolent and willing to be cooperative, all the effective power is in the hands of Dr. Perdigão and his wife, who, of course, cannot be expected to do everything. Yet no one in the Foundation will take an important decision in Dr. Perdigão's absence, and if an important decision is taken by Dr. Perdigão, he frequently, so we have discovered, fails to put his subordinates in the picture.<sup>32</sup>

[55] As John Muir realised, the chairman of the Foundation was its prominent figure, the top of a firm hierarchical structure. Evidently all the decisions in the different fields of action of the Foundation, particularly the artistic one, depended on Perdigão. Therefore, despite the problems underlined by the British Council's representative, we must credit Perdigão with the positive impact of the Foundation and with its bold actions.

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<sup>31</sup> Letter from Lilian Sommerville to John Muir, dated 27 October 1960, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from John Muir to Lilian Sommerville, dated 25 November 1961, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

[56] But Muir's report also gives further information about the organisation of the exhibition. Given the lack of communication between Perdigão and the Foundation's staff, there wasn't yet any venue reserved for the exhibition. Considering, therefore, that the Foundation was showing an "amateurish approach to this important event", he reminds that although the Portuguese institution was initially responsible for the catalogue translation and publicity, these tasks had to be accomplished by the British Council. This did not carry necessarily a negative consequence: "seeing the way things are going we welcome this development, as we now have an excuse to go regularly to the [Foundation's Fine Arts] department and make nuisances of ourselves; so do not worry".<sup>33</sup>

[57] Undoubtedly, the British Council was very careful in its dealings with the Portuguese Foundation. This was not only due to the several problems pointed out by John Muir –it was mostly concerned with outside events that ended up by interfering with the show's arrangements.

[58] This exhibition was becoming a political issue.

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### **'Gestures of Protest'**

[59] After the 1939–45 war and the creation of the United Nations the autonomy of the colonial territories was legitimised especially through the UN Charter whose article 73 expressed the progressive independence of those territories and the obligation of the colonial administrators to provide information to the Secretary General about their possessions. Portugal, although ruled by an authoritarian government that still defended the legitimacy of its colonial empire, was after the war positively acknowledged by the international community that did not force a political change in the country. Eventually Portugal also became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (1948) and of the UN (1955).

[60] During the Portuguese president's official visit to London in 1955, mentioned above, the press conveyed a sympathetic image of the Portuguese regime, even calling Salazar a "benevolent dictator"<sup>34</sup>. This indulgent attitude of the Western States was mostly related to the importance of Portuguese territories in the defence of the North–Atlantic area (with an American military structure established in the Azores) and with the threat of the Portuguese Communists replacing Salazar's government after its fall<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Letter from John Muir, 25 November 1961.

<sup>34</sup> According to Amélia Fernandes this was the most common description of Salazar in the British newspapers, *A Exposição de Arte Portuguesa em Londres 1955/ 1956: 'A Personalidade Artística do País'*, Lisbon 2001, 263.

<sup>35</sup> The Portuguese historian Rui Ramos quotes the United States' President Dwight D. Eisenhower in order to provide another explanation for the exceptional treatment that the Portuguese dictatorship received from the Western democracies: "dictatorships of this type are sometimes necessary in countries whose institutions are not as advanced as ours" ("ditaduras deste tipo são por vezes

[61] By the end of the 1950s, Salazar was investing in the country's projection abroad in order to create a positive image of Portugal and to justify maintaining its colonies. But History was running against the dictator's intentions. The independence of European colonies in Asia, particularly India in 1947, and in Africa, more significantly the Belgian Congo in 1960, strengthened the development of anti-colonial movements in the Portuguese territories. At the beginning of 1961, the situation in Angola became even more unstable. A workers' strike at a cotton enterprise had been met with military repression, which resulted in hundreds of dead and wounded among the insurgents. At the same time, a rebellion was taking place in the capital, Luanda, against military and governmental facilities. But it was a violent attack in the north of Angola perpetrated in March by the UPA<sup>36</sup> guerrilla that forced massive military intervention in the country<sup>37</sup>.

[62] The turmoil in Angola began to be directly followed by international journalists who travelled to Luanda in January after the seizure of the Portuguese cruise liner *Santa Maria* by the Iberian Revolutionary Directorate for Liberation<sup>38</sup>. The original plans of the Directorate were to attack Spanish territories in Equatorial Guinea and assault Luanda. Henrique Galvão, the leader of this operation, issued a communiqué that made an impact on international opinion, which led to the *Santa Maria's* chase by two American destroyers and a British frigate to be aborted. The Portuguese authorities blamed primarily the new American president, John F. Kennedy, for not rescuing the hostages. The hijacked liner ended up anchoring in Brazil, whose president promised the rebels asylum.

[63] Although the main goal of the assault was not accomplished, the *Santa Maria* affair called worldwide attention to the Portuguese colonial policy.<sup>39</sup>

[64] The events in Angola were discussed in the UN and a Security Council's motion was issued condemning the situation in the African territory. For the first time the United States and the Soviet Union agreed on the same issue.

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necessárias em países cujas instituições não são tão avançadas como as nossas", my translation). Rui Ramos, "O segundo Salazarismo: A Guerra Fria, a industrialização e as guerras em África (1945-1974)," in: *História de Portugal*, Lisbon 2009, 668. See also Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, *Salazar: A political biography*, New York 2010 and Pedro Aires Oliveira, *Os despojos da Aliança: a Grã-Bretanha e a questão colonial portuguesa, 1945-1975*, Lisbon 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Union of Angolan Peoples (União dos Povos de Angola).

<sup>37</sup> For the repercussion of these events on British public opinion, namely through the connection between UPA and British Baptist missionaries in Angola see Pedro Aires de Oliveira, "Generous Albion? Portuguese anti-Salazarists in the United Kingdom, c. 1960-74," in: *Portuguese Studies* 2 (2011), 175-207.

<sup>38</sup> Directório Revolucionário Ibérico de Libertação.

<sup>39</sup> For more detailed information about the events described above see Meneses, *Salazar: A political biography*.

[65] As for the British Council and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, they were confronted for the first time with the consequences of the Portuguese colonial policy when preparing the exhibition of British Painting and Sculpture in Portugal.

[66] When Lilian Sommerville started to contact museums, galleries, collectors and artists at the beginning of 1961 in order to gather the works that would be shown in Portugal, she had surprising replies from four sculptors.

[67] Although in the letter sent to all the possible lenders Sommerville stressed that the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation was "an international body" that "has given much valuable support to the arts in this country and elsewhere", some artists couldn't really dissociate the Foundation from the Portuguese regime.

[68] Hubert Dalwood (1924–76) wrote to Lilian Sommerville in April explaining the reasons why he could not accept participating in the exhibition:

There are without doubt more villainous governments with more repressive colonial administration than Portugal but somehow the misdemeanors of Portugal (and of Spain) are disregarded in this country. For the sake of the debatable advantages of "The Western Alliance", the government grant a complete indulgence to Spain and Portugal.

It seems to me that any official exhibition will help to perpetuate the emotional fiction surrounding the phrase, "our oldest ally", and discourage those people in Portugal who wish for reform, and who look to this country for moral support.

I would be obliged if you will bring my views to the notice of the Committee and thank them for considering me.<sup>40</sup>

[69] The Irish sculptor F. E. McWilliam (1909–92) also declined the invitation of the British Council, mentioning his recent visit to South Africa, – "so maybe I feel more strongly about it than most people"<sup>41</sup>.

[70] Bernard Meadows (1915–2005) had the same attitude. After receiving letters from the British Council in March, April and May, his reply arrived only in June:

For some time now, in fact ever since the idea of sending an exhibition to Portugal in the Autumn was first mentioned, I have not been happy at the idea of lending works in view of the recent happenings in Angola.

I feel it is necessary to make some gesture of protest against the barbarous and inhuman reprisals perpetrated by the Portuguese. Of course in such a ruthless manner nor as official policy. One has no right in interfere with the internal politics of Portugal, but also one need not condone Portuguese action. I feel lending ones works would do just this.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Letter from Hubert Dalwood to Lilian Sommerville, dated 9 April 1961, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/209.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from F. E. McWilliam to Lilian Sommerville, dated 11 June 1961, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/210.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Bernard Meadows to Lilian Sommerville, dated 19 June 1961, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/210.

[71] These "gestures of protest" were not, however, completely unexpected. The exhibition organizers suffered the first setback as early as March from a leading figure of the British arts – Barbara Hepworth.

[72] After Lilian Sommerville's initial contact, the sculptor showed clear enthusiasm for the exhibition – "I very much hope that you will be able to include a large one [sculpture] of mine this time? It sounds a splendid exhibition"<sup>43</sup>. But Hepworth changed completely her mind as a later letter testifies:

I have been approached by the Council for Freedom in Portugal and Colonies<sup>44</sup> and after giving the matter some very serious thought I have allowed my name to go forward as a sponsor and must ask you, therefore, to allow me to retract my participation in the exhibition in Portugal.

Please do make it absolutely clear to your Committee that my decision does not contain any criticism whatsoever of either The British Council or The Gulbenkian Foundation. I have the greatest possible admiration for (and appreciation of) the magnificent work done by all of you.

I send you my personal apologies for having written and accepted the invitation without giving the matter enough thought from the point of view of my own convictions and hope you will understand.<sup>45</sup>

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### **Boycott Repercussions**

[73] In May 1961, after presenting Barbara Hepworth's case to the selection committee of the exhibition, Lilian Sommerville finally replied to the sculptor's refusal. The main purpose was to detach the British Council and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation from the political circumstances underlined above rather than to argue against Hepworth's decision:

The British Council, as you know, is a non-political body and does not differentiate between countries or political systems. Our exhibitions are chosen to show in other countries the best paintings and sculpture produced in this country. The exhibition for Portugal is being arranged by the British Council and the Gulbenkian Foundation, an international body with its head-quarters in Portugal. The Foundation will be paying all expenses in Portugal, not the Portuguese Government.

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<sup>43</sup> Letter from Barbara Hepworth to Lilian Sommerville, dated 15 March 1961, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/209.

<sup>44</sup> According to a New York Times report, the Council for Freedom in Portugal and Colonies was created in March 1961, "headed by three Labour Members of Parliament and sponsored by about fifty prominent Britons". The goal of this group, whose chairman was Sir Leslie Plummer, was to "move toward a 'united front' of opponents of the Salazar regime in Lisbon" ["Foes of Salazar British Forum Unit; Three Laborite M.P.'s Head 'Council for Freedom in Portugal and Colonies'," in: *The New York Times* (30 March 1961)]. This Council was coordinated by the Movement for Colonial Freedom, established by Labour MP Fenner Brockway in 1954. For information about the anti-Salazar movements active in Britain see Oliveira, "Generous Albion? Portuguese anti-Salazarists in the United Kingdom, c. 1960-74."

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Barbara Hepworth to Lilian Sommerville, dated 21 March 1961, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/209.

We do, however, accept the fact that you do not feel you should take part in this exhibition since you have agreed to be sponsor for the Council for Freedom in Portugal and Colonies. We were also in full agreement that your gesture should not be negated by borrowing sculpture to represent you in this exhibition.<sup>46</sup>

[74] This resigned attitude possibly aimed at preventing the case from becoming public by not promoting further discussion. However, a few articles did point out the sculptors' refusal in participating in the exhibition. *The Observer* called it a "Boycott":

The British Council planning to send an exhibition of contemporary painting and sculpture to Lisbon in January, have come up against a difficulty. Many of the sculptors they invited to participate have refused because of present Portuguese policy in Angola. This was no idle inexpensive gesture. This exhibition had been asked for by the Gulbenkian Foundation, which has provided a lot of money for the British Council to buy paintings and sculpture with on its behalf. So the artists were risking giving offence to an important source of patronage.<sup>47</sup>

[75] In this same line, another article considered the attitude of the "dissident" sculptors a "courageous step". Reporting specifically F. E. McWilliams's position, the *Northern Whig* explains again the context behind it:

Why did Mr. McWilliams decline the invitation? "The exhibition was being held in Lisbon" he told me at his London home, "and I feel that I could not take part in view of the massacres in Angola. I think it is a bad time to hold an exhibition of British works in Portugal. Such an exhibition might be interpreted as support for Portuguese policy in Angola". Mr. McWilliams' decision was influenced by a visit he made recently to South West Africa, the former German possession now administered under international mandate by South Africa. He was not at all impressed at the way the African population were being treated.<sup>48</sup>

[76] The British Council took into consideration these news and their probable implications. The articles were archived by the Council within the documentation related to the organisation of the exhibition. *The Observer* "Boycott" was even attached to John Muir's 25–November–1961 report, already mentioned. Together with this newspaper clipping a message from Lord Bridges was also enclosed, stating that the article had not had much impact – the case was not mentioned by other newspapers, with the exception of the regional *Northern Whig*, from Belfast.

[77] Despite the words of assurance in Lord Bridges letter, *The Observer* article also brought about a different concern. In a message from the Foundation's London trustee, British jurist Charles Wishaw, he expressed his anxiety "that nothing should be written which would put into my colleagues' minds the suggestion that the British by their

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<sup>46</sup> Letter from Lilian Sommerville to Barbara Hepworth, dated 15 May 1961, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/209.

<sup>47</sup> "Boycott," in: *The Observer* (29 October 1961), 13.

<sup>48</sup> "London Diary. Banbridge born sculptor takes a courageous step," in: *Northern Whig* (22 November 1961), 1.

criticism of the Portuguese Government render themselves unsuitable objects of the Foundation's benefaction"<sup>49</sup>.

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## 1961

[78] The prospects of the British Council and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for the exhibition were little by little collapsing. Instead of the public acknowledgement they were looking for, both institutions were dealing with unfavourable reactions. Not only were they collateral victims of Portuguese colonialism, but also their own activity was being questioned.

[79] Therefore, the timing of that artistic enterprise could not have been more adverse. In 1961, as mentioned above, the colonial war in Portuguese territories broke out with the events in Angola. By the end of the year the unyielding posture of the Portuguese regime hit hard.

[80] In Asia, after the diplomatic relations between Portugal and the Indian Union had been cut in 1953, the situation in the territory became dramatically explosive. Nehru could no longer tolerate the remaining traces of colonialism in the sub-continent. Military forces were engaged in the occupation of Goa and other Portuguese territories in the region. Besides the objective of unifying the peninsula, other concerns emerged from the Indian Union's claims over Portuguese possessions, namely the leading role of the "Afro-Asian Block" in the fight against colonialism. Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses cites another Portuguese historian, Pedro Aires de Oliveira, to point out "the succession of diplomatic and political setbacks endured by Salazar, the inability of the Portuguese to mount an effective, or even symbolic, resistance"<sup>50</sup> as other reasons for Nehru's decision to invade Goa. These same facts may also justify the progressive loss of control over the situation by the Portuguese government.

[81] Given that Portugal and the Indian Union had ceased dialoguing, their intermediaries, the United States and the United Kingdom, established a communicational bridge between the two states. Both intermediary countries assumed a very cautious attitude, consisting mainly in advising Nehru not to resort to force. This could, on the one hand, question his non-aggressive philosophy and, on the other hand, provide an example for other countries whose territory had regions occupied by foreign governments. This last situation could be particularly harmful to the British authorities that wished to preserve their Hong Kong and Gibraltar dominions. But they also needed to consolidate the Commonwealth structure, of which the Indian Union was an important piece. Therefore Britain would only advise but never interfere.

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<sup>49</sup> Letter from Charles Whishaw to Lord Bridges, dated 3 November 1961, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

<sup>50</sup> Meneses, *Salazar: A political biography*, 492, footnote 1.

[82] The Commonwealth and British influence in Asia through India were, thus, more important for Britain than the centuries-old Alliance with Portugal. This Alliance led in 1899 to a declaration that established that each country would provide military support to the other one whenever its territorial sovereignty was threatened.

[83] In November, Salazar was informed that the Indian Union announced to American and British authorities its resolution to occupy Portuguese India. It was a matter of a month. In December, Portugal appealed for British intervention in the light of the common agreement. The answer was consistent with Britain's strategic approach to the Indian Union. Nevertheless, British authorities insisted with Nehru for a peaceful resolution.

[84] According to Salazar, the imminent invasion of Portuguese India had only one solution – resistance "to the last drop of blood". In a dramatic letter, the Portuguese prime-minister ordered the governor-general in Goa to be prepared for the worse. Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses interpreted Salazar strategy this way:

Resistance was the first duty of the Portuguese armed forces, since it would cast India as an aggressor, and bring upon it international condemnation. But simple resistance was not enough: this resistance had to be worthy of Portugal's long presence in India, in order to uphold Portugal's claim to the territory – and, by extension, the rest of empire.<sup>51</sup>

[85] Salazar therefore wanted to send a message to the insurgent groups in Africa – that Portugal would not give up its colonies and would resolutely fight for them.

[86] On 18 December 1961 the Indian army invaded Portuguese possessions and on the following day the governor-general and the Portuguese forces, limited to fight with nearly-obsolete weapons, surrendered against Salazar's orders.

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### **'We British are the Scapegoats for Goa'**

[87] News about the Goa invasion and the fall of Portuguese India were manipulated in Portugal by the regime. The surrender was never mentioned – the Portuguese press and television conveyed the facts as Salazar wished them to have happened, that is, the heroic defence of Portuguese territories.

[88] Maria Manuel Stocker explained the need to control all the information about Portuguese India: "the manipulation of information about the Goa affair, as a means of safeguarding the interests of the regime, began in 1950 and reached its climax in 1961". The main objective was to:

Justify Portugal as a colonial empire and legitimise the regime as a protector of an allegedly multi-continental and glorious nation. The control over the press was the strongest weapon that the regime had to culturally unite populations against internal and external threats to the regime. As for India, with the huge difference

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<sup>51</sup> Meneses, *Salazar: A political biography*, 496.

in human resources, economic and military power, only the law and public opinion could defend what had become politically indefensible.<sup>52</sup>

[89] As a strategy to prevent the regime from being internally held responsible for the loss of the Indian territories, the media pointed the finger at British disrespect for the Anglo–Portuguese Alliance. Therefore, Britain became the main target of Portugal's sour resignation. This, of course, affected the British institutions and citizens established in Portugal at that time.

[90] Naturally enough, John Muir's correspondence, besides reporting the preparation of the exhibition, also portrayed the anti–Britain manifestations as well as the political environment and the depressive mood of the Portuguese capital after the Indian invasion:

[...] 2) The present situation is that the country is virtually in mourning. There were no Christmas celebrations; flags have been at half–mast; no floodlighting; no end–of–year fireworks; no Carnival, etc.

3) Further we British are the scape–goats for Goa, a point confirmed officially in Dr. Salazar's speech last night – hence the attack on the Institute, requests for abolition of English teaching, etc. – All parties and sections of the community feel hurt at the loss of Goa, and the propaganda aims at exploiting this feeling.

4) This means that we obviously cannot make any sort of celebration or ceremony of the opening of the exhibition. –In any case, the President of the Republic will certainly *not* attend; he did not open the Gulbenkian Exhibition of Portuguese Art.<sup>53</sup>

[91] This letter clearly establishes a relationship between the political events involving both Portugal and Britain and the exhibition's arrangements. The British Council's management was indeed very concerned with the happenings in Portugal resulting from the Goa affair. Again, among the documents related to the exhibition, an article published in *The Times* highlighted the anti–Britain declaration published by the director of the Portuguese newspaper *Diário Popular*:

After saying that England did not accede to Portugal's request for aid in the Goa affair because it was against her "partner" in the Commonwealth, the article asks: "What is the significance of this British failure within the framework of relations between Portugal and England? Its significance is that the alliance is now worth nothing because it is incompatible with the existence of the Commonwealth. " Later Senhor de Mello states: "It is said that Portugal should revoke the alliance. Why? The revocation would be purely formal. In fact it has already been revoked, repudiated, broken by Great Britain. "<sup>54</sup>

[92] This anger against the British led to several demonstrations of protest in some cases secretly promoted by the Portuguese regime. The Union Jack was burned in the

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<sup>52</sup> My translation. Maria Manuel Stocker, *Xeque–mate a Goa*, Lisbon 2005, 92–93.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from John Muir to the British Council headquarters, dated 5 January 1962, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

<sup>54</sup> "Crowds turn out for Beja victim's funeral: Many arrests expected in Portugal," in: *The Times* (3 January 1962).

streets, the British embassy was flooded with white feathers (symbol of cowardice), an anonymous leaflet called for a boycott to British products and the nationalization of British enterprises (the Lisbon Tramway Company and The Anglo-Portuguese Telephone Company), and, even more dramatically, the British Council's headquarters in Lisbon were stoned. In view of this particular attack, the British ambassador, Sir Archibald Ross (1911-96), in a letter to the Portuguese Foreign Minister, requested police protection in the Council's building.

[93] At this point, the British Council considered suspending the exhibition. John Muir wrote to London again on 8 January to argue in favour of the original plans. Mentioning one more incident occurred two years before that involved young right-wing supporters and a group of Brazilian actors that had performed a Brecht play, Muir pointed out the triangular relationship between the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the Portuguese government and Britain:

I therefore discussed the matter with the Head of the Chancery and he fully agreed that it would be most undesirable to let the Gulbenkian Foundation down when they were stoutly planning to continue with the Exhibition. Furthermore, the Government frankly cannot afford to antagonise the Gulbenkian Foundation and, of course, the Gulbenkian Foundation itself receives all its funds through London. So long, therefore, as responsible parties are aware of the risk, and bearing in mind that no demonstration can take place except with the connivance of the Government, I am sure that the risk is minimal.<sup>55</sup>

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### **Setting up the Exhibition**

[94] In October 1961 the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation had requested another delay of the exhibition inauguration. It was now to be opened in February. Arguing that the display would not be ready in January, Azeredo Perdigão was especially "anxious that the exhibition should be opened by the President of the Republic in the presence of H.M. Ambassador". The relationship between both parts was not the best one at that precise moment and it was hoped that tensions would have eased by February. In a later report to London about the exhibition in Portugal, P. Reed states that the several delays in the opening of the exhibition were "partly because of political feeling against this country in Portugal after the invasion of Goa".<sup>56</sup>

[95] Indeed, both the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the British Council were aware of the political implications of their exhibition. Lilian Sommerville advised Lady Albemarle, Vice Chairman of the British Council, not to attend the opening, informing that the Chairman of the British Council, Lord Bridges, was also advised not to do so.<sup>57</sup> In

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<sup>55</sup> Letter from John Muir to British Council headquarters, dated 8 January 1962, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

<sup>56</sup> [P. Reed], 20th Century British Art, Portugal, 1962, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

<sup>57</sup> Draft letter from Lilian Sommerville to Lady Albemarle, dated 12 January 1962, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

another letter from the director of the British Council's Fine Arts Department to John Muir, Sommerville insisted that detailed information about the exhibition venues and security procedures be sent to London. She further proposed that visitors leave their personal belongings at the entrance of the exhibition in order to prevent any intentional damaging of the works on display.<sup>58</sup>

[96] All these aspects were considered in a meeting between John Muir and Azeredo Perdigão, who did not avoid mentioning the political situation:

Dr. Perdigão went on to refer to the present political divergence between England and Portugal, in fact he underlined his opinion that it was England that was diverging from Portugal which is probably true. He said, however, that though the situation was not to be allowed to reflect in any way on Anglo-Portuguese culture and technical relations, there was clearly a need for discretion in the opening ceremonies and the exhibition programme.<sup>59</sup>

[97] Nevertheless, according to the Foundation's chairman, "the mounting of the Exhibition had to be at the very best level of which the Foundation was capable and at least not below the mounting of the Foundation's own exhibition"<sup>60</sup>, which had taken place in December 1961. As I have referred above, the promotion of the Foundation's image was strongly connected with the visual apparatus of its public events, namely its exhibitions. Therefore it was of utmost importance to ensure a framework that would be prestigious both for the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the British Council.

[98] In Lisbon the exhibition was going to be set up in the main hall of the Sociedade Nacional de Belas-Artes<sup>61</sup>, located in central Lisbon. The team responsible for its mounting was constituted by an architect, José Sommer Ribeiro, and a painter, Fernando de Azevedo, who had already cooperated in the set up of the Foundation's own fine arts exhibition in 1961. In this event, a careful planning influenced by the international design's new trends, mainly Italian, were applied for the first time in an exhibition devoted exclusively to the fine arts. Sommer and Azevedo's experience in conceiving rational and sophisticated displays, where the works exhibited could interact in meaningful ways, was well evidenced in the British art exhibition.

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<sup>58</sup> Letter from Lilian Sommerville to John Muir, dated 16 January 1962, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from John Muir to British Council's 'Fine Arts' Department, dated 25 January 1962, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from John Muir, 25 January 1962.

<sup>61</sup> National Society of Fine Arts.



8 The *British Art of the Twentieth Century* exhibition: paintings by Alan Davie and Terry Frost. Coimbra, Associação Académica headquarters, 1962 (© Tate, London 2012)

[99] In Lisbon, but also in Coimbra and Oporto, where the exhibition traveled to, the display rooms caused a very positive impression.<sup>62</sup> Lilian Sommerville, reporting the visit of John Hulton (Deputy Director of the Fine Arts Department) to Lisbon to monitor preparations, declared that:

No expense had been spared; screens were arranged in the hall to form a sequence of interconnecting spaces in which the paintings were hung in roughly chronological order in a way which gave proper emphasis to the more important artists and at the same time provided effective juxtapositions of individual works.<sup>63</sup>

[100] John Muir also attested to the excitement of entering the exhibition in Lisbon:

The final result was most satisfying; the effect of entering the hall and being faced with the Ben Nicholsons and seeing on one side the Sutherlands and on the other catching glimpses of the Bacons is unforgettable. Next the visitor noticed where the exhibition started, a passage between screens on his left, and he so was imperceptibly led, stage-by-stage, through the various developments of English paintings since 1900. It was a delightful experience and, as the size of the exhibition was just right, not at all tiring, so that many people returned several times.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The Tate Archive preserves a significant number of photographs of this exhibition in Coimbra and Oporto. See file Exhibition of 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Art, Portugal 1961 - TGA 9712/2/212.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Lilian Sommerville to Assistant Controller 1 Arts and Sciences, dated 20 March 1962, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from John Muir, 9 April 1962.



9 The *British Art of the Twentieth Century* exhibition: paintings by Francis Bacon, Roger Hilton (in the background) and Graham Sutherland. Oporto, Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis, 1962  
(© Tate, London 2012)

[101] Muir went on to praise the different solutions adopted for the display of the works in Coimbra and Oporto: "in each case the problems presented by the buildings and rooms were different, and in each case the solutions seemed to be excellent. It was most interesting to see the same exhibition in different surroundings".<sup>65</sup>

[102] For John Hulton the weakest aspect of the exhibition was the sculpture sector. Not only because there were important names missing – and a Portuguese art critic clearly pointed out Barbara Hepworth as the most significant absence of the whole exhibition<sup>66</sup>– but also because the arrangement of the sculpture sector was not as interesting as the rest of the display: "the only serious fault Mr. Hulton could find was in the arrangement of the sculpture which was relegated to a semi-circular area at one end of the hall, where it gave the impression of an afterthought".<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Letter from John Muir to British Council's 'Fine Arts' Department, 29 June 1962, Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

<sup>66</sup> Rui Mário Gonçalves, "Exposição 'Arte Britânica do século XX'," in: *Jornal de Letras e Artes* 27 (4 April 1962), 10.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Lilian Sommerville, 20 March 1962.



10 The *British Art of the Twentieth Century* exhibition: sculptures by Reg Butler and Lynn Chadwick in the foreground. Oporto, Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis, 1962 (© Tate, London 2012)

[103] All in all, the modernised and careful arrangement of the exhibition in Lisbon, Coimbra and Oporto did surprise the British Council given the "nerve-racking" negotiations with the Calouste Gulbenkain Foundation, namely its last minute decisions, postponements and lack of action.<sup>68</sup> Lilian Sommerville concluded finally that "however unsatisfactory the arrangements may have seemed from this end, the results amply justify the Representatives' [John Muir] cautious approach and his confidence, which we did not always share at the time, in the outcome"<sup>69</sup>. P. Reed went even further in stating that:

The collaboration between the Council and the Gulbenkian Foundation in the end turned out to be wonderfully successful though such an ending appeared impossible at one stage. In the political circumstances it is doubtful whether an exhibition organised entirely by the Council could have been staged at all. The impression made by the exhibition was far greater than expected.<sup>70</sup>

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### Impact of the Exhibition

[104] The exhibition of *British Art of the Twentieth Century*<sup>71</sup> was opened in Lisbon on 12 February 1962 by the Portuguese Minister of Education, who hesitated to accept Azeredo Perdigão's invitation. The British ambassador and his French and American counterparts also attended the inauguration. As advised, Lord Bridges did not travel to Lisbon, but Lady Albemarle was present in a luncheon offered by the British ambassador, who also received the Minister of Education and the members of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

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<sup>68</sup> Letter from John Muir, 9 April 1962.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from Lilian Sommerville, 20 March 1962.

<sup>70</sup> [P. Reed], *20th Century British Art*.

<sup>71</sup> *Arte Britânica no Século XX*.

[105] Despite the absence of high-ranked figures of the Portuguese regime, the opening event was very successful and "made all the more remarkable by the official political bad-feeling that had seemed to spoil relations between England and Portugal...".<sup>72</sup>

[106] An art exhibition was therefore acting as a diplomatic agent in reconciling, at least on that particular occasion, two antagonised allies.

[107] Although the Portuguese regime insisted on a national artistic identity, based more, in fact, on an ideological impulse rather than on solid evidence, it admitted that modern art was more susceptible to external influences. Modern art may, thus, escape from a nationalist discourse and even, as in the *British Watercolours and Drawings of the Twentieth Century* exhibition mentioned above, contradict such a discourse. Given its international nature and in some cases its aseptic quality, modern art and design were capable of bringing nations together.<sup>73</sup>

[108] In the exhibition catalogue, the analysis of British art of the first half of the Twentieth century proceeded by comparison and contrast with the international trends, especially Parisian, that marked the artistic production of that period, from Sickert to Paolozzi. The display integrated members from the Camden Town Group, mentioned very briefly the Vorticist movement through William Roberts paintings (dated yet from the 1930s), included also Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson, Ceri Richards, introduced Graham Sutherland's "nature mystical romanticism", mentioned the Euston Road School with Coldstream and Pasmore and presented Francis Bacon and Josef Herman.

[109] In the catalogue's introduction John Russell<sup>74</sup> highlighted however the British post-war art, which did finally stand out in the international panorama. Indeed, Russell declared that the exhibition paid special attention to the contribution of the post-war artists that gave British art a vivid expansion and the international prestige that it was never able to achieve before the war. Nevertheless, this revision of the most recent art did not manage to show the new developments that had contaminated the traditional media and even neglected them for an imprint of reality and popular culture. Considering the activity of the Independent Group and the new dynamics of the British artistic schools, the British art exhibition in Lisbon ended up by being rather conservative. It was actually focused on the traditional artistic media, painting and sculpture, and portrayed particularly the abstract influx, in a lyrical or more gestural form in painting, or in a

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<sup>72</sup> [P. Reed], 20th Century British Art.

<sup>73</sup> A few art historians believe that the National Secretariat of Information subtly promoted the abstract artists since their works could hardly convey any political message. Until 1956 the Secretariat had to deal with the Neo-realistic's movement events, which manifested an ideological view very closed to the communist party. Therefore, the Portuguese regime did not support an artistic trend in particular, but modern artworks which did not hide any subliminal message or were already familiar to the general public, as the case of the modern art display at the Portuguese Pavilion in Brussels clearly points out.

<sup>74</sup> John Russell (1919-2008) was an English art critic. He started his career in *The Sunday Times*, moving in 1974 to *The New York Times*, where he became chief art critic from 1982 to 1990.

primitivistic and schematic fashion in sculpture (Henry Moore, Reg Butler, Ceri Richards, etc.).

[110] It is among the painting nucleus that we find works belonging to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation purchased by the British Council: works from Roger Hilton, Terry Frost, Peter Lanyon, Alan Davie, Adrian Heath, and Patrick Heron.

[111] The international character of the exhibition and the prestige of the institutions behind it attracted many visitors. In Lisbon attendance was estimated at between 200 and 250 visitors a day<sup>75</sup>.

[112] Additional activities such as conferences by Gerald Forty and films on Moore, Armitage and Sutherland complemented the information provided by the exhibition about British art.



11 *The British Art of the Twentieth Century* exhibition: paintings by William Roberts and Wyndham Lewis. Coimbra, Associação Académica headquarters, 1962 (© Tate, London 2012)

[113] Nevertheless, as newspapers reported<sup>76</sup>, this exhibition did not go without scandalizing visitors. In Oporto, for instance, the British Council's librarian pointed to the difference between the visitors who attended the opening of the exhibition for social reasons and the teachers and students of the city's School of Fine Arts. The former, representative of a "rather conservative and 'bourgeois'" society, were in some cases very shocked, while the latter showed a true enthusiasm for the display.<sup>77</sup> Actually,

<sup>75</sup> [P. Reed], 20th Century British Art.

<sup>76</sup> Almost all newspapers which commented the British art exhibition praised its organisation and considered this an unique event and a landmark in the national artistic panorama. See "Artes Plásticas. «A Arte Britânica no Século XX» – grandiosa exposição no Museu Soares dos Reis," in: *Jornal de Notícias* (11 April 1962) Artur Maciel, "Arte Britânica do Séc. XX: Exposição na .S.N.B.A.," in: *Colóquio: Revista de Artes e Letras* 18 (May 1962), 30-35; and Gonçalves, "Exposição 'Arte Britânica do século XX'," 10.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from John Muir, 29 June 1962.

Oporto school not only contrasted with the high-society of the city, but also with the more rigid and academic environment of the School of Fine Arts in Lisbon.

[114] Artists, art students and teachers were probably the most directly benefited from the British art exhibition. As stated by some press, the Portuguese artistic sector had traditionally kept close links with Paris. The contact with the artistic production of another country, albeit influenced by French art as well, could only be an enriching experience for the artists. However, Portuguese artists had already recognised the dynamics of the British artistic *milieu* and London as an art centre long before the Portuguese art critics, still very attached to the French paradigm. Indeed, since the early 1950s, many Portuguese artists had begun travelling to London to attend its art schools – Paula Rego in 1952 or Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos, who arrived in London in 1956 to study at the Slade School, where he began teaching in the Department of Engraving in 1961.

[115] This exhibition did not come therefore as a complete revelation of the artistic production in Britain. Nevertheless, it was considered the first one of the kind ever to be organised in Portugal (a citation, in fact, of Philip Hendy's preface) and the artistic event of the year.

[116] All the articles published about the exhibition praised this event and its arrangement. Most of them followed the words of Philip Hendy and John Russell's texts in the catalogue, pointing out the development of British art in the post-war period and naming Henry Moore as its most important figure. However, art critic Rui Mário Gonçalves stressed the absences, considering that this exhibition should have been larger so as to provide a more comprehensive view of British art from the Twentieth century<sup>78</sup>. Nevertheless, Gonçalves recognised that, given the limitations, the selection of artists was "scrupulous". For the same art critic this exhibition also brought out a contrast between the British and Portuguese artistic panoramas. Portuguese artists still lacked the international promotion that the British had been able to enjoy since the war, as well as leading figures that brought them together and stimulated them –according to Gonçalves those leading figures were in Britain Ben Nicholson, Victor Pasmore and Barbara Hepworth.

[117] The British Council was also to take the results of this exhibition into account. In his annual report (1962–63), John Muir analysed the effectiveness of "joint action" between the British Council and other organisations. Focusing on the organisation of the British art exhibition in Portugal, considered as the "main event of the Council's work" on that period, Muir weighed the pros and cons of sharing responsibilities:

The practice of sharing with outside bodies the responsibility for various activities seems to be increasing and this is a good opportunity to review its working in Portugal. In the above case it was in the end triumphantly justified. Had the

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<sup>78</sup> Gonçalves, "Exposição 'Arte Britânica do século XX'," 10.

Gulbenkian Foundation not been involved it is difficult to see how the exhibition could ever have been put on, at least with any measure of success, in the atmosphere that reigned at a crucial stage in the arrangements. On the other hand the painful delays and postponements, over which we had no control, showed the weakness of divided responsibility. [...]

But if the policy of working through outside agencies is continued or expanded, the risks will have to be accepted; every now and then a failure will be inevitable.<sup>79</sup>

[118] The British art exhibition promoted, therefore, an internal debate within the institutions that were involved in their organisation. This was a true challenge that the Gulbenkian Foundation and the British Council had to overcome in order to maintain their high standing and influence that were initially threatened.

[119] As for the Portuguese artists, this exhibition reinforced the prominent position that London in particular seemed to be reaching in the art world. For the first time the Portuguese artists had access to a broad presentation of the British painting and sculpture and, consequently, to new international references. The impact of this event rests also in the isolation of Portuguese artistic milieu from the most dynamic international centres. Moreover, given that the major artistic events took place mainly in Lisbon, the repetition of the British arts exhibition in other cities like Coimbra and Oporto may well be the most important contribution to the artistic promotion in Portugal, as the local newspapers clearly testified.<sup>80</sup>

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## Conclusion

[120] The successful outcome of the exhibition of *British Art of the Twentieth Century* promoted further reflection on the activity of the two institutions involved in its organisation. They continued to cooperate especially in the constitution of a collection of British contemporary art that would be comprehensively exhibited for the first time in Lisbon in 1971<sup>81</sup>.

[121] However, between 1962 and 1971 the British Council and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation did not cooperate in the arrangement of any other exhibition. This fact was not probably related to the "nerve-racking" organisation of the British art exhibition in Lisbon, but was mostly due to the arrangements that the Foundation had already

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<sup>79</sup> [John Muir], *Extracts from representative Portugal's annual reports: 1962–1963*, [1963]. Tate Archive, TGA 9712/2/208.

<sup>80</sup> See Oporto's newspapers covered extensively the opening of this exhibition in the city's museum and also in Coimbra: "'Arte Britânica no Século XX' notável exposição de pintura e escultura patente no Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis organizada pelo British Council sob os auspícios da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian", in: *O Primeiro de Janeiro* (11 April 1962); "Arte. 'Arte Britânica do século XX', no Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis", in: *O Comércio do Porto* (11 April 1962); "Arte Britânica no Século XX", in: *O Primeiro de Janeiro* (14 April 1962).

<sup>81</sup> *100 obras de arte britânica contemporânea da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian*, exh. cat., Lisbon 1971.

initiated in 1961 for a major exhibition in London, *Painting and Sculpture of a Decade '54-'64*.<sup>82</sup>

[122] Institutional and diplomatic interests played a crucial role in the organisation of the British art exhibition in Lisbon, Coimbra and Oporto, proving that these events are not indifferent to a much broader context than the artistic one. But is it fair to reduce them to just politics? Not in the least; the exhibition in Portugal had also an undeniable effect on this country's artistic scene. Portuguese arts were rather isolated from the main artistic trends and had as its only paradigm the French arts. This exhibition not only contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the contemporary artistic dynamics, but also to diversify the main references of the Portuguese artists and public in general. Indeed, during the 1960s a growing number of artists decided to choose London to continue their artistic education, in most cases supported by the Gulbenkian Foundation's grants. Most significantly, the British arts event, by travelling to other Portuguese cities as Coimbra and Oporto, broke with the traditional concentration of the most important artistic activities in Lisbon, thus unifying the country and contributing to a more generalised access to new international inputs.

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<sup>82</sup> See Stephenson, 'Painting and Sculpture of a Decade '54-'64 Revisited'.