

THE
MOMENT
IS
NOW
OR
NEVER



The first time I saw Antonio Poppe was on a summer afternoon in the back garden of number 211 on Avenida da Liberdade. Once a late-19th century residential building, Avenida 211 was, following a series of small miracles in the early 2000s, transformed into what any contemporary marketing guru would describe as a “creative hub.” Artists’, designers’ and other creators’ studios were back to back with exhibition, debate and mere social spaces, right in the economic and financial heart of the capital. All private, low profile and behind closed doors, because the building was kindly provided by lenders who preferred to remain anonymous. A few years after this influx of creative laborers, Avenida 211 began hosting an inaugural summer vacation dinner that brought together the entire community and guests at a gigantic party. In the 2011 edition, and shortly after a live version of that anthem to the petty-bourgeois sleaziness that is “O Pai da Criança”, António went on stage with no warning to declaim poetry. For a few moments, the audience that had just jostled in apotheosis to the sound of the Orquestra Chave d’Ouro’s success drafted a generalized squeal of astonishment and disbelief as they witnessed the collage of verses, some in tongues never heard before, that came out of Antonio Poppe’s mouth in a continuous, unobstructed flow. In the center of the stage, with his eyes closed and his face tilted at 45° in the direction of the spotlight, his figure gave off an unsuspected energy – the security of someone who’s absolutely comfortable in being a mediator, in making of his body and his spirit a kind of antenna that, upon request, tunes in and connects in broadband with some sort of transcendence.

António set his studio on the top floor of ZDB last spring so that he could intensify his work with Natxo. In three large rooms, its kaleidoscopic universe began to expand as if it was a sort of crystal: an image draws a text that draws an object that draws a book that draws a memory that closes in a word and starts again. Very quickly,

the three rooms were too small for a process that showed no signs of slowing down. Floor, walls, ceiling, doors – all space was, at the same time, a support and a part of an entropic construction. During one of the visits we did together, and while he was watching closely a collage hanging from the ceiling, Natxo starts telling the following story: *When I was in Varanasi I met a yogi from Bangladesh called Kozut. He lived in an adobe hut that he had built with mud from a stream that flowed right in front of it. The outer walls were smooth, a bit rough even, but what was impressive was that inside the shed everything was carved in bas-relief. I mean it was as if Rodin's Gates of Hell occupied all the walls and ceilings of a three- or four-room shed. There was not a single object inside. Only sitting, lying or resting areas, delimited by slight elevations on the ground.* As he listened to Natxo's account, Antonio smiled as if he knew exactly what he was talking about. *"Like the temple of Khajuraho, but turned inside out?" Exactly! When I entered, he began pointing at the carved figures: Kartikeya, Parvati, Kali, Brahma ... "Shiva, Vishnu, Lakshmi" Durgaaaaan, "Saraswati", Ganeesha ...*

As the recounting advanced, the names seemed to merge, and I perceived less and less where one deity ended and another began. As their voices slowly turned into a litany on the background, I focused my gaze on a mandala that had a coral set just below the center and to the right. As is often the case with António's artistic production, this piece no longer exists. Or rather, it is not that it does not exist; it is just in another stage of evolution. Like a body, it has matured, it was transformed; it has lost and gained elements – elements that have not changed their essence, just their figure. That some of Antonio's works often pass from owner to owner in the most informal manner is not a case for perplexity; but that some of these owners accept, and some even promote, the "updating" of previously acquired works, reveals a particular synchrony with the artist and a remarkable detachment

from the feeling of ownership that usually characterizes the collector's impulse.

The art market doesn't easily accommodate Antonio's drive to update his works. In fact, nothing of the static, functional, tidy, categorized, and definite version of the world relates in good terms with his universe. To realize this, one doesn't need a deep reflection. It is enough to observe the contents (the old and the new) of the mandala that I was examining at the sound of Natxo and Antonio's parade of gods (*Dakshayaaaany*, "Prajapati", *Varuuna*, "Chitragupta" ...): portraits of children, of pregnant women and of birth, of seasonal or occasional atmospheric phenomena, of introspection, closed eyes, meditation, affection, of various aspects of plants and other elements of the natural world, of water, streams, corals or fractals – a whole set of signs that point to this power of being, of persisting, and of transforming that is the essential matter of life. And suddenly, upon finding a labyrinth and a spiral on the resinous surface of the mandala, a wormhole appeared to me in the form of a mental image: this image which served the physicists to explain, based on the plasticity and curvature of the universe, the possibility of creating cosmic shortcuts between distinct points in space or distinct moments in time; the same image, incidentally, that served Joan Solé to explain the fourth point of the epistemological theory of Arthur Schopenhauer.

As the cornerstone of his understanding of the relation of the human being to reality, this point is the one that best cuts the contribution of the German philosopher to the whole of Western philosophy. Presented to the Upanishads – a set of dialogues that comment on the Vedas, the sacred texts of Hinduism – by the orientalist Frederich Maier in the early nineteenth century, Schopenhauer found in this inheritance a theoretical support for an intuition that

had been cherishing for some time: that the plurality and diversity of the real is illusory, that the variety of the world is a *veil of Maya*, a mask that prevents us from accessing the true, same nature of the real. Phenomena – that is, the way things are given to us in the senses – are the stuff of this deception and the favorite source of the natural sciences, mathematics and even abstract thinking. In order to attain knowledge of the noumenon, of the *thing itself*, one must exercise another kind of approach: one must open a breach in the *veil of Maya*, dig a wormhole into the apparent surface of reality to discover the inner essence of things. The tool that opens this hole is a particular mode of intuitive introspection that is conventionally called meditation – the deliberate suspension of all concept and of all reason, in order to dry up the illusory foam of appearances and leave the essence which unites us all and everything that exists.

For Schopenhauer, this essence was Will: a drive to Be and to persevere, the mystery of desire, the moving force that makes things what they are and what they appear to be. And as I leaned over Antonio Poppe's mandala, I thought I understood better why all his work is a giant collage-in-progress. I convinced myself that the allegorical strength of this organic amalgam of images did not lie in its iconicity, in what it showed, but more precisely in what of its unfathomable nature became clear (pass the contradiction) in the interval between each image, and between each of them and the whole of which they are an integral part. Perhaps it was there, in this interstitial space, in the arena where the mutual interpotentiation of a community of images could take place, that intuition could allow us to perceive, in an unprecedented way, the mechanics and nature of the force that impels us to keep on living. Perhaps it was in this hollow space, in this mythical opportunity of nothingness, that one could glimpse, as on the other side of a wormhole, the glimmer of consciousness itself.

"Matrikas", Chamuuunda, "Nataraja, Ugrata, Puruja ..." Yeah! So, the other day I'm crossing Rossio, I hear a guy calling my name. When I turn back, Kozut is standing in front of me: shaved hair, dressed in an orange kurta, he has a tambourine in his hand. When I asked him what he was doing there, he told me that a monsoon had destroyed his adobe house and that he had decided to walk over to Kathmandu, Nepal. Then he said something quite incomprehensible about the color of the wings of the butterfly of God and how he fell in love with a Peruvian called Pajita, with whom he founded a commune of ayahuasca in Ayacucho. When that went south, he joined an Andean music band with which he came to Lisbon. "Those of the pan flutes amplified by a gas generator?" Exactly. When I pointed, astonished, to his garment, as if asking, but how did you get to become a Krishna follower? He said to me: 'Natxo, I looked for the truth in the surface of all things and, here and there, I seemed to have seen its spectrum. But in fact, only on the celebration of the body and in the freedom of its expression did I discover the face of the all-attracting and felt the source of all pleasure. "And you? What did you say?" Me? I invited him to come and play at the opening.

Bruno Marchand

First floor

	4	6	7	8	10	11	13	
3								14
	2			5		9	12	
1								

Room 1

1. *PALCO PRIMEIRO*, 2019

Room 2

2. Page from a book, 2012
3. *TAMBOR*, 2019
4. Page from a book, 2012

Room 3

5. *A LA CLÉZIO*, 2018-2019
6. Page from a book, 2012
7. Book *Índio Branco*
de Jean-Marie
Gustave Le Cléziau
8. Page from a book, 2012

Room 4

9. *ISTO*, 2013
10. Page from a book, 2012
11. Page from a book, 2012

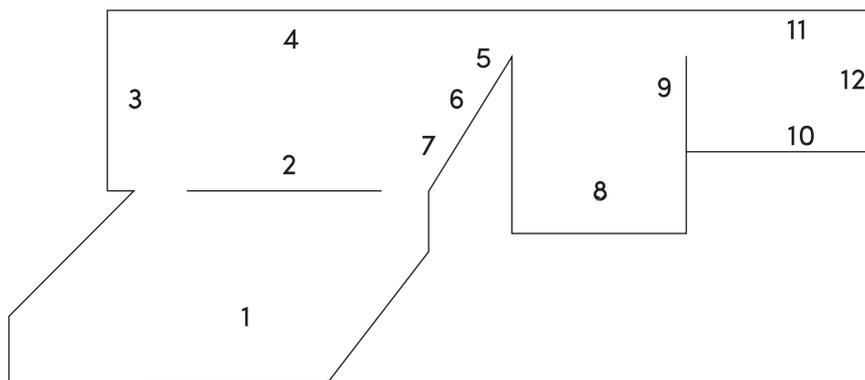
Room 5

12. Page from a book, 2012
13. Page from a book, 2012
14. *DEEP SEE*, 2018

Stairs

jnani, 2014
Courtesy Collection
Figueiredo Ribeiro

Second floor



Room 1

1. *MIL ÓRBITAS*, 1991–2019

Room 2

2. *HOLOGRAMÁTICA*, 2019
3. Page from a book, 2012
4. *PAUTA PARA KORA DE IBRA GALISSA*, 2014–2019
5. Page from a book, 2012
6. Page from a book, 2012
7. Book page of *Korallen* by Charles Darwin with intervention, 2018

Room 3

8. *ESFERAS AMAM TAGENTES (MARIA)*, 2019
9. Page from a book, 2012

Room 4

10. *ESQUELETO D'ASA*, 2019
11. Page from a book, 2012
12. *A GRANDE IMAGEM*, 2011–2019

António Poppe (1968, Lisbon)

Visual artist, poet, and performer, lives and works in Lisbon. He studied at the Ar.Co (Center for Art and Visual Communication), at the Royal College of Arts in London, and at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where he held a Master's Degree in Performative Art and Cinema as a fellow of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Luso American Foundation for Development. He develops a hybrid work of poetry and visual arts, part of which has been edited by Assírio & Alvim (*Torre de Juan Abad*, 2001), Documenta (*Livro da Luz*, 2012) and Douda Correria (*Medicine*, in 2015, and *Come Coral*, in 2017). He has already performed and or exhibited in venues such as the Serralves Museum, ZDB Gallery, Galeria 111, Culturgest, Fundação Carmona e Costa, among others. In 2015, he took part in *Oracular Spectacular – Desenho e Animismo*, at Centro Internacional de Artes José de Guimarães (CIAJG); in 2017, he exhibited *Watercourse*, with Joana Ferverça, at Galeria 111, and participated in *Encontros para Além da História, under the theme As Magias* (CIAJG). The following year he collaborated with Mumtazz for the 6th edition of *Encontros para Além da História*, this time under the theme *O Nascimento da Arte (d'après Georges Bataille)*, also in the CIAJG; collaborated with *musa paradisiaca* in Collaboration, curated by Filipa Oliveira at the Quetzal Art Center in Jachthuis Schijf, The Netherlands; and developed an artistic residence and seminar at Port 33, on the island of Madeira, part of he cycle *Mais importante do que desenhar é afiar o lápis*, curated by Nuno Faria.

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