



Paula Rego: Obedience and Defiance

MK Gallery, Milton Keynes 14 June to 22 September 2019

Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh 23 November 2019 to 26 April 2020

Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin 25 May to 1 November 2020

MK Gallery is organising what will be a bold and beautiful exhibition of Paula Rego's work, spanning her career, with a special focus on the way Rego's art has addressed the moral challenges to humanity, particularly in the face of violence, political tyranny, gender discrimination, and grief. This very timely exhibition will include twenty large scale 'pastel on paper on aluminium' paintings from a number of major public and private collections as well as previously unseen paintings in gouache and acrylic and drawings from the family and the artist's close friends. The pictures reflect Rego's perspective as an empathetic, courageous woman and a defender of justice, often through reference to past literary narratives and the culture of her times – especially cartoons, film and theatre.

Beginning in the 1960s while living for most of the year in Portugal, Rego's works addressed the repression during Salazar's fascist regime from a variety of viewpoints, those of the advocates of a democratic, republican government, many in exile, as well as the impoverished population. *The Firemen of Alijo* was inspired by the sight of barefoot volunteer firemen in the north of Portugal and in this oil on collage, the artist inserts a kind of devil creature, the drawings borrowing from Catalanian Romanesque art. *Manifesto for a Lost Cause* was dedicated to Rego's father José Figueiroa Rego who died in 1966, a frustrated republican like his own father before him.



Paula Rego

The Firemen of Alijo

1966

Tate



Paula Rego
Manifesto for a Lost Cause
1965
Calouste Gulbenkian Museum

In the 1980s, faced with her husband Victor Willing's diminishing health and increased dependency, Rego began introducing animals to describe human behaviour, initially a dog, bear and rabbit, and drew near caricatures in which conflicted relationships, love-triangles, revenge and castration are played out by a cast of animals. This combination of attachment and a will to survive tragedy continues with the first works drawn from a live model, *The Dog Women*. The dancing ostriches, the idea borrowed from Disney's *Fantasia*, are stocky figures incapable of leaps and grace, suggesting the impossible ideal of balletic elegance replaced by what Rego calls 'the grotto' of the human psyche.



Paula Rego
Wife Cuts Off Red Monkey's Tail
1981
Private Collection

Rego used Eça de Queiro's *The Crime of Father Amaro*, the classic Portuguese story of provincial life in the 1870s, as a starting point for several works, suggesting the claustrophobic norms of society and the power of the clergy. In a dramatic episode she invented, *Angel* 1998, the death of the young girl is avenged. *The Company of Women* 1997 is a nuanced reference to the weakness of men who never grow up, a theme that reoccurs in various drawings. Martin McDonagh's 2003 play *The Pillowman* was the inspiration for a triptych which became an elegy to her own father, the setting the beach in Estoril, Portugal.



Paula Rego
Angel
1998
Ostrich Arts Limited



Paula Rego
The Pillowman (triptych)
2004
Ostrich Arts Limited

Rego's decision to address the subject of abortion arose from her anger at the time of a referendum on its legalisation in Portugal and the consequences of the initial 'no' vote. The resulting works are credited by former Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio as being of tremendous influence in overturning the decision at the 2007 revote. As the critic Robert Hughes put it in 2007, 'There is something undeceived but triumphal about the way these girls look back at you, neither in blame nor in forgiveness, from their sordid and improvised surroundings... In the eyes of Rego, they are brave almost to the point of heroism.' We will also include drawings and prints related to FGM and Honour Killing. The space will conclude with other specifically political works, *War* 2003, which references the first Gulf war using a photograph of a girl in panic published in the Guardian as a starting point and *Cake Woman* 2004.



Paula Rego
Untitled no. 4
1998
Private Collection



Paula Rego
The Cake Woman
2004
Private Collection

The exhibition concludes by examining Rego's own experience as an artist, one who has navigated the difficulties female artists face, a story that underlines her fighting spirit which is especially revealed in the widely praised film released in March 2017, directed by her son Nick Willing, *Secrets and Stories*. It is a remarkable documentary that draws from a large archive spanning sixty years of home movies and interviews, the narration anchored in very personal revelations. Rego has said she is, 'of course a feminist' because 'all women are feminists'.



Paula Rego
Painting Him Out
2011
Private Collection



Paula Rego

Impailed

2008

Private Collection

Working closely with the family and Paula's gallery, Marlborough Fine Art, Catherine Lampert, the curator, and MK Gallery are sourcing extraordinary, many previously unseen works. A major catalogue, published by *Art / Books* will accompany the exhibition, bringing fresh voices into the appreciation of Rego's achievements, along with a text that draws on her own interpretations and revelations about individual works.

Curator

Catherine Lampert is an independent curator and art historian. She has curated numerous exhibitions at the Hayward Gallery, the Whitechapel Gallery, where she was director from 1988 to 2001 and more recently at the Royal Academy of the Arts, Tate Britain, the Kunstmuseum Bonn and MUAC, Mexico City. The subjects of these exhibitions have ranged from old to contemporary masters, including Auguste Rodin, Honoré Daumier, Thomas Schütte, Rosemarie Trockel and Anish Kapoor. She co-curated "Bare Life," an exhibition of postwar British painting from life, 1950-80 at the LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur in Münster (Francis Bacon, Richard Hamilton, David Hockney, R.B.Kitaj, Patrick Caulfield...) in 2014. Her publications include Francis Alys: The Prophet and the Fly (2003) and *Le temps du sommeil* (2010, 2016); Euan Uglow: The Complete Paintings (2007), Peter Doig (2011 and 2018) and Frank Auerbach: Speaking and Painting (2015) and recent essays on Georg Baselitz and George Shaw. She is currently working on the catalogue raisonné of Lucian Freud's paintings. She has been a friend of Rego's since the late 1970s.

MK Gallery

MK Gallery is an educational charitable trust. The Gallery re-opens its doors in early 2019 after a major renovation and expansion, designed by award winning 6a architects. The new, fully accessible facility will more than double the Gallery's footprint with enhanced exhibition galleries, a new auditorium and social and learning spaces.

The Gallery opened in 1999 with a solo exhibition of Gilbert & George and has since presented over 60 wide-ranging exhibitions of contemporary art including solo exhibitions of Marcel Broodthaers, Michael Craig-Martin, Nasreen Mohamedi, Olivia Plender, Pascale Marthine Tayou, Melanie Smith and Andy Warhol. The Gallery also runs a dynamic outreach and events programme, and is a regular publisher and commissioner of new work, often in partnership with an extensive international network. More information can be found at: <http://www.mkgallery.org/information/about/>.