

# THE SPECTACLE OF POWER

AND EXHIBITIONS 1934-1940



Portuguese Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exposition.  
Photograph by Mário Novais. CFT003.103308  
Biblioteca de Arte e Arquivos - Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian

# THE SPECTACLE OF POWER

## POLITICS AND EXHIBITIONS 1934-1940

Combining history, art and ephemeral architecture, political exhibitions seek to celebrate the ruling political system. Such events have always been devised as seductive spaces, urban shows where power took centre stage and through which extremely clear political results are sought and achieved.

This particular exhibition, whose narrative is rooted in miscellaneous documentation – some of which have never been published before – includes four units. Each one proposes a voyage through the political exhibitions held in and on behalf of Portugal between 1934 and 1940, including the Portuguese pavilions presented at the international exhibitions of Paris (1937) and New York (1939).

These events are understood as being in dialogue with other forms of representing power, as shown in the central exhibition area.

As we move through this exhibition, it will be made clear that Portugal played an important role in the great political stage of the 1930s, contributing to the process of disseminating and contaminating narratives and aesthetic canons.

Overall, we will learn about the ingenious spectacle of power while also catching glimpses of what was happening behind the scenes. Behind the brightness, the lights and the stage sets, this exhibition reveals a history that is not always straightforward, marked by debates, experimentations, mistakes and learning regarding propaganda. In this way, it makes visible the apparent and not-so-apparent aspects of the path that led to the 1940 Portuguese World Exhibition.



Portuguese American Civic League banner in procession [c. 1936]  
St. Anthony's/Photographs/249  
Greater Boston Portuguese American Digital Archive  
Center for Lowell History | University of Massachusetts Lowell



Portuguese Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exposition, Achievements Room.  
Photograph by Mário Novais. CFT003.103308  
Biblioteca de Arte e Arquivos - Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian



Portuguese Pavilion at the 1937 Paris International Exposition, State Hall.  
Photograph by Mário Novais  
Biblioteca de Arte e Arquivos - Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian

EXHIBITION  
THE SPECTACLE OF POWER  
POLITICS AND EXHIBITIONS  
1934 - 1940

13 MAY - 30 DECEMBER 2023  
PADRÃO DOS DESCOBRIMENTOS

DIRECTOR  
OF PADRÃO DOS DESCOBRIMENTOS  
Margarida Kol de Carvalho

DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
Conceição Romão

RESEARCH  
Sofia Diniz

COMMUNICATION  
Mário Camolas

SCIENTIFIC AND PEDAGOGICAL  
MEDIATION  
Ana Madeira  
Joana Vitorino

FRONT OF HOUSE AND TICKET OFFICE  
Bárbara Duarte  
Miguel Viana  
Regina Gonçalves  
Sílvia Freire  
Tiago Pereira

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION  
Annarita Gari

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION SUPPORT  
Michelangelo Di Giacomo  
- Museo M9

ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
Carlos Bartolo - CITAD - ULL  
Maria Alexandre Lousada - FLUL  
Nuno Domingos - ICS-UL  
Paula André - Dinâmicas-ISCITE-IUL  
Rita Almeida de Carvalho - ICS-UL

PLASTIC DESIGN  
António Viana

ASSISTANT PRODUCER  
Nuno Magalhães

GRAPHIC DESIGN  
Rita Neves

GRAPHIC CONCEPT  
AND COMMUNICATION ARTWORK  
Oland - Denominação  
de Origem Criativa

PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS  
Ricardo Mesquita

AUDIOVISUAL DESIGN  
Monstro Criativo

PROOFREADING  
GoodSpell - Comunicação,  
Tradução, Edição, Lda.

TRANSLATION  
Alexandra Andresen Leitão

PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION  
Maria Helena Nunes - Mão de Papel

VINYL AND WALLPAPER  
Nuno Manuel Neves Santos

LIGHTING PLAN  
Vitor Vajão

CONSTRUCTION  
A.S. Pinheiro, Lda

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Archives Nationales
- Archivio Centrale dello Stato
- Archivio Istituto Luce
- Arquivo Diplomático e Biblioteca | Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros
- Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa
- Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo | Direção Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas
- Armando Calvão Rocha
- Biblioteca de Arte e Arquivos | Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian
- Biblioteca Fondazione Oriani
- Biblioteca Nacional de España
- Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal
- Bibliothèque Nationale de France
- Centro Português de Fotografia
- Cinemateca Portuguesa - Museu do Cinema
- Collezione Salce (Treviso)
- Fundação António Quadros
- Fundação Mário Soares e Maria Barroso
- Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa
- Greater Boston Portuguese American Digital Archive, Center for Lowell History - University of Massachusetts Lowell
- Lee Douglas
- Hemeroteca Municipal de Lisboa
- João Paulo Martins
- Museu da Presidência da República
- Museu Digital Conservas de Portugal
- Museu do Dourado
- Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center | Boston Public Library
- Private Collection of PJ Made | Cornell University Library
- RTP - Rádio e Televisão de Portugal
- The Ferreira-Mendes Portuguese-American Archives | University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
- The New York Public Library | Manuscripts and Archives Division
- Universiteit van Amsterdam - Bibliothek
- Lupa - Luís Pavão
- Museu Nacional do Teatro e da Dança
- VERITAS Art Auctioneers



## THE THIRTIES: POLITICS TAKES CENTRE STAGE

In the 1930s, the means of transport and communication expanded and proliferated. This period was also marked by one of the greatest economic crises of the 20th century, forms of political radicalisation and the birth of dictatorships, all of which changed our world forever.

This combination of factors produced a new idea of propaganda, which, taking advantage of recent forms of entertainment, aimed to inform, educate and inculcate political values among the population.

One of the most effective and utilised forms of propaganda was that of political exhibitions. Such events used the models of the history museum and art exhibitions and turned them into a spectacle. They exchanged trust in progress – the trust on which trade fairs were based – for pride in national politics and the nation's past. They also replaced the illusion of travelling in space, so typical of colonial exhibitions, with that of travelling in time.

Capable of reaching millions of people, these exhibitions were used by both dictatorships and democracies as propaganda tools, soon becoming key events for government agendas in the 1930s.

Graphs at the Documentary Exhibition of the National Dictatorship's Accomplishments, S.C. 1928 V. Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal



## A RECENT PAST, A PRESENT FUTURE LISBON, 1934 AND 1936

In both 1934 and 1936, the Estado Novo celebrated the anniversary of the military coup of 28 May 1926 with two exhibitions: the Documentary Exhibition of the National Dictatorship's Accomplishments and the Year X Exhibition.

On both occasions, the "national revolution" was presented as a turning point in the country's recent history, which had established a new order after a period which was ruled by chaos.

The two exhibitions publicly and visibly showcased the efficiency and unity of power. Backstage, however, in this initial phase of the regime's propaganda campaign, difficulties and tensions arose between those involved over elements such as the design, creation and installation of the exhibitions.

The predominant narratives and aesthetics in these exhibitions were influenced by the celebration of other recent revolutions, namely those that had occurred in fascist Italy and Soviet Russia. However, the Portuguese context was not suited to directly emulating these models. For one thing, it was difficult to use the coup of 1926 as a foundational myth since it had not directly given rise to the regime.

Moreover, the celebrations surrounding the coup were, above all, an expression of appreciation for the military in order to maintain their support. Finally, inadequate financial resources and the absence of a clear aesthetic vision resulted in a diversity of solutions that were not always easy to understand.



Portugal 1934 PT/MPR/AOC/GV065/032 Museu da Presidência da República

National Revolution. Photograph by Mário Novais CFT003.100217 Biblioteca de Arte e Arquivos - Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian



Installation in the Documentary Exhibition of the National Dictatorship's Accomplishments, at the Portuguese Industries Pavilion, S.C. 1928 V. Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal

## REHEARSALS IN EDUARDO VII PARK

Between 1934 and 1937, Eduardo VII Park was transformed into an experimental space where intellectuals, artists and architects explored the complex relationship between historic imaginaries, aesthetics and the increasing tendency to link spectacle and power.

On three occasions, the Portuguese Industries Pavilion – the present-day Carlos Lopes Pavilion – was adapted and camouflaged to act as a stage for a politically manipulated production of the country's recent history, which sought to legitimise the new regime. Each of the three exhibitions held in the park proved successful in some ways but unsuccessful in others. They were also marked by hesitancy and conflicts between the various agents involved.

Those who designed and organised the exhibitions displayed in this pavilion were not operating in a vacuum. Rather, they acted as transnational agents. Indeed, during the interwar period, these agents constituted a major network, a sort of European laboratory in which ideas and practices would be tested.

## A NOT SO DISTANT PAST LISBON, 1937

Organised by the Agência Geral das Colónias (General Agency for the Colonies), the Historical Exhibition of the 19th Century Occupation omitted the epic theme of maritime expansionism and focused instead on the principal facts surrounding the occupation of African territories in the period between the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference and the military campaigns of the Great War.

Predominantly aimed at the elites, the exhibition combined modern design elements, such as attention to the lighting of rooms, with the extensive use of archival documentation, paying tribute to the actions of colonial governors and senior military commanders. In terms of public attendance, the exhibition was a failure. Also unsuccessful was the unusual decision to combine a colonial exhibition free from any ludic aspects with a museological approach which sought to narrate an exemplary colonisation process – with the 1930 Colonial Act its apogee.



Portuguese Stand in the San Francisco World's Fair. PT/AR/D3/MNE-MD/LEM-USA-EWAS/093/000031 Arquivo Diplomático e Biblioteca - Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros

## PORTUGAL ON THE FOREIGN STAGE

The interwar years were a period of crisis, characterised by economic instability, ideological warfare and the threat of imminent conflict. All these factors affected international relations and compromised traditional political and diplomatic channels.

The international exhibitions held in the 1930s acted as crucial political arenas, stages where various world views were displayed and confronted each other.

The pavilions were conceived and designed to be the calling cards for those nations taking part in the World's Fair. Through architecture, aesthetic practices and the promotion of cultural elements deemed to represent national identity – including history, art, cinema, music, food, etc. – both democracies and dictatorships proclaimed the superiority of their political ideologies, setting themselves apart from some, seeking affinities with others, and maintaining the control and support of their own communities abroad.

## A MODERN IMAGE, A TRADITIONAL COUNTRY PARIS, 1937

When it was inaugurated in 1937, the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* (International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life) was presented as a celebration of human enterprise and an opportunity for cooperation and dialogue between peoples.

However, the direct confrontation between the pavilions of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, just a stone's throw away from the Eiffel Tower, together with the display of Picasso's painting *Guernica* (1937), told another story.

The Paris Exhibition was the first occasion in which António Ferro portrayed the Estado Novo at an international event. Given the challenge of fulfilling the general theme proposed by the organisers – the avant-garde of the arts and technologies in modern life – the Director of Portuguese propaganda turned the theme on its head, presenting the new Portugal as the result of the art of good governance and the mastery of balanced budgets.

The Portuguese Pavilion sought to show that the nation was both modern and traditional. The country's present was exalted in photomontages that filled the building's interior, while its historical past was embodied via bas-reliefs on the façades. Finally, the mythical tradition of the Portuguese people was displayed in the folklore art room.



General view of the International Exposition in Paris. Photograph by Mário Novais CFT003.100217 Biblioteca de Arte e Arquivos - Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian

## GOLDEN GATE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION SAN FRANCISCO, 1939

The Golden Gate International Exhibition aimed to celebrate the great engineering feat of the Golden Gate Bridge, which linked San Francisco and, consequently, the United States of America to the Pacific Ocean.

The stand representing Portugal drew inspiration from a stereotyped view of a small village church. Inside, Portugal's participation in the "discovery" of California was emphasised, as well as the role of handicrafts in the Portuguese economy and the achievements of the new regime.

A major part of the stand was dedicated to Portuguese communities living on the east coast of the United States. This tribute was owed to the fact that these emigrants had financially supported its construction and display through collective donations.

## TOMORROW'S WORLD IS YESTERDAY'S WORLD NEW YORK, 1939

The New York World's Fair was devised as a light-filled, modern spectacle of colours, an almost-utopian projection of a future world. Paradoxically, in the same year that the Second World War broke out, participating states were asked to ensure that their pavilions responded to the theme "Building the World of Tomorrow".

Portugal opted for a nostalgic vision and approach. The Portuguese Pavilion was designed as a fortress where maritime epic played a decisive role in the organisation of the layout and the interior design. Having decided on a narrative intended to engender pride in the large emigrant community while also emphasising an image of Portugal in the eyes of visitors, António Ferro underscored the country's importance on the world stage and in relation to the founding story of the United States, going so far as to include Christopher Columbus in the historic Portuguese pantheon.

At the end of the exhibition, an allegory showed the world of tomorrow, as imagined through the eyes of the Estado Novo: an environment of calm and social progress rooted in the unity provided by the Christian nuclear family and corporatist organisations.

The Exhibition of the Portuguese World. Foundation Doar. Photograph by Mário Novais, CFT003.25645 Biblioteca de Arte e Arquivos - Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian



## BELÉM, THE SCENARIO OF POWER

Belém marks the end of the story told by this exhibition. It was also the final and grandest stage on which the Estado Novo displayed its power.

The lessons learned from earlier exhibitions hosted in Eduardo VII Park ensured that mistakes could be corrected. Principally, these mistakes included the acritical importation of models which had been in vogue at the time, the use of elitist language, and the use of multiple styles lacking a common harmony. Meanwhile, the experience gained from participating in the exhibitions in Paris and New York made it possible to perfect and even challenge the traditional methods deployed by Portuguese propaganda up to that point.

The Exhibition of the Portuguese World was an impressive spectacle which was able to address a broad audience. Its metaphors and allegories sought to encourage a rational approach rooted in historical knowledge, while the shining lights and the monumentality of the exhibition sought to generate an immediate, emotional and prideful reaction to Portugal's national past, as well as the regime.

Although temporary, the exhibition left a lasting mark on the city, definitively transforming the space between the Jerónimos Monastery and Belém Tower into a backdrop for the display of power. Indeed, the complicated legacy of the exhibition bequeathed an unpredictable process of resignification of the site, which remains a source of debate even today.