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Interview With David Evans: Memories and Reflections on Post-April 25 Mural Painting

Entrevista a David Evans: Memórias e Reflexões Sobre Pintura Mural no Pós-25 de Abril

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David Evans and the Post-April 25 Murals

David Evans, originally from the United Kingdom, has lived in Portugal since 1966. A self-taught painter, his career includes numerous group and solo exhibitions. He served as director of the Galeria Judite Dacruz in the early 1970s, taught for nearly 30 years, and later became director of English Studies at the British Council in Lisbon. Currently, he is a researcher in Anglo-Portuguese studies at the Nova University Lisbon and also works as a translator.

On June 10, 1974, during a popular festival organised by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), David Evans, along with 47 other artists, participated in the creation of a collaborative panel at the Modern Art Gallery in Belém. This initiative marked the beginning of a series of mural interventions that would unfold over the following years, embodying the spirit of the era through themes such as freedom, resistance, and social transformation.

During the Portuguese revolutionary process, mural painting emerged as a powerful medium of social mobilisation and popular expression in the context

of newly won freedom. In addition to initiatives by the MFA, political parties utilised murals as vehicles for communication and ideological dissemination. Between 1974 and 1977, public art in Portugal played a pivotal role in bringing the population closer to the revolutionary movement, with artists employing these practices as instruments for dialogue with civil society (Cruzeiro, 2021). The murals created by Evans (Figure 1) and other artists were part of a broader tradition of revolutionary public art, drawing parallels with historical movements such as Mexican muralism and the Cuban experience.



Figure 1: *David Evans paints the mural at the Festa da Luz in the village of Chã, 1975*

Credits. © Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa, Ernesto de Sousa, ESO001465

During the session "Mural Painting and Revolution"¹, part of the "Image and Revolution" series of talks, Evans' speech stood out for its clarity and insightful observations. Motivated by the significance of his experiences and perceptions of the post-April 25 period, I invited him for an interview to delve deeper into his reflections and memories.

Catarina Lira Pereira (CLP): How did the idea for the June 10, '74, panel come about, and who organised the event?

¹The Art History Institute organised the session in partnership with the Atelier-Museu Júlio Pomar. It featured the participation of Cristina Pratas Cruzeiro, Begoña Farré Torras, Sónia Moura, and Margarida Rendeiro, with Sara Antónia Matos serving as moderator. It took place on July 11 2024.

David Evans (DE): The idea emerged during meetings of an organisation established at the time — the Democratic Movement of Plastic Artists (DMPA). Today, it might be called the "Democratic Movement of Visual Artists". The concept for DMPA arose on May 1², just a week after April 25. I recall us asking one another: "so, what happens now? Will everything change? How do we take part? How can we contribute to the necessary changes?". We agreed to meet a few days later at Galeria 111, where about 20 or 30 of us gathered. It was there that the idea for the movement took shape, and we decided that the ideal place to launch the initiative would be the artists' house: the National Society of Fine Arts. Despite all the constraints before April 25, it had always remained functional and was a space of freedom for artists. The first action was scheduled for May 28, the anniversary of the coup that ended the First Republic and ushered in 48 years of dictatorship. We agreed to wrap Salazar's statue at the Foz Palace, which at the time housed the Ministry of Social Communication. The building had undergone several transformations — it had been the SNI [National Secretariat for Information, Popular Culture and Tourism] (1944–1968) and later the SEIT [Secretariat of State for Information and Tourism] (1968–1974) — before the April 25 revolution. At the time, a large statue of Salazar by the sculptor Francisco Franco still stood prominently in the courtyard. We decided against defacing or damaging a work of art and instead wrapped the statue in black cloth, accompanied by a large banner reading "Democratic Movement of Plastic Artists". We recognised it as a public act, distributed a press release³ to newspapers and journalists, and ensured photographs were taken. Interestingly, just two or three days later, for me, one of the most poetic moments of that phase of "sweet anarchy" in the early days of the Revolution occurred: an open letter from the railway workers gathered in a plenary session in Entroncamento, was published in a newspaper of that time. Addressed to the DMPA and visual artists, the letter offered "their trains" for us to use in transporting the fascist statues to a designated location, where they would be transformed into monuments to democracy⁴. The initiative by the railway workers to address the artists in this manner is something that only happens in truly exceptional circumstances, as was the case with our revolution. Shortly afterwards, we decided that we should approach the MFA soldiers to explore how we could actively contribute to the revolution. I recall a meeting between representatives of the DMPA and members of the MFA, where it was agreed that on June 10 — Portugal Day

²The Democratic Movement of Plastic Artists was officially created on May 8, 1974.

³Part of the press release stated: "‘Dress coat’ – that's how Salazar treated art (see António Ferro's book, 'Salazar', 1933). In the garden of the Palácio Foz — the 'barracks of demagoguery in colour', as artists nicknamed it many years ago — the statue of Salazar remains in a past that we want to be absent. (...) Fascist art is bad for the eyes!" ("Comunicado", 1974, p. 3).

⁴On this subject, on May 20, *Diário Popular* published a suggestion from the railway workers addressed to the National Salvation Junta, which proposed that "the bronze from statues, busts, medallions, etc., and marble plaques (...) should be used, as well as many official buildings and even many factories and companies visited and inaugurated by figures from the fascist regime (...). 'These are symbols of hollow vanity, which should be removed now, but repurposed for a magnificent monument to Liberation since tonnes of bronze and marble will need to be collected'" ("Sugestão dos Ferroviários Para Edificação do Monumento ao Preso Político Desconhecido", 1974, p. 14).

— we would stage a collective intervention at the Belém Art Gallery, which was virtually abandoned. Naturally, we lacked the logistical capacity to erect a three-storey scaffold or to unveil a canvas measuring 24 m long by 4.5 m high... But the soldiers did! To this day, I still wonder where they managed to find the canvas [laughs]... It was agreed that all the necessary materials and equipment would be provided and ready for us. A sort of lottery was held to determine the participants, though I'm not sure where the list of names came from. It primarily included artists who had been actively involved in the early days, attending the endless DMPA meetings at the National Society of Fine Arts, many of whom were well-known opponents of the previous regime. The names were selected without any particular order, and I don't think we knew our positions until the day before or even on the day itself, so there was no opportunity to discuss what we were going to do... And when I got there, I was amazed; I found myself standing in the middle of the canvas between Júlio Pomar and Alice Jorge, along with a number of well-known artists from previous generations⁵. I was one of the youngest, though the youngest of all was Teresa Dias Coelho, daughter of José Dias Coelho, who had been murdered by the PIDE (International and State Defence Police) 13 years earlier. She was positioned in the top left-hand corner, almost as if she were reading, let's say, from a book... It was the beginning — the chief position of the panel.

CLP: Was that positioning intentional?

DE: I never discussed it with her, but I believe it was. It was meant to represent the beginning. There were the paints — wall paints — and the brushes. The space allocated to each artist was about 1.50 m by 1.50 m, and we were 48 in three rows. It was a unique day, much like May 1 and April 25... Truly unforgettable days. There was a live television broadcast that lasted for hours, showing the paintings and the other events that took place that day, including, for example, the magnificent Navy Music Band dressed in their first formal uniform!

There was a crowd composed of people of all ages — entire families. As it was a public holiday, people took the opportunity to be by the river and participate in this unique event. There was also the Teatro da Comuna and the Choir of the Academia de Amadores de Música, directed by Fernando Lopes Graça. While there were surely other activities, our focus was entirely on completing our task — finishing the painting within the available time despite the unbearable

⁵The 48 artists were, from left to right, listed as follows, in the top row: Teresa Dias Coelho, Sá Nogueira, João Abel Manta, Júlio Pereira, Henrique Manuel, António Palolo, Artur Rosa, Ângelo de Sousa, Nuno San-Payo, Lima de Carvalho, Teresa Magalhães, Guilherme Parente, Fátima Vaz, Manuel Pires, René Bértholo, João Vieira. centre row: Jorge Martins, Querubim Lapa, Manuel Baptista, Ana Vieira, António Charrua, Helena Almeida, Costa Pinheiro, Jorge Pinheiro, Júlio Pomar, David Evans, Alice Jorge, Emília Nadal, Fernando Azevedo, Vespeira, Rogério Ribeiro, José Escada; and in the bottom row: Victor Palla, Tomás Mateus, António Domingues, Menez, António Sena, Justino Alves, Eurico Gonçalves, Sérgio Pombo, Moniz Pereira, Nikias Skapinakis, Vítor Fortes, Jorge Vieira, Eduardo Nery, Maria Velez, António Mendes, and Carlos Calvet (Sousa, 1974).

heat! Outside, the temperature reached 36°, 37° C; inside, with the lights and the crowd, it must have exceeded 40°C. After 20 minutes, the artists were half undressed, but no one cared because we were driven by an immense energy, a deep desire to contribute to the country's social transformation actively. It was a privilege and an honour for everyone. As I said, it was a truly unforgettable moment.

CLP: How did the artists' selection process take place? Were they all part of the DMPA?

DE: Yes. In fact, the artists didn't volunteer to participate in the collective painting; most of them were actively involved in the meetings... And we knew each other. I, for example, don't know why, but I was always the chairperson at the meetings. It was a tremendous responsibility; I had to manage the participation of people who, after being silenced for so many years, could now speak freely and often wouldn't stop, and I had to tell them to quiet down... When I could! To be part of the MFA, anyone who wanted to join could. It was the same with the DMPA; that's just how things happened.

CLP: At a certain point, the RTP broadcast was cut. How did you experience this moment?

DE: The broadcast was interrupted because the Teatro da Comuna began to touch on certain symbols, the "sacred cows" of the previous regime, particularly the Church. They had already done a kind of theatrical caricature of Américo Tomás, who was the President of the Republic until April 25. He was an old man who was privately nicknamed "pumpkin head" [laughs]. But then they addressed a very sensitive issue: the figure of the Cardinal-Patriarch. Considering the hostile attitude of the First Republic towards the Church — which, in a way, hindered reforms and created distrust among some sectors of the population towards the Republicans — I think that the MFA soldiers, just days after the Revolution, wanted to avoid anti-clericalism. So, perhaps out of caution, they cut off the live broadcast, which turned out to be a strategic mistake. It seems that a group of people involved in the organisation that day went to speak to Raul Rego, who was the Minister of Social Communication at the time, to confront him about the interruption. He called the studios, and the transmission resumed. However, there were some tense moments when an almost violent popular reaction could have occurred, although, fortunately, it was avoided. There were, in fact, protests about censorship being reintroduced, and Júlio Pomar, who was next to me, put down his brushes and wrote in his space: "censorship exists". At that moment, I was too focused on what I was painting, which was a reminder that the Colonial War was still ongoing. Soldiers were still being sent to Angola, Mozambique, and also Guinea-Bissau, I think. So, I didn't react in the same way.

CLP: Throughout the panel's making, did each artist stay in their own corner, or did you move around and comment on each other's work?

DE: There was some movement. Some artists had help from colleagues, friends,

or students, which allowed them to finish their work more quickly and then go around to see what others were doing. Some curious onlookers would climb the scaffolding and add a few brushstrokes. As the painting progressed, it became clear that, for aesthetic or other reasons linked to the motifs of each individual's painting, there was the opportunity to interlink certain elements. As you can see from the photographs that still exist and the film, there were indeed artists who asked their neighbours for help: "can I use this blue or this red here? Can we connect this line to that?". It's clear that there were areas where this happened, naturally and spontaneously, and not in all parts of the painting. It wasn't planned because, as I explained, there was no time or possibility to plan anything specifically. Some people might have had conversations like, "what are you going to do? Let's have a look at your drawing!". There was, let's say, more rapport, not between generations of painters, but between painters who shared similar forms of expression.

CLP: After observing what your colleagues had created, did you notice any common themes among the individual works?

DE: Alice Jorge's painting dealt with the same theme as mine, just in a slightly different way. So did José Escada, but Escada was far away, and Alice Jorge was near me. She asked me: "can I connect that?", and I said: "of course, please!". The notion that the conflict wasn't over yet, that the colonial question hadn't been resolved, was very present among the participating artists. Especially for Sá Nogueira, whose origins were, I think, Cape Verdean, although a little distant, this was a topic of great importance at the time, as it was for António Domingues — of São Toméan origins if I'm not mistaken. However, for anyone paying attention to the political situation, it was an issue that needed to be resolved. And indeed, political developments have shown that. Shortly afterwards, it was realised that there were differences of opinion or strategy among members of the National Salvation Junta, especially between Spínola and the captains who had carried out the military coup. That led to an attempted counter-revolution on September 28 and a much more serious one on March 11⁶. So it was an issue that was still pressing and still unresolved: the independence or right to political autonomy of the "overseas provinces", as they were known by the previous regime, or the "colonies", as we called them at the time.

CLP: Which interventions, apart from yours, did you like the most?

DE: But did I enjoy my intervention? [laughs] Anyway, I said what I wanted to say in a way that seemed accessible at the time. I don't see the panel as a collection of individual interventions; I see it as a collective action, and I think that nearly all of my colleagues who participated — and even those who didn't — viewed the June 10 painting in the same way. Only one or two participants had a slightly different perspective. For example, my friend António Mendes, who wasn't very politically active, was quoted in a rather sad article... I'm not

⁶On September 28, 1974, a demonstration called the "silent majority" took place in support of then-President General Spínola, aimed at strengthening his political position. On March 11, 1975, Spínola led an attempted coup d'état.

sure "sad" is the right word... That came out a short time later in *Colóquio Artes*. Zé Ernesto quoted António, who was, let's say, one of the few less enthusiastic voices⁷. You can see it in his painting; António couldn't quite get on board with the others. So, although there are differences in certain areas, the vast majority of artists were aligned, which is clear in the final result. It may not be a great work of art, but there's no doubt that it was a cry for freedom, a unique moment in the Revolution, and a living testament to the unity and joy of that moment (Figure 2)!



Figure 2: *Commemorative Festival of June 10: Painting of the Collective Panel by the Democratic Movement of Plastic Artists at the Mercado do Povo in Belém, 1974*

Credits. © Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa, Ernesto de Sousa, ESO001618

CLP: Could you tell me about the relationship between the political activism of the artists at the time and mural painting? How did you perceive this practice: as an exercise in citizenship or as a more active militancy for social transformation?

DE: Both, obviously. At the time, although I had always been left-wing, even before I came to Portugal, I wasn't linked to any political party. However, the vast majority of people, in fact, at that time and for some time afterwards, agreed on certain major principles or transformations that we wanted to see

⁷In his article "O Mural de 10 de Junho ou a Passagem ao Acto" (The Mural of June 10 or the Turning to Action), Ernesto de Sousa (1974) critically examined António Mendes' statements, including his use of the phrase "puppets for the people", to offer an ironic analysis of the collective artistic intervention.

implemented. Until mid-June 1975, up until the start of the so-called "Verão Quente"⁸ (Hot Summer), there were no major divisions. The divisions, the sectarianism, only emerged later. It was around the time of the campaign for the first free elections, in March-April 1975, that mural paintings from political parties began to appear, made by professional and non-professional artists as well as party activists. Before that, there was graffiti, writing on walls, symbols, etc., but there were no paintings properly planned or coordinated with a specific objective.

CLP: Was the Mexican muralist movement an influence or inspiration for these artists in any way? Did murals with a socially critical angle also emerge in Portugal?

DE: Indirectly. Mexican muralism may have influenced the paintings of the Cuban Revolution. There's also the now famous case of René Bértholo and Lourdes Castro's participation in the collective mural "Cuba Colectiva" in 1967, celebrating the Cuban Revolution. Indirectly, mural paintings in Chile also had an influence. We had Pancho Ariztía⁹, a Chilean painter who became the cultural attaché at the Chilean Embassy after the revolution. In 1975, after April 25, he created an amazing, large-scale mural in Alcântara, quite different from the ones we made during the dynamisation campaigns. I believe he worked on it alone, though I'm not sure if he had assistance... This mural no longer exists, but it is being celebrated at the Almada Theatre Festival with an exhibition. It was a work that, indeed, showcased some South American influences, particularly those linked to Mexican muralism. But this was an exception. In Portugal, the inspiration came more from events like May '68 in Paris and possibly, as I explained earlier, from the Cuban or Chilean revolutions, though only as an example and not from an aesthetic or artistic standpoint. What made the difference was the almost anarchic freedom in some of the murals created at that time, which I consider to be a very positive factor. It reflects the freedom political parties granted their militants in terms of forms of expression. There were even documents issued after the Revolution that emphasised this freedom party activists had. Although some far-left groups, such as the MRPP [Communist Party of Portuguese Workers] and the PCP(ML) [Portuguese Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist)], Maoist parties may have been exceptions.

CLP: Did the party guidelines have a direct influence on the aesthetics and content of the mural paintings?

DE: Those other murals were created somewhat similarly to our paintings in the dynamisation campaigns. In other words, party meetings would involve

⁸The term "Verão Quente" refers to the period in Portugal during 1975, marked by intense political tensions, frequent confrontations, and extreme political polarisation.

⁹Known as Pancho to his friends, Francisco Ariztía was born in 1943 in Santiago de Chile, where he attended the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes at the Universidad de Chile. After studying in Belgrade, Paris, and Bologna, he relocated to Lisbon in 1975. He acquired Portuguese nationality in 1988.

discussions about what to do, with everyone contributing ideas. There would be someone — possibly a coordinator — who would suggest what could be painted or what should be included. However, with the MRPP, the approach was completely different; from the outset, there was strict control over the subject matter, the content, and the distribution of elements in the painting, and the undertaking was planned ahead.

CLP: And the colours as well?

DE: And the colours! I believe they were restricted to red, yellow, and black. The creative freedom was far greater in the case of the other parties. There was, of course, a clear preference for red across all the parties, as they were all leaning to the left at the time. Interestingly, the names of the parties from that period still reflect this; the Social Democratic Party is now more liberal than social democratic, while the Socialist Party is still social democratic, and so on. I even recall the CDS, which claimed to be a centrist party, stating that it supported "personalist socialism"! Because back then, anyone who didn't talk about socialism wasn't considered a "good person". As for the MRPP murals, it's clear that there was a completely different direction, with a professional graphic team¹⁰ that imposed a specific aesthetic, which was pro-Chinese. Those murals were heavily influenced by Maoist art from the same period. Meanwhile, militants from the other parties enjoyed greater freedom of expression.

CLP: How did the DMPA's relationship with the MFA evolve?

DE: Beyond the June 10 panel, there was a very important phase, including on an aesthetic level, connected to the Cultural Dynamisation Campaigns led by the MFA. During these campaigns, artists participated in mural paintings coordinated by an MFA unit known as "CODICE" [Central Dynamisation Commission], part of the 5th Division¹¹. This entity was essentially the agitprop unit or the sector responsible for the cultural dissemination of the movement's principles in the less politicised areas of the country. As you can imagine, 50 years ago, there was a lot of illiteracy in certain parts of the country and a lot of influence from conservative forces, often through the Catholic Church. The MFA recognised the need to promote its principles and objectives, as while there was widespread awareness and support for these ideals in Lisbon and Porto — the major cities — rural areas farther from urban centres remained sceptical. To address this, they organised initiatives where theatre, circus, visual arts, and other artists joined forces with the soldiers to convey these messages to people in more remote regions.

¹⁰This graphic team, part of the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of Portuguese Workers, was so deeply immersed in the party's aesthetic that any member could create a specific piece of work, either independently or in collaboration with others (Carneiro, 2015).

¹¹The Central Dynamisation Commission was established by the 5th Division of the General Staff of the Armed Forces to spearhead cultural and civic action campaigns following the Revolution of April 25, 1974. This military body tasked with information and propaganda was instrumental in spreading revolutionary ideals and advocating for the development of a "socialist democracy" (Veiga, 2014).

Following the success of the June 10 panel, the DMPA was invited to join these initiatives. We held several meetings with the soldiers to discuss how we could collaborate and contribute. Many artists participated by creating posters. Vespeira was probably the most active. Still, others, such as Henrique Ruivo and João Abel Manta, also played significant roles, with Manta standing out for his remarkable caricatures, posters, postage stamps, and postcards.

The involvement of visual artists — or "plastic artists", as we used to say back then — in the cultural dynamisation campaigns was highly significant. Numerous murals were created, though most no longer exist, either fortunately or unfortunately. Among these was the June 10 mural, which was tragically destroyed in a fire in 1981¹².

CLP: But it was an accident, wasn't it?

DE: Good question... I'll leave the answer open... In any case, these murals have disappeared. A series of them was created in 1975. We painted in various locations. It seems that the first mural, created by artists from Porto and Lisbon, was in Viseu, which, at the time, let's say, was the capital of the conservative reaction. The soldiers went there with military bands, etc., and tried to replicate the enthusiasm of June 10 in an environment... I'm not saying hostile, but certainly suspicious. I think some of the more conservative forces had already told the people that the soldiers were coming to steal land from farmers and so on... A number of professional artists from Porto and Lisbon joined the soldiers and created the first mural painting on the wall of the Caixa Geral de Depósitos near the centre of Viseu. At first, the locals weren't sure if they wanted to participate, but in the end, they did, and there was even a theatre performance, which was seen by people who had never been to a play in their lives. They were amazed, of course! Then, we were invited to take part in a collective mural painting in the village of Chã, near Sobral de Monte Agraço. It's amazing to think that, back then, there were villages near Lisbon that didn't even have electricity. How did they store their food? Did they salt it? It must have been like that... A group of volunteer soldiers spent six weeks installing electricity for three neighbouring villages. On the day the power was turned on, we, the visual artists from DMPA, were invited to paint a mural. The Festival of Light is still celebrated today every June in the village of Chã! So, we went there, some of us who had participated on June 10. The conditions were tough; it was a very hot day, but mainly because the wall was rough, painted with whitewash on a coarse surface. The scaffolding was made of wood — a fragile structure — and we had to climb and balance on it with difficulty, but we managed to finish the mural. The day ended well with a meal for the whole village and everyone who had worked on the painting and the electricity installation, followed by a dance and a *burricada*¹³. The *burricada* was won by one of the CODICE soldiers, Captain Faria Paulino from Madeira, who had far more experience than most

¹²In August 1981, a fire at the Modern Art Gallery in Belém destroyed the mural.

¹³Festive event where participants ride donkeys, held as part of traditional celebrations in rural areas of Portugal. In the event in question, it involved a race.

of the artists in riding donkeys and had probably done so as a child [laughs]. I remember that mine didn't ride at all, but anyway... It was a great day! The photographs were taken by Zé Ernesto de Sousa, who complemented his excellent reportage with an article on the June 10 panel. I can speak like this because Zé Ernesto was a friend of mine... And I also know his wife, Isabel Alves, very well. However, the most significant mural we created was in Évora, which was also the largest one. It was completed on July 5 and 6, 1975. Though it's now covered with layers of whitewash, traces of it remain, though nothing is visible. I believe it was about 6.40 metres long. The soldiers had set up the scaffolding, and it was a weekend. We arrived in a military van from Lisbon. Once there, we had some time to sit in the shade and discuss the content of the painting because painting under the sun was simply impossible. We had already agreed during the journey that the theme would be agrarian reform, the hot topic at the time, particularly in the Alentejo and Ribatejo regions. The occupation of half-abandoned estates had already taken place. There was a certain atmosphere, not exactly tense but somewhat distant, not from everyone but from some members of the city's bourgeoisie. As soon as the sun began to set, we started painting and managed to create an extraordinary piece, considering the space available and the limited resources at our disposal. A mural 6 m x 40 m long was a massive challenge, even for us professional artists (Figure 3).



Figure 3: *Close-up of the mural in Évora, 1975*
Credits. Gracinda Candeias

CLP: How many were you?

DE: About 15 or 16, the usual suspects: me, Vespeira, Henrique Ruivo, Sá Nogueira, Silvia Chicó, Rogério Amaral, Rodrigo de Freitas, Júlio Pereira, Gracinda Candeias, Ana Isabel Rodrigues, Henrique Manuel, Sérgio Pombo, Costa Martins [son], Teresa Magalhães, Moniz Pereira... We managed to finish over the weekend. The photographs really show that it was a completed work of art and that we successfully integrated all the spaces. I had to do something I'd never done before — paint large letters because we were expecting João Vieira to come, who, as you know, painted letters, but he didn't show up for some reason. The artists came as they could; we weren't paid, we volunteered. So, I had to paint "the land to those who work it" up there, which was the motto of the Agrarian Reform at the time. There was also a group painting initiative in Figueira da Foz on walls made available by the town hall. After that, I think the first party mural painting was done by the PCP [Portuguese Communist Party] around March 15, 1975. That was followed by a series of works by other parties; one I remember was by MES, the Socialist Left Movement, a few by the Socialist Party... And many very ambitious ones by the MRPP, but with a completely different approach to all the other parties (Figure 4).



Figure 4: *Murals with political propaganda messages, 1975*
Credits. © Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa, Ernesto de Sousa, ESO001249

CLP: How long did mural painting maintain a significant presence as a social and political commitment in Portugal?

DE: I think the fact that mural paintings haven't lasted is a clear indication that

they were essentially ephemeral. They were linked to the moment, to a particular way of seeing the world at a specific time. Now, with works like those of Vhils and other mural sculptures, there's a desire for permanence. These are more monumental and more focused on permanence than the mural paintings of that time. Of course, some paintings were made to last, but others were never intended to. When we were painting after April 25, we didn't expect our paintings to last forever... Quite the opposite! They were a reflection of a moment, of a political aspect of the evolution of events, of the progress of the revolution, as we said at the time. There are murals like those by the Mexicans Rivera and Siqueiros, which were commissions meant to endure; they were created during an interesting period in the United States political history — the *New Deal*¹⁴ under Franklin Roosevelt. Famous artists of the time took part in mural projects around the country, advocating for social change. It was a period of social transformation, with major state-funded projects like dams and other infrastructure works. Even Jackson Pollock, whose style evolved into the informal and abstract, participated in these murals... How long did the movement last in Portugal? It's like asking how long the Revolution lasted — there are various answers. I've just written an article for the major exhibition at Serralves, painting and the Revolution, *Pre/Post - Visual Variations of 25 April*¹⁵, curated by Miguel von Hafe Pérez. The title of my article is "The Short Revolution" because, for me, there was a relatively brief period of intense social transformations — and the dynamisation campaign was part of that — that ended abruptly on November 25. After that, the 5th Division and CODICE¹⁶ were dismantled, and mural painting became almost exclusively partisan. Political and social divisions, which had begun in the "Verão Quente" before November 25, started to surface. It was a moment of clarification that, in hindsight, had to happen. Fortunately, we were lucky not to have gone too far and that we still live in a democratic country.

CLP: In the conversation "Pintura Mural e Revolução" (Mural Painting and Revolution), you mentioned that, after a few years, mural paintings began to cause unease and discomfort. Could you elaborate on how you realised this?

DE: Well, I don't want to jump to conclusions, but let's not forget that the June 10 painting was destroyed in a fire, and most of the political murals disappeared. Most of them were painted over and covered with whitewash. For example, the murals in Figueira da Foz, Viseu, and Évora were all painted over. In 1979, I

¹⁴The *New Deal* was an economic recovery plan that began in 1933 aimed at revitalising and reforming the United States economy, as well as providing assistance to those affected by the Great Depression.

¹⁵An exhibition at the Serralves Museum, marking the 50th anniversary of the April 25 Revolution, showcases artistic works reflecting the periods before and after the Revolution. The exhibition runs from April 24 to October 20, 2024, with David Evans among the featured artists.

¹⁶The 5th Division was suspended on August 25, 1975, due to widespread concerns in certain sectors that it was ideologically linked to the Portuguese Communist Party. On November 17 of the same year, a restructuring proposal, signed by Ramalho Eanes and other officers, was approved. It aimed at "demystifying the 5th Division" (Veiga, 2014, p. 2) in an effort to counter the perception that specific political ideologies influenced the Armed Forces.

worked on a mural supporting agrarian reform with Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos, his wife, Susan Plant, and Helena Lapas — my wife — at the request of several cooperatives for the Harvest Festival in Montemor-o-Novo. That mural also disappeared. And I remember that in '82, we did a group painting in Santarém to celebrate April 25 with around 60 artists, many of whom had taken part in the June 10 project. As I've mentioned, these were ephemeral works, and they vanished, I'd say, naturally, because the country was changing. Politics is no longer played out in the streets but in the Assembly of the Republic, which is absolutely normal! And elections, which were once an exception to the country's rule, have become absolutely normal too, so normal that in the first elections, there was more than a 90% voter turnout, whereas now it's often half of that or 50%.

CLP: The 1974 panel was initially slated for important exhibitions at least twice but ended up not going¹⁷...

DE: I know that, at least once, the June 10 panel was set to go to the Venice Biennale and possibly to São Paulo, but that never happened. In fact, after November 25, there was a shift in political "leadership" regarding the arts. After April 25, João Vieira was responsible for Cultural Action at the Secretariat of State for Culture. But then, there was a prolonged period — first with Nikias Skapinakis, followed by Fernando Calhau and Julião Sarmento — during which cultural policy reverted to something very similar to what it had been before April 25. In other words, it was influenced by the aesthetic vision of José-Augusto França and some Francophile critics from the AICA [International Association of Art Critics]. The selection of artists followed traditional lines — within a democratic framework, of course — but it meant that some of the artists most active during the Revolution were, in a way, sidelined. Personally, I have no reason to complain, but many other artists were marginalised for quite a long time. The first significant confrontation occurred over an exhibition that was requested for Paris¹⁸. The selection for this exhibition was made by a committee, and there was a clear division among the artists, with opposing camps forming over the choices, which essentially mirrored pre-April 25 selections. Unity among the artists was only restored after the bombing of the Cooperativa Árvore on January 7, 1976, when a manifesto of solidarity emerged, and I gathered signatures for it. At the time of the Paris exhibition, a critic from one of the leading French newspapers wrote that the selection of artists showed no real change from the pre-April 25 period¹⁹...

¹⁷Rui Mário Gonçalves mentions that the panel was nominated to represent Portugal at the Venice Biennale and the Salon de la Jeune Peinture in Paris (Gonçalves, 2004).

¹⁸The *Art Portugais Contemporain* exhibition, which opened on September 30 1976 (initially scheduled for June 1975) at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Secretary of State for Culture, and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, in partnership with French public institutions (Castilho, 2022; Coimbra, 2016).

¹⁹Evans refers to Jacques Michel, who, in his article for *Le Monde*, criticises the *Art Portugais Contemporain* exhibition. Michel (1976) points out that, despite the apparent effervescence of creative activity on the streets of Portugal, where artists formed "brigades of painters" to create political and expressive murals, the exhibition fails to reflect the radical transformations

CLP: Watching the film footage of the 1974 panel, you can see a palpable energy and enthusiasm among the artists. During the 2022 recreation in the gardens of MAAT [Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology], did you perceive any parallels between the post-dictatorship and post-pandemic periods, particularly regarding the sense of regaining freedom, even if on different scales?

DE: Post-pandemic, no, I don't see it that way. What I see... Anyway, invitations were sent out to various artists by the museum itself. I don't know who was responsible for the invitations, but the artists weren't involved in the choice. Beforehand, there was a meeting with the surviving participants of the June 10, '74 panel, where we were asked if we would be willing to take part in a new painting. Most of those present agreed to the proposal, but some of the artists said they no longer felt capable. I think there were six or seven of us participating.

But the ambience was totally different. For one, we were outdoors. The only similarity was that there was a lottery to allocate seats. I think some artists swapped with each other, perhaps for logistical reasons; some people didn't want to go up to the second floor... The invitations went out to a multitude of artists from various social, political and aesthetic backgrounds, with or without experience in mural work or graffiti. Obviously, this resulted in a great diversity of aesthetic forms, ideas and motivations. In a way, what you notice about June 10, '74, was a unity of expression and a collective embrace of the freedom that had been offered to us so recently, while the vast majority of the artists in the 2022 mural had grown up in freedom. I recall that from time to time, small feet would appear in front of my painting, and when I looked, I noticed that the young artist upstairs had painted the phrase: "in Portugal, there is racism", and I remarked: "today, you can paint that! When I got here before April 25, it wasn't even possible to paint on the wall, let alone something like that!". I think that, as the saying goes, "everyone was out for themselves". June 10, '74, was a kind of celebration — everyone brought sandwiches or packed lunches, and we ate together... On June 10, two years ago, everyone ate at their own tables, exchanging a wave with each other at most. That was the feeling I got, and in fact, it shows in the final work; each artist spoke to a specific audience. On June 10 1974, we were aware that we were speaking to everyone, and everyone knew that we were speaking to everyone.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

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experienced in the country and does not present any distinctive characteristics. He highlights a significant discrepancy between the artistic dynamism in the streets and its representation in institutional spaces.

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