Manuel Amado (1938-2019) was a prolific painter with a consistent decades-long body of work. Many of his works are thematic series, of which the human figure is either absent or in a secondary position in relation to the spaces that are represented. Manuel Amado’s paintings combine a contemplative appeal and a latent disturbance, as they are both an invitation to take a long, peaceful look and a statement of a spatial and temporal void which points to a play between forgetfulness and remembrance. The spaces that are represented are like stage sets for an unknown action or for lost memories in which light plays a fundamental scenic role. Even though they are realistic, they do not represent real places, as they are recreated and reinvented from memory. According to the painter himself, “scenes on stage” are always on the canvas. These scenes can also refer back to turning points in cinema, which are necessary for the narrative montage, in which time is suspended, in suspense.

Pintura sem álibi (Painting without alibi) is a phrase by Vitor Silva Tavares on the artist’s work, which may be understood as painting without a pretext, without the need for justifications: it is what it is. Or, considering the Latin origin of the word, alius ibi (which means “elsewhere”), painting is but in that place of laborious staging that is the canvas.

This exhibition focuses on Manuel Amado’s works in the Millennium bcp collection, which are a very representative part of the painter’s body of work over the years, and features pieces from private collections as well.
“To me, painting is the most direct form of representing reality, considering that reality is made by ourselves. That is, without interference of word or fiction. I like to paint what I see when I am quiet. Better still, it is the memory of what I have seen while I was quiet. I can even say that I paint to see better what I have once seen, to be sure.”


“I like Manuel’s paintings because:
- They give the observer a feeling of being part of them, of being able to step forward and enter the painting, into the station, where there is nobody not even whoever left the bicycle outside. The train is ready to leave, its door is open. But (this is the enigma of the painting) will it depart? […]
- The bag’s owner is surely sitting, out of sight, at the other end of the bench. The light reflected on the wall is highly suggestive.
- The bright shining light does not let us distinguish the distant scenery beyond the platform. The empty cart. The closed train. Nobody to ask for information. […]
I like Manuel’s paintings for all that is not seen but felt intuitively to be part of the picture. If it does not make you dream what kind of art is it?”


“[This painting] is the gaze of whatever sees us depart and remains behind. […] All this is quite evocative of a geometer’s precision. […] But in this case the ‘vanishing point’ on which both the drawing and the description are focused is himself: the Painter and his Memory, and once this is acknowledged all precision becomes inverted: the reality of the landscape is so obstinately and ‘faithfully’ reproduced that it becomes, on a second reading, disturbingly bizarre.
Here we have a subtle hint of disorder in the seductive tidiness; or, if we wish, the very discreet and humorous way in which the fantastic exists alongside the most palpable and objective reality. […]
[Manuel Amado’s painting] contains no trace of self-promotion, only memory and passage. It is a step, a window, a wall (those signs that connect us to the others’ world) that says it with its eternity of colour, its immaculate lines, its light. That says it, no; that knows it. And everything
is in that testimony, because the House/Street, Shadow/Light duality becomes here the most intimate formulation of the everyday movements of all of us. It is there, on these abandoned spaces, that our memories of journey and return, of dream (evasion) and routine become manifest. God, how they haunt us and whisper to us. How they move us, too.”

José Cardoso Pires in the catalogue of Manuel Amado’s exhibition at Galeria de S. Mamede, Lisbon, 1983

“These paintings all have an ominous simplicity. [...] It’s as if he paints to eradicate a ghost, something he will never be able to do”. [...] The pictures are all very formal. They are very slick compositions. The shadows, the composition, are reminiscent of Edward Hopper’s work, but much more claustrophobic and dangerous.”

Paula Rego, catalogue Manuel Amado. O Verão era assim como uma casa de morar onde todas as coisas estão..., Casa das Histórias Paula Rego, Cascais, 2016

“No single corner of the house is left for confidences or parallel readings: exact, sharp, this painting manifests itself when one looks into its patient handicraft. It is what it is – reality in painting or painting without alibi. One could say: laborious craft according to the rule. In every line, angle, scale, perspective, reticulation of light and shadow. And also, in the scarcity of elements: attic, door, washstand, rocking horse. All substantive. Everything is elementary and exposed, naked and placid in that stripped-down evidence. In that haunting fixedness. Then, on the other side of the mirror, the space (mine only, now) of the labyrinth appears: this painting awakens in me an unknown oblivion, fills some unknown corner of myself with impossible fascination. I enter it, complicit. And, once behind the screen, I am taken by a troubling unrest, from which not even normative accidents or copies of things manage to distract me. I feel anguished – before the Dream Palace’s implacable quietness. I may evade the challenge, by qualifying my gaze and my prose, recurring to textual comprehensiveness. There still remains the Sphinx, the prodigious energy of silence. Either I am much mistaken, or I stand before a kind of Resurrection of Death. Indeed, Beauty can only exist when it is convulsive. Occult.”
And there are never words for the best and worst of this tally, close to the occlusive vomit/shudder of Poetry.
To paint houses, corridors or rocking horses is still the task of painting. When and if it is done by painters. Those incorrigible, secretive animals.

Joy: silencing an immense Farewell.”

Vitor Silva Tavares, catalogue for the exhibition in Espace Alliance, Lisbon, 1984

“Applause, applause.
Manuel is back to theatre.
To the world of theatre.
To the empty theatre.”

Note from Lourdes Castro to Manuel Amado on the occasion of the series of paintings The show is about to begin..., 2007
BIOGRAPHY

Manuel Amado was born in Lisbon on 13 June 1938. He was the fourth of the seven children of writer and director Fernando Amado and Margarida Sotto-Mayor. Until he was nineteen years old, he lived in his grandparents’ large eighteenth-century house, Palácio Pimenta, which is now home to Museu de Lisboa, Lisbon’s city museum. He studied at Colégio Moderno and performed in school plays from an early age. He was also an actor with Mocidade Portuguesa under António Manuel Couto Viana’s direction, as well as under his father’s direction at Teatro Universitário de Lisboa. Even though he was interested in theatre all his life, he left the stage when he was nineteen and only returned with artist and friend Lourdes Castro in Antes de Começar, a play by Almada Negreiros, in 1984. He designed stage sets – which he thought was “a wonderful thing” – throughout his life.

Amado took a degree in Architecture between 1957 and 1966, while working in architects’ studios. He was forced to interrupt his degree when he was drafted and later sent to Angola as a second lieutenant following the onset of the Colonial War in 1961. He stayed there until 1963. He married Teresa Viegas in 1961, before leaving to Angola. His son Rodrigo was born in 1964, his daughter Rita the following year and his daughter Joana in 1968. He painted on-and-off during those years. De Chirico and Magritte were among his first references in painting. He participated in group exhibitions at Sociedade Nacional de Belas-Artes and was invited by painter and poet Cruzeiro Seixas to do his first solo show in 1978. He exhibited on a regular basis since 1983 and decided to drop architecture and dedicate entirely to painting in 1987. He discovered Edward Hopper’s paintings when he went to the USA that same year and was quite moved by them. Pedro Tamen and Nuno Júdice wrote poems in dialogue with Amado’s paintings. He painted mostly thematic series, returning to some of them, sometimes years later. The houses in which he lived, cinema, the beach and the sea, transitory spaces and theatre are the stuff his paintings are made of. He died in Lisbon on 14 October 2019.