

Vieira da Silva Arpad Szenes studios



Our Cinzeiro 8 room hosts for the second time, and once again in fruitful partnership with the Arpad Szenes - Vieira da Silva Foundation, an exhibition dedicated to the painters of which that institution is the namesake.

In 2008, the presentation of "Couple", a long series developed by Arpad Szenes during the 1930s and 40s, allowed us to observe the nucleus of mysterious energy into which converged, or out of which irradiated, the mutual love that united the two painters. In the present exhibition, a two-sided approach, combining documental (texts, photographs) and artistic (paintings and drawings) elements, gives us the opportunity to become acquainted with the places where that love grew but also released itself from everyday vicissitudes, from individual successes or failures, to reach an immortality only great art can achieve.

Decade by decade, from the 1920s to the end of their lives, we will visit the seven workspaces the couple successively occupied. To follow Vieira and Arpad across various Paris locations, Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro and finally Yèvre is to follow not only the course of their private lives, but also of their lives as artists.

The peculiar atmosphere of each workspace would always reflect itself indirectly on the great body of work the two artists created over time, just as their love kept quietly growing. However, while in their early years of joint work and shared studios, Vieira da Silva and her husband shared the same space, seeing and depicting each other constantly, the increasing complexity and volume of their individual oeuvres would progressively demand them to lavish more effort and care on the definition of personal, autonomous artistic expressions, leaving them less time to observe and represent the material and sentimental details of their immediate surroundings, or even to depict each other as they worked, talked or simply rested. Several such moments and meanings in their career are displayed here, as explained in the text, quoted below, by the exhibition's curator and director of the Arpad Szenes - Vieira da Silva Foundation's Museum.

João Pinharanda

During their 55 years of married life, Vieira da Silva and Arpad Szenes occupied several houses and studios, in Paris, Lisbon, Yèvre-le-Châtel or Rio de Janeiro. Formal and conceptual affinities between the various spaces in which they worked and their visual and experiential universe emerge in this exhibition, which is also concerned with revealing important influences of the places in which they lived and worked, and also with the way they felt their surroundings. Studios are now places of isolation, of confrontation with creative silences, now spaces for creation, for intense production. The intensity of each (shared or not) place was experienced differently over time by Maria Helena Vieira da Silva and Arpad Szenes. Their early married years saw the couple forced to share working spaces (Villa des Camélias and Boulevard Saint-Jacques in Paris, Alto de São Francisco in Lisbon). These places became subjects or backgrounds for their visual researches, and are inseparable from many of their works, besides evoking for us the history of their pictorial relationship. Mutual influences are obvious in their work, generating visual richness through the exchange and sharing of tastes, ideas and options, in an atmosphere of intense complicity. Indeed, though their respective oeuvres have few common denominators, that does not mean they are independent and separate from each other. Correspondences occur beyond the formal realm, being more due to a common understanding of painting, to their shared demanding attitude, and to the visual interrogations they solved in their own personal way. Arpad Szenes was eleven years older than Vieira da Silva, and she would listen attentively to her husband's comments on her painting, even though these were made without any didactic intention, due to the admiration she felt for him and his work. However, sharing the same studio during their first married years was probably not a good experience. As soon as possible, they separated their work places, afraid of inconveniencing each other, and would only show their pieces to each other once they were finished or very nearly so. The 1950s confirmed their decision to keep their working spaces separated and prepared in accordance to their wishes and needs (Rue de l'Abbé Carton); the decade will equally usher in another stage in their growing maturity as artists, which will lead them to another kind of art, where they no longer dedicated themselves to depicting their surroundings or each other.

The house in Alto de São Francisco, near Amoreiras Square, in Lisbon, is still today Vieira da Silva's house – as part of the assets of the Arpad Szenes - Vieira da Silva Foundation –, and it was there that she lived and worked whenever she returned to her native city, in the company of her husband, painter Arpad Szenes. It was there that the couple suffered the pain of finding themselves bereft of nationality, and from there they left Europe for Brazil. In Rio de Janeiro (Santa Tereza) Arpad taught young artists, an activity he would continue on their return to Paris, and painted many portraits of Vieira da Silva. For his wife, the stay in Brazil proved particularly painful, and her works reflect the uprooting, nostalgia and anguish of the war years. Their return to Europe, in 1947, does not include Lisbon. They will settle in Paris, again at the Boulevard Saint-Jacques.

Later, during their years of cosmopolitan success, Vieira and Arpad would regularly return to Lisbon, always to that small spot in Alto de São Francisco that put them in mind of simplicity and essentiality. The Yèvre-le-Châtel country house, which they bought and remodelled in 1960, also proved of great importance to their work. Countless works by Vieira da Silva evoke the house's wooden structure, some of them displaying light effects suggestive of monastic spaces for silence and contemplation. Arpad's oeuvre reaches a very subtle spiritual dimension; an exploration of atmosphere and a very personal use of light and rhythm rule his imagined landscapes. His painting is often described as silent, evocative and elusive, which is partly due to the Yèvre isolation. (...)

Marina Bairrão Ruivo

Museu da Electricidade Sala do Cinzeiro 8 December 3th 2009 to January 31th 2010 Tuesday to Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Free Entrance

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