



fundação **carmona e costa**

ESPAÇO ARTES DECORATIVAS

## MARIA CAPELO

*Arde a folhagem das colunas e inclina-se*

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EXHIBITION ON VIEW UNTIL 17 JULY 2021  
Wednesday to Saturday 3pm – 8pm (except holidays)

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### Three drawings by Maria Capelo

We are inside the studio. “Two rooms connected by a door”, thus we might describe the small space Maria Capelo occupies in an old Lisbon neighbourhood. To the right is the painting room, and on the left we find the room mostly dedicated to drawing, though it is also used for writing, reading or image-searching.

Detective-like, we search for clues in the studio space that may help us understand the strange combination of landscape and language that, we believe, lies at the core of Maria Capelo’s work. Our eye is drawn to the details: the murky dish in which combinations of green are tested, the books, open as they usually are here, displaying their contents, or the canvases lined up in one corner. But what truly leaps up at us is the door that both connects and separates that basic organisation of left and right, painting and drawing, in the artist’s studio. The passage-threshold. The passage-language. It intrigues us because it immediately puts us in mind of Renaissance Annunciation paintings, where the door is the connecting element of the scene: it is through it that the Angel and the Virgin communicate with each other. If that door was not there, the mystery would not be as we know it.

Taking further this simple comprehension exercise on Maria Capelo’s studio, we may now attribute elements or properties to each room. As in a play on words, the painting room could be a rock. Geology and permanence connecting us to reality via painting. The left room could be a tangle of branches, such as rivers often carry. The transitoriness and fugacity of drawing. A giddiness of lines that can convey the plural, the unutterable, the infinite, and reveal a subterranean morphology, dug up by the hand’s ploughing.

As we have previously observed, that “dramatic” connection of the studio is also visible in the way Maria Capelo conceives her exhibitions, and indeed exists throughout her artistic poetics. Let us look at the title the artist chose for her exhibition at Fundação Carmona e Costa: *Arde a folhagem das colunas, e inclina-se*. [“The pillars’ foliage burns and stirs.” (Transl. Michael Hamburger)] It is a line taken from Hölderlin’s poem “The Ister” (i.e. the Danube), part of the collection *Late Hymns*, in a Portuguese translation by Maria Teresa Dias Furtado. But it is, first and foremost – like all literature and all art –, the invocation of a “scene”, or, in critical parlance, “a discursive fulcrum”.

What burns? The pillars’ foliage. What stirs? Who stirs? We do not know... In Hölderlin, there is an almost agrammatical ambiguity that is highly suggestive. The reflexive pronoun in the Portuguese verb “inclinat” subtly suggests the existence of a separate subject who appears to stand out of the sentence. “Arde a folhagem das colunas” [The pillars’ foliage burns] is a powerful image. suddenly, it stands before us like a strange vision. As for “inclina-se”, that verb makes us hesitate at the threshold-door of language.

The strangeness and uniqueness of the German poet’s lines demands redoubled attention from us, the readers. Similarly, both this strange rhythmical pacing and a language of interiority and the creative force are also present in the work of Maria Capelo, an artist whose plastic expressiveness is itself a struggle with her own instrument.

A line that begins with a verb in the present tense (“arde”) is evocative of the immediate time of now. Soon, however, that time is disrupted by the intriguing “inclina-se”. What we read seems like a piece of cinema, suggested here by what almost appears to be a freeze-frame of the action. The cinema is a constant in all of Maria Capelo’s work, and here it is a vision of that immense Danube of which Hölderlin sings, running for more than three thousand kilometres through the heart of Europe, from the point it debouches into the Black Sea to its spring in Germany’s Black Forest.

Rivers, cinema, threshold, flowing waters, perforation, furrow, weft, Hölderlin’s Danube or Brecht’s *yellow leaves*... all this inhabits Maria Capelo’s work in a rhizomatic plane, like “forces emanating from the hand’s micro-movements” (Nuno Faria). Such is the case of the three drawings presented here, with their enveloping and yet distant quality. The nature in Maria Capelo’s drawings has the force of Hölderlin’s oaks, a creative force that they attempt to regenerate, in spite of the destruction they evoke. What makes them so special is their tight, overlapping weft, making us feel as if we were inside of a vegetable tangle that is only discernible through the limits of the paper.

Also visible in these three drawings, and in the whole of Maria Capelo’s *ars poetica*, is the impression of a future time. As Heidegger tells us: language bids things to come.

Marta Mestre, April 2021