

Turned into Stone: The Portuguese Colonial Exhibitions Today

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Barbara Neves Alves

Abstract

Portugal's two colonial exhibitions took place in 1934 and 1940, the first in Porto and the second in Lisbon. Both exhibitions were set up by the fascist regime of António Salazar, as powerful tools of propaganda that asserted an idea of empire and invited the population to colonize Portugal's ultramarine domains and civilize indigenes populations. Both exhibitions created a "Square of the Empire," punctuated by a monument erected in perishable materials, as temporary instalment. In Porto, celebrating the Portuguese colonial effort and, in Lisbon, the Portuguese discoveries. While these monuments were demolished after the exhibitions ended, replicas of each were later re-erected in stone and brought to "Squares of the Empire," in Lisbon—1960—and Porto—1984. I frame these monuments historically, attending to the contexts of their making, their recreation/relocation and presence in public space. Studying how these monuments—and squares—move the ideas promoted by the exhibition into public space. I engage a diverse body of literature to reflect about how these exhibitions still linger and haunt the urban landscape and collective memory. Telling about Portugal's difficulties in dealing with its past, due to how the regime succeeded in communicating a sense of Portuguese identity construed on idealized versions of history, that in their persisting memorialization, render invisible other versions, and the people affected to them, in a country with enduring and widespread racism, and inequality. I look at artists engaging critically with the monuments at both Squares—Ângela Ferreira, Kiluanji Kia Henda, Interstruct Collective—and present my own research practice where I study different inhabitations/views of a monument to research how the ideas they air can be seen as a spectre haunting the present, engaging with Spectrality Studies, and "ghost" and "haunting" as operative concepts when analysing cultural situations where there is an erasure, an invisibility, or latency.

Introduction

Portugal was the first (1415) and last European empire. Only in 1974, when a revolutionary movement overthrew the dictatorial regime of *Estado Novo* (New State), was the end of Portugal's war against self-determination movements in three of its colonised countries Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique declared.^[1] As scholar and curator Elsa Peralta notes, after over five centuries of holding power over colonies, the end of the empire and

the democratisation of the country did not erase Portugal's self-image as an imperial nation. The national narrative still revolves around symbols of Portugal as an imperial maritime entity, and ideas of the Portuguese "as peaceful, non-racist, gentler colonialists, and of their culture as universal, hybrid, somehow Creole, enriched by centuries of colonial contact."^[2] Portugal's colonial exhibitions contributed to the construction of this narrative, each including a Square of the Empire holding a monument erected for the occasion. These monuments remain in public space today.

Portugal's colonial exhibitions took place in 1934 and 1940, the first in Porto and the second in Lisbon.^[3] Both exhibitions were set up by the dictatorial regime (1926-1974), as powerful tools of propaganda, through which a "live, animated, didactic expression" of colonial politics asserted an idea of empire and invited the population to "possess and colonize ultramarine domains and civilize indigenes populations."^[4] An idea of empire built upon the notion of the Portuguese as a marine folk, descendant of the "heroic discoverers of the world", held by fate to the higher call of helping others "reach civilisation" through colonisation. This rhetoric rendered invisible the violence of Portuguese colonialism, by inscribing the idea of a softer, miscegenated and multicultural colonialism.^[5] The exhibitions contributed to forming and disseminating these ideas, by creating a strong communicational apparatus that merged the political and the aesthetic to embed a sense of national identity tied to the discoveries.

In this text, I start by briefly contextualising Portugal's colonial exhibitions. The exhibition in Porto took place in the iron and glass structure of the Crystal Palace, transformed with a fake art-deco facade, topped by statues of an elephant and a lighthouse. Inside was a series of exhibits addressing Portuguese expansion since 1415. In the gardens, there were replicas of monuments and villages in which inhabitants of the several countries of the colonies brought to Porto were exhibited while living in a simulation of their habitats. The colonial exhibition of 1940 in Lisbon sought to reaffirm the extension and importance of the Portuguese empire and was meticulously planned to become a large and festive party. Taking place in the capital, it was much bigger in scale, with the renovation of a whole area of the city, repositioning Lisbon as an imperial city. Again, it included simulated habitats, and highlighted the Portuguese project of civilisation, now strongly tied to the narrative of the Portuguese discoveries and ideas of luso-tropicalism.^[6] This, at a time when Europe was at war and Lisbon inundated by thousands of refugees.

Both exhibitions created a Square of the Empire, punctuated by a monument erected in perishable materials, as a temporary instalment: in Porto celebrating the Portuguese colonial effort, and in Lisbon the Portuguese discoveries. While these monuments were demolished after the exhibitions ended, replicas of each in stone were later re-erected and brought to the Squares of the Empire, in Lisbon in 1960 and Porto in 1984. I frame these monuments historically, considering the contexts of their making, their recreation and relocation, studying how these monuments and squares move the ideas promoted by the exhibition into public space. I engage with a diverse body of literature to reflect on how these exhibitions still haunt the urban landscape and collective memory. Their story speaks to Portugal's difficulties in dealing with its past, due in great part to how the regime succeeded in communicating a sense of Portuguese identity based on an idealised version of history, which in its persisting memorialisation renders invisible the people affected by them, in a country with enduring and widespread racism and deep inequality. I look at artists engaging critically with the exhibition in Porto Interstruct Collective and the monument in Lisbon Ângela Ferreira and Kiluanji Kia Henda and present the initial phase of my own artistic/design research practice, aiming to disturb the Portuguese cultural archive, engaging with Spectrality Studies, and "ghost" and "haunting" as operative concepts when analysing cultural situations of erasure, invisibility or latency.^[7]



A view of the entrance of the exhibition and Square of the Empire. Photo: Vianna da Mota, Porto Municipality Archive

The First Colonial Exhibition in Porto

The First Portuguese Colonial Exhibition took place between 16 June and 30 September 1934 in the gardens and Crystal Palace in Porto. The exhibition contained 400 pavilions and took 5 months to build, and was supported financially by local businesses and the church, which organised excursions to the event and were represented in the exhibition and its advertising. It generated a variety of printed matter and was widely covered in the media. It included exhibits about the Portuguese expansion since 1415, as well as themes related to different aspects of life in the colonised countries. In the gardens, visitors could “travel around the world”, by foot, train or cable car, through streets with names alluding to Portuguese colonies, and reproductions of monuments such as the Arch of the Vice-King of India, or the Macau lighthouse. A theatre, zoo, tea house and several monuments were created for the event. Inhabitants from the colonised countries were brought to Porto to live in an environment constructed to simulate their “real” habitat a highlight for the public.

The idea of a “Portuguese Empire” was established by law in 1930: the “colonial act” stated that the Portuguese domains across the seas would be denominated as colonies and that “the organic essence of the Portuguese Nation [was] to play out the historic function of possessing and colonising overseas domains, and civilise the indigenous populations found there.”^[8] The exhibition aimed to promote this law, backed mostly by economic motives, looking to increase migration as a means to establish the power of Portugal in relation to Europe and respond to growing contestation in the colonised countries.^[9] The commissioner of the exhibition, Henrique Galvão, programmed the event as a “matter of propaganda”,^[10] looking to legitimise Portugal’s foreign domains by creating awareness of the potential riches of the colonies: “Portuguese! All this belongs to you. When will you come to occupy what is yours?”^[11]



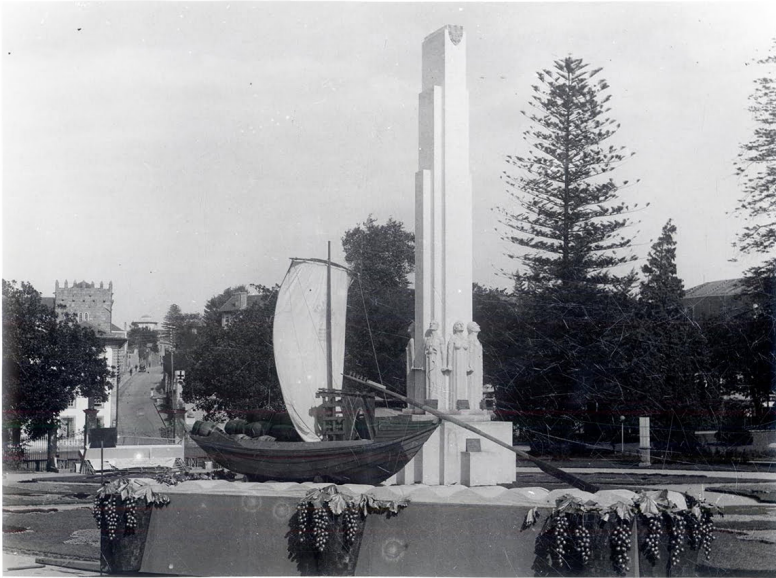
Official map to the exhibition. Included in the official catalogue of the exhibition.

The exhibition received 1.3 million visitors and largely contributed to the construction of a colonial narrative by setting up a communication apparatus that showcased the empire not “through words alone, but [through] live, animated truths.”^[12] For example, by presenting “villages” in which inhabitants from the colonised countries brought to Porto were exhibited while living in a simulation of their habitats, creating stereotyped visions of “the other” by presenting these people as “primitive” and incapable of contributing to a civilisational process. As historian and researcher Filipa Lowndes Vicente notes, the exhibition allowed the public to occupy “even if temporarily, the gaze and the look of the colonizer”.^[13] Because the empire was large and needed those who could occupy and work it, the exhibition attempted to transform it into an object of desire. According to Vicente, the exhibiting of people from the colonised countries represented “colonial spaces that emerged as feminized, made of disorderly nature that the imperial European masculinity would control”^[14] eroticising the empire, made highly seductive and available, in its appeal to “become colonized” and obscuring inequalities of origin, gender and sexuality. In this way, the exhibition shaped a strongly performative and political manner of seeing, where visitors were invited to experience the role of coloniser as a tool of propaganda.



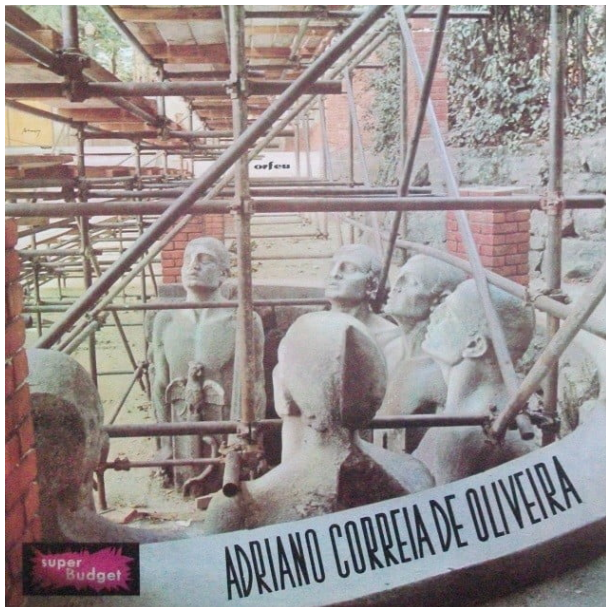






The Portuguese Monument to Colonial Effort

The Portuguese Monument to Colonial Effort was commissioned as an ex libris of the exhibition, occupying an important place on the Square of the Empire, in front of the main entrance to the Palace of the Colonies. Created by lieutenant Alberto Ponce and sculptor José de Sousa Caldas in an art-deco style to match the facade of the palace, it was ten metres tall and composed of a pillar surrounded by six parallelepipeds at the base, all presenting a figure “personifying Portuguese colonisation”. Each of these figures was naked and carried a symbol on its torso: the warrior the sword; the missionary the cross; the merchant the caduceus; the doctor the serpent and the cock; the farmer the ear of wheat; and the women prominent breasts.”^[15] The figures stood straight, sharing uniform features and gazing upwards, connected with their hands, their closed fists touching each other. On the side of the pillar was a list of prominent male figures tied to colonisation, and at the base an inscription paying homage to the Portuguese colonial effort.



Cover of an album by left-wing singer Adriano Correia de Oliveira, showing the figures while stored in the gardens of the Crystal Palace in Porto. Orpheu record label, 1973

The monument was created in temporary materials (plaster) for the exhibition with the intent that it later be replicated in stone at the same location. In December 1935, during the celebrations of Portuguese independence from Spain, a granite version of the monument was already in place, with an added inscription explaining its creation within the context of the exhibition, and without the list of names on its pillar. In March 1943, the city council decided that the monument did not fit the surrounding gardens of the palace and should be relocated elsewhere in Porto. For this to happen, another statue had to be moved, which never occurred. The monument was eventually dismantled and transported to a secluded area of the gardens, where it remained hidden to the public. In 1954, when asked about the possibility of re-erecting the monument, the president of the Municipal Commission for Art and Archaeology, Manuel Figueiredo, stated: “There are no aesthetic reasons that justify such a decision.”^[16]

In 1984, ten years after democracy was installed, and half a century after the first colonial exhibition took place, the monument was reassembled under the orders of the then city councillor and former settler, Paulo Vallada. The monument was re-erected at the Square of the Empire in the privileged area of Foz, a square created in December 1937 “with the intention of glorifying those immortal figures that built in the past, glorious Portugal of beyond seas.”^[17] Thus, fifty years after its creation, the monument was returned to a Square of the Empire, five kilometres from its original spot. According to historian Luisa Marroni, moving the monument in 1984 asserted its role as a “memory location”,^[18] by incorporating a toponymic network dedicated to ideas promoted by *Estado Novo*.^[19]

As I see it, the decision to re-erect the monument at another Square of the Empire in Porto highlights a historical parallel, and also a contrast between the context in which the monument was created and the one it was transported to: the first focused on teaching the Portuguese to see themselves as an empire, rather than a small country, while the second re-affirmed the idea of empire ten years after the end of the fascist regime and the independence of colonised countries.

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Collection of graffiti on the monument in recent years. The city council swiftly cleans these without further comment on the meaning of the monument. The graffiti in the photos says: “GET THIS SHIT OUT OF HERE”, “SHITY SETTLERS OUT”, “FASCISTS OUT”, and painted in red, “OPPRESSORS”. Photo: Câmara Municipal do Porto







Extreme right-wing party Ergue-te (formerly PNR) celebrates the restoration of independence from Spain next to the MECP. Invitation for the 2019 festivities with the call “It is important to restore. Now!” Photo of the event with graffiti in the background. Photo: Partido Ergue-te

Since its relocation to its new Square of the Empire, the monument has generally been ignored. In 2009 there was a debate around the possibility of its removal to create space for the new Porto metro line.^[20] More recently, it has become the object of sporadic interventions protesting its presence (see Fig. 10) or painting the figures’ fists red. Porto city council swiftly cleans these inscriptions, reporting when it does on its website, but failing to contextualise its history or meaning today, instead appealing for “respect for the city’s patrimony, independently from any judgement made of the historical context in which political acts may have occurred.”^[21] The city council includes the monument in its tourist routes, again without explaining its history. In 2019, the monument became the focus for a gathering organised by an ultra-right-wing party to commemorate the Portuguese restoration of independence from Spain.

Shielded in a residential area and surrounded by place names related to historical events, the monument remains

largely invisible, even to the people living close to it. Very few projects engage with it critically or artistically. An exception are Interstruct Collective, a group of artists that has engaged with Porto's colonial past, in particular working on locations around the story of the exhibition.^[22] They recently developed the workshop ATLAS, for which they invited people to consider the relations between cartography, images, words and concepts tied to the exhibition and its legacy through a guided tour around the gardens of the Crystal Palace.^[23] ATLAS is integrated in the programme "ping! An Elephant in the Crystal Palace", an initiative of Porto's Municipal Gallery, with guest curators Alexandra Balona, Melissa Rodrigues and Nuno Coelho.^[24] It proposes a public programme to debate the exhibition and its meaning today, through meetings between different fields, voices and approaches. In October 2021, the publication *ATLAS* will be launched as a closing event, hopefully yielding further critical engagement around the exhibition and its legacy in Porto.



The Exhibition of the Portuguese World

[...] but it was in these hundred meters of sand, that Portugal found itself, fixing its universal destiny; here Portugal was founded, as homeland of two worlds.^[26]

This quote is an extract from the opening speech to the exhibition of the Portuguese world in Belém, Lisbon, illustrating the metaphorical, idealised versions of history projected by the *Estado Novo*, and its exhibitions. In reality, Portugal was not founded in the hundred metres of sand of a beach in Belém, but it was to the advantage of the regime that Portugal found its “universal destiny” at this symbolic location, tied to an undetermined idea: as creator of two worlds, both human and divine, real and imaginary, of sea and land, of heroic but humble folk, inhabiting a space of universality, left purposefully nebulous and inscribed into the future.

In 1940, while most of Europe was at war, Portugal staged a highly stylised event that enabled a fantasised world, in stark contrast with what was happening in the rest of the continent. After the fall of Paris, Lisbon became the main point of escape from Europa to America, with around 80,000 people waiting to board a transatlantic ship between the summer of 1940 and 1942.^[26] This new exhibition served to politically consolidate the regime, and with it an idealised version of Portuguese identity, responding to mounting international pressure concerning its colonial domains.



Official plan of the Exhibition

The exhibition transformed an area of 560,000 square metres, in a major urban renovation project in western Lisbon. It took two years to build, implying a profound rearrangement of monuments and urban space. Restelo beach in Belém was established as the point from where Portuguese navigators departed to discover and civilise the world, and from there the exhibition was designed around a main axis connecting the monastery of Hieronymites (recovered for the occasion) and the beach, where the shoreline took centre stage. Between the monastery and the beach, the Square of the Empire was constructed as the epicentre of the exhibition, with an

illuminated fountain and hippocampus statues adorning its gardens.





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Around the Square of the Empire, the exhibition was organised in four sections: the historical section, including pavilions on Portuguese conquests, independence and discoveries; the regional centre, with Portuguese villages and pavilions; and the colonial section, offering an ethnographic journey through the overseas provinces. The colonial section had streets named after regions of the empire, like in Porto, and inhabitants of different countries of the empire living in simulated environments, however, in fewer numbers than in Porto. Lastly, there was a section for “diverse attractions” and a Monument to the Discoveries at Restelo marked the departing point of the voyages of the discoveries.

The exhibition celebrated a narrative constructed around three dates 1140, 1640 and 1940 referring to the

foundation of nationhood (1143), the restoration of independence from Spain (1640) and celebrating Portugal (1940) past, present and future. It focused on a narrative of Portugal's maritime history through a layout designed along a chronological line departing from the foundation gate, through the historical section, into the centre of the exhibition and the Square of the Empire. In interviewing visitors about their experience, anthropologist Patricia Ferraz de Matos reports distinct lighting effects along this pathway, creating a brighter area around the centre of the exhibit and it being darker elsewhere, with the colonial section presented in twilight. Matos suggests this was planned to reproduce the darkness of the dense forest, but also questions the intention to "underline the secondary nature of the colonies in relation to metropolitan Portugal by muting their visual presence."^[27] Showing, again, how the viewing experience was a highly performative one.

The exhibition was visited by three million people, and filmed for posterity.^[28] Its architect, Cottinelli Telmo, had ties to the film industry, and António Ferro, Secretary for National Propaganda, was central in structuring the event along a narrative arc that was easy to understand and reproduce, impactful in its media coverage and linked to public space. "The real city was destroyed and, in its place, a symbolic city of Portuguese history was constructed."^[29] But, as Peralta remarks, without historical scrutiny, thus allowing for a sanitised version of colonial history, in which the imperial was equated with the civilisational quality of Portuguese colonialism, mixing distinct temporal and geographic scales to form an idealised and mystical "Portuguese identity" associated with Portuguese maritime expansion and solitary heroes creating collective epic narratives.^[30] This was combined with ideas anchored in notions of the popular, the rural as well as colonial.^[31] Intriguingly, despite its political and ideological objectives, this event mobilised artists and intellectuals from all sides of the political spectrum, even those opposed to the regime.^[32]

After the end of the exhibition, in 1941, a storm destroyed part of the remaining structures, including the figure of Henry the Navigator, which fell from the Monument to the Discoveries into the water. In 1943, it was in large part demolished, leaving a set of structures in place that have shaped the urban landscape until today. Over the years, Belém has been represented as a symbolic space through a series of political decisions since the 1980s, while continuing to present the narrative of the discoveries to a growing wave of tourists.^[33] In 1983, the Monastery of the Hieronymites and the Tower of Belém became UNESCO world heritage sites.^[34] In 1992, Portugal took on the presidency of the European Union, with the Cultural Centre of Belém (CCB) being constructed as headquarters, along one side of the Square of the Empire, which stands mostly unaltered.

Today, CCB is a centre for contemporary culture, and one of many cultural attractions in an area densely populated with museums including the Gulbenkian Planetarium, the Navy Museum, the Museum of Archaeology, the Coach Museum, and the more recent Museum for Art, Architecture and Technology (MAAT). The Tropical Gardens, where the colonial exhibition took place, have been preserved and are open to the public, neighbouring the presidential palace and a street that survived demolition and that houses a line of restaurants, including the famous Pastéis de Belém. The other side of the Square of the Empire connects by way of a passage to the Belém Tower, street markets and several monuments, including a replica of the Monument to the Discoveries.

Tourists can wander through the gardens of the Square of the Empire, sit next to the fountain decorated with the coats of arms from all the provinces of the former empire, distracted by vendors and caterers. Like in Porto, streets surrounding the square are frequently named after figures related to the discoveries. Tourists are met with the narratives of the discoveries still aligned with the ideas of *Estado Novo*, but now combined with contemporary cultural on offer at CCB or MAAT. As Peralta remarks, narratives that were previously mobilised because of ideological agendas are now repositioned in reference to the demands of the consumer and leisure

markets and tourism,^[35] with the empire making place for the voyage, looking to build a story of these locations that can add revenue to the tourist industry.^[36]

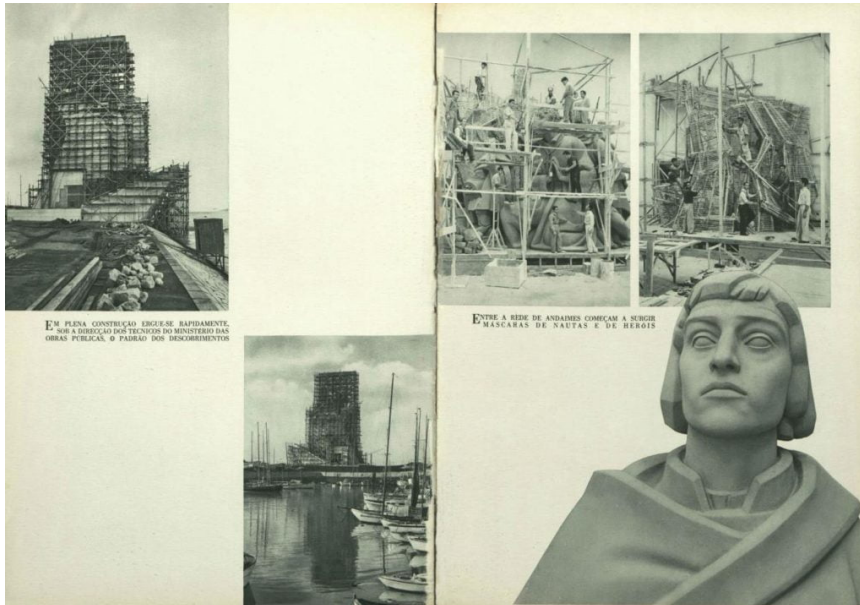


The Monument to the Discoveries at night, 1940. Col. Estúdio Mário Novais | FCG Biblioteca de Arte e Arquivos

Monument to the Discoveries

The Monument to the Discoveries, created by Telmo and the sculptor Leopoldo de Almeida, is located on the waterside of the Square of the Empire. It was constructed in temporary materials for the exhibition, with the idea that it would be demolished later, as happened in 1943, after its partial destruction in a storm. In 1960, as Portuguese colonialism came under increased scrutiny, *Estado Novo* returned to the narrative of the discoveries to commemorate 500 years of the death of Henry the Navigator and the decision was made to re-erect the monument on a larger scale for this occasion.^[37]

Architect Pardal Monteiro eventually led the efforts to recreate an enlarged version of the monument with a 50 metre tall structure in reinforced concrete, layered with rose stone from Leiria and limestone from Sintra, with new exhibition spaces inside and access to a viewing point overlooking the city. The monument took 370 days to build. It is shaped like the bow of a caravel with two side ramps meeting at the bow, where Henry the Navigator is situated, facing the waterside, with figures connected to the discoveries behind him, along the ramps. A wall decorated with Portuguese weapons from the time of “overseas discoveries” is visible above the sails and in the back. Along the entire back of the monument, hovering over the entrance, hangs a sword, symbolising both strength and Christian faith. Around the monument, the pavement a gift from the South African apartheid regime presents a *mappa mundi* and a compass rose.



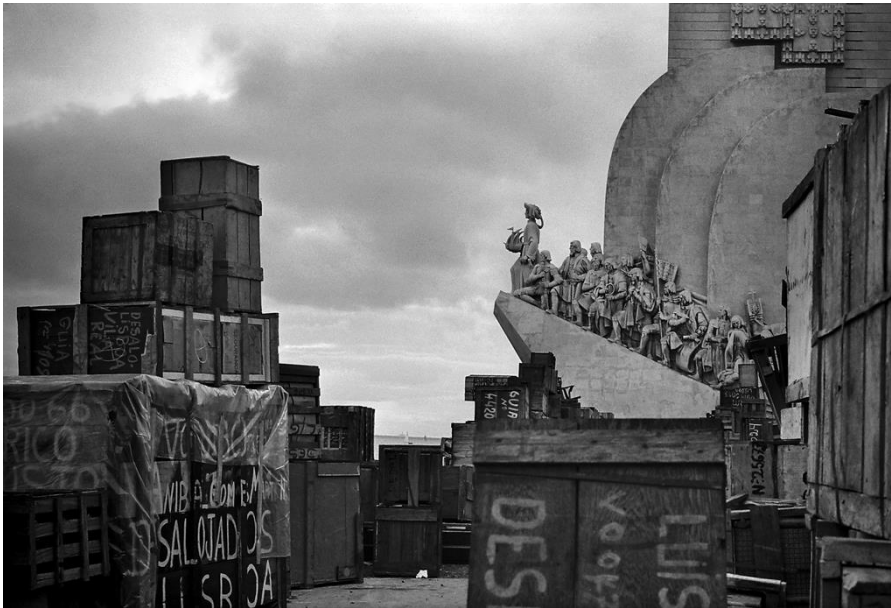
Spread from the booklet published on occasion of the inauguration of the monument in the context of the 500th commemoration of Henry the Navigator's death



Sculptor Leopoldo de Almeida and the group of workers at atelier Avenida da Índia (Lisboa). Col. Estúdio Mário Novais I FCG Biblioteca de Arte e Arquivos

A small publication was produced on the occasion of the inauguration of the monument, including photos and texts by political figures of the regime. The texts were written in a highly metaphorical language, strongly evocative, emphasising the material and performative dimensions of the monument's story. The monument is described, as a "stone anthem that will forever remain", created "between the webs of scaffolding, [where] the masks of our heroes start to emerge", "with mathematical precision, [...] meeting an ancestral and evocative call." Henry the Navigator, foregrounded in the monument, is described as "creator of space and modeller of time", a "Hamlet of the sea, sculpting the destiny of a civilisation". Hyperbolic language is used to surround the monument with myths and stories of the sea, conveying ideas of permanence and strength, and positioning the Portuguese people as "uninterruptedly transmit[ing] the sacred blood" of their heroes. In this way, binding bodies of the past to the present and future, in a rhetoric that still holds a strong grip over Portuguese society, which can be perceived in the difficulty in accepting other narratives that contest or disturb this account of history,

and in revisiting the end of colonisation or its violence.



The Monument to the Discoveries surrounded by wooden crates. Photo by Alfredo Cunha, 1975

The monument, in an image shot by photographer Alfredo Cunha (see Fig. 32), captures the ideological construct of the empire in its contrast with the evident end of Portuguese colonisation. Neglected after the end of the dictatorship, for years the monument was surrounded by thousands of wooden crates that held the belongings of the large amount of people travelling from the colonised countries to Lisbon after the end of colonisation.^[38] In 1985, the monument underwent renovation, with construction work granting access to its inside and the viewing platform. Since then, it has become a favourite tourist destination, with most visitors remaining oblivious to the meaning of what they are experiencing, as city guides and tours focus on the narrative of discoveries, while visitors take superficial snapshots of the pavement, monument and river. Guides concentrate on the architectural and stylistic quality of the monuments in telling the tale of discoveries.^[39] As Peralta notes, this absence of information reproduces a certain form of memory while being resistant to interpretation.^[40]

Turned into Stone, the Squares of the Empire Today

Both colonial exhibitions originated a Square of the Empire, each holding a monument. These squares remain until today, attesting to the hold of the ideals promoted by *Estado Novo* in public life. In Porto, a new Square of the Empire was created, five kilometres away from the gardens of the Crystal Palace, with a surrounding toponymy that captures the ideas of the regime. In Lisbon, the Square of the Empire and the names of adjacent streets remain unaltered until today. In both theses squares, the monuments, created in temporary materials for the exhibitions, were later re-erected in stone, transporting the narratives set up through the exhibitions into public space. More recently, the monuments have met with increasing contestation, but remain largely ignored, while being progressively commodified, in particular in Lisbon.

In his text “Empire in the City”, historian Tiago Castela discusses how contemporary modes of valuing built heritage retain colonial rationales, noting how these exhibitions remain largely unexamined as a political problem, leading to a continued fragmentary presence of a pedagogy of inequality in which memorials contribute to spatial violence.^[41] Indeed, acts of memory are located in the present and are inevitably political, motivated by

ideological readings of the past that tie then and now together.^[42] But they are also a space for revision and actualisation, open to negotiation and conflict to create new meanings of memory. Replicated outside the context of their exhibitions, these monuments, their story and location in public space remain open to frictions, transformations, disturbances and to a diversity of readings that have been suppressed within the narrative of the discoveries. In denying the violence of Portuguese colonisation, manifold voices and perspectives remain invisible, opening public space to important questions about engaging with this legacy in a critical way.

Portuguese philosopher José Gil studies the rhetorical strategies of the Portuguese regime to point out how these had affective consequences, leading to a silencing of dissensus and an erasure of individual personalities.^[43] The philosopher develops the idea of inscription in relation to this silencing, proposing that today the Portuguese still live in the shadow of this erasure and therefore in a state of non-inscription. Gil elaborates on the idea of re-inscription as a way of making visible what is omitted and opening up the affective to dissensus. I believe that as symbols these monuments can be explored in terms of their ability to re-inscribe affective registers that differ from official versions, opening up a public space for dissensus.

In engaging with this idea, I consider the figures of “ghost” and “haunting” as operative concepts when analysing cultural situations in which there is an erasure, invisibility and latency of a colonial past.^[44] The movements of the past on the present can be seen as a form of haunting that remains invisible until discovered, or visible when represented. In retracing the story of these exhibitions and becoming involved with a monument that memorialises colonial ideas, as a communication designer/artistic researcher, I am interested in approaching these monuments from this perspective.

The figures of the ghost and haunting can be explored as “conceptual metaphors” that act, not only as comparisons and figurations, but guiding critical thought to surface what is hidden, repressed or unspoken, and question memory in its material and archival dimensions.^[45] The perception of the past and the making of history become inseparable from the speculation on new directions for the future, because, as Jacques Derrida writes, “the past is both absent and present within the now moment, but also [...] can open up the possibilities for the future.”^[46] In unsettling homogeneous views of history, linking the present to the past, and shaping the present towards the future, these monuments “haunt” not only by asserting a certain narrative over time, but also by continuously inscribing their materiality in the situatedness of the present, never claiming to tell a story in universal terms

What moves me to engage with critical discourses of spectrality, is how such discourses destabilise dichotomies such as past against present, presence instead of absence, the real and the imagined, affecting collective memory, individual agency and the cultural archive. Spectres are simultaneously present and absent, imagined and real, in the past and in the present, significantly framing “the immaterial as also and already constituent of material reality.”^[47] As Achille Mbembe remarks, overcoming “dualistic western modes of thought” implies a living with the spectral where “exorcism (in the sense of completely doing away with them) is not an option”, and we inhabit both sides of the dichotomy.^[48] Following Mbembe, I am looking for “the perspective of those who (are made to) live as ghosts”, or not even capable of haunting, but also at how spectres assert forms of power in a way that is “spectral (unpredictable, unassailable, unaccountable), making it virtually impossible to challenge or escape.”^[49] Moreover, following Ann Stoler in her considerations about how empires are conceived as haunting structures, I want to explore how monuments hold a legacy of implicated histories, representing forms of power that act(ed) “simultaneously at a distance” and through “strangely familiar ‘uncanny’ intimacies.”^[50]



Ângela Ferreira, *Messy Colonialism, Wild Decolonization*, 2015.
Photos: Hendrik Zeitler

With its strong visual presence and imposing symbolism, the Monument to the Discoveries has been the subject of a number of activist and artistic interventions by contemporary artists, including Ângela Ferreira (Mozambique, 1958) and Kiluanji Kia Henda (Angola, 1979). In *Messy Colonialism, Wild Decolonization* (2015), shown in the exhibition “Returning Traces of Memory”, Ferreira installed a pile of wooden boxes of different sizes alluding to the photograph by Cunha showing the boxes of settler’s stored belongings, in some cases for years, next to the Monument to the Discoveries. Projected onto them was a silent video, edited from archival material about the monument’s history, including celebratory footage of the “Exhibition of the Portuguese World”.^[51] In this way, it brought the idealised narratives materialised in the monument in contrast with the reality of the end of colonisation. As researcher Ana Balona de Oliveira remarks, it confronted the viewer with the lack of “rigorous

public debate on the violence of the colonial enterprise”, and also with “contradictions of a decolonisation process, which involved the sudden and mass arrival of many Portuguese from the former colonies who were practically strangers to the former metropolis and unwanted by the revolution.”^[52]

In talking about this monument, Ferreira believes in the possibility of reading buildings as political texts, proposing to not only tell a story as historian, but “to identify the buildings as metaphors, knowing how to articulate critical readings brought around them; adding to the idea of the building, the power of the contents of the ‘archive’ it refers to.”^[53] For Ferreira, the monument and its surroundings are haunted by its “nefarious history” and she is not convinced that it is possible to easily overturn the forces it projects as archival matter.^[54] She believes it is important to consider the ethics of form, remaining careful to engage critically with the content so that the monuments do not become confusing or perceived as neutral, or worse, appropriated by nostalgic discourses.^[55]

As a Portuguese born in 1974, I have experienced the reminiscing about the regime in narratives throughout my life, deeply engrained in the educational system, in the privilege of my position as a white person living within a medium income and educated family. The silencing of Portugal’s recent history made for a late encounter with postcolonial and decolonial discourses and the level of criticality that Ferreira is advocating for. I consider Ferreira’s work as evoking ideas of the spectre discussed above: I cannot but sense the weight of an absence, the absence of the many personal stories and affects tied to the events it tells about.



Kiluanji Kia Henda, *Descobertas/Padrão dos Descobrimentos*, 2007

In *Descobertas/Padrão dos Descobrimentos* (2007),^[56] Henda photographed a group of young people on top of one of the ramps of the monument, posing and leaning against its historical figures, dwarfed by their colossal scale.^[57] The group were all of African descent, and included a woman, in contrast with the group of male historical figures represented in the monument. The title is an ironic allusion to the “discoveries” invoked by the monument, but also to the “discovery” of that location by the group, which had travelled from the Alta de Lisboa neighbourhood in Lisbon, which has a large African community, into the colonially-charged and symbolical area that is Belém. In this work, there is a contrast between the monument, memorialising its version of history, and the presence of racialised people standing on the monument itself, inverting its presence with another. In my view, the image strikes a very fine balance between humour and mockery contained in the dramatisation of the

poses and the manifestly political and activist move of posing for the photo itself. The photo defiantly imposes the narrative made invisible by the rhetoric of *Estado Novo* onto one of its main symbols. As such the enormity of the monument's scale is made to feel ridiculous and exaggerated, the photograph dismantling its power.

The works of Ferreira and Henda show how artistic approaches activate conversations that defy the forms of memorialisation set in motion by the regime, by making visible contrasts that show hidden layers of history in active ways that unsettle the viewer. While these works are strong in themselves, also important are particular moments around their creation, and tied to their circulation. Journalist, editor and producer Marta Lança writes about the process of developing this work by Henda, observing how for her the most relevant part of its history took place even before coming close to the monument.^[58] She describes how many in the group had never been to Belém before and how when arriving and parking next to the Square of the Empire, four police officers immediately approached them to check out “who those people in that part of the city were”. The police were looking for a pickpocket, and in Lança's view never considered that the group could be enjoying a part of the city that does not “belong to them”. Lança describes how the conversation with the police involved answering many questions, requests for identification and the intermediation of white people to diffuse doubts, as Lança remarks, showing the marks of coloniality in the city.

After its creation in 2007, Henda's work still draws scrutiny from the media: in 2017 when the photograph was part of an exhibition taking place inside the monument,^[59] and more recently in the controversy around the photograph being bought by the city council,^[60] without knowledge of the artist, who had promised to donate part of its profits to the association that those in the photo belonged to (which happened later). The conversation became public and brought about a discussion about the work, its relation to the city and its symbolism, which demonstrates that in their circulation these works also create important moments for debate.



Details of the paint left from protesting the monument. Toes recreated in cement, rusty iron structural element surfacing between the stones. “Amo-te” (I Love you) written at a figure's toes. Photos: Pedro Manuel



The casts standing at the feet of the monument. Photo: Pedro Manuel

I have recently initiated a study around the Monument to Colonial Effort in Porto, which I grew up close to, troubled by its presence in public space. I am researching different inhabitations and views of the monument by studying its ecologies of communication, which is bringing me to research embodied, material, performative dimensions of communication and the particular affects these draw out. In doing so, I am exploring a space for speculation about how to interfere with how memory is enacted in the present, hoping to disrupt sedimented narratives.



Detail of the mould that passed from the granite of the monument into the silicone of the cast. Photo: Pedro Manuel

I have begun by creating silicone casts that become a concrete way of studying the monument in public space. The activity of creating the casts with the necessary preparation and drying times demand a period of being physically very close to the monument, extending a relation of observation to a prolonged experience that involves close witnessing and bodily encounters.^[61] Up close, the monument is tall, imposing, with one always looking from below looking up to the figures. The granite is porous, rough and worn, with lichens and spider

webs, tiny inscriptions, rubbish and broken glass. The figures' extremities are damaged: there are missing toes and noses that are corrected with cement. There are lines of erosion where different parts of the figures connect, showing their iron frame that stains the stone around it. These details activate new readings, disturbing the monument's grandeur with the corrosion of time, and with inhabitations that seem oblivious to what it seeks to memorialise.

The working process took place with permission from the city council. The police were called several times and passers-by shared their opinion for and against what the monument stands for, or simply showed surprise with the re-appearance of the monument often overlooked in daily life. During these conversations, the work was presented as part of an artistic project and the casts as a practicality, avoiding more political conversations. Circumscribing the project in this way felt like a pre-condition to being able to create the project, even if delaying/dislocating possible conflicts to a different context and time. In fact, stating that the aim of the project was to question the monument's symbolical value within an artistic sphere is true to the nature of the project, and perhaps what enabled the making of casts. However, it softened/compromised the violence of the monument's presence, and avoided dealing with the conflict and conversations brought about by working in public space hindering the political dimension of the working process.

With the casts, I propose a play between presence and absence, with the casts seen as a spectral strategy. In their materiality, the casts become a concrete way of reworking the monument, in themselves symbolic objects, reproducing both the monument and the silencing it holds. Casts generate negative spaces of parts of the monument, as memory and potential of reproduction. The casts become new objects that are flexible, hollow, contrasting with the granite of the monument; they open up symbolically to new appropriations, projections, dispositions, readings, which I aim to explore by working in public space. The goal is to symbolically raise questions and engagements that are not only interlocutory, but explore other forms of exchanging and generating meaning in public space. As this process develops, my aim is to further debate around these monuments and exhibitions that contributes to questioning the narratives promoted by *Estado Novo*.





NB: All translations from Portuguese by the author.

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Footnotes

1. Peralta, Elsa. "The return from Africa: Illegitimacy, concealment, and the non-memory of Portugal's imperial collapse". *Memory Studies*. 22 May 2019. p. 1. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698019849704> (accessed 2021-07-16).
2. Peralta, Elsa. "Fictions of a Creole Nation: (Re)Presenting Portugal's Imperial Past". In *Negotiating identities: constructed selves and others*. Edited by Helen Vella Bonavita. Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi. 2011. p. 193.
3. The Portuguese colonial exhibitions were not an isolated event, but variations of a nineteenth-century trend in creating world exhibitions. Since a first edition in London in 1851, these spread across major

cities in Europe and North America, celebrating the success of the industrial world. They were ephemeral events, built with economic purposes, and holding strong educational and entertainment dimensions. The first colonial exhibition took place in Amsterdam in 1883, designed to “showcase natural and human resources of Imperial Power”, including the display of “inhabitants of remote territories [...] just as the resources and raw materials of the colonies [were] Usually confined to a replica of a native village.” Their strong entertainment value made them very popular in the late nineteenth century, with Portugal adhering to this trend quite late and at a smaller scale compared to its richer European neighbours, but having learnt from the experience of participating in previous editions. See Matos, Patricia F. *The Colours of the Empire: Racialized Representations of the Empire*. Oxford and New York, NY: Berghahn Books. 2013. pp. 149–154.

4. Henrique Galvão, the commissioner of the exhibition. *Jornal O Século*, cited in Figueiredo, Ricardo. “Os Planos para o Porto—dos Almadás aos nossos dias 7 IV”. *Do Porto e não só*. 2010. Available at <http://doportoenaoso.blogspot.com/2010/10/os-planos-para-o-porto-dos-almadas-aos.html> (accessed 2021-07-13).
5. These ideas paved the way to the later formulation of Portuguese exceptionalism in the notion of luso-tropicalism, proposed by Gilberto Freyre. See Anderson, Warwick, Roque, Ricardo and Santos Ricardo Ventura (eds.). *Luso-Tropicalism and Its Discontents: The Making and Unmaking of Racial Exceptionalism*. New York, NY, and Oxford: Berghahn Books. 2019.
6. *Ibid.*
7. For Gloria Wekker the cultural archive is a “racial grammar, a deep structure of inequality in thought and affect” based on how ideas about race formed a sense of self in imperial Europe. See Wekker, Gloria. *White Innocence*. Durham, NC: Duke Press. 2016. p. 2.
8. Decree No. 18570, 8 July 1930. Available at <https://dre.pt/application/conteudo/224055> (accessed 2021-07-13).
9. The exhibition was located in Porto because the north of Portugal was an area with strong migration to Brazil during the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century.
10. Cited in Figueiredo, “Os Planos para o Porto”.—
11. Galvão, H. “Introdução”. In *O Império Português na 1ª Exposição Colonial Portuguesa, Album, Catálogo*. Porto: Agência Geral das Colónias. 1934.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Vicente, Filipa Lowndes. “‘Rosita’ e o Império Como Objecto de Desejo”. *Publico, Ípsilon*. 25 August 2013. Available at <https://www.buala.org/pt/corpo/rosita-e-o-imperio-como-objecto-de-desejo> (accessed 2021-07-13).
14. *Ibid.* ☺
15. Abreu, José Guilherme. “Os Caminhos da Escultura Pública do Porto. Do Novecentismo ao Estado Novo”. *Boletim da Associação Cultural Os Amigos do Porto*. No. 28. 2010.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Ferreira, M.C. “IMPÉRIO (Praça do)”. In *Prontuário Toponímico Portuense*. Porto: Afrontament0, 2017. p. 578.
18. Marroni, Luisa. “Experiencias de Colonialismo no Porto de 1934, na Primeira Exposição Colonial Portuguesa”. In *cescontexto Direitos e Dignidade Trajectorias e experiências de luta IX Edição do Congresso Ibérico de Estudos Africanos—Vol 1*. Edited by M.P. Meneses and B.S. Martins. See *Debates*. No. 13. April 2016. pp. 67–87.
19. “The Square of the Empire is connected to Avenida Marechal Gomes da Costa, which pays tribute to the chief of the military coup that originated the *Estado Novo*. Also, the street D. Nuno Álvares Pereira starts at the Square of the Empire, remembering another pillar of national identity during the *Estado Novo*: the

- affirmation in face of Spanish hegemony. But it also connects to the streets Bartoloneu Velho, Diogo Botelho, João de Barros, Gil Eanes, Street of Diu and Avenue of Brazil—which transport the memory of the Discoveries. Finally, Henrique Mendonça street and Alfredo Keil street remember the creators of one of the most important national symbols: the national anthem. This network of memory constitutes a semiotic context, which confers to the monument a meaning similar to that conferred in the context of the Colonial Exhibition.” Pinheiro, Teresa. “Memória Histórica de Portugal Contemporâneo”. In *Dialogos com a Lusofonia Colóquio Comemorativo dos 30 Anos do Instituto de Estudos Ibéricos e Ibero-Americanos da Universidade de Varsóvia*. Edited by Anna Kaleswska. 2008. p. 90.
20. See Vieira, Álvaro. “Metro do Porto quer tirar monumento do meio da rotunda da Praça do Império”. *Publico*, 14 March 2009. Available at <https://www.publico.pt/2009/03/14/jornal/metro-do-porto-quer-tirar-monumento-do-meio-da-rotunda-da-praca-do-imperio-298991> (accessed 2021-07-13).
 21. “Monumento da Praça do Império construído em 1934 foi vandalizado”. *Porto*. 12 June 2018. Available at <https://www.porto.pt/pt/noticia/monumento-da-praca-do-imperio-construido-em-1934-foi-vandalizado> (accessed 2021-07-13).
 22. The collective is formed by Claire Sivier, Desirée Desmarattes, Isabel Stein, Melissa Rodrigues, Miguel F., Sebastian Ioan and Vijay Patel.
 23. See Bontempo, Bruno. “1st Portuguese Colonial Exhibition (1934): Territory and Representation”. *Interstruct Collective*, 10 June 2021. Available at <https://interstructcollective.com/blog/1st-portuguese-colonial-exhibition-1934-territory-and-representation/> (accessed 2021-07-13).
 24. “ping!”. Galeria Municipal do Porto. Available at <http://www.galeriamunicipaldoporto.pt/pt/programa-de-incursao-a-galeria/um-elefante-no-palacio-de-cristal/> (accessed 2021-07-13).
 25. Augusto de Castro during the inauguration of the “Exhibition of the Portuguese World”, *Revista dos Centenários*. July/August 1940. p. 2. Cited in Alves, Alice N. and Mariz, Vera. “O Padrão dos Descobrimentos como ‘imagem de marca’ do Estado Novo”. In *Genius Loci. Lugares e significados. Breves reflexões*. Edited by Lúcia Rosas, Ana Cristina Sousa and Hugo Barreira. Porto: CITCEM. 2016. pp. 42-43.
 26. As Antoine Saint-Exupéry describes: “As I travelled through Portugal in December 1940 on my way to America, I saw Lisbon as an enlightened and sad paradise. At that time, one spoke a lot about the threat of invasion; Portugal painfully bound itself to the illusion of its luck. Lisbon, which built the most extravagant exhibition in the world, smiled the somewhat grim smile of a mother who, having received no news of her son in the battlefield, tries now to protect him through her trust [...] It was so that I wandered full of melancholia every evening through this exhibition of extraordinary taste [...] Could it be so that the world would destroy such a wonderful feeling for art? And I found Lisbon with its smiles sadder than my destroyed cities.” In *Lettre à un otage*. Paris: Gallimard 2011 [1944]. Cited in Bodenschatz, Harald. “Urbanism and dictatorship—overcoming tunnel vision: Three exhibitions in Salazar’s Lisbon: 1940, 1941 and 1952”. In *Windows Upon Planning History*. Edited by Karl F. Fischer and Uwe Altrock. Milton Park and New York, NY: Routledge. 2018.
 27. Matos, *Colours of the Empire*, p.199
 28. It was filmed by Lopes Ribeiro and Carneiro Mendes. Part of this footage can be seen in the film “Lusitania Fantasy” by João Canijo.
 29. Commissioner of the exhibition, Augusto de Castro. Cited in Peralta, Elsa. “A composição de um complexo de memória: O caso de Belém, Lisboa” In *Cidade e império: dinâmicas coloniais e reconfigurações pós-coloniais*. Edited by Nuno Domingos and Elsa Peralta. Lisbon: Edições 70. 2013. p. 380.
 30. *Ibid.*, p. 381.

31. *Ibid.*
32. Matos, *Colours of the Empire*, p. 195
33. Peralta, “A composição de um complexo de memória”, p. 387
34. “Standing at the entrance to Lisbon harbour, the Monastery of the Hieronymites—construction of which began in 1502—exemplifies Portuguese art at its best. The nearby Tower of Belém, built to commemorate Vasco da Gama’s expedition, is a reminder of the great maritime discoveries that laid the foundations of the modern world.” After reading about this description in Peralta, “A composição de um complexo de memória”, p. 389, with reference to 2012, I visited the UNESCO website (March 2021) to find the same description. “Monastery of the Hieronymites and Tower of Belem in Lisbon”, UNESCO, Culture, World Heritage Centre, The List, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/263/> (accessed 2021-07-13).
35. Peralta, “A composição de um complexo de memória”, p. 389.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 401.
37. Telmo, the architect of the exhibition and co-designer of the monument, believed in the idea of ephemeral architecture. This brought him to vehemently contest the idea of re-erecting the monument, as for Telmo, no remains of the exhibition should be left in public space: “conserving bits of the exhibition [...] seems a mistake! They are leftovers, ruins, rags”, as the exhibition space must be “a shout, alone, and not a yelling!” See Telmo, Cottinelli. “O que costumam ser e o que poderiam ser os Monumentos Comemorativos”. *O Diabo*. 16 September 1934.
38. An estimated 550,000 people arrived from the former colonised countries, many without a place to live and residing in pensions or hotels for long periods of time. See, for example, Rato, Vanessa. “O ‘retorno’ foi há 40 anos mas volta a ser agora”. *Publico*. 20 November 2015. Available at <https://www.publico.pt/2015/11/20/culturaipsilon/noticia/o-retorno-foi-ha-40-anos-mas-volta-a-ser-agora-1714408> (accessed 2021-07-16). Moreover, Ryszard Kapuscinski vividly describes these boxes in the book *Another day of life*. London: Penguin Books, 2001, (1976).
39. An exception is the African Lisbon Tour, developed by Naky. See <https://africanlisbontour.com/what-we-do/> (accessed 2021-07-13).
40. Peralta, “A composição de um complexo de memória”, p. 392.
41. Castela, Tiago. “Empire in the City: Politicizing Urban Memorials of Colonialism in Portugal and Mozambique”. In *Whose Tradition? Discourses on the Built Environment*. Edited by Nezar AlSayyad, Mark Gillem and David Moffat. London: Routledge. 2017.
42. Peralta, “A composição de um complexo de memória”, p. 366.
43. See Gil, José. *Salazar: A Retórica da Invisibilidade*, Lisboa: Relógio d’Água. 1995; and Gil, José. *Portugal, Hoje: O Medo de Existir*, Lisbon: Relógio d’Água. 2007.
44. Here I am referring to the field of Spectrality Studies. See Del Pilar Blanco, Maria, and Peeren, Esther (eds.). *The Spectralities Reader*. London, Bloomsbury. 2013.
45. “[...] a conceptual metaphor, Mieke Bal suggests, differs from an ordinary one in evoking, through a dynamic comparative interaction, not just another thing, word or idea and its associations, but a discourse, a system of producing knowledge. Besides fulfilling an aesthetic or semantic function, then, a conceptual metaphor ‘performs theoretical work.’” Blanco and Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader*, p. 1.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
51. Taking place in Lisbon in 2015. See *Retornar: Traços de Memória*. Available at <http://tracosedememoria.letas.ulisboa.pt/> (accessed 2021-07-13).

52. Oliveira, Ana Balona de. "Decolonization in, of and through the archival 'moving images' of artistic practice". *BUALA*. 6 December 2020. Available at <https://www.buala.org/en/games-without-borders/decolonization-in-of-and-through-the-archival-moving-images-of-artistic-practi> (accessed 2021-07-13).
53. Ferreira, Angela. "Os limites do poder do Padrão dos Descobrimentos e o retorno ao arquivo" In *Retornar: Traços da Memória do Fim do Império*. Edited by Elsa Peralta, Bruno Góis and Joana Oliveira, Lisbon: Edições 70. 2017. p. 351.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 352.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 355-356.
56. In English "Discoveries/Monument to the Discoveries"
57. The group consisted of Raul, Liliana, Dabanda, Mendonça, Tchola, Admir, Queiroz, Prila, Dércio, Santo, Igo, Pyas, Eduardo, Adilson and Rui, members of an association in Lumiar, Lisbon.
58. Marta Lança, facebook post. 25 February 2021. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/marta.lanca.9> (accessed 2021-07-13).
59. The exhibition "Racismo e Cidadania", commissioned by professor Francisco Bethencourt, Kings College London.
60. EGEAC Cultura em Lisboa, facebook post. 26 February 2021. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/egeac/posts/4056174947760615> (accessed 2021-07-13).
61. To create the casts, I enlisted the help of the sculptor Daniel Silva, who joined the team as consultant, ensuring the monument would not be damaged, theatre maker Pedro Manuel and sculptor Rui Castro.