

Manuel Amado (1938-2018)

Fernando Pessoa's Room, I, II, II

1993

Oil on canvas

Mariana Pinto dos Santos

Mariana Pinto dos Santos is an art historian and independent curator. She is a researcher and deputy director of the Institute of Art History and a professor at the Department of Art History of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the NOVA University of Lisbon (NOVA FCSH). Her work focuses on modernity and modernisms, the circulation of the avant-garde, historiography and art theory, the relationship between aesthetics and politics in the twentieth century, and is based on critical and transdisciplinary perspectives of art history. She coordinates the Almada Negreiros - Sarah Affonso Centre for Studies and Documentation at NOVA FCSH. She was the curator, among others, of the exhibitions *José de Almada Negreiros: a way of being modern*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon (2017), *Manuel Amado — Painting without Alibi* (Arpad Szenes-Vieira da Silva Museum, 2020), *Troubles with Primitivism — a view from Portugal*, with Marta Mestre (CIAJG, Guimarães, 2024), *Neorealisms, or the politicization of art in Júlio Pomar*, with Afonso Dias Ramos (Atelier-Museu Júlio Pomar, 2025). She is the coordinating editor of *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Iberian Peninsula: A Companion* (Brill), 4 volumes, in preparation. In addition, she founded the publishing house Saguão with Rui Miguel Ribeiro in 2017, which since then has published little, but well.

Echoes of the Collection

Casa Fernando Pessoa preserves more than memories: it holds a relevant collection of art related to Pessoa, literature and poetry.

Through this program, our collection comes out of the reserves and becomes living matter, inviting you to get to know each work through the eyes of writers, critics and historians.

“
*What
interests me
is what you
see from afar,
space, not
time.*
”

Manuel Amado,
interviewed by Marta Ferreira dos Reis,
Público, November 15, 2007

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Echoes of the Collection

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Manuel Amado

*Fernando
Pessoa's Room,
I, II, II*

27 OCT'26 to 7 FEB'27



Casa
Fernando
Pessoa

MUSEU DE LITERATURA



Fernando Pessoa's Room

Mariana Pinto dos Santos

Manuel Amado (1938-2018) shared his birthdate (June 13) with the poet Fernando Pessoa, being born three years after his death. He painted this series of three oil paintings in 1993, the year Casa Fernando Pessoa was inaugurated. They were immediately exhibited at the museum's opening and are the inaugural works of its collection.

The three canvases apparently show the same space at three different times of the day. The interior of a room, in shades of yellow, shows sparse furniture and an always open window through which one can see the building in front of the pink façade.

In the first painting, the rectangles of sun are projected onto the interior floor while the façade in front remains in the cold shadow of the early hours of morning. The door is open. In the second canvas, the façade of the building in front is already sunlit, but the shadows of adjacent buildings are cut out in it, including the one where the room is, thus shaping our perspective. The room no longer has direct light and what we see projected on the floor are the reflections of the sun, gleaming on the windows of the opposite building. Finally, in the third painting, the room is illuminated by the light of the lamp on a tiny bookcase, shaped by the lampshade, intensifying the yellows. On the other side of the street (the street we deduce is there but do not see), the lights are on at the window on the first floor.

The lighting orientation corresponds to what is experienced throughout the day on Rua Coelho da Rocha. The view from the room also allows us to infer that it is a first floor, close to street level, which leads us to consider that Manuel Amado painted Fernando Pessoa's bedroom at his final address, the first floor to the right of Rua Coelho da Rocha, nº 16, where the poet lived his last fifteen years, welcomed by the family after occupying many other addresses. However, we know that the room where he slept was an interior one, windowless and very small, fitting in it little more than a bed and the famous trunk where

he kept his manuscripts. Therefore, this depicted room may rather correspond to the one where Pessoa worked and had a bookcase with his reference library, which was in another part of the house. This one did have a window to Rua Coelho da Rocha. However, the bookcase represented by Manuel Amado with a lamp on top is small, and does not correspond to Pessoa's main bookcase, a piece of furniture showcased nowadays in this museum. If the painting's depiction of the bookcase drifts away from the desired verisimilitude, other items offer recognition. On a chair in the right corner are a hat and a grey jacket or trench coat, identity signs of the poet, as the hat became an almost inseparable attribute after the iconisation of his image prompted by his friend, painter José de Almada Negreiros. The grey trench coat, on the other hand, is what Pessoa wears in some of the few photographs that were taken of him. We do not know if it was in fact grey, or if assumed to be that way because of the black and white snapshots of the time.

Manuel Amado graduated in architecture, but from an early age he also dedicated himself to painting, which he embraced exclusively from 1987 onwards. Space is the protagonist in his canvases, superimposing itself as a subject to any human representation. The artist explained this in an interview: «the [human] character would introduce the time factor, which is something that doesn't interest me. What interests me is *what you see from afar*, space, not time.»¹ The space of his paintings is defined by skirting boards, windows, frames, furniture, objects, and especially by the light and the projection of shadows and reflections that shape the places he chose to depict.

Although his style of painting is considered realistic, his works represent a relationship with the memory of places, real or imaginary; or real ones made imaginary through the exercise of remembrance and fixation on canvas. In memory, two things happen. Firstly, time becomes diffuse, mixed, and sometimes places jump out like a vision of the past emerging in the present. It is only in this sense, when past becomes present on a canvas, that time is suspended in the works of Manuel Amado. On the other hand, time is indeed there: the shadows tell us so, showing that the

instant captured by the painter happened at a certain time of day. Secondly, in memory there is always a representation, not the thing itself, which is unreachable, unrepeatable — and, therefore, there is always something theatrical, a staging of memory, a space that, when fictionalized, frees itself from time.

In these canvases, we might see the memory of a Fernando Pessoa's chamber, the attempt to capture the silence of the empty room that awaits a poet who cannot be far away, as his hat and trench coat are already there, waiting for him. Time is fixed in each one of them – but if we watch them in sequence, things change: time advances from one to the other and the poet does not arrive. Morning, afternoon and night follow one another without disturbance to the space, but there is a suggestion of presences. For example, the door of the opposite building was open in the morning but is shut in the afternoon and night: someone went through. And the lights on both the fronting window and from the lamp in the room itself indicate a hypothesis of characters inhabiting these rooms. On the other hand, could there really be continuity of reading? Are the canvases always showing the same space? If we look at the books in the tiny bookcase, they seem to have subtle changes. Therefore, maybe this room isn't always the same, or every time it is remembered it becomes another room, or maybe even the time that goes by from one representation to another is much more than the course of a day from morning to night: it could be a timeframe during which the books on the shelf can change, perhaps over many years. Or, finally, it isn't significant that the books have small differences from canvas to canvas, because realism isn't important if the room is a fictionalized stage, indefinitely waiting to be inhabited by a hypothesis of a poet, of which Pessoa with his heteronyms is the ultimate symbol.

Despite fictionally opening a space on the wall of Casa Fernando Pessoa, this room is as inaccessible as the street to which it leads, as stated in the verses of the poem *Tabacaria*, by the heteronym Álvaro de Campos: «*windows of my room, / [...] You open onto the mystery of a street continually crossed by people, / a street inaccessible to any and every thought [...]*»².

¹ Marta Ferreira dos Reis, «Interview with Manuel Amado: "People are made of what they see"», *Público* — *Ipsilon*, 15 November 2007.

² Translation by Richard Zenith, in "Fernando Pessoa - Forever Someone Else – selected poems" (Lisbon, Assírio & Alvim, 2008)