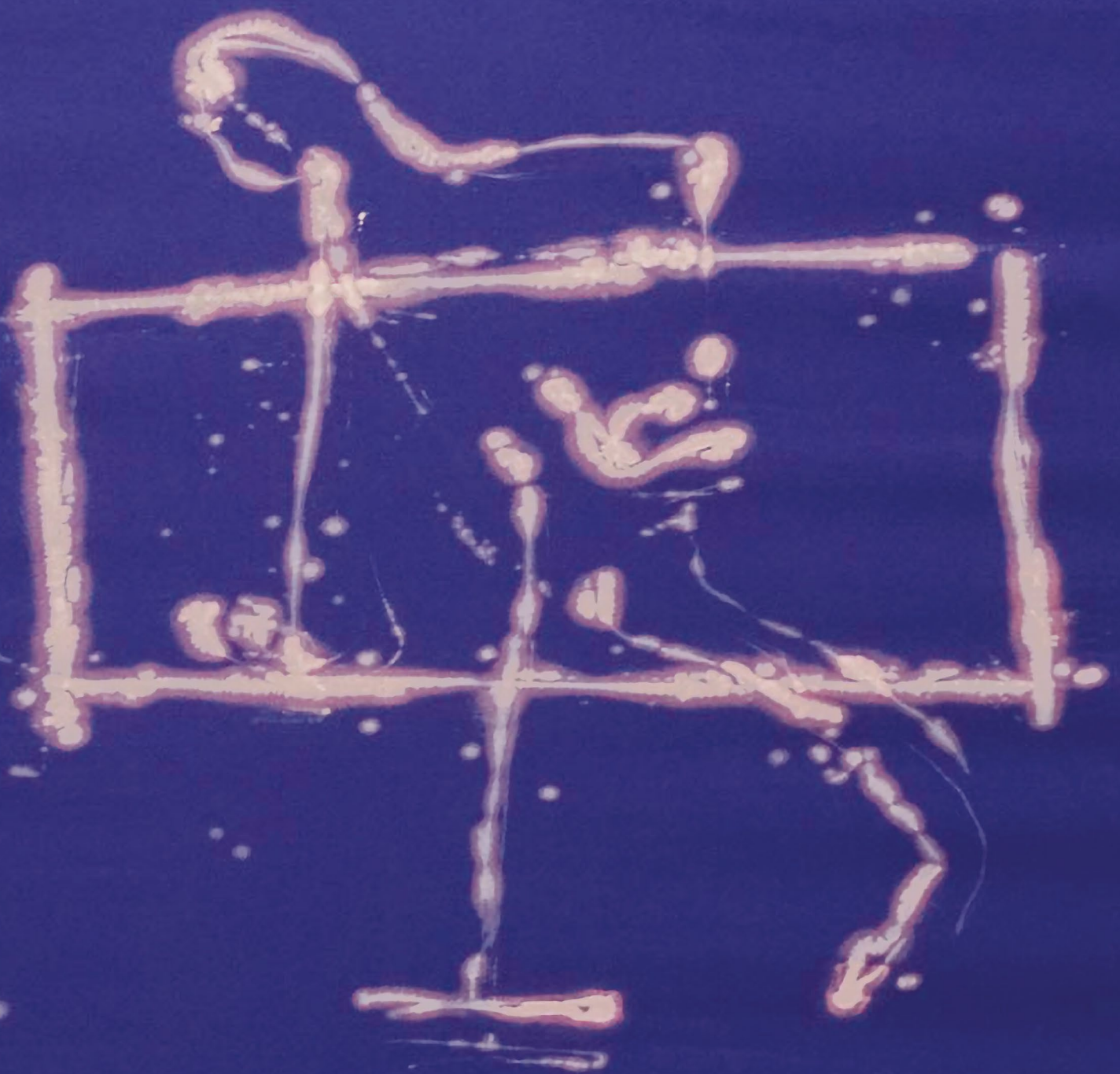


Ana Jotta

EN



On peut

On peut encore

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INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the past five decades, Ana Jotta has developed a deeply personal artistic vocabulary that rejects and even antagonizes all forms of classification and identification. Instead of any recognizable style, she takes from, subverts, and trespasses across various aesthetic categories, making a world that exists only on her own terms.

Instead of attempting to encompass Jotta's entire practice, the exhibition narrows its focus around a specific aspect of her work: the expanded sense she brings to the act of drawing. For Jotta, to draw does not only refer to making marks on paper, but, more generally, to demonstrate and to discover potential connections that lie dormant between disparate images and references. In her hands, to draw is to take, to appropriate, and to extract from the world. The artist expands the language of drawing by inventing a field where sketches, paints, stitches, scribbles, silhouettes, scratches, and scissors contribute to an ecosystem of overlapping gestures. Jotta translates things into meanings, images into words, preferably based on found or encountered poetic or affective images, which she uses to tap into new dimensions in visual rebuses.

Curators: Anthony Huberman & Miguel Wandschneider

Coordinating curator: Pauline Hatzigeorgiou

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE CURATORS

Miguel Wandschneider: Ana Jotta is an artist whose practice is not tied to any particular medium. Hers is an extremely fluid practice and she has always jumped from one medium to another with great versatility. Ana always made drawings, but it's not as if she has a prolific drawing output. This exhibition uses drawing more as a lens for the selection of the works. It includes drawings as well as works in other media that are clearly indebted to a drawing vocabulary.

Anthony Huberman: Yes, we are not talking about drawing only as a medium, but in all of its many senses and manifestations. This exhibition takes “drawing,” in quotes, as its point of departure, reflecting on how more expanded manifestations of the act of drawing might reveal a way to think about Ana's work more generally.

MW: An earlier and much smaller version of this exhibition took place in the United States, and in English, “to draw” has many meanings—to draw on, to draw from, to draw out, to draw with, and so on. But the word does not work in the same way in French.

AH: That's true. In French, the word “dessin” or “dessiner” is more closely linked to the medium of drawing itself, although it also refers to the idea of sketching or designing. I think what we're proposing is that drawing, in Ana's case, describes an approach in a broader sense.

MW: A common denominator to most of the works in the exhibition is the primacy of the line as a formal and expressive element, and that includes, for example, an embroidered line, a line bleached into fabric, a line drawn onto a screen, or even a line carved into wood.

AH: There are lines drawn on paper, there are the line drawings from the world of cartoons, and there are the lines of hand-written letters. There are also the lines drawn by the threads used to stitch small fragments of leather together.

MW: The framework of the exhibition functions as a way to make certain aspects of Ana's work and working process coalesce. As soon as one enters the exhibition, I think most people will recognize a strict frugality of means, a speed in the process of making, a preference for simple and concise expression.

AH: Like in *Desenho fantasma* [Ghost Drawing]. This work feels like a painting that's on its way back to being a drawing or a preliminary sketch. It's an image in reverse. It's present but it's also erased and removed, like a ghost.

MW: For a long time, Ana harbored the desire to be, first and foremost, a painter. There is nothing she admires more in art than the discipline, the patience, and the perseverance that the *métier* of painting requires. For her first solo exhibitions in commercial galleries, in the second half of the 1980s, when she became a professional artist (a "professional amateur," as she likes to put it), she decided to produce and show oil paintings. But she soon moved to other

things: small objects in bronze or porcelain, photographs, drawings, embroideries. Her restless temperament seems to be at odds with that type of concentrated practice.

AH: On my first visit to Ana's apartment, I was immediately struck by *Pathé-Baby*, which is not a drawing but is a found object where lines come in the ghostly form of creases and folds.

MW: This is an untouched ready-made. It's an old projection screen she bought in a shop in Brussels. Ana loves objects that have had a life of their own, that have been used and have lived their lives. That is evidently the case also with the old table top where she carves a geometric composition (*Torso*) or the stained tablecloth she uses to make an embroidered geometric pattern (*The Ant's Place*).

AH: A line can obviously also be far less abstract and take on the shape of letters. *On peut* [One can] and *On peut encore* [One can also] resemble school-book handwriting exercises, which is how all of us learned how to turn lines into letters. As in all the works from the same series, the text excerpts are taken from a school manual.

MW: This exhibition is very telling with regards to Ana's recurrent use of pre-existing images. In *Chuva da Tarde* [Afternoon Rain], she refers to a mid-19th century woodcut by the Japanese artist Utagawa Hiroshige, a source that is not recognizable to most because only a few elements of the image have been kept: the figure of a peasant who crosses the river in

his barge, in the rain. The colorful composition of clouds quotes a well-known painting by Max Ernst, but once again, only part of the original composition has been retained. Her works often appropriate far more banal imagery. The drawing of the boy painting (*Untitled, from the series Os touros de Mary Foster*) belongs to a series of drawings copied from a children's coloring book. The images in *Estação Rateira* [Rat Station] come from a schoolbook. The long colorful drawing depicting a chain of people dancing dressed in traditional folklore costumes (*Untitled, 1987*) recreates a black and white drawing that decorates a small pot.

AH: That long scroll borrows from another vocabulary that is perhaps most commonly associated with drawing, which is the cartoon or the comic strip. In French, the connection is particularly direct, since a cartoon is a “dessin animé.”

MW: Images drawn from comics are quite common in Ana's work. Since 2018, she has made many works where she inserts characters and different scenic details from George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* comic strip, such as the little mouse Ignatz depicted in *Entrada dos Artistas* [The Artist's Door]. The figures of snowmen laughing are borrowed from the comic strip *Calvin & Hobbes* by Bill Watterson. More recently, she has been incorporating different characters – such as the funny character in *A Day Past* – and other iconography from the drawings of Rodolphe Töpffer, the Swiss 19th century precursor of comic strips.

AH: One of the connotations of drawings is that it's a sketch, that it's somewhat preliminary. Not that it's hesitant, but that there is an act of experimentation, of trying something out. That drawing is inherently exploratory in nature. It doesn't have the monumentality of declaring that something is the case, but it has a built-in ambiguity. I think this comes up in the work *Que Sais Je?* [What Do I Know?], which is not a drawing at all, in the technical sense of a medium—it's a silkscreened print on a used kitchen towel—but it somehow speaks to this idea of the exploratory, of learning, of the process of figuring out what's going on in the world. And then there is a monumental work like *Fala-Só* [Soliloquy], where the figure looks sketched, almost like an apparition or an approximation. It's someone or something that happens fast or suddenly, like a drawing, and yet is permanently etched into place, losing all sense of the provisional or the preliminary—bleach doesn't sit on top of fabric but eats away at it, carving its marks into it forever. It's also not a subtle line drawing but a monumental sculpture that draws a line through the building.

MW: In a certain sense, *Fala-Só* is an oblique representation of the artist as a solitary figure, as someone who is, and needs to be, constantly engaged in a conversation with oneself.

AH: Perhaps most solitary of all is a sculpture of a single letter from the artist's last name, *J*. It's also a single curved line, the shape of the letter J. It brings us back to drawing as a form of writing, back to the classroom and to learning

the ABCs, back to how Ana situates her own identity in this constantly shifting way, where even her own name is never stable—the letter J appears as a line, as a letter, as a monogram, as a sculpture, as an umbrella, as a piece of found curved ceramic, as a shape she finds on the street.

MW: By playing with the first letter of her last name as a kind of signature, Ana implicitly raises fundamental questions: what is an author? what makes an oeuvre?

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Ana Jotta (b.1946, Lisbon) builds a body of work that challenges notions of authorship and that obscures the line between art and life. From the late 1970s until the late 1980s, she worked in theatre both as an actress and costume and stage designer. On the side, she started her practice as an artist working across all media.

She has had monographic exhibitions at Kunsthalle Zurich (2024), Wattis Institute, San Francisco (2023), Festival d'Automne, Paris (2022), Casa São Roque – Centro de Arte, Porto (2019), Temporary Gallery, Cologne (2018), Établissement d'en face, Brussels (2016), Le Crédac, Ivry-sur-Seine (2016), and Culturgest, Porto (2016). A first retrospective of her work was presented at the Serralves Museum in Porto in 2005 and a second one at Culturgest, in Lisbon, in 2014. She lives and works in Lisbon.

EVENTS

Conversation between the curators (EN)

Fri. 06.09.2024, 18:30

Lecture on Ana Jotta by Clément Dirié (FR)

Thu. 31.10.2024, 18:30–20:00

Look Who's Talking: Etienne Wynants (NL)

Sat. 09.11.2024, 14:30–15:30

Look Who's Talking: Regina Barunke (EN)

Sat. 23.11.2024, 14:30–15:30

Nocturnes with guided tours (NL/FR/EN)

Every 1st Wednesday of the month, 11:00–21:00

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Image credit: Ana Jotta, *Fala-só*, 2016-17 (detail).

Bleach on blue twill, 1.60m × 40m. Courtesy of the artist and greengrassi, London.



PHILLIPS



De Standaard

