

Galeria **Francisco Fino**

João Penalva

Solo exhibition

25.09.2025 – 08.11.2025

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Installation view at Galeria Francisco Fino, 2025

I would like to call this first exhibition with Galeria Francisco Fino a retrospective exhibition. Retrospective in the sense that some works, although recent, refer to previous works or even incorporate them, some are older works presented for the first time in Portugal, and some were shown in Portugal so long ago that no one remembers seeing them.

The heterogeneity of these works reminded me of a Saturday afternoon in Porto, in 1990.

A painting exhibition of mine had opened at Galeria Atlântica the day before. João Pinharanda, who was then an art critic for *Público*, was coming to see the exhibition around six o'clock, but as he was known for always being late, neither José Mario Brandão, who was the director of the gallery, nor I, expected him to arrive before seven, the gallery closing time. We waited. At half past seven José Mario Brandão, resigned that Pinharanda would not be coming, decided it was time to close.

We were already walking away along Rua da Galeria de Paris towards Rua das Carmelitas when we heard him call after us as he got out of a taxi in front of the gallery. We went back, and while José Mário Brandão took the key to the door, João Pinharanda, looking at the exhibition through the shopfront window, said, as if he had been duped:

“Ah!... So, after all it's a group show!”





João Penalva

Seven views of spaces between five chairs, 2015

The spaces between these five stacked chairs were photographed in East London on Monday the 6th of June 2007, in the studio of the Mexican photographer Roberto Rubalcava, with his camera, between 12:17 p.m. and 2:47 p.m. In other words, we were so engrossed we skipped lunch. I remember being fascinated by what I saw through the camera and not wanting to stop. How could five chairs multiply into endless spaces, tunnels, constructions that seemed to talk the language of the constructivists?

I found these chairs in Trieste in 1989, in a second-hand furniture shop where my friend Armando Borgatta took me after seeing them there while looking for a cot for his son. Where could they have been made? When? For what purpose? No one knew, but there have been many assumptions over the years, both mine and those of others more versed in design. I was told they could perhaps be Dutch designs from the 1930s, or from Eastern Europe, perhaps from even earlier. Could they have been made to order for a modern tea house? But why only five? Could they be props for an avant-garde play, all in black and white?

These images were originally digital files. Negatives were made from them, and then, in a laboratory in Malmö, Sweden, they were printed by the Korean artist and master printer Youngjae Lih. The technique is called 'Lith photography'. A Lith photograph is a silver gelatin print that is overexposed and partially developed in a highly diluted lithographic film developer.

Each one is, therefore, a fictionalisation of a digital image into an analogue one, to which an antiquated technique gives an indeterminate date unless accompanied by a label. They have never been shown before today.

In addition to existing as digital prints, these chairs have had many other lives. They were a book entitled *Spaces between 5 chairs*, in 2008, and





an installation entitled *Harlequin and Shadow*, in 2011, where they appear stacked, tied together with ropes in a seemingly unstable balance, while behind them a photograph shows them stacked in another configuration. In 2011 I thought the photograph was the shadow and the sculpture of chairs was the Harlequin, but today it seems to me that it may well be the other way around.

They have spent the last fourteen years in an art storage warehouse in Berlin and will arrive in Lisbon at the end of September to begin a new chapter in their lives.

Meanwhile, Roberto Rubalcava, who was a professional gymnast before becoming a photographer, gave up photography twenty years ago and is today a yoga master.

João Penalva

Seven views of spaces between five chairs, 2015

Silver bromide on fibre paper, card, glass and
oak frame

48 x 38 x 4 cm



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Seven views of spaces between five chairs, 2015

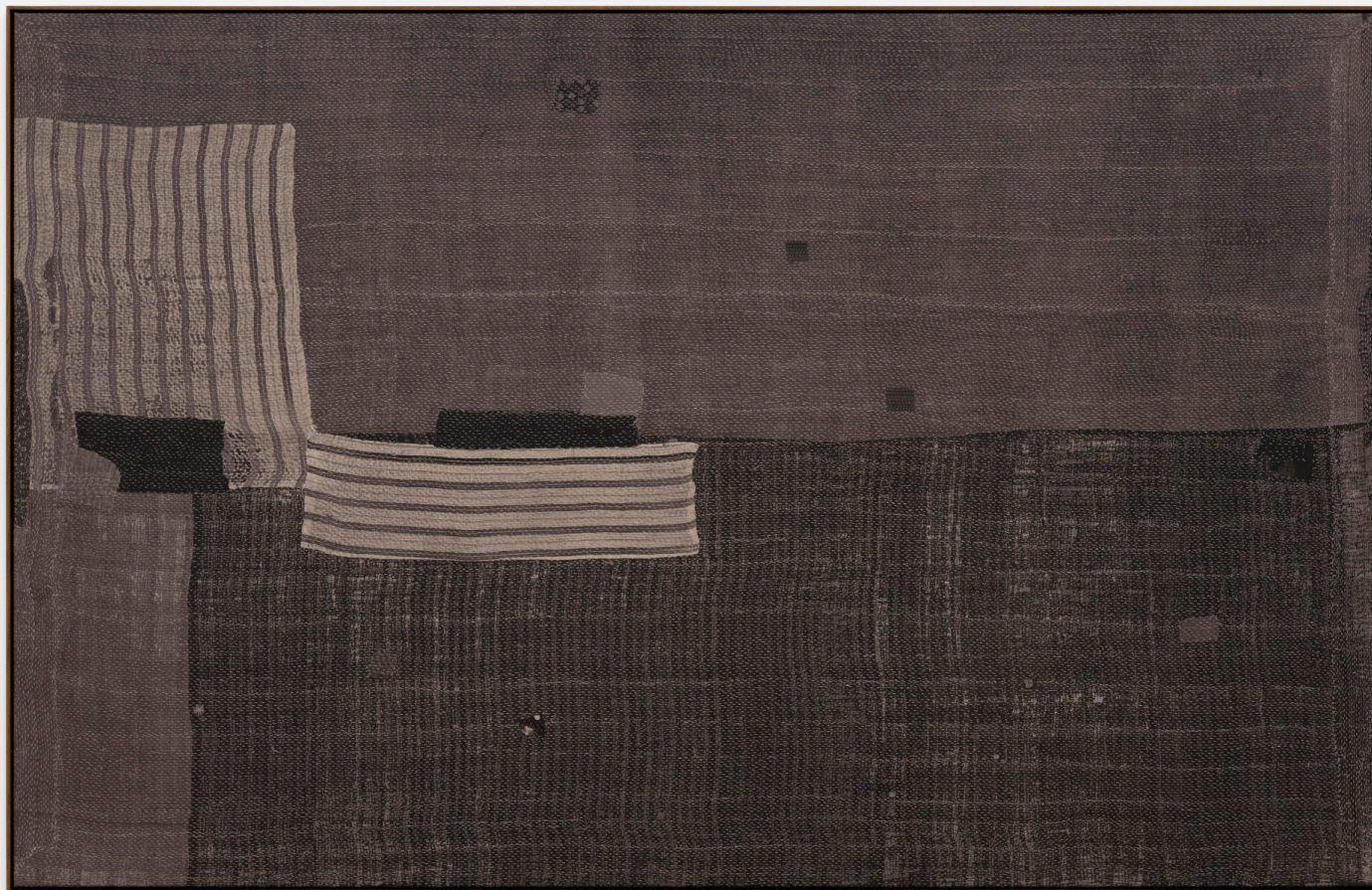
Silver bromide on fibre paper, card, glass and
oak frame

48 x 38 x 4 cm





Installation view at Galeria Francisco Fino, 2025



João Penalva

Reclining Nude (Abstract), 2025

UV print on linen, oak frame

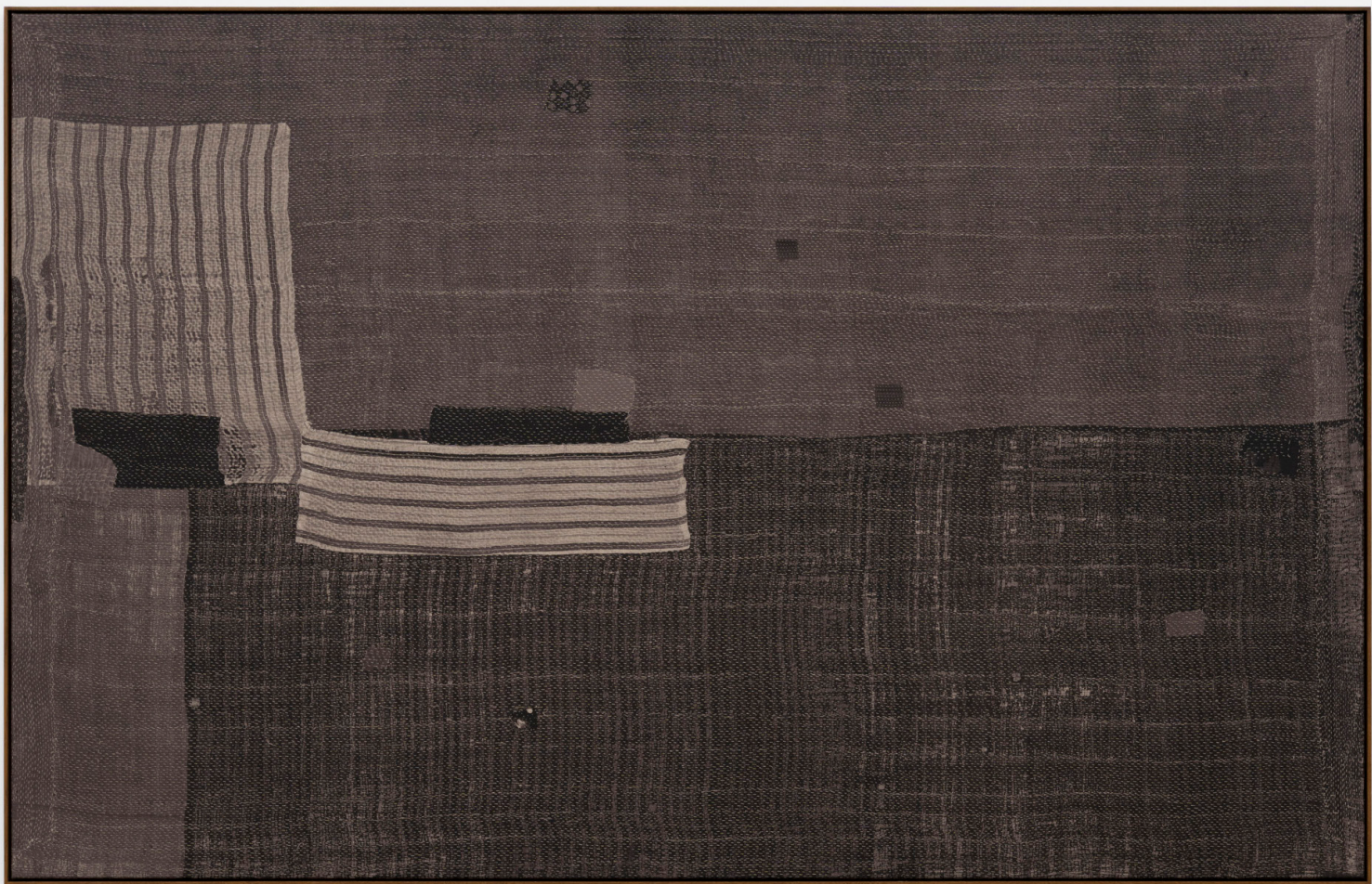
117,8 x 276,5 x 4 cm

The image of *Reclining Nude (Abstract)*, printed on the reverse side of linen prepared for oil paint, was created on the 20th of November 2014 at the Todd-White photographic studio, in the basement of 3 Clifford Street, Mayfair, London. It is a digital image of a *kantha* blanket from southern India or Bangladesh. These blankets are hand-sewn by groups of women working together, recycling scraps of cotton fabric from worn-out saris and other clothes which they sew together in layers with white thread in a wide stitch in the direction of the longest dimension, spaced about a centimetre apart. They have two very different sides: one with the best fabrics, the other where the most worn fabrics or those with holes have been patched with fabrics that contrast with what they patch, giving them compositions devised only by chance.

This image of the patched side was the first of a series I called Blanket pictures in 2016 because they reproduced the original blankets in their exact large dimensions and colours and, hung on a gallery wall, they could be mistaken for paintings. In fact, my intention was that these blankets were mistaken for paintings, and they were, from afar.

Now, in this new version, the *kantha* blanket once again imitates a painting, but with its colour having been removed, its status as a culturally distant artefact has disappeared. Its original portrait orientation was changed to landscape and, inadvertently, in one of the digital processes it underwent, its proportions were increased. I see it now as a black and white Western abstract painting from the 1950s or 60s by a Benoît Chanteau, a Will Fisher, a Rosalind Kramer, a Paolo Pansardi. If the reclining nude is not visible, it is certainly because it is an abstract.





Installation view at Galeria Francisco Fino, 2025

João Penalva

Composition with two Nineteenth-century Japanese paper bags for the storage and carrying of silkworm cocoons and other dry goods, and used cotton velvet from MacCulloch & Wallis, 21 Poland Street, London W1, 2025

Paper collage on cotton velvet, glass and oak frame

236.7 x 139 x 9.3 cm

and

UV printing on Dibond and oak frame

41.8 x 31.3 cm



These antique Japanese paper bags were purchased at Harakujo, in Tokyo, in 2004. There were originally five – one brown, the others light-coloured like these, all with a stamp and large Japanese characters in black ink on one side only. They all had patches of glued on paper of the same type, most likely from similar bags. It was only by 2019 that I began the process of translation of the stamp and the handwritten characters. It involved two professional translators and one academic, as the ancient characters, both printed and handwritten, were not legible to contemporary Japanese translators.

For fifteen years, a certain modesty prevented me from using them in my work because I thought that using them would mean modifying them, damaging their physical integrity. But when I learned that these bags had stored silkworm cocoons and that the stamp was simply nineteenth-century advertising, I understood how, by exhibiting their history in a framed text as if it were a label, my work with them could take the form of a composition that would keep them intact.

In 2021 I made a first work that I called Composition with three antique Japanese paper bags for the storage and carrying of silkworm cocoons and other dry goods, and theatrical black Molton from Russell and Chaple Ltd., Store Street, London. Now, in 2025, in addition to their history the framed text next to them addresses those who read it, and proposes a game.



Framed text

The two Japanese paper bags on the right date from sometime between 1895 to the first years of the twentieth century, and are identifiable as belonging to the merchant company Hayhashi-ya by its name handwritten in black ink in large characters on the reverse.

The black stamp-printed text on both bags is an account by its manufacturer, the Hashimoto Company, of Sendai City, of the Honourable Mention awarded to Mr. Tayoshi Oishi, their inventor, by the 4th National Industrial Exhibition, held in Kyoto in 1895.

The text reads:

“4th National Industrial Exhibition – Certificate of Honourable Mention
Paper storage bags for silk cocoons and other dry goods.

A great innovation of national interest.

Inventor: Taichi Oishi

Merchant: Ryokandou, Sendai City

Sales office: Oishi Main Branch, 1-chome, Kokubuncho, Sendai City

To begin with, Japan’s most popular export products are raw silk and tea, followed by papermaking.

Mr. Oishi, who lives in Sendai City, lamented the lack of effective storage solutions for silkworm cocoons, which are the raw material for silk. After several years’ work, he invented a perfect, strong paper storage bag, and introduced it to the world. For Mr. Oishi, as he poured his passion into product development and his innovation spread rather quickly, those years felt like days.

The effect of his invention is remarkable.

This storage bag does not rust like tin cans.

In addition, it does not allow air to pass through, is particularly resistant to insect damage, and can be stored for many years.

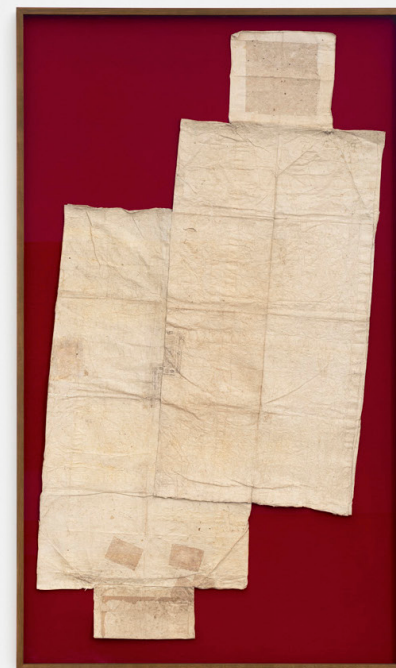
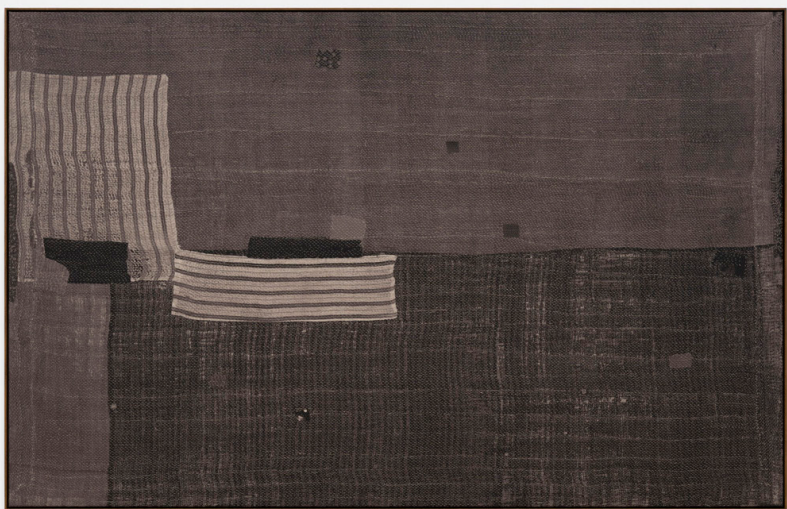
The quality of the contents will not diminish, and the bag will not perish. Moreover, if it stores rice it won’t be affected by dampness even if it’s exposed to humidity. Given these benefits, it is far superior to tin cans in storing large dry items.

Therefore, our store praises Mr. Oishi’s invention for its timeliness, we will spread the word about it, and expand our sales channels.

We want everyone involved in sericulture to try out this product first-hand and see for themselves.

You will soon learn that our store is not lying about the performance of this innovation.”

Framed like a collage on velvet the colour of stage curtains, these bags can be seen as characters. A Picasso harlequin? Ned Kelly, the nineteenth-century Australian hero, gang leader, bank robber and cop killer, famous for his square helmet and six-millimetre-thick iron body armour to protect himself from bullets? Two perfume bottles? Or even an alligator with menacing eyes, about to attack?



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1. The sound of a car engine starting.
2. The sound of a car engine idling.
3. The sound of a car engine revving.
4. The sound of a car engine braking.
5. The sound of a car engine stopping.



Sound effects engineers use their voices as well as their hands, feet, often, lips, hands and knees. Chase Perry's imitation of a crying baby is so believable that a studio mate once came running and, ignoring the illuminated ON AIR sign, opened the studio door and almost raised the broadcast. Chase Perry is now here with a pair of coconut halves, the best known of all sound effects props, demonstrating how to make the sound of a crashing horse.



Sam Hinton showing how to make the sound of a demurring horse head by squeaking rubber and making gargling, lip-smacking sounds with the ear-cup a Maraca opening by twisting in-run pan and turn alone inside out by removing rubber gloves covered with jelly.

João Penalva

Shiroyama, 2025

UV printing on linen dry-mounted on Dibond and oak frame
161.7 x 108.2 x 4 cm



I have been interested in anonymous compositions for many years, seduced by their intricacy derived from strict necessity and chance. The drawings of cables in the sky of Osaka and their utility poles that I worked with in 2004 are the work of electricians concerned only with making the length of the cables as short as possible. The traces, spills, marks and tears on London pavements that I photographed in 2014 are the unintentional imprints of millions of walkers, bikes and trotinettes. Although I have painted, drawn and photographed crazy pavings since the 1970s, it took me until now to work with them in a series and, soon, also a book.

Crazy paving can be found on all continents. While the quality and shape of the stones or cement varies, their arrangements are similarly unplanned, made on the spot with the available stones, jigsaw puzzles resolved by workmen who never read Baudrillard. There isn't very much of a difference between crazy paving in Japan or in Dona Lúcia's *patio* near Sesimbra, in Portugal.

This image was taken in Japan, on Shiroyama Hill, overlooking Kagoshima City, a small city on the island of Kyūshū, living with a quiet, live volcano on its shore. It shows the pavement of a short ramp leading to a low, stand-alone building, a rather forlorn restaurant from the 1980s with a garden and viewpoint. While I paced about with my camera I was observed by a motionless cat with half-closed eyes that made me think of Pierre Loti.

Very much like electricians dealing with utility cables in Japan wanting to use only the strictly necessary amount of cable, the literary work of those involved in composing titles, labels and captions has an inherent limitation on the number of words as its guiding principle.

Kagoshima has a gigantic crag on the vast grounds of a historic house, Sengan-en, the seat of the Shimazu clan. In the early nineteenth-century, Shimazu Nairoki, the 27th head of the clan, employed 3900 men for three months to carve into it the Chinese characters used at the time, eleven metres high, the inscription 'A crag of great height', designed to convey the rock's grandeur and dramatic scale.



Sound effects engineers use their voices as well as their hands, feet, elbows, hips, heads and knees. Chase Perry's imitation of a crying baby is so believable that a studio nurse once came running and, ignoring the illuminated ON AIR sign, opened the studio door and almost ruined the broadcast. Chase Perry is seen here with a pair of coconut halves, the best known of all sound effects props, demonstrating how to make the sound of a trotting horse.



Tom Horan showing how to make the sound of a monster devouring human flesh by squawking salad spaghetti and making gurgling, lip-smacking sounds with his mouth. He can open a Martian spaceship by twisting the lid of a cast iron pan and turn aliens inside out by removing a light-tinting rubber glove covered with jelly.



Terrance Chalmers showing how kisses are made in the sound studio by rubbing a balloon. This photograph was published in the Atlanta Journal with a short interview in which she explained that not all the sounds she makes are this sweet. Deception, she said, can easily be achieved by chopping a red cabbage into a wicker basket. The interviewer asked "Does the cabbage have to be red?"



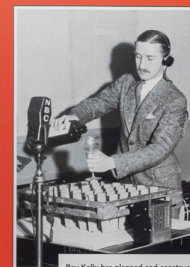
Glen Brechner stomping and fondling broom straws close to the microphone while looking at the script for reference. A frightened girl crushes through dense underbrush surrounding a haunted house she is running away from in the dead of night. The headphones give him an idea how the sound is being broadcast.



"Sometimes I wish I was an octopus. I need that many hands!" said Sara Jane Troy, seen here producing the sound effects for a melodrama. She slams a door with her hip, splinters a basket for the sound of a door smashing, shoots a gun with one hand and with the other she drops a sandbag for the sound of a body falling.



Harry Sax built this huge square drum to replace the old tin sheet bought from a theatre to produce the effect of thunderstorms. "Sax's drum", as it became known, was made of a single piece of steel. It became the department's autograph album when Sax himself asked Mrs. Zucker, the station director's wife, to sign it when she visited the studio. From then on every distinguished guest was asked to sign it. When Sax beats the skin with his mallets his storms sound more terrifying than the real thing. The drum can also make the deep, low-pitched grumbling sound of an earthquake.



Ray Kelly has planned and constructed over two hundred contrivances with which to produce several thousand individual sound effects, from the chirp of a cricket to the roar of an avalanche. Following the script of a live broadcast, here he is as a barman filling a glass of whiskey. The recorded sound of a noisy bar is being played on a turntable by another sound engineer behind him, not seen in the photograph.



Glen Brechner shows how he makes the sound of a man walking on thousands of spiders attacking his home. This difficult sound effect was achieved by stomping on large, luscious Californian grapes.



Here Harry Sax may be producing the murmuring of a forest brook or the loud, gurgling sound of a broken gutter pipe.

Chase Perry splintering a strawberry box to make the sound of a coastguard cutter ramming into a wooden trawler getting away with stolen goods.



João Penalva

People On Air, 2014

Wall paint and digital printing on paper

Variable dimensions

People on Air was my response to a commission of a new work for a solo exhibition at the Trondheim Kunstmuseum, in Norway, in 2014. The museum is a large, austere building from 1930, with many rooms of different sizes and all were already assigned to other works when the proposal for a new work came in. I wasn't willing to sacrifice any of the rooms for this new work. I had no idea what it could be except, perhaps, a sound work.

I found the images for sale online and knew instantly that they were my material for this new work. When they arrived in the post I realised that most of them had a piece of cut out paper taped to the back with notes, some typed, some handwritten, some describing the sound being produced and the name of the sound engineer, others had only the name but no other information, and there was no name of the photographer.

The only space available in the museum for the new work was an odd one, long and thin, too wide for it to be a corridor but not quite wide enough to be a room, with an entrance at each end. Knowing that anything on its walls could be viewed starting from either of its two ends I developed a parade of characters, a line, very much like the front-of-stage chorus line of dancers in 1950s musicals. I choreographed them.

The last presentation of *People On Air* was in Berlin at Galerie Thomas Schulte in 2017 and I hadn't needed the print files since then. Now that I needed them for this exhibition, I found them filed in the folder I had named 'Sound Works', and this made me smile. There were no sound files at all. But was this a mistake? Did I not hear that boat, that falling body, those thousands of spiders, that thunder?

But, more importantly, didn't you?



"Sometimes I wish I was an octopus. I need that many hands!" said Sara Jane Troy, seen here producing the sound effects for a melodrama. She slams a door with her hip, splinters a basket for the sound of a door smashing, shoots a gun with one hand and with the other she drops a sandbag for the sound of a body falling.



Installation view at Galeria Francisco Fino, 2025

João Penalva

W, 1994

Oil and encaustic on wood panel and wire

37 x 20 x 2 cm



This painting is one of a group of twenty-six whose height represents in millimetres the number of names in the mailing list of the Richard Salmon Gallery in 1994, then at Studio 4, 59 South Edwardes Square, in Kensington, London. They were one of many parts of an installation I made for three spaces of the gallery, which was housed in a beautiful Victorian building especially built as artist's studios, on a leafy private square. Each had many rooms with large windows.

This installation, that I called *Would You*, alluding to gentlemen's polite use of the conditional tense, was made for a group exhibition curated by Rear Window, a team of curators, and entitled *Every Now and Then*. It addressed the long history of the space. At the time one of its spaces had been, only a few months earlier, at Richard Salmon's invitation, Dereck Jarman's final studio, and his brushes, paints, smock and unfinished paintings were still there.

Looking for material to work with, I focussed on everything that could be secret in Richard Salmon's business and in finding ways of representing it. When I asked Richard Salmon what was it that he considered secret, he told me it was his mailing list, his correspondence, those he sold to, and for how much. I started from there. Another space, with the walls that I covered entirely with potpourri, showed his correspondence with another gallerist, Karsten Schubert, his ex-business partner, with whom he was having a nasty falling-out. Their letters and faxes were so heavily redacted by both as to be practically unreadable. Another part of the work also showed a correspondence, this one fictional, between a model and the artist who worked in the studio, one Charles Edward Holmer. She had left her earrings behind after modelling and would like to retrieve them, but Holmer never replied to her mail and when she tried to go by the studio and knock at the door neither he nor his assistant Henry were ever in. Her name was Mara Tsvetkova, a Bulgarian.

Her name was given to me by someone I didn't know and went to meet for the express purpose of finding a convincing Bulgarian name. That was Valeri Tchukov, a Bulgarian who worked at Bush House, on the Strand, in the Bulgarian Service of the BBC, and who was a friend of my friend Steven Moore, to whom I had confided that I wanted her to be Bulgarian but I didn't know a single Bulgarian, and came to my rescue and gave me Mara.

Contrary to my expectations, the correspondence between Richard Salmon and Karsten Schubert was taken for a fiction, and Mara's small blue paper letters written with purple ink taken for real.

Thirty-one years later, this painting could forget its own story and be happy to celebrate a Walter, a Wendy, a Winston, a Wallid or Waldemar.



Installation view at Galeria Francisco Fino, 2025



João Penalva

Philharmonie, after Erich Fritz Reuter (1911–1997), 2025

Oil and oil pastel on linen and burlap collage and oak frame

172 x 279 x 4 cm

The pattern of this triptych is inspired by the stone mosaic designed by the sculptor Erich Fritz Reuter for the floor of the entrance hall of the Berlin Philharmonic building, designed by the German architect Hans Scharoun in 1963 as a concert hall. Reuter's mosaic combines areas of white stone with others that are coloured and represent, in their proportions and progression, one of the best-known musical cryptographies – the BACH motif, created by J.S. Bach himself and later used by many composers in his honour. It takes the sequence of notes B-A-C-H in German notation, or si bémol-la-do-si in French notation.

Reuter is better known for his numerous public commissions, mostly large-format sculptures in bronze or stone. This mosaic stands out from all other works of his for its conceptual origin, transposing what is musical into the visual realm.

I have spent many hours in the studio looking at this pattern, following its lines up and down these canvasses and know it well by now. It has no centre, nothing stands out, its rhythms are all over the place yet perfectly balanced.

The 1980s and 90s were a time when I painted the Harlequin costume pattern time and time again as if it were my own, knowing full well that it belongs to Picasso more than any other artist. Recently, I have been thinking that it is time to let the work of others back into my work in an explicit way. Why not start with an artist whose work does not, generally, interest me? The only definition of art that has seemed sensible to me since my student days is that art is what artists do, so it may well be that in the work of any artist, no matter how uninteresting it may seem to me, there may be something to lead me somewhere that I would not have reached by myself.





Installation view at Galeria Francisco Fino, 2025



João Penalva

John Tanner 1892, 2025

Enamel paint on wood, screws, graphite, cotton velvet, UV printing
on Dibond, oak frames, glass

Wall installation 193.5 x 281.3 x 8 cm

I found this door in England, in 2017. It is a small door on which someone has carved all over, with a sharp point, capital letters, single or in groups, many of them overlapping, and none of them appearing to form words. There are also scratches, perforations and violent tears. This side of the door was painted with black enamel paint. On the other side, where the wood appears to be untreated, the words 'John Tanner 1892' are written in pencil in an antiquated hand.

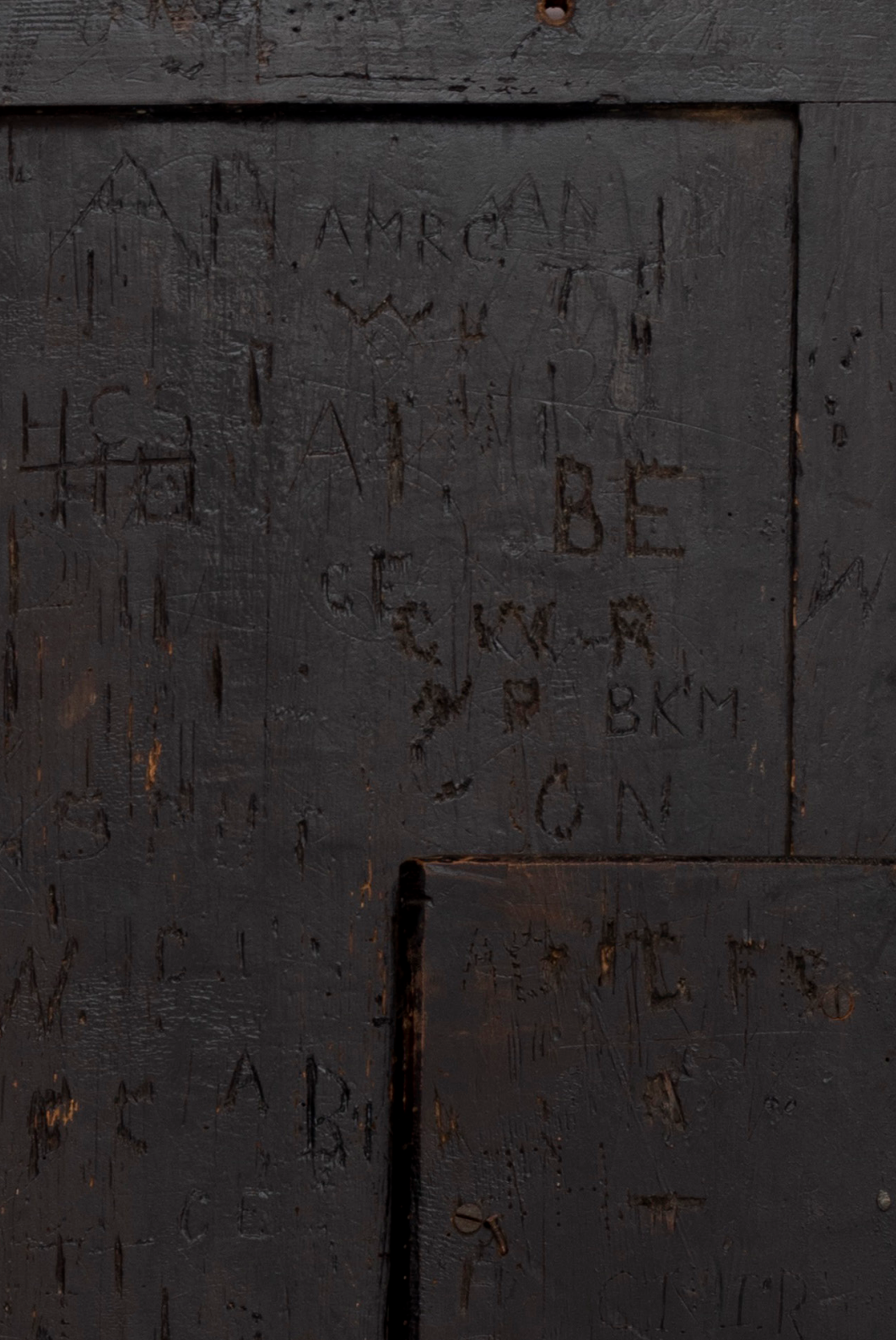
In addition to the mystery presented by each side of the door, there is another: the vertical gap, with rounded edges, smooth from careful sanding. This gap belongs to the board that overlaps and hides another gap of a partially missing board.

John was the most common male name given in the United Kingdom in 1892. Tanner, one of many occupational surnames, meaning someone who tans hides, was, according to my research, the surname of some 5000 men that year. Could one of these men have written his own name on this door? The practice of writing in pencil directly on walls and furniture by bricklayers, painters, carpenters and other labourers is very old in the United Kingdom, but it is associated with notes and work plans, not with ownership.

Could it have been written by someone other than this John and not in 1892 but later? Or even earlier?

In 2017, embedded in a wall of the Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, in Luxembourg, this door was the protagonist of an installation of a two-channel video projection lasting two hours and forty-two minutes, which could only be seen through its gap. Its title was *Door*. It showed a carpenter making a chair in real time. This door is now presented in two frames, one with itself, the other with a photographed version of its other side, in its exact dimensions. There is nothing less natural for





a door than its horizontal position. Besides beds and tables, chairs and doors are the objects that most suggest the body to me. A horizontal door does not bring to mind the upright body that opens and closes it, enters and exits it, but the reclining body, asleep, dead, or at rest.

The practice of art is a continuous celebration of artifice, and throwing a door up in the air, as clowns do to hats and plates, is an exhilarating moment of control: it doesn't fall, it hovers.



Installation view at Galeria Francisco Fino, 2025

João Penalva

João Penalva was born in Lisbon in 1949. He lived in London from 1976 to 2021, and in Lisbon from 2021 to the present.

After starting his career in contemporary dance from 1968 to 1976, including a period with Pina Bausch's company (1973-74) and co-founding The Moon Dance Company with Jean Pomares (1976), he moved to London. There, he received a scholarship from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to study at the Chelsea School of Art (1976-81). Initially focused on painting, his practice expanded in the 1990s to include various media such as film, photography, and installation. His body of work integrates text and imagery as foundational elements. Drawing from diverse sources like music, found objects, and archival materials, his work often involves deep research that informs the final piece. One of the core aspects of his work is exploring communication in its many forms, blending both formal and theoretical approaches within complex narratives that mix reality and fiction.

Penalva represented Portugal in the 23rd Bienal de São Paulo and in the 49th Venice Biennale. He also exhibited in the 2nd Berlin Biennale and the 13th Biennale of Sydney.

Solo exhibitions include: Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon; Camden Arts Centre, London; Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius; Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck; Tramway, Glasgow; Rooseum Center for Contemporary

Art, Malmö; Institute of Visual Arts, Milwaukee; Power Plant, Toronto; Serralves Museum, Porto; Ludwig Museum Budapest; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; DAAD Gallery, Berlin; Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, UK; Lunds Konsthall, Lund; Berlinische Galerie, Berlin; Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon; Brandts Kunsthallen, Odense, Denmark; Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Norway; LOGE, Berlin; Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg; Culturgest, Porto; Lumiar Cité, Lisbon; Appleton Square, Lisbon.

Group exhibitions include, among others: Haus der Kunst, Munich; Museum Folkwang, Essen; K20 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden; Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul; Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei; Bombas Gens Centre d'Art, Valencia; Tramway, Glasgow; Wellcome Collection, London; South London Gallery, London; Lunds Konsthall, Sweden; Hayward Gallery and Tate Modern, London.

Penalva was awarded the DAAD Berlin Artist's Residency in 2003; the Bryan Robertson Award in 2009; The Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award in 2020.

[More about the artist](#)

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