

UNIVERSITY OF LISBON  
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**The experience of place: its influence on the pictorial  
production of the artist-traveller,  
in the 21st century**

Rute Norte

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## **ABSTRACT**

Human beings are constantly being altered by spaces and places, seeing their identity expand and enrich as these multiply. This study seeks to evaluate how being in a peculiar place affects artistic production, that is, how the work of the travelling artist is born and develops in this circumstance, as well as his particular way of transmitting ideas, thoughts and sensations.

It also aims to differentiate the approaches of some artist-travellers located in the 21st century. Some artist-travellers write ideas, studies and sketches in diaries, or notebooks of notes, which translate a vision of what surrounds them and their most intimate emotions. These diaries are possible references for future works and help to understand the artist's creative process. Other artists, however, do not register: they resort to observation, experience and absorption of what surrounds them, i.e. sounds, smells, images or tactile sensations. Whatever the case, these multiple expressions and transfers between sketching, photography, writing, video, or mental processes such as memory and absorption, promote the creation of a confluent instant, and from a set of images and sensations a transposition is made into visual records. In this study, the emergence and the various possibilities of this transfer are analysed.

Keywords:

Artist-Traveller; Creative process; Travel chronicles; Contemporary art.

## Full index of the Portuguese version

ABSTRACT (in Portuguese) .....	3
ABSTRACT (in English).....	4
Previous Notes .....	6
1. Introduction .....	9
1.1. Motivation in choosing the topic .....	9
1.2. Goals .....	12
1.3. Methodology .....	13
2. Bimediality: painting and writing .....	17
2.1. Travel literature: background and current state .....	18
2.2. The relationship between painting and travel literature in the 21st century .....	19
2.3. Hamish Fulton - materialization of hiking texts .....	20
2.4. Willy Puchner - travel diaries .....	25
2.5. Francis Alÿs – politics and poetics .....	28
2.6. Considerations.....	41
3. The role of memory in the pictorial construction .....	43
3.1. Howard Hodgkin - connotations of emotion .....	43
3.2. The authentic experience .....	45
3.3. Considerations.....	64
4. Pictorial project - fantasy or reality?.....	66
4.1. – Technical aspects .....	82
4.2. – The strangeness .....	90
4.3. – The uncertainty .....	103
4.4. – Articulation between art and travel.....	109
4.5. – Sense and meaning: destiny .....	113
5. Conclusion .....	118
Bibliography .....	121
Webgraphy .....	127
Videography.....	131
Image Index .....	132

This document translates chapters 1, 4 and 5.

Chapters 2 and 3 are available exclusively in Portuguese, and can be consulted in the repository of the University of Lisbon:

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## **Previous notes**

All translations in this dissertation were made by the author.



Rise up, man! Enjoy this voyage of changing your point of view as if you were changing scenery, and seeing yourself transposed into a world that distracts you and gives you strength for the inevitable return to the grayness of everyday life. (Klee, 2014, p. 45)

# 1. Introduction

In the present study, my pictorial project as an artist-traveller, as well as those of four other artist-travellers, will be analyzed, serving as an introductory approach to my own artistic work. In a first approach, three authors who connect their artistic production with written narrative, specifically travel chronicles, will be examined: Hamish Fulton, Willy Puchner, and Francis Alÿs. In a second aspect, the pictorial work of Howard Hodgkin will be analyzed, who left no written record associated with his travel experiences, with memories and recollections constituting the driving force behind his artistic work. To understand the rationale behind the selection of these four artists, it is important to provide a brief description of the type of journey I undertake, and additionally explain how I associate pictorial production with written narrative.

In this chapter of the introduction, three points will be addressed: the motivation, that is, what led me to choose this theme in the present dissertation and what added value I can bring in its analysis; the goals I set myself; and finally the methodology that I will follow. The authorship is presented under the artistic pseudonym Runa - the first syllables of Rute Norte converted to the feminine.

## 1.1. Motivation in choosing the topic

Having travelled across several continents over the years, and working as an artist – more specifically as a painter – I was inevitably influenced by those same trips; and after verifying that there is relatively little literature relating the two subjects, travel and painting, a relationship that is so common<sup>1</sup> and yet with so few studies relating both, I decided to present this master's dissertation focusing on this theme: understanding the creative process of the artist-traveller.

I have been to Kenya, Australia, Amazonia, Patagonia, Greenland, East Timor, Vietnam, Sao Tome and Principe, India, Egypt, Tunisia, China, New York, Seychelles, and of

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the recent cases of Katherine Bernhardt, who, having travelled to Guatemala, later exhibited at the Canada NY gallery, in 2021, a series of paintings with themes linked to her experience in this country, with landscapes, people, animals and fruits (bananas!) (Canada, 2021); or Marcel Dzama, who also exhibited in 2021, this time at the David Zwirner gallery, a series of works inspired by photographs he took in Morocco, Mexico and Fire Island, places where he had travelled. David Zwirner (2021).

course, several countries in Europe. In 2020 I made the 9 islands of the Azores by bicycle: 719 km by bicycle, alone, in 33 days. In 2019 I did Sao Tome and Principe: 550 km by bike, alone, 29 days. In 2018 I did Timor: 831 km by bike, alone, 26 days. Sometimes I hire a support car to follow me on my bike (as was the case in India, China or Timor), other times I travel without support (as was the case in Sao Tome and Principe and the Azores, for example).

The trips have an average duration of one month, as this is the period of time available for annual leave - in accordance with labor legislation in Portugal.

The bike is a mountain bike, that is, suitable for dirt roads; as opposed to the road bike, which is only suitable for tarmac.

I travel alone or accompanied; however, in recent years, I have chosen to travel alone because it is a totally different experience. I began to notice this in small experiences during my earlier trips, where solitude began to reveal itself as an enabler of closer and more direct contact with local populations, or simple experiences of introspection and contemplation in remote and wild landscapes.

The bicycle, on the other hand, is a means of transport that further facilitates those two aspects. It provides a slower journey (although it is possible to reach a reasonable speed, much higher than it would be possible to travel on foot, for example) as well as direct and immediate enjoyment of the landscapes – and silently. Furthermore, allows making alternative routes, through fields and forests, where a car cannot always enter.

Additionally, I accompany the trips with written chronicles, in which each trip has an average of four hundred A4 pages of text, and – separately – two to three thousand photos. These chronicles are partially published on my website ([www.rutenorte.com](http://www.rutenorte.com)). It remains to publish some chronicles from previous years, since I created the website at the end of 2017. It is a work that I have pending.

In these chronicles I describe the episodes spent on the trip. Subsequent paintings, however, are far from descriptive, and I will present, in this study, several examples of both – paintings and texts. In this context, and as a first demonstration of the motivation in choosing the theme, I present a painting linked to an excerpt from a chronicle of East Timor:





Figure 1 - Runa, *Diving in the Coral Triangle*. 2020. ([Chronicle 61](#) of East Timor). Acrylic, oil and oil pastel on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm (11,7 x 16,5 inches). Artist's collection.

“The Coral Triangle covers areas within six countries: East Timor, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. It’s shaped like a triangle because scientists have identified that these are the limits that outline the epicentre of marine biodiversity on Planet Earth. (...)

It’s here that exists the greatest diversity of corals in the world (...).

The dive lasted 56 minutes, and we went down to 17,6 meters deep [57 feet]. We did about 400 meters horizontally [1300 feet]. There aren’t words to describe what I saw. I saw a colourful world, full of colourful fish. 27 degrees water [80° Fahrenheit]”. (Norte, 2018)

This excerpt, like many others I've written about my travels, will enable me to build my visual artworks in a more consistent and structured manner, some of which will be presented in this dissertation.

Thus, and to conclude the issue of motivation in choosing this theme: given that I am an artist-traveller, painting and travelling over the years, I believe I can make a contribution to the study and analysis of these matters, namely to assess how being in a place peculiar affects the artist-traveller's pictorial production.

## 1.2. Goals

There are some publications that analyse the creative process of artist-travellers, however they refer mainly to historical figures, between the 16th and 19th centuries, in the old expeditionary voyages. There are some studies that address contemporary authors, and not just historical figures, but in other areas of the visual arts, namely installation<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, there are some studies in the 21st century relating travel with drawing and illustration, with cinema, literature, comics, but not specifically with painting<sup>3</sup>.

Additionally, approaches are found on contemporary artists, but rarely on artist-travellers with a pictorial production related to the travel narrative.

The present study will analyse, therefore, how the pictorial work is born and developed in this circumstance – under the influence of a trip – an analysis that will be carried out through travel literature, photography, video; and also from disciplines such as social anthropology. Some travelling artists of the 21st century will also be distinguished, and their respective approaches.

I leave the note that the focus on the 21st century is due to the fact that I intend to move away from a theme that has already been much discussed before, that is, there are currently prolific studies that analyse authors from the 20th century and previous centuries. I chose not to follow this path, which would effectively make this study easier due to the abundant existing literature, and decided to follow a perhaps more difficult path, where I focus on living authors, or who lived in the 21st century, more specifically in the last 22 years. A trip in the 21st century can already be quite different from a trip in the 20th century, and opportunely, in a chapter below, I will detail this aspect.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, at FBAUL (Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Lisbon), see the case of No. 26 of *Estúdio Magazine*, dedicated to the theme of art and travel, with the article by Rodolfo Silveira: “*The Invisible Present: sensorial dimension in the installation “Your blind passenger”, by Olafur Eliasson*”, or the article, in the same magazine, “*Exhibition or installation? Tony Camargo’s video modules*”, written by Yasmin Fabris and Ronaldo Corrêa. Or in *Croma Magazine*, also from FBAUL, whose No. 6 features the article “*Notes of a travelling artist - considerations on Marcelo Moscheta’s creative process*”, written by Priscila Rampin. There are also master’s dissertations, such as that by Neide Marcondes with the dissertation “*Amazonia: the new travellers, the artists of wood*”; or by António Duarte with the dissertation “*Obscure Atlas: nomadism between reality and fiction*”. (All these publications are in Portuguese).

<sup>3</sup> In this case, we have, for example, the articles cited in the bibliography of the present study, articles written by Mário Matos, such as “*Perpetuum mobile – Algumas considerações sobre narrativas de viagem*” or “*Narra-Grafias de Viagem*”.

Upon completion of this study, it is expected to have conveyed the various possibilities of pictorial production by artist-travellers, both thematic and symbolic, as well as the existential questions of searching, escaping, thinking, contemplating, and transitioning into visual representation. A collection of pictorial works of mine directly related to specific episodes of each undertaken trip, and produced during this master's degree, will also be presented.

### **1.3. Methodology**

Analysing something as intimate and subjective as the genesis of the pictorial work in the mind of the artist-traveller is not an easy task. Maybe that is why there are few studies in this area. The words of Professor Mário Matos (2013), from the University of Minho, in Portugal, are quite enlightening: “There are few studies that consider the importance of visual means and, above all, the fruitful interaction between verbal text and pictorial image underlying the strategies of representation and travel mediation”. (p. 17).

On the other hand, the physical genesis is something more tangible, that is, the medium used (canvas, paper...), the colors, the media employed – with all the physical and palpable questions that arise when analyzing the created work. However, its immaterial genesis – what lies at the heart of the idea and thought – undoubtedly demands the use of the intuitive method, that is, intuitively grasping the driving force behind the pictorial work, along with the subsequent and inevitable subjective element present in the process of artistic creation. In the book “*The Intelligence of Complexity*”, Edgar Morin and Jean-Louis le Moigne (1999) explain, regarding this methodology:

There is always a principle of uncertainty between our mind and the external universe. We cannot translate his unknown language except by attributing and adapting our language to it. (...) It is, therefore, not a question of seeking laws or a new system, but a method that makes it possible to connect and deal with uncertainty at the same time. (pp. 86 and 219)

And the authors analyse the traditional forms of scientific knowledge, with its “obsession for verification” (p. 233), noting, however, that “the universe (...) is always more fabulous and incomprehensible than reason believes.” (idem). As they explain, examining issues

from a quantitative, statistical and organizational point of view is not adequate when dealing with “human subjects, capable of reactions, initiatives, intelligence, astuteness. By treating them as objects, this is ignored and the anthroposocial reality, which always has a subjective component, is mutilated”. (p. 297).

\*

The generative methodology will also be used, along with the process documents. The generative methodology aims to analyse how the work of art is born: “How is an artwork created? This is its big question.” (Salles, 1992, p. 28). “Interviews and testimonials by artists who talk about the backstage of creation are easily found. (...) the interest in the way works of art are made is not new, as artists have always made records of this process and, in many cases, preserved them. (Salles, 1992, p. 22). Among the preserved elements are the process documents, or working documents, consisting of data or information that help in the realization of the work of art. The artist uses the most diverse means to store information. They can be verbal, visual, sound or even mnemonic records. Gonçalves (2020) gives examples of objects, photographs, notes or memories that populate or surround the artist's space and imagination (p. 20). In this study I will show how the artists analysed here – and myself, in my work process – make use of these documents from the past.

Continuing with Salles (1992): “By following different processes, one observes, in the intimacy of creation, a continuous translational movement (intersemiotic translation), that is, passage from one language to another. (p. 44). Applying these words from Salles to my personal project, and for a better understanding of the generative methodology and working documents, I present a second example related to my project:



Figure 2 - Runa, *In the Forest of Principe Island*. 2020. ([Chronicle 19](#) of Sao Tome and Principe). Acrylic, oil and oil pastel on paper, 29,7 x 42 cm (11,7 x 16,5 inches). Artist's collection.



Figure 3 – Obo Natural Park, Sao Tome and Principe. Digital photo of the author, taken during the bike ride through the forest, on the island of Principe. 4496 x 3000 pixels. Artist archive. Published in [Chronicle 19](#) of Sao Tome and Principe.

And an extract from the text of this chronicle 19 of Sao Tome and Principe:

The best of all is that I constantly hear the rustle of large animals around me. Well, a human can't be, he can't walk in this tangle of forest – he or she would have to come down the road. I look in the direction of the rustling between the bushes and the trees, but I see nothing. What animals are these? Wild pigs? Goats? Monkeys? They are big! They make as much or more noise than me. These are not 10 cm geckos. They break branches in their passage and are fast. But here in Principe there is nothing to fear, there are no dangerous animals. A thousand little eyes are watching me, for sure.

(...)

I will reach the end of my journey! If the forest does not close completely, I will get there! Decidedly, no one has been here for years. The forest is becoming increasingly inhospitable. Its weight increases on me. It's more and more closed, darker, more and more humid. Mosquitoes are voracious. And the wound stings my foot. But I want to continue, I am 100% determined to continue. (Norte, 2019a)

In the example above, three languages are identified: textual, photographic and pictorial. The first two are descriptive, but the pictorial one is not. Here there is a mental and aesthetic representation, where inner experience and imagination are revealed.

There is therefore an emphasis on the interpretation of data and meanings, that is, a qualitative research will be applied in this study that aims to understand the reason for certain things.

Finally, the semiotic methodology in art will also be used.

## 2. Bimediality: painting and writing

The travel is made by the artist, that is, it is an immediate experience for himself. The question arises: how can the artist share this experience? How can you transmit it to a spectator who has not experienced it, who has not been able to live it? According to Lorenzo Giusti's analysis, and adapting it to painting<sup>4</sup>, the use of paintings, texts and other means such as photography only reveals the impossibility of capturing experience in its sensorial and mental dimension. Each experience at most produces something residual, which is the part intended for the public (paintings, texts, photographs), however, as residuals, these media have the task of transmitting the idea of time, events and sensations. (Vargiu, 2018).

We can say that this combination of media – painting and writing, in particular, on which the present study focuses – leads us to the idea of “multifocalization, polysensorialism”, in which an entire subjective world becomes visible through the senses. (Vilas-Boas, 2018, p. 89)<sup>5</sup>. There is a functioning of complementarity or cumulation. “It is therefore not a question of a change of medium, but rather a bimediality, an intersection or sequential emergence of means”. (Outeirinho, 2010, pp. 568 and 575)<sup>6</sup>.

In this chapter, the evolution of travel literature will be analysed, followed by its use by three artists: Hamish Fulton; and Willy Puchner – which will be discussed briefly, insofar as painting and writing (simultaneously) do not constitute the central focus of their work, despite existing residually and therefore interesting to analyse it, and, finally, a deeper analysis of a third artist, Francis Alÿs, who constantly uses painting and writing in his work.

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<sup>4</sup> Lorenzo Giusti is a critic and current director of GAMEC - Galeria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporânea (Modern and Contemporary Art Gallery), in Bergamo, Italy. His analysis comes to us through Luca Vargiu in a video made available by the Berardo Collection Museum (Vargiu, 2018). In this analysis, which can be seen between minutes 41'30" and 43'14", Giusti addresses, by way of example, the two means used by Hamish Fulton in revealing his travel experiences, that is: text and photography.

<sup>5</sup> Gonçalo Vilas-Boas is an emeritus professor in the area of German-speaking literature at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto, Portugal. He was director and scientific coordinator of the Institute of Comparative Literature Margarida Losa. One of his research areas has been travel literature.

<sup>6</sup> Maria de Fátima Outeirinho is an associate professor at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto, Portugal, and scientific coordinator of the Institute of Comparative Literature Margarida Losa. She has carried out research mainly in the field of travel literature.

- 2.1. Travel literature: background and current state**
- 2.2. The relationship between painting and travel literature in the 21st century**
- 2.3. Hamish Fulton - materialization of hiking texts**
- 2.4. Willy Puchner - travel diaries**
- 2.5. Francis Alÿs – politics and poetics**
- 2.6. Considerations**

*[Subchapters available in the Portuguese version, in the repository of the University of Lisbon: <https://repositorio.ul.pt/handle/10451/55792>]*



### **3. The role of memory in the pictorial construction**

#### **3.1. Howard Hodgkin - connotations of emotion**

#### **3.2. The authentic experience**

#### **3.3. Considerations**

*[Full chapter about Howard Hodgkin available in the Portuguese version, in the repository of the University of Lisbon: <https://repositorio.ul.pt/handle/10451/55792>]*

## 4. Pictorial design - fantasy or reality?

In the fourth and last part of this dissertation, it will be addressed the aspects analysed so far, that is, the plurimedial context, memory and authentic experience, applying them to my artistic work, in which there is an intersection of these various concepts patent in the four authors analysed.

Talking about one's artistic project is always a delicate task, as Paul Klee had already pointed out:

Ladies and gentlemen!

I am a little apprehensive as I address you here, in the presence of my work, which should really speak for itself, and I ask myself if I will be able to gather enough arguments and if I will do it correctly. (Klee, 2014, p. 18)

Let us begin by presenting the triangulation usually present in my work, between paintings, texts and photographs, in that trimediality referred to in the chapter dedicated to Francis Alÿs. Similar to what is done by this artist, in my work a story is being told. Picasso's words are very illustrative of this: "One's work is a way of keeping a diary"<sup>7</sup>. (Richardson, 2007, pp. 465-6). My paintings reflect passing episodes. Lives and experiences expressed on canvas, with paints and brushes. In this sense, they can either refer to an episode that occurred on a trip – a memory – or they can talk about food, or the cat that appeared on the roof (figure 47). Or they could be simple ideas and concepts that pass at the moment.

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<sup>7</sup> This phrase was uttered during an interview given by Picasso to Tériade, a Parisian art critic born in Greece, for the newspaper "L'Intransigeant", on June 15, 1932, an interview that is quoted by Richardson.



Figure 47 - Runa, *Cat Sleeping with me Under the Blankets*. 2021  
Acrylic on paper, 40,7 x 29,7 cm (16 x 11,7 inches). Artist's collection.



Figure 48 - Runa, *Self-Portrait (Tribute to Howard Hodgkin)*. 2021  
Acrylic, oil and oil stick on paper, 29,7 x 40,7 cm (11,7 x 16 inches). Artist's collection.

It is important to note that my pictorial project is far from focusing exclusively on the theme of travel, as exemplified by the two works above (figures 47 and 48), and as will be seen in other examples in the following chapters. However, for the purposes of this study, the main topic addressed is travel. I remember that the authorship is presented under the artistic pseudonym Runa - the first syllables of Rute Norte converted to the feminine.

As an artist-traveller, in which I write travel chronicles accompanied by photos, I tell a story through this trimediality: painting, text and photography. Let's reengage the exemplification:

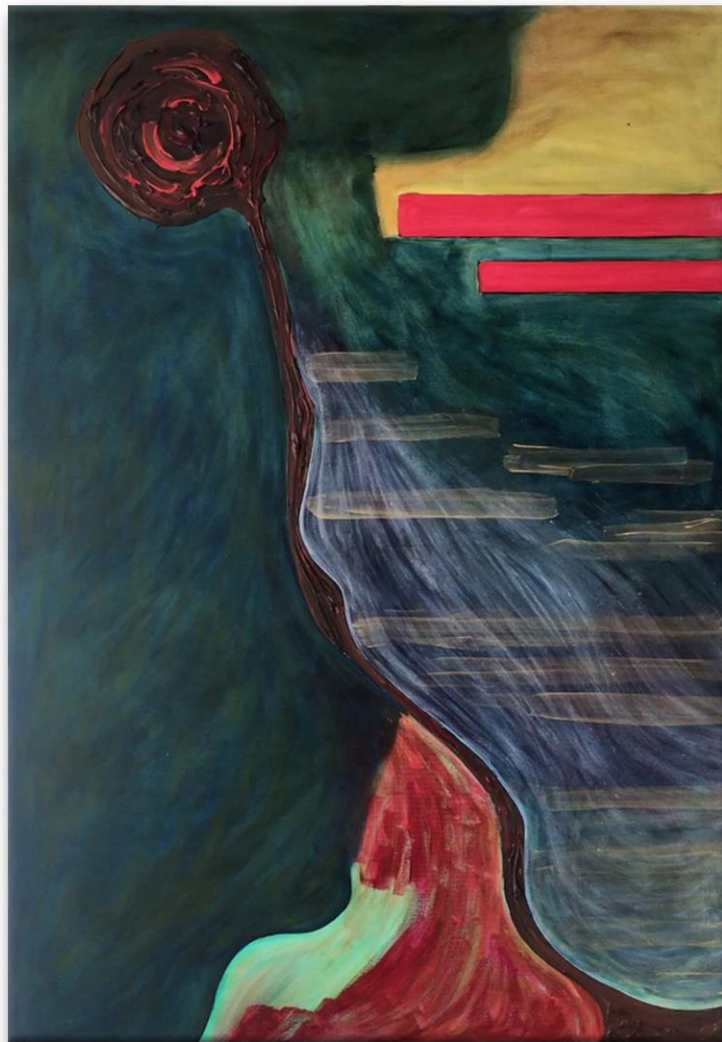


Figure 49 - Runa, *The Island*. 2020. ([Chronicle 50](#) of the Azores). Acrylic and oil on canvas, 116 x 81 cm (46 x 32 inches). Artist's collection.

The photo below, among others in chronicle 50 of the Azores, as well as an extract from its text, accompany this painting:



Figure 50 - Selfie on the island of Corvo, Azores.  
Digital photograph, 5827 x 4082 pixels. Artist archive.  
Published in [Chronicle 50](#) of the Azores.

I have sat here for some time. The wind is so violent. Everything looks so peaceful, so green, and yet nature is so impetuous and tumultuous. How small and insignificant we are - I become aware. How everything is so small in the face of such magnificence. (Norte, 2020a)

There are three means and ways of narrating the journey, with a kind of intertextuality existing between the three types of travel narrative: textual, photographic and pictorial. In other words, there is a migratory process of travel literature – which is where my work effectively begins, given that the chronicles are written in the first place – a process that ensures the continuity of the genre in a specific medial context (Matos, 2013, p. 9), in my case painting.

In this example below, trimediality is also present, this time in an episode that took place in the Amazonian aquatic forest:

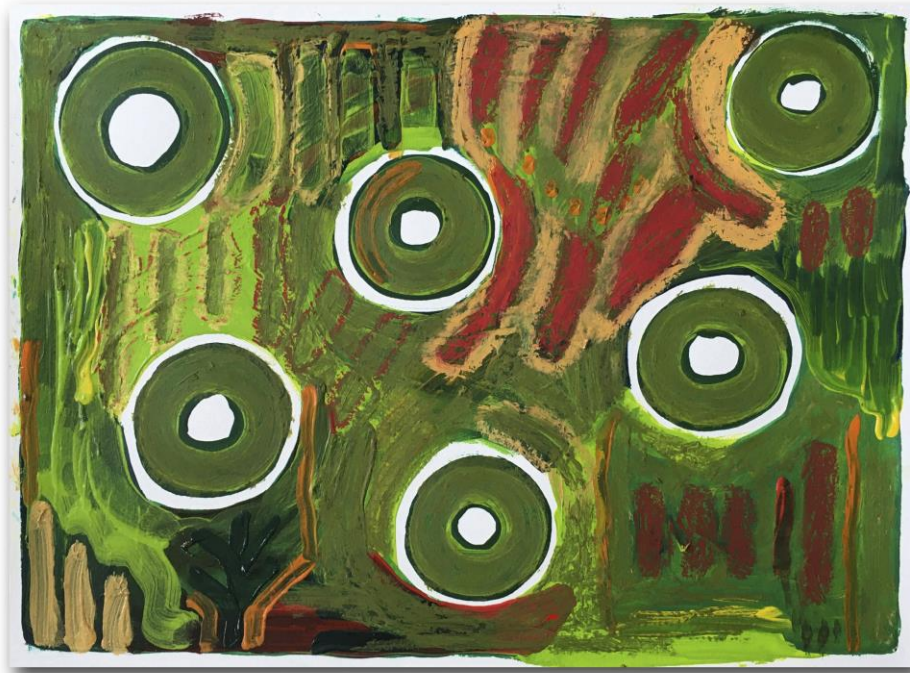


Figure 51 - Runa, *Canoe Trip in an Igapo*. 2020.  
([Chronicle 55](#) of Amazonia). Acrylic, oil and oil pastel on paper,  
29,7 x 40,7 cm (11,7 x 16 inches). Artist's collection.

Below is a photo and an excerpt from chronicle 55 of Amazonia, which accompany this painting:



Figure 52 – Digital photo of the author, taken in Amazonia.  
2048 x 1360 pixels. Artist archive. Published in [Chronicle 55](#) of Amazonia.

An igapo is a forest that is flooded frequently, to the point that its vegetation gets used and adapted. It is characteristic of Amazonia. In these igapos there are anacondas, hidden in the bottom of the water, among the plants. The population

stopped having ducks because the anacondas ate them, they explained. Anaconda - or sucuri - is not poisonous, it kills victims by constriction, that is, by squeezing them. It approaches carefully, slowly, and from the moment it is able to surround and wrap itself around the victim, in a few seconds it squeezes it until it smashes it. The anaconda has a very powerful force. (...)

There are also alligators, and Luiz told us an episode in which one got stuck in the branches, the firefighters had to come and rescue it, and it was necessary to bind its mouth and lace it. (Norte, 2013)

If writing shows the journey of the body; the painting shows the journey of the spirit. In this way I tread a simultaneously real and invented territory, crossing several borders between languages. This territory is an intimate world, where the interpretation of reality is done in a subjective, personal and unique way. There are no rules and it's the experience that counts. It is an authentic experience, an experience *in situ*. This experience is physical and palpable - it's real, when narrated through photographs and words, in travel chronicles. But it becomes total imagination in the artistic discourse. Here, inner experience, self-knowledge, a magical world is revealed. In this new pictorial existence, reality is rethought and converted, and two worlds intersect, the exterior and the interior, imbued with memory:

Every form of representation takes up a method and a memory as something “portable” that it is intended to designate. The very “portability” of memory, *a posteriori*, accentuates the intensive essentiality of what marked us, its fundamental importance, to retain. (Guerreiro, 2012, p. 287)

There was therefore an experience - first and foremost. Which is photographed. Photography occurs simultaneously, as the photographic recording is done in the moment of experience. Secondly, after returning from the trip, the texts are written over the course of about six months. And finally, over the years, memory and the consequent artistic representation are revealed.

The paintings are a residue, therefore. They are reminiscences, they are what remains:

The idea of residue that assists creative products, namely artistic ones, concerns a set, a web of elements that function as demonstrative doors of an entry into a

space; in this sense, every work of art is a reality left over from a process, and each work of art can be understood as an attempt to close the gap, the fissure between the two worlds, in an exercise of desire and continuity. (Guerreiro, 2012, p. 288)

The journey brings with it countless perceptions and sensations that serve as raw material for a new universe – the realm of visual arts. In it, on the journey, there are small fissures of everyday life, fissures that lead to the discovery of an internal foreign territory, always recreated and expanded by external reality. (Rodrigues & Gondar, 2018).

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Some paintings are not accompanied by a specific text. Sometimes they relate to an episode lasting a whole day, or more days, as is the case of this work below, referring to the arrival - and knowledge - of Corvo Village, the only existing village on the small island of Corvo:



Figure 53 - Runa, *Corvo Village*. 2020. ([Chronicle 44](#) of the Azores).  
Acrylic and oil on paper, 29,7 x 40,7 cm (11,7 x 16 inches). Artist's collection.



The island of Corvo, where I spent six days, proved to be a magical place, on this journey through the 9 islands of the Azores, by bicycle, and this had repercussions, later, in this and other paintings. As revealed in an interview with the newspaper “*Diário dos Açores*” (“*Azores Daily*”):

My favorite island was Corvo. For its isolation, for being so small and grand. A rock in the sea. Beaten by waves and wind.

It was where I felt in total freedom, without restrictions, without fear. On the other hand, it was also where I managed to get closer to people – to its population – precisely because it was such a small environment. It will be the safest island in the Azores archipelago, as the Corvinos pointed out to me, and as I commented in the chronicles. They are such wild scenarios, so at the mercy of nature's weather, that they send a person to silence, to thought, to introspection. (Norte, 2021)

The representation of a magical and introspective place is carried out through the use of bright colours and dots inspiring magical scenarios. The opposition between sea and houses is also presented - the latter in extreme isolation - this isolation being an historical aspect analysed in the text of the chronicles, mainly through conversations with the local population, a topic that is interesting to mention here for a better understanding of my perspective and consequent paintings:

Peter dived to collect seaweed, which he sold to Sao Miguel island, and from there it went to the mainland. Several people sold seaweed for medicine. A lot of money was made from it, he tells me. Now cheaper alternatives will have been arranged, as this is no longer done. (...)

And now he has indicated to me that he has also done whaling. Peter was a whale hunter! (...)

Here on the island of Corvo there is a veterinarian, about 40 years old, who came from the mainland, Peter explains to me. Before there was only one boy, who was more skilled and managed things. (...)

Peter continues to explain a series of things to me, while the tank fills with water:

Today the island of Corvo has a dentist; a doctor who came from the island of Sao Jorge and lives here; and there is also a nurse. Before there was none of this. (Norte, 2020 b&c)

Below are two examples of paintings linked to the theme of magic and the fantastic sensed during the journey, particularly on the island of Corvo:



Figure 54 - Runa, *Great Lord of the Bird Kingdom*. 2020. (Chronicles [59](#) until 62 of the Azores).  
Acrylic and oil on unstretched canvas, 26,5 x 63,5 cm (10,4 x 25 inches). Artist's collection.



Figure 55 - Runa, *Blackbird, the Messenger*. 2020. (Chronicles 46, [49](#), 59 and 62 of the Azores)  
Acrylic and oil on paper, 29,7 x 40,7 cm (11,7 x 16 inches). Artist's collection.

During the travel there are moments of unrepresentable intensity that take shape in artistic production. It is always a challenge to “be able to materially demonstrate the (...) sensations of astonishment and rapture”. (Serra, 2013, p. 360). In this challenge, the exhibition of documents (texts and photos), together with pictorial works, “does not aim to explain and reduce the meanings of the exhibitions; on the contrary, it makes it possible for the spectator to trace new relationships of meaning at the same time that it brings him closer to the constitutive framework of the production process”. (Corona, 2010, p. 1242).

\*

Continuing with paintings not accompanied by a specific text, from the chronicles, see this example below, this time referring to the bicycle trip along the Danube River, in 2016. On this trip my boyfriend accompanied me, and it was a total of 838 km by bike through Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary over 24 days:

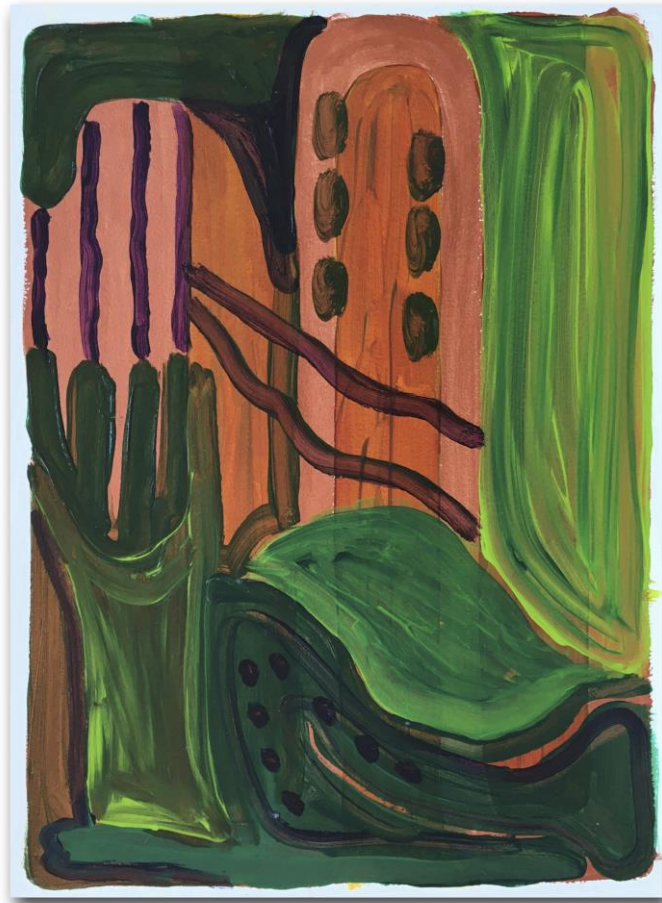


Figure 56 - Runa, *Weaving through the Great Green Mountains of Austria*. 2020.

([Chronicle 1](#) - Cycling along the Danube River)

40,7 x 29,7 cm (16 x 11,7 inches). Artist's collection.

This painting evokes an experience over time, a bicycle ride through the huge green mountains of northern Europe, in a country – Austria – in which the timber industry is one of the largest employers. The lines, having no edges, are undulating and smooth, as was the route, mostly flat, along the river.

According to Manuel Botelho's words about Philip Guston, and adapting them to my project: the shapes seem to suggest trees, or plants, or living organisms of mysterious identity. With these characters from a parallel world, the sensation of managing a play is intensified, my own play, my stage, populated by figures/forms turned into living realities, actors of tragedies, or farces, without a precise narrative sense. (Botelho, 2013, p. 495).

In a 1960 interview with BBC London, [Guston] would state: “Well, I see my paintings as a kind of figuration. Obviously they don't look like people sitting on chairs or walking down the street (...)”.

Although unable to speak of figuration in the strict sense of the term (there is no direct and recognizable reference to reality in his works), the allusive universe of these works definitely deviated from the reductive principles of pure abstraction. The two complementary impulses of his artistic project were increasingly evident: on the one hand, a stubborn fidelity to abstraction; on the other, a growing desire to deal with the physical world, the tangible world of objects. (Botelho, 2013, p. 497)

This issue of “real versus fantasy” is therefore evident in a number of authors, and Paul Klee's statement has become famous and an axiom: “Art does not reproduce the visible, it makes visible.” (Klee, 2014, p. 38) and explains:

Before, we described things that were visible on earth (...). Now, the relativity of visible things becomes evident, and with this is manifested the belief that the visible is only an isolated example in relation to the whole universe, and that there are other truths in latency and in great number. Things manifest themselves in a broad and complex sense, often apparently contradicting yesterday's rational experience. (Klee, 2014, p. 8)

Effectively, and as discussed in point 2.3., I, - and now I will adapt the words of Mário Matos (2014, p. 247), in a study on slower journeys: on foot, by donkey or scooter; I adapt his words here to my case - I, as an artist-traveller, am more focused on understanding how the modus of my tour – that is, by bicycle - determines my personal perception of the reality that surrounds me, than on describing it in itself. The epicenter of my narrative – pictorial and textual – is constituted by the transposition of my interior borders, and not so much the geographic ones. Mário Matos then provides, in that study, an example of one of the analysed authors, Lorenz Schröter, who published in 2002 a report of a trip he made, by donkey, in a German province, lasting four weeks and 700 km: “By crossing the Rhine, I also crossed another frontier. I am transforming myself into a hiker who no longer knows Tuesdays or Thursdays. The weekdays fade away”. (Schröter cit. in Matos,

2014, p. 247). And I transcribe, taking the torch, a text of mine, happened in India in 2009, on a bike trip, alone, with a support car:

I enter today on the 25th day. Or 26th, if we count the day of the plane trip. The end is near. Although there are still four days to go - there are still some things to see and to happen. There is still, for example, a night on a bamboo boat. The Periyar Natural Park is still missing, with one more day of trekking and rafting. By this time I have already forgotten my home in Lisbon; of my room. I wrote down these thoughts on my little pad: I don't even remember how the furniture is arranged anymore. When I wake up, which way do I turn to turn on the light? I found myself thinking about this and having a hard time remembering quickly. I've been changing rooms almost daily for 25 days, I don't know which way the lights are. In fact, I always use a flashlight – not to light them, but precisely to find the light switches. Every day's adventure begins right there, upon waking up: what room am I in?, what hotel am I in?, what country am I in?... And where are the lights?!...

And the same goes for English: I've been speaking English every day for almost a month. I already think in English, also; gradually Portuguese disappears. On this last day in Munnar I thought: You must pack your things, Rute. Why didn't I think, "Tens de fazer as malas, Rute"? I thought in English. I already thought everything in English. I imagined myself recounting the adventures of the trip in Portugal, struggling to find the words. But why am I describing the trip in English?, I found myself asking.

And I'm not tired or wanting to return home. This life is too good to want to return. Good hotels, private driver, meals always ready, all possible comforts combined with the permanent discovery of a distant country. Who gets tired of a life like this? On the contrary, it is with great apprehension that I face the last days of the trip. (Norte, 2009)



Figure 57 - Runa, *Nights in Udaipur, India*. 2021  
Acrylic, oil, wax and oil stick on unstretched canvas,  
126 x 91 cm (49,6 x 36 inches). Artist's collection.

In short – and continuing with Mário Matos analysis – the main interest of the trip is therefore not what I experience, but the way, the point of view and the means by which I experience a certain space (natural and/or cultural):

We are here facing a paradigm shift from the substantial to the procedural, from the extensive to the intensive, which underlies (...) the majority of this type of journeys that we could call "slow motion trips with lots of emotion" consubstantiating (...) an emphatic praise of slowness. (Matos, 2014, pp. 247-48)

Of course, these views - intensely personal and subjective - are debatable. But weren't they always? Let us return to Howard Hodgkin and recall the words of Tom Lubbock, quoted in point 3.3., where he questioned:

Is Howard Hodgkin a conceptual artist? Well, as every Hodgkin-lover learns, his paintings encapsulate intense episodes from his personal life. But then, as every Hodgkin-lover finds, the translation of paint back into life isn't straightforward. There's a gap between the painting you're looking at and the experience it's supposed to hold.

How do you know that Hodgkin himself doesn't add his own titles after the paintings are done? The subject, the experience, is supposed to be there from the start, but how do you know it doesn't change mid-picture? How do you know that there ever was an actual experience? Because such intensity could only be founded on fact? Come, now. It's one thing to say that the paintings have a strong emotional content. They do. But the true-life experience stuff is a kind of conceptual game we enter into. (Lubbock, 2011)

Paul Klee, in his book "Writings on Art", from 1956, appealed to "patience" – like this, literally, in the simple and direct style that characterizes this publication:

We must say to each temporal dimension: "You are transforming yourself into the past, but perhaps we are going to find a happy place in the new dimension that restores your present". And when this plurality of dimensions makes it increasingly difficult for us to bring the different parts of this structure to the present, a lot of patience is needed.

(...) Then those strange things become realities, realities of art that extend the limits of life beyond its ordinary appearance. Because they no longer reproduce, with more or less temperament, what was seen, but rather make visible a secret vision." (Klee, 2014, pp. 21, 22, 35)

This discussion about the faithful representation of reality was even held in the 19th and 20th centuries by artists "of great prestige and influence" (Tuan, 1990, p. 438). Take the case of Picasso:



Certain modern artists (...) have continued to pay homage to realism, even though their works, to an unsympathetic critic's eye, seem to show obvious distortions. Picasso, when accused by a critic of painting pictures that are "monstrous" and "inhuman", responds in an interview in 1945: "This [criticism] surprises me because on the contrary I always try to observe nature. As you can see, I've put in this still-life a box of leeks... I wanted my canvas to smell of leeks. I insist on likeness, a more profound likeness, more real than the real." (Tuan, 1990, p. 438)

Rodin, too, wished to protect himself against the accusation of departing from nature, that is, of engaging in fantasy. Even when he is labouring over a sculpture that shows clear distortions, he asserts: "In everything, I obey Nature, and never do I dare give orders to it. My only ambition is servile fidelity to it." (Tuan, 1990, p. 438)

This issue was therefore – and continues to be – controversial. Effectively, I also see my paintings as a kind of figuration, as seen before. Reality is painted as seen during travel. I believe that, exactly as Picasso said, my realm of visual arts is more real than the real. Continuing and ending with an analysis by Charles Peirce, author of the book entitled "Semiotics", regarding the semiotic approach that I take here:

Whether or not this is really so, is a matter of reality, and has nothing to do with how we are inclined to think. If a given person is unable to see the connection, the argument is still valid, so long as this relationship of real facts actually holds. If the entire human race were unable to see the connection, the argument would still be solid, though not humanly clear. (Peirce, 2005, p. 215)

As Gerhard Richter said, "The first impulse towards painting, or towards art in general, stems from the need to communicate, the effort to fix one's vision, to deal with appearances (which are alien and must be given names and meanings)." (Richter, 1995, p. 11). If I translate these appearances in a non-perceptible way into painting, this could be seen as an advantage: "(Advantages of being a painter. Allow us to insist on the conviction that painters, as Guston said, do not have to be right. Nor do they have to be clear.)". (Jacinto, 2013, p. 68).

#### 4.1. – Technical aspects

About my work process, and as already mentioned, while travelling I do not paint. Let us remember that Howard Hodgkin also returned home and then painted. Or, in opposition, the case of Francis Alÿs, who paints while travelling. I don't paint while travelling for the simple reason that I don't have time. Perhaps if the trip lasted a year, and I stayed some time in the same place, I would be able to paint. However, the trips last about a month, have been made by bicycle, sometimes changing accommodation daily in order to travel the country – and thus, the opportunity for engaging in artistic activity is not provided. That's not really my goal. The focus during the trip is to get to know the lands and the people. Then, later, quietly, in the tranquility of the studio, I paint.



Figure 58 - Runa, Self-portrait in the studio. 2021.

Digital photography, 6000 x 4000 pixels. Lisbon, Portugal. Artist archive.

Nor do I start from a photograph. Hence, I do not want to attribute particular prominence to photography in the present study; I leave that task to my colleagues who use photography as a source of reference for their paintings. Photography, in my case, is used

to document the journey, a record to which I could dedicate another study, not this one. And effectively I don't start from the text either, although this undoubtedly has a greater relevance in the pictorial process. Faced with the same photograph, the reader can interpret: it is being pleasant / or it is being rough. It is my text that guides the perspective, and consequently guides the visual composition, as is the case of the painting "*Weaving through the Great Green Mountains of Austria*", shown and explained in the previous subchapter (figure 56).

On the other hand, paintings must be independent of any story. They have to live for themselves. Therefore, since always and with continuation in recent experiences, when exhibited in some gallery or cultural space, in fact I have not given information about the chronicles and texts. Maybe one day I will do it, but it will be conformed to a specific and expressly planned objective – that of combining both: travel and painting. Information about the paintings, in any case, is available on social media or on my website, for a more curious audience, so it has not been relevant to disclose this matter during exhibitions.

Regarding the technique, I usually use acrylic on the first layer – or eventually on subsequent layers – and oil later on to finish the work, usually with several layers as well. Complement with oil pastel and oil bar. I usually start with a white initial stain.

There has been a recent change in my way of painting, and it is important to mention it: Prior to 2021, I usually drew in pencil directly on canvas, before starting to paint. Until now I have never (without exception) drawn on paper, that is, on paper I do not draw in advance, at least until the date I present this dissertation.

In the most recent canvases (from the end of 2021) I started to reduce the amount of drawing, that is, if beforehand I performed the delimitation of shapes with pencil or another means, and then painted them, from that date I started to reduce the previous strokes, on the canvases, until they were completely eliminated, and then I started to use direct brushstrokes – similar to what I already did on paper, applying paint, with a brush, without any previous sketch. I rarely use spatulas.

That is, as I started to paint on paper, from the beginning of 2020, the technique used on this support – a technique that is characterized by greater spontaneity and expressiveness of the gesture, without any prior drawing – ended up spreading to the canvases. The canvases are normally more than one meter long, on one side, and the papers follow smaller formats, namely A3 and A2. During this master's degree (which began in September 2020), and under the strong influence of the tutorials, I greatly expanded this

technique, which ceased to be exclusive to small papers, and started to be applied to larger canvases as well. Perhaps it was training, supported and encouraged by my professors during the master's degree, training that effectively continues to take place. The journey is far from finished. It is a constant and progressive effort.

Regardless of whether there is a previous drawing or not, the painting is built with successive layers. Occasionally a first and only layer will suffice. *Alla prima* works are rare, but they do happen; this was the case with the painting presented at the beginning of this 4th chapter (figure 47): “*Cat Sleeping With Me Under the Blankets*”.

I also work unevenly on the surface of the paintings, with some areas receiving a layer of paint, in contrast to the various layers in other areas.



Figure 59 - Runa, *Atauro Island, East Timor*. 2021.

([Chronicle 61](#) of East Timor). Acrylic, oil, wax, oil pastel and oil stick on unstretched canvas, 126 x 91 cm (49,6 x 36 inches). Artist's collection.

In this canvas above (figure 59), for example, which repeats the text of chronicle 61 presented in point 1.1. (that is, it refers to the dive taken on the island of Atauro, in the area known by scientists as the “Coral Triangle” – which effectively represents a remarkable episode among all the trips I have made, and there are three paintings, in all, that refer to it – hitherto); on this canvas, as I was going to say, no previous drawing was made. I let chance take over the gesture. This chance is one of the “psychological secrets” evoked by Rui Serra in his work:

The other great 'psychological secret' lies in having discovered the importance, within my path, of the unconscious, often seen as procedural chance. Jung also highlights its relevance in creative activity: "The unconscious is limited not only to the processes of instincts and reflexes of the subcortical centers, but also goes beyond consciousness, anticipating with its symbols future processes of consciousness". (...) Hence the importance given to the unconscious in this investigation, namely when coincidences are presented and verified in the elaboration of the pictorial project, in the realization of the paintings, in the results obtained, and in the relationships established with other works and other authors. (Serra, 2013, p. 359)

Let us see another example, without prior drawing, where there is the aforementioned inequality in the surface of the painting, with some areas receiving a layer of paint, while other areas have several layers:

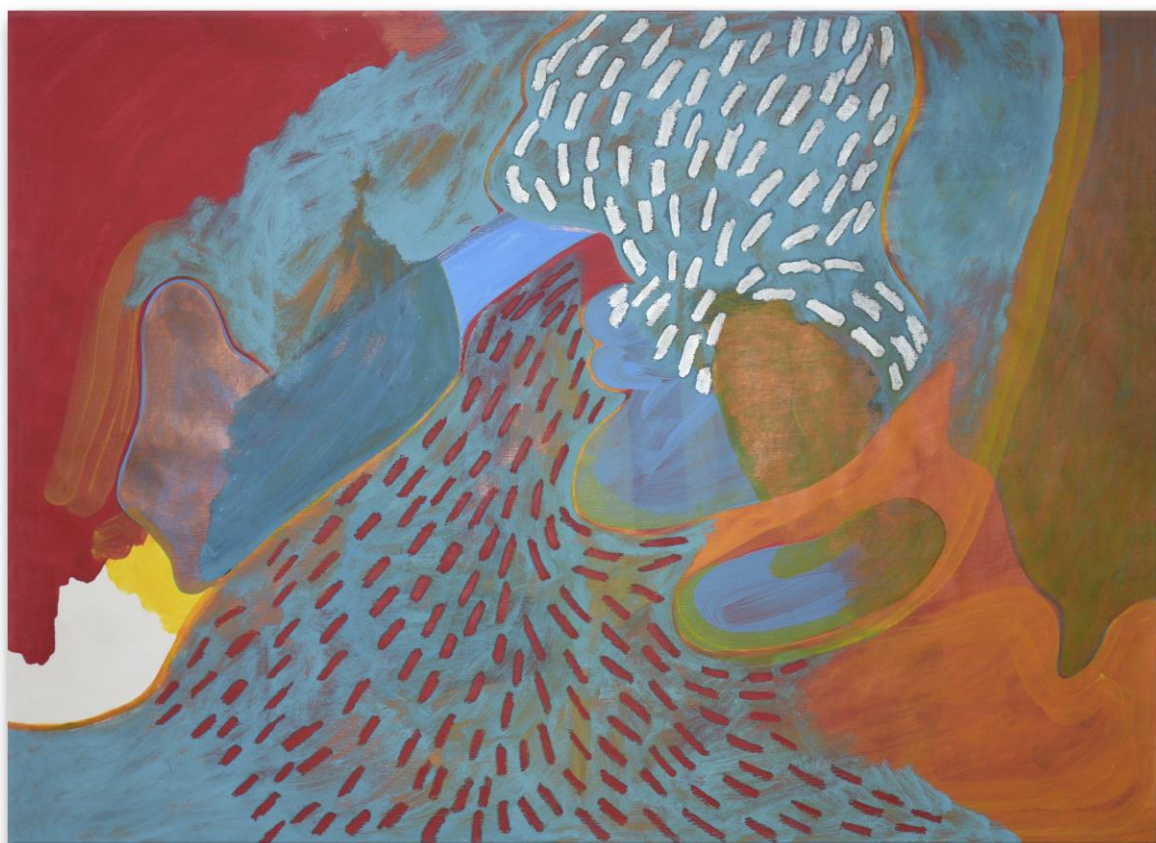


Figure 60 - Runa, *Going Far*. 2021. ([Patagonia Chronicles](#)).

Acrylic, oil and oil stick on unstretched canvas, 91 x 126 cm (36 x 49,6 inches). Artist's collection.

In this work above, a white shape is presented – which contains a single layer. It is a characteristic present in some of my works, this game with the white background, a game that can be clearly seen in this painting:



Figure 61 - Runa, *Cocktail at Sunset*. 2021.

Acrylic, oil and oil stick on paper,  
40,7 x 29,7 cm (16 x 11,7 inches). Artist's collection.

As already mentioned, the painting usually starts with a white acrylic glaze, and playing with chance – with the unconscious – the forms are completed and harmonized with each other. Quoting, in this regard, the American painter Chris Martin (b. 1954):

On some level my practice is based on unconscious drawing, doodling. There are times when you doodle spirals a lot, other times when you make jagged things, and other times you make things out of dots,” he has said. “You could say, you’re thinking about snails or galaxies. Or, maybe, you’re not thinking at all, and you just like making spirals.” (Artnet, s.d.)

In these two images below, it can be seen the evolution of the painting made in these circumstances, playing with chance and the unconscious:



Figures 62 and 63 - Runa, studio photographs of “Going Far”, in progress. 2021.  
Digital photographs, variable dimensions. Artist archive.

In these cases, the direct brush stroke builds forms, a process already present in some authors - in a certain North American tradition, which includes Philip Guston (1913 – 1980):

Working with great freedom, the images appeared and were obliterated, giving way to others (...) “We are painting a shoe; we start painting the sole and it turns into a moon; we are painting the moon and it becomes a piece of bread”. As the works were painted and scraped, and the base elements reconfigured in different combinations and inserted in new contexts (opening space for multiple and contradictory readings), it would oscillate freely between the real and the fantastic, the tangible and the imaginary (...). (Botelho, 2013, p. 503)

However, during paintings I can carry out abundant studies before moving forward - before taking any decisive step, and I use digital means for planning. This is not the case with “*Cocktail at Sunset*”, but it was the case with the painting “*Going Far*”, for example. In these images below, it can be seen the studies carried out digitally to decide just one point: the dotted line, which was later made with oil bar.



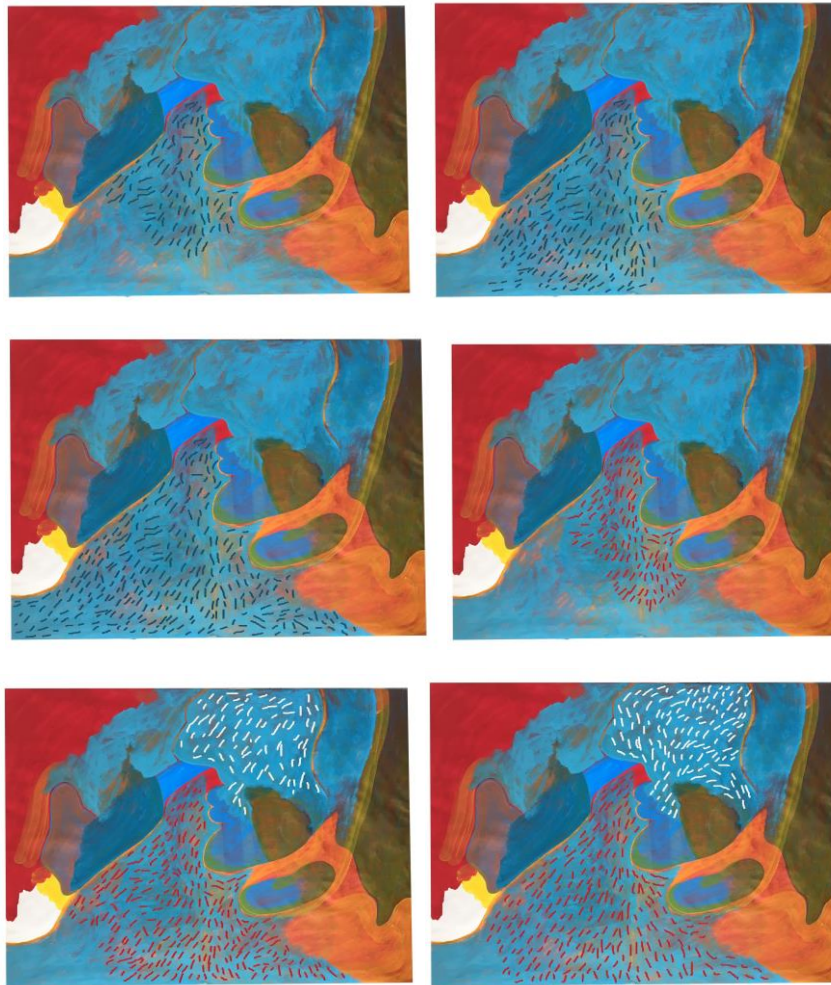


Figure 64 - Runa, examples of digital studies for “Going Far”, 2021.

Variable dimensions, artist archive.

Continuing with the technical part, before turning to the question of the meaning and significance of my artistic project. I do not always choose colours. Without looking, I pick up a tube of paint at random from the box of paints. The colour that comes is the one that will be used. But the colour that comes defines which area is painted. If the blue colour comes, maybe paint the top part. If the yellow colour comes, maybe paint the underside. Here is an intuitive process. All colours have their beauty, and they understand each other, it is the human eye that values them more or not. And there are a lot of human eyes – plus there's an audience that isn't exactly human. Already Xavier de Maistre, in “*Voyage autour de ma chambre*”, written in 1794, referred, in an amusing way, to his varied public, which included animals:

That is why, when I grant an amateur the pleasure of travelling with me, I always keep it until the end as a special luxury, and since the first time I presented this sublime painting to connoisseurs and ignorants, to men of the world, to artists, to women, children, even animals, I have always thought that the spectators, whoever they are, show, each in their own way, signs of pleasure and surprise, so admirably does nature translate into them.

And what a picture could be presented to you, gentlemen; what spectacle, ladies, could be placed before your eyes with more certainty of approbation than your faithful portrayal? The image I speak of is a mirror and no one has yet ventured to criticize it. (Maistre, 2020, p. 47)

#### **4.2. – The strangeness**

Is of principal interest to focus on the theme of travel – of travelling – as absorption of stimuli and as self-knowledge, and to reflect on its impact on artistic activity.

The first point that eventually arises is the “why”. Why travel? Why do some people like to travel and others don't?

I do not intend to dwell on this point in particular, as it is not the focus of this study. Effectively, it is a question of psychology, a question of personality. I refer to the scientific areas of this subject: psychology, possibly the social sciences. Or, alternatively, on a metaphysical side, I could hand the matter over to Fernando Pessoa, and his astrological analyses.

This, of course, excluding financial impediments that could make it impossible for a potential travel enthusiast to travel. Placing human beings on a platform of equality (financial and cultural), there have always been differences in tastes, personalities, ways of being. It is not up to us here, in this study, to enter into this differentiation. I will address, in my specific case, what happens during the trip, and which will lead to my artistic project:

How does the practice of travelling and going to a foreign country – discovered or rediscovered – guide the artist's perception? How does this experience of knowing oneself and the world continue on an artistic level, and what, in turn, are

the effects produced by the work created from this experience? (Cardoso, 2012, p. 183)

It should be noted that the author, Isabel Lopes Cardoso, only mentions “foreign country” – and not travels through the interior of Portugal, given that she is analysing in her text a specific author: Cyril Pedrosa, French, comic book author, grandson of Portuguese emigrants. In the present dissertation, and applying these analyses by Cardoso and other authors, a trip can be made both abroad and within Portugal, as is the case of my recent trip to the Azores, or other trips about which I have also published chronicles, namely to Porto. And many others, in which I didn't write chronicles.

But let's return to the question posed by Isabel Cardoso: how does the practice of travel guide the artist's perception? To analyse this, the second and immediate point that arises, already in the course of the trip, is the question of strangeness:

The idea of travel always promotes strangeness. (...) Because it is a cut, an idea of change (in our more or less sedentary, westernized pace), the proposal for travel is alteration, a more or less temporary change of habitat. It is leaving home, changing the landscape, perhaps violently altering one's being, “going along the road”, on the path and thirst for travel and its discoveries and consequences (...). (Guerreiro, 2012, p. 283-4)

This is our starting point. The strangeness linked to travel. Perhaps I will, however, contradict this statement.

Let us recall chapter 3.3. dedicated to Howard Hodgkin, and the words of presenter Alan Yentob, when he says that travelling in exotic places is an assault on the senses due to the strangeness it provokes. To which Hodgkin replied that to be an artist is to be a stranger, and as such it's good to find a place where it's natural to be a stranger. (Parsons, 2006). Hodgkin was referring to India, one of the most exotic places he has visited. Let us remember that Hodgkin appreciated domesticated settings; gardens and terraces, not exactly forests, deserts and mountains.

Perhaps this is where it manifests the difference. Being myself fond of forests, deserts and mountains (in addition to domesticated scenarios, for which I also have great affection – namely cities like New York, Sydney, or European capitals, which, using a term called “traveller”, provoke a great vibration in me), being a lover of wild settings, I can't say that I feel like an outsider in them. On the contrary. I'm at home. Like a fish in water. I finally feel part of it. Part of what? Of the world? Of the nature? Of the universe? I believe that the strangeness is in everyday life, in the second home. The second home is where I live: in Lisbon, in Portugal, in Europe. Strangeness disappears during travel, in forests, deserts and mountains. Yes, this is the first home.

The concept of “geographical double”, by Yi-Fu Tuan, explains this well:

Death Valley is a tourist attraction. Many go there for its visual novelty – its strangeness. For me, it has always been far more. In my very first encounter with the desert, I felt as though I had met my geographical double – the objective correlative of the person I am, absent the social façade. I didn't make much of the experience at the time, but as years passed, I began to wonder how it compared with my encounters with works of art. More generally, I wondered about the kinship between place and the arts – not so much how certain places seem to encourage art, or how the arts have influenced the way we perceive place, but how the arts themselves are places – virtual places. (Tuan, 2004, pp. 19-20)

And he continues:

Besides providing nurture, place is an important source of our identity – a key to who we are. To the question, “What sort of person are you?” I can imagine the poet W. H. Auden pointing to limestone for answer. Similarly addressed, I would point to the desert. The desert and I are one. In it, I see lineaments of my psychological nature. The arts are likewise emblematic and revelatory. The ones I strongly like and dislike expose me, make me feel naked before the public eye, which is why I am guarded in my confessions. (Tuan, 2004, p. 21)



Figure 65 - Runa, *My Cabin in the Amazon*. 2020.  
([Chronicle 67](#) of Amazonia). Acrylic, oil and oil pastel on paper,  
29,5 x 41,6 cm (11,6 x 16,4 inches). Artist's collection.

Upon reading Yi-Fu Tuan's words, I immediately pondered what my geographic double would be. I think all his readers will wonder about this. There will be those who have a geographic double on the couch at home. This painting above, about the Amazon, does not mean that this is my geographic double, I present it in this analysis because it fits the theme: my cabin – or my home – in the Amazon. My geographic double, however, I'm not sure if it will be the tropical forests of Africa, the rugged mountains of Latin America, the white scenery of Greenland, or the volcanoes of the Azores. Maybe I shall remain in closer scenarios: maybe my geographic double is really the silent and vast Alentejo plains, place of maternal origin, and where this whole story of travel, freedom, introspection and cycling began.



Figure 66 - Runa, *Secret*. 2020.

Acrylic and oil on paper, 29,7 x 40,7 cm (11,7 x 16 inches). Artist's collection.

This issue of the geographical double is important for what it reveals about character. However, before we get into this matter – that of character revelation – it is still necessary to return to the theme of strangeness, and develop it. Indeed, on a trip, not everything is forests or wild scenery. There are settlements. Airports. Buses and taxis. Hotels. To say that there is never any strangeness I think would be abnormal, even if it is the first time you travel to a place with different cultures and ethnicities. Even if it is strange basic things, like the bed you sleep in, in a lodging. Look my first day in China, in a rural area:

It's cold, maybe 18 degrees in the morning. It rained all night, and in the morning too. (...) Here in Lijiang it's cool, but in a few days it's going to be really hot. I woke up at 5 am (which for me is seven hours less, that is, 10 pm in Portugal); (sleeping until 10 pm is hard work, but I managed it) and before breakfast, at 8.30 am, I went to look outside the hotel. Let's see what's going on here. I'm in the middle of the setting phase – everything is strange. I don't know anything, I arrived at night, dazed with so many hours of flights and airports. At the hotel door I have two options: turn left or turn right. Well, let's start on the right, I see more trees. Me with an open umbrella (available at the reception of the small hotel, where you couldn't see a soul) taking my first steps in Yunnan, a land where I would come

to feel so good, so safe. But now still hesitating. I saw a family with a child leaving the house, I don't know where they would go. It's the school vacation season. They stared at me, curious, and I didn't even say goodbye. So many hellos and goodbyes that I'm going to say on this trip, but today is the first day, it's the first morning, I'm in the phase of ground reconnaissance. We didn't speak, but they followed my probing steps with their eyes. (Norte, 2017a)

The issue of strangeness is relative, therefore. Or to be more exact in words, it is temporary. In India, after dozens of trips to that country, Hodgkin would no longer feel like an outsider. He would feel at home, and from what he described, namely in the quoted BBC video, he would probably consider it as a first home. The strangeness may be in the “other” in relation to us. It is significant that that Chinese family, with a child by the hand, followed me, curious, with their eyes. I wasn't the one who followed them, then. They were the ones who followed me. On this trip I quickly got used to the enormous curiosity of the Chinese people, and I learned how to respond. I learned that they like to take selfies with me and there were countless times I was photographed by their cell phones, with the people themselves, or in the middle of groups, or even with Chinese children by the hand, as happened in Tiananmen Square, in chronicle 116. I couldn't stop reflecting on everything that happened there, in that square, on that floor - covered in blood - and now - I, a European - am there hand in hand with a Chinese child, with his mother taking us souvenir photographs.

In this case, there is a strangeness related to past events. In fact, I did not feel strange at all in that square, especially having so many tourists, and also because I was on the 21st day of the trip, that is, fully accustomed and integrated.

To end this issue of strangeness – and keeping this specific case of China – I quote again one of the last chronicles of this trip:

Today is the 24th day of the trip. My steps, staggering on the first day in Yunnan, probing paths, have since become assured steps. Firm and confident. These streets became mine. This world has become part of me. It is with sadness that I arrive at the last day of this magnificent journey, so complete, so full of discoveries, fun and adventures. (Norte, 2017b)



Figure 67 - Beijing, China. Digital photo with the author, taken by an anonymous person, on the 24th day of the trip. 2048 x 1360 pixels. Artist archive.

Published in [chronicle 128](#) of China.

Manuel João Ramos, anthropologist, designer and professor at ISCTE - University Institute of Lisbon, in his book “Traços de Viagem” (in English is something like “Sketches of Travel”) (2009), writes:

I write and draw to remember what it's like to disappear from my usual world and still be alive, being able to see, hear, smell and speak. I do it to create a graphic testimony of what I feel like round trips to an upside down world. (...) when I return home, (...) drawing becomes a precious catalyst for memory and imagination. (Ramos, 2009, p. 31)

This text, having been written by an artist- traveller, in this case linked to drawing, is easily adapted to painting. Indeed, when I return from the trip, painting becomes a precious catalyst for memory and imagination.





Figure 68 - Runa, *Christmas Cave, Lava Tube* – *Terceira island, Azores*. 2021. ([Chronicle 105](#) of the Azores). Oil on paper, 29,7 x 40,7 cm (11,7 x 16 inches). Artist's collection.



Figure 69 - Runa, *Coal Cavern, Volcanic Cavity* – *Terceira island, Azores*. 2021 ([Chronicle 97](#) of the Azores) Oil on paper, 29,7 x 40,7 cm (11,7 x 16 inches) Artist's collection.

If the trip registry is done through text and photography, the painting comes at the end - on a deferred basis, that is, after the return, to fill in a certain incompleteness of these.

There is the memorization of a moment - or an element - of the travel experience, with text, photography and painting functioning as “different medial forms of artistic updating of this memory process” (Outeirinho, 2010, p. 575). Adapting the words of Mario Matos, in his study on the graphic representation of travel (2011, p. 4), to my particular case of painting: they are not, therefore, artistic means closed in on themselves, but, on the contrary, they are forms and modes - despite being based on different codes - functionally complementary. That is, we must understand both, whether the textual and photographic narrative or the pictorial representation of the journey, as means through which I try to shape a vision and image – optical and mental – of the world, as forms and ways of registering and expressing the experiences and perceptions associated with intercultural mobility.



Figure 70 - Runa, *Uba Budo Velho*. 2021.

([Chronicle 78](#) of Sao Tome and Principe).

Acrylic and oil on paper, 40,7 x 29,7 cm (16 x 11,7 inches). Artist's collection.

The case of the painting “Uba Budo Velho”, shown above (toponym of an existing village in Sao Tome and Principe), is part of a “green period”, for example, a short but intense period, during which I made several paintings always intensely green, under the influence of the last two trips made: one to the vibrant tropical forests of Sao Tome and Principe (2019), another to the stunning and verdant scenery of the Azores (2020). Reviewing the paintings of previous years, the colour green had never been used as the main color, or even with particular prominence. Counting works with a majority presence of the colour green, carried out during the two years of this master's degree (i.e., right after those two big trips), there are twenty-two in all. Most are linked to the theme of travel and refer to a specific chronicle (Sao Tome and Principe, Azores, and also Amazonia – with two works shown in the previous chapters, namely in points 4. and 4.2. – figures 51 and 65), but not only: in an intercalary way, I have been using green on other topics not related to travel, such as the three cases below:



Figure 71 - Runa, *Drive*. 2021.

Acrylic and oil stick on paper, 29,7 x 40,7 cm (11,7 x 16 inches).

Artist's collection.



Figure 72 - Runa, *Torel Garden*. 2020.

Acrylic and oil on paper, 39,8 x 55,4 cm (15,6 x 21.8 inches).

Artist's collection.



Figure 73 - Runa, *The Secret Hideout*. 2022

Acrylic, oil, oil stick and oil pastel on unstretched canvas, 210 x 160 cm (82,6 x 63 inches)

All the green paintings reveal the influence that these last two trips exerted, and the intense presence of the colour green activates a whole set of memories, sensations and

senses. It wasn't about seeing images on the internet, or reading books: are experiences, smells, green trails traversed. Authentic experiences. In fact, seeing – just seeing – does not deeply involve emotions, and as such becomes something distant. We can see the Amazon on television, but only “(...) the taste of lemon, the texture of warm skin, and the sound of rustling leaves, reach us as sensations”. (Tuan, 1980, p. 12). In mediation, these sensations are materialized, they are made real. There is a story that cannot be erased and that is incorporated into an object: the painting, thus materializing the volatile, the passing and the past. However, as stated by Hamish Fulton, an object cannot compete with an experience. An object is a tiny part of an experience:

(...) an object, or an image, that seeks to retain an experience, will correspond to the suspension of an action – it will invariably be just a reduction or simplification of it. It will be a way of condensing something irrecoverable into a material dimension, thus leaving us with a small and symbolic part of a complex whole – a bit like a souvenir bought during a trip. (Alves, 2012, p.248)

That is, the experience cannot be reattained, it has become part of the memory. But the object – the material dimension of the artwork – has the power to awaken memories, to transport you to the past, allowing you to rediscover lost time. Quoting Yi-Fu Tuan:

Of, course, place and art also differ. One difference is that, whereas in life I can't go home again, in art I often can. The actual home, a house, neighbourhood, town or city – is likely to be altered by subsequent occupants and their builders. Even the desert will lose its physical integrity as population continues to increase. By contrast, a painting or sculpture, other than the stains or scars of time, stays much the same. To it, I can return. (Tuan, 2004, pp. 21-22)



Figure 74 - Runa, *Grotto of Towers, Pico island, Azores*. 2021.  
([Chronicle 83](#) of the Azores). Acrylic, oil, oil stick and oil pastel on paper,  
40,7 x 29,7 cm (16 x 11,7 inches). Artist's collection.

\*

Strangeness is relative, therefore. With the habit of travelling, it ends up disappearing. The very concept of “strangeness” - as something unexpected, unusual, eventually uncomfortable - starts to evoke a routine, after a series of trips to exotic destinations. When there is nothing to be strange, is that it becomes strange.

#### **4.3. – The uncertainty**

During the travel there is only one certainty: that everything is uncertain. Life depends on chance. Even on purely tourist trips, organized by travel agencies, with defined programs

and schedules, there is a clause: “Weather conditions may change the program”. In our daily lives, there is a greater certainty of things, only shaken by major events, such as a pandemic. But on a trip, the dose of uncertainty is permanent. When it's foggy, we don't stop going to work. However, if it's foggy on the day you're supposed to see an extensive landscape, on top of a mountain, then we'll stop doing that excursion. Likewise, cycling in the mountains of East-Timor, or in the forests of Australia, presents constant unforeseen events. And they are usually welcome. If we are not speaking about a puncture in the bicycle tire, for example, they are welcome. The paths themselves are uncertain. Travelling by car, or even on a road bike (by tarred roads, therefore) is a different experience from following rural paths, through the fields, sometimes pedestrian paths, where the bike - mountain bike - may even not pass, at least with me pedaling. The path may have ceased to exist, with brambles taking over it. This often happens.

Additionally, there is another key point: who will I run into along the way? I am alone. Only with a bicycle. In the middle of the forest or the field.

Waking up in the morning and starting the day's tour is an unknown adventure.

I consider this to be one of the great challenges of the trip. Accept with serenity the uncertainty and the unforeseen. With desire, even. Surprise me, earth. Surprise me, person. Or animal. I'm here at your mercy. Face to face.

The facial aspect – that is, of “face to face” - is essential for the communication it provides, as Ana Santos Guerreiro explains:

(...) there are those who travel alone. Who choose solitude. And take, in addition to the essential and very well selected luggage, what Pedro Rosa Mendes once referred to as one of the most precious and universal values of exchange and essential communication: the face value. The universality of face value, the ability to understand the face, to give the face, the brow, as a single currency, fosters another economy that only those who travel in a certain way understand. When our self-references in other lands, in other distant cultures are abstracted, the face is the index, the icon and the symbol of what we mean, a territory of exchange and impression between our world and the unknown, its people and culture. (Guerreiro, 2012, p. 285)

M. A. Michael, in the book “*Traveller's Quest - Original Contributions Towards a Philosophy of Travel*”, published in 1950, considers that the real journey is made on foot,



without the intervention of mechanical devices. Contact with what a country is made of, landscapes and people, is only truly profound when the traveller finds himself on foot, face to face with his interlocutors, treading on the same ground. This is a genuine journey for him, without the speed and noise of mechanical means of locomotion, and adds: “The one concession is, perhaps, the bicycle. It depends upon a man for its motive power, its restrictions upon his liberty are not extensive and, being a thing of little value, it can be abandoned without great loss.” (Michael, 1950, p. 18).

There are several debatable points in this statement. The first, immediately, is the issue of being a man pedaling. In 1950 perhaps women still did not cycle. Second, we have the “thing of little value”. Effectively, my bicycle is far from being a valuable object, precisely because of this issue of being able to abandon it and continue on my way, as I so often do; but also by transport in airplanes and motor vehicles, where it is subject to damage. But anyway, it's not exactly something to abandon and throw away, as Michael suggests. Not even for the fact that the trip continues, and the bicycle continues to be needed. On the issue of mechanical means, namely air travel, Michael further clarifies:

There may be danger too in getting to the starting point for your travels. The railway is not always safe, the motor car is a lethal weapon, the aeroplane a challenge to providence. Use them, if you care to take the risk, as a means of getting quickly to the place from which you intend to set out; but your travel, if it is true travel, will be a matter of feet (...). (Michael, 1950, p. 18)

And he continues, analysing the consequent need for time, in this type of slow travel, to stop, look, investigate, and stay for a long time in the places “where delight is”. (Michael, 1950, p. 5):

(...) how can you perceive and discover unless (...) giving immediate obedience to every prompting of intuition and curiosity? (...) How can you travel if you cannot stop when a hare or fox lollaps out of the edge, or when you see a bird or animal freeze a few yards away? How can you travel if you cannot smell the scent of the hedgerows and trees, the fragrance that comes on the air, or if you cannot feel the weather? How can you travel if there is no silence and solitude? You cannot. (Michael, 1950, p. 19)

It is important to mention – before returning to the theme of uncertainty and the unknown – that the slowness of the travel is also reflected in the artistic way of doing things. That is, painting. Why don't I dedicate myself to video, for example? It is the widely used mode for reporting trips. Painting has even been called into question in the face of new technological means that are emerging in the meantime, due to the greater interest they may arouse in the current world in which we live. However “(...) the painted image resists, due to its inability to respond precisely to the principles that condemn it and that are typical of the cathodic image: speed and consumption. Because that is exactly what gives it its own potential creative space.” (Sabino, 2000, p. 225). I maintain the modalities of painting, writing, and photography as the basis of my work – admitting that it is not exactly a voluntary choice, it will be a matter of nature, propensity and personality. With regard to this, and to end the issue of the slowness of the travel - and the artistic milieu -, I quote again the words of Isabel Sabino:

A painting has similarities with the pages of a book, as a delimited structure that creates its own space and that is not only seen but read, and both, painting and book, resent in some way this time of decline of the strictest text, the verbal, in favor of visuality full of immediacy, speed and movement. (Sabino, 2000, p. 226)

\*

Let us return to the specific theme of this subchapter: uncertainty. Being alone, face to face with the unknown, on a slow journey, heightens uncertainty. In this reverence paid to the unknown – and consequently to uncertainty and chance – both appear with a preponderant role during the journey. However, they also appear later, as the driving force of the pictorial work. In chapter 4.1. this role of chance in pictorial construction was revealed. The uncertainty principle thus becomes the basis of the process – at all levels. The magic of the unknown, the fascination with the incognito, the incursion into the unpredictable, going against security, and the recuperation of amazement, throwing myself at random in the thirst for indetermination – all of this is revealed in the various aspects of both travel and art. “It is a question of touching danger very closely without letting yourself be swallowed by the dangerous face of the unknown (...). It is a balancing act, it's balancing on the monster's shoulder.” (Faria, 2014, p. 98).



Figure 75 - Runa, *The Limit*. 2021.

([Chronicle 7](#) of Greenland).

Acrylic on paper, 35 x 35 cm (13,7 x 13,7 inches). Artist's collection.

This painting – “The Limit” – evokes a solitary walk in the icy landscapes of Greenland, one of the most remarkable experiences of all my travels, where there was actually some risk. I can say that all my trips are made safely – walking through the villages of China presents the same risk as walking through the villages of Portugal – but this walk, which lasted six hours, presented risks due to the fact that I was in low temperatures, I did not know the path (which, in fact, it was not possible to see it, as it was covered with snow and ice), and additionally, there was no cell phone network. It was unexpected: the path through the mountains suddenly appeared before me; and I did not want to go back. I went ahead. I even considered it quite easy (so easy that I did it) and I defied the alerts that appeared, with warnings in bold letters, recommending the return, even alerting to the fact that the rescue expenses would be paid by me.

But if I can't take a walk – beautiful like this, white, silent – what will I be able to do in life?

So I proceeded. In amazing icy settings. Silent.

And I probably changed that day.

There is, therefore, a transforming experience of character, during the trip, through these elements that constitute it - of strangeness, uncertainty, chance, risk; experience that is enhanced later in the process of artistic work. Something new and unknown erupts and reveals itself during the journey, and the same thing happens later in the paintings. In the next chapter, the relationship between this transforming experience and its articulation with art will be analysed.

#### **4.4. – Articulation between art and travel**

Having exposed these various facets of travel, we can begin to articulate the relationship between art and travel, and one of the ways to do so, as a starting point, will be to analyse the transformation that the action of travelling brings about in each traveller, a transformation that:

(...) it fosters a component of reflexivity that, in the search for an attribution of meaning to its action, is embodied in the search for its symbolic mediation: thus, travel writing [and I add – painting] is also itself creation and mediation, being this attitude, characteristically cultural and symbolic, which realizes the specificity and universality of human action in the face of what could be considered a purely instinctive domain. (Guerreiro, 2012, p. 286)

The mediation of travel, however, does not hold exclusivity in revealing the cultural and civilizational component of the human being: the travel itself is already the revelation of this aspect: “Fluidity, mobility, illusoriness – these are precisely the qualities that make us civilized. Barbarians don’t travel. They simply go to destinations or conduct raids.” (Tokarczuk, 2007, p. 53).

But let's focus on the relationship between art and travel. The act of travelling transforms the traveller over time. I speak of the traveller in general, and, in the present study, of the artist-traveller in particular.

Returning to the theme started above, in point 4.2., about the geographic double and the revelation of character, and continuing to follow Yi-Fu Tuan's analysis: the fact of travelling and discovering new places makes aspects of me reveal themselves, to myself, that would otherwise remain hidden (2004, p.18). The human being is not a static entity, fixed in time, without evolution. If “place” largely defines who we are (being born and raised in Uzbekistan defines different ways of life and thinking than someone born and raised in Norway), if “place” defines who we are to a large extent, how was i going to say, in a condition of freedom we are not, however, limited to the place where we were born:

“Who I am is far more than how local place defines me” is the basic idea. For example, had I never left my hometown in humid eastern China, I would never have known my desert personality, never have discovered that the desert – whether in Death Valley or the lands of Acoma Pueblo – is my truer home. (Tuan, 2004, p. 42)

Tuan continues his analysis making a comparison between geographical places – physical, therefore; and works of art – as virtual places. Both places, physical and virtual, feed the “I”. Nourish it. If in physical places (towns and cities and landscapes in which we live or visit) we rest and are nourished by them, the same happens in relation to works of art: “Isn’t it true that we pause before them, rest in them, and are, in one sense or another, nurtured by them?” (2004, p. 3). Tuan relates this question of “nurturing” with place and art, as well as with the question of “departing and returning”:

The word “nurture” says two things about us: that we “feed” on places and artworks, and that, so fed, we grow. The self, in other words, is not fixed. We continue to discover who we are as we open ourselves to new sources of nurture and experience.

(...)

A self that is coherent and firm, yet capable of growth, would seem to call for an alternation of stillness and motion, stability and change, place and space, the duration of each being calibrated by culture and individual temperament. (...) such bipolar tug is common. (2004, p. 4 e 7)

There is the urge to leave and travel, but there is also the urge to return. Hence the return home of Howard Hodgkin, to then paint. Or my return too. In fact, thinking about all the destinations I've been to today, I don't remember wanting to stay the rest of my life in any of them. But perhaps I wasn't even given that hypothesis (a hypothesis given by Aladdin, from the magic lamp, or by myself). If I could choose, if I decided to live permanently in some geographical place visited by me, eventually I would choose one (or some); it would be a question to ponder. Until now, the return to Lisbon has been inevitable – and let us be pragmatic, a return that is also conditioned by financial issues, that is, support in a new geographical area of the planet. Anyway, the sun, the small houses and alleys of Lisbon, the beautiful beaches just a few minutes away, and my own house, pull me. But one thing is certain – and let us return to the question of the character and evolution of the “I”:

Home is a house and, in the larger sense, a neighbourhood, hometown, country – and, ultimately, the earth. Our identity expands and is enriched as the places in which we feel at home – if only temporarily – are multiplied. This seems to say that identity changes over time, that we are one sort of person when young and another sort when mature or old. (Tuan, 2004, pp 12-13)

The “I” evolves in time and space, that is, it goes through a path – in both: time and space. It grows stronger with the knowledge of new geographic doubles. It acquires new ways of being, thinking, and acting, as it experiences new places – new homes – even if temporary. And naturally, this is reflected in his/her work, and in particular in the type of mediation he/she carries out, of the travel. In my case, through painting, writing and photography, and quoting Ana Santos Guerreiro's phrase above: “as an attitude, characteristically cultural and symbolic”.

It is through mediation, that is, through the material dimension of the artwork – and as mentioned in chapter 4.2.: this dimension that allows transporting us to the past – that it becomes possible to “overcome space-time limitations”, in the words of Margarida Brito Alves (2012, p. 248), and which quotes Duchamp:

It was in this sense that Marcel Duchamp, who questioned the nature and legitimacy of the work of art so much, surprisingly stated, in an interview in 1956, that only through art could man transcend an animal state, given that art consists

of an access route to territories that are not regulated by space and time. (Alves, 2012, p. 248-9)

In this way, it is art that allows an experience to remain active, that it does not really disappear, that does not become simply a past. It is through this production of objects and images that the experience remains in the regime of visibility. However, being the experience represented, made present, this representation always corresponds to a proof of loss, and works as a testimony that highlights the passage of time, like the rest of a story as if it reappears from a spectral world. (Alves, 2012, p. 249). Each of the paintings presented here, paintings that relive a moment of a certain trip, only prove that I lost it, that it belongs to the past, that it is nothing more than a memory. However, it is possible to relive the experience each time I return to that virtual place. Even more than an experience, “(...) what we see is not just the capture of a more or less rarefied memory, (...) what we see is also a privileged element to see beyond the experience which served as a referent. (Alves, 2012, p. 249). We return to point 4: in my project, the pictorial mediation of the travel is not limited to representation; and we return to Klee: “it does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible.”:

What is thus at stake is not a substitution, or representation, but an act of interpretation, creation and projection. Ultimately, the material dimension of a work of art only leaves visible a small part of a complex whole that we can only imagine. Exactly like an iceberg. (Alves, 2012, p. 250)

Painting is no longer just a memory, then. Or something left. It becomes an artistic object, valid in itself, with “interpretation, creation and projection”: there is a process of subjectivation that makes it independent and autonomous - something new.



Figure 76 - Runa, *At Treetops Kenya*, 2021.

([Chronicle 3](#) of Kenya).

Acrylic and oil on paper, 42 x 58 cm (16,5 x 22,8 inches). Artist's collection.

#### **4.5. – Sense and meaning: destiny**

A journey has a beginning and an end. A journey through space and time is made. But if in space there is a departure and a return, the journey in time is different. There's no return. The path is only made in one direction, and there is no return. All small journeys become rehearsals for the great journey of life:

If we feel a certain fascination for explorers and exploration, it may be because all of us are embarked on the journey of life. We are on the move, one that is relieved by pauses, each of which produces a somewhat familiar world – a place, even if this just a camp in the Arctic wilds; the longer pauses produce homes or home-like places. While this is a good enough characterization of our journey through space, it fits less well with our journey through time. In the journey through time, there



is no pause, not even in sleep. We become older every second and move inexorably to our final destination – death. (Tuan, 2004, p. 11)



Figure 77 - Runa, *Riding the Bike (In Putrefaction)*. 2021.  
Acrylic on cardboard, 37,5 x 37,5 cm (14,7 x 14,7 inches). Artist's collection.

We can compare the displacement, from a beginning to an end, with the passage of time itself, from birth to death (Babo, 2012, p. 13). This is an omnipresent idea in all my work: the relentless path towards death. Each day that passes, each journey that is made, only translates this reality that we cannot escape. There is an “instinctive preparation for death, as the ultimate goal” (Serra, 2013, p. 358). In this painting above, “*Riding the Bike (In Putrefaction)*”, as well as in the painting “*The Limit*”, shown in chapter 4.3., I brazenly play with the theme of death – of my death:

In art, contrary to what is practiced in the life of the “civilized man”, death enters the “account of life”, art includes what such a man tends to exclude during his life or, said in a more condensed way, art is the comprehensibility (capacity of inclusion) of the incomprehensible (of absolute exteriority).”

In this rigorous sense, the artistic image is the imagination of the unimaginable: only in art – says Freud in short – “do we find men who know how to die (...)”. (Maia, 2009, p. 56)

Men and women.

The goals – or destinations – of travel are mere pretexts. Attempt to understand the final destination:

Trips are also pilgrimages. On the way in search of the spirit. Escape the condition, seek more scope, discern, understand. Accept the determination. The pilgrimage is a journey and a metaphor for the duration of life: it begins, lasts and ends. If there is benefit, if there is fatality, if there is sense. (Queiroz, 2019, p. 13)

The travel thus becomes a search for experiences, existences – for intensity – an escape from the “authoritarianism of time” (Sabino, 2014, p. 266), so that it does not limit itself to dragging me to death. When my work is not specifically about the theme of death, it is always implied.



Figure 78 - Runa, *Memento Mori - Remember you must die.* 2022.

Acrylic, oil and oil stick on unstretched canvas, 160 x 210 cm (63 x 82,6 inches). Artist's collection.

And this happens not only in the artistic discourse, but also during travel: visiting the cemeteries of the countries I travel through, for example, takes priority, as well as getting to know the funeral habits and rituals of the various cultures. The way a country – a given society and culture – faces death, and performs funeral rites, varies greatly from country to country, and I have had the opportunity to observe this, across Europe, America, Asia, Africa, Australia. A cemetery in East Timor, for example, is richly coloured. The graves have light tones: blue, green, yellow. In the verdant cemeteries in Vienna, Austria, people cycle inside, sit and read a book. Here I cycled between the tombs of Beethoven, Mozart and others. Some cemeteries have vast lawns. Others, dense vegetation, which practically prevents the passage of those who visit them (and this is not due to abandonment). Other cemeteries proudly display their tombs for those passing by on the road – this is the case in Hungary (for kilometers, the tombs greeted me, as I passed by on my bicycle). Other countries – such as Portugal – in turn hide them behind walls.

But this would be a topic for another master's dissertation. Here, we are interested in knowing that death is an omnipresent theme in my artistic project – as a mere reflection of the fact that it is an omnipresent theme in travel, and in these, in turn, as a reflection of everyday life. In this sense, painting becomes:

(...) a place where one lives peacefully with ghosts, starting by ignoring them, in a process of silencing and introspection that later makes it possible to live normally with them. (Sabino, 2014, p. 266)

Life itself is an “exercise of death” – constant rehearsals of the final path – but it is precisely this exposure to mortality that intensifies it, that makes it vivid. (Maia, 2009, pp. 92 and 108).

It is then a matter of calmly accepting the determination - the tragic condition of belonging to the race of mortals, and of playing with it. Rehearse, prowl, defy death. Probe it closely.

## 5. Conclusion

Throughout the present study, various aspects of the work of some artist-travellers have been analysed, which are a reflection of their travels, their way of being, and their character; character that is defined and/or accentuated by the travel experience. An introduction was made in chapter 1, where three essential questions were explained: motivation, that is, what led me to choose this topic; the goals I set for myself; and finally the methodology I followed; after this introduction, in chapter 2 I began by briefly analysing some authors – artist-travellers – who use travel writing in their artistic work, namely Hamish Fulton and Willy Puchner. Both resort mainly to photographic register and illustration, however the analysis of the written aspect present in these two authors served as an introduction to the next author: Francis Alÿs, who has a strong pictorial and writing component, simultaneously, in his work, that is, he paints and accompanies his paintings by travel chronicles, and as such was analysed in greater depth compared to the two previous authors.

Then, in another aspect – now combining memory and authentic experience, without using a written narrative – in chapter 3, a fourth author was analysed, Howard Hodgkin, and the emotional projection that he makes, of his travel experiences, in his painting.

In the 4th chapter I then transposed it to my own work. I actually believe that there is never really anything unique in human experience. There is always someone who has lived through similar situations and experiences, so it is possible to exchange views, analyse something that has already happened (with someone else) – which helps to analyse my own way of acting, my position in life, and consequently my artistic project.

Regarding this – my artistic project, we saw that the imagination and the unconscious are essential creative factors, and that I disconnected pictorial production from the imposition of seeking verisimilitude. In turn, we also saw that the exhibition of documents (texts and photos), together with the pictorial works, does not limit the meanings of the expositions, but that, on the contrary, it helps the analysis and discernment of the works, and also contributes to understanding their constitutive process.

For the construction of a visual discourse, I showed how I think about reality and transform it into images, with creation driven by my memories and previous experiences. In this sense, the role of authentic experience in the creation process was also analysed, through travel, which generates brief, but profound, ruptures in time and space, and forces new physical, psychological and cultural perceptive relationships.

The great reality, however, given that the experience is not shareable, that is, it is not possible to reproduce it in its entirety (at least until now, in the 21st century – and more precisely in the first 22 years of this century), what remains – the artwork – is a mere mental translation of what I saw and felt; and subject to great incompleteness and subjectivity. This attempt to reveal experience, and to materially deal with appearances, is not always perceptibly translated into painting, and examples of some artists were presented, which, in an identical way, show that perhaps this is an advantage of being a painter. That is, reality is seen subjectively – and also presented materially, through mediation, in a subjective way.

I showed how I use a variety of media to convey memories and emotions; and these means include color, abstract form, line, pattern, brush marks, geometry, transparencies, impasto and relief, or flatness, and even the edges of paper or canvas are occasionally painted. The margin, when it exists, is part of the painting, that is, it is an element worked on and cared for by me. These different pictorial elements are combined together in order to symbolically convey the perception of an experience.

My visual composition thus incorporates a universe of visual, sensorial and cultural references, through memory and look, in this journey through the world – and above all, through the inner-self.



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## **Full image index as stated in the Portuguese version:**

Figure 1 - Runa, *Mergulho no Triângulo de Coral*. 2020. (Crónica 61 de Timor-Leste). Acrílico, óleo e pastel de óleo sobre papel, 29,7 x 42 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 11].

Figure 2 - Runa, *Na Floresta da Ilha do Príncipe*. 2020. (Crónica 19 de São Tomé e Príncipe). Acrílico, óleo e pastel de óleo sobre papel, 29,7 x 40,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 15].

Figure 3 - Parque Natural Obô, São Tomé e Príncipe. Foto digital da autora, tirada durante o percurso de bicicleta pela floresta, na ilha do Príncipe. 4496 x 3000 píxeis. Arquivo da artista. (Norte, 2019a). [Página 15].

Figure 4 - Hamish Fulton, *An Object cannot Compete with an Experience*. 1999-2000. Imagem retirada de Center for Contemporary Art Kitakyushu, 2000. [Página 21].

Figure 5 - Hamish Fulton, *Touching Boulders by Hand*. 1994. Museu Coleção Berardo, CCB. Fotografia digital, 4032 x 3024 píxeis, 2022. Arquivo da artista. [Página 21].

Figure 6 - Apresentação de Hamish Fulton. Imagem retirada de Center for Contemporary Art Kitakyushu, Japão, 2000. [Página 23].

Figure 7 - Exposição de Hamish Fulton. Imagem retirada de Galeria Thomas Schulte, Berlim, 2021. [Página 23].

Figures 8 e 9 - Willy Puchner, *Illustriertes Fernweh*. 2006. Imagens retiradas do website oficial de Willy Puchner, (s.d.). [Página 26].

Figure 10 - "*I Am Too Tall, Too Pale, and Too Gringo*": Francis Alÿs on Being a Belgian Artist in Mexico City". Imagem retirada de Artspace (2018). [Página 28].

Figure 11 - Francis Alÿs, postal (s.d.). Imagem retirada de Piet Mondrian Online Studios (s.d.). [Página 29].

Figure 12 - Francis Alÿs, *Pebble Walk* (1999). Imagem retirada de Tate (2016). [Página 30].

Figure 13 - Francis Alÿs, *Narcoturismo*. 1996. Imagem retirada de Godfrey et al., 2010, p. 82. [Página 31].

Figure 14 - Mapa mostrando a distância entre as Florida Keys e Havana. Escala: 20 km. Imagem retirada de Google Maps. [Página 33].

Figure 15 - Francis Alÿs, *Sem título*, estudo para “*Bridge / Puente*”, 2006. Óleo e papel vegetal sobre tela sobre madeira, 28,7 x 35,2 x 2 cm. Imagem retirada de Alÿs et al, 2015, p. 82. [Página 34].

Figure 16 - Francis Alÿs, *Sem título*, estudo para “*Bridge / Puente*”, 2006. Óleo e encáustica sobre madeira, 15,1 x 19,9 x 2 cm. Imagem retirada de Alÿs et al, 2015, p. 91. [Página 34].

Figure 17 - Francis Alÿs, *Sem título*, estudo para “*Don't Cross the Bridge Before You Get to the River*”, 2006. Óleo e lápis sobre papel vegetal. 34,9 x 26,6 x 2 cm. Imagem retirada de Alÿs et al, 2015, p. 95. [Página 35].

Figures 18 e 19 - Francis Alÿs, *Estreito de Gibraltar*, 2008. Duas imagens retiradas de Galerie Peter Kilchmann (2019). [Página 37].

Figures 20 e 21 - Ambas as obras: Francis Alÿs, *Sem título (Tânger)*, estudos para “*Don't Cross the Bridge Before You Get to the River*”, 2007. Óleo sobre tela sobre madeira. Cada obra: 17,7 x 12,6 x 1,4 cm. Duas imagens retiradas de Alÿs et al, 2015, p. 123. [Página 37].

Figures 22 e 23 - Francis Alÿs, *Cuatro Caminos* (díptico), estudos para “*Don't Cross the Bridge Before You Get to the River*”, 2007. Óleo sobre tela sobre madeira. Cada

obra: 22,4 x 14 x 2 cm. Duas imagens retiradas de Alÿs et al, 2015, pp. 106 e 107. [Página 39].

Figure 24 - Francis Alÿs, *Sem título (Herat)*, 2012. Óleo sobre tela sobre madeira, 12,7 x 17,8 x 1 cm. Imagem retirada de Alÿs et al, 2015, p. 178. [Página 40].

Figure 25 - Howard Hodgkin, *Black as Egypt's Night*. 2005 - 2013, 48.9 x 56.5 cm, óleo sobre madeira. [Página 43].

Figure 26 - Howard Hodgkin, *Paris*. 1962, 91 x 102 cm, óleo sobre tela. [Página 44].

Figure 27 - Howard Hodgkin em 1970, com 38 anos de idade. Foto retirada da revista "Glasstire" (Patterson, 2017). [Página 45].

Figure 28 - Howard Hodgkin, *In the Train*. 1979 – 1981, 44,5 x 44,5 cm, óleo sobre madeira. [Página 45].

Figure 29 - Susan Sontag, Annie Leibovitz e Howard Hodgkin no Egípto, 1993. (Foto retirada de Howard Hodgkin Studio, Instagram oficial). [Página 47].

Figure 30 - Howard Hodgkin, *Mud on the Nile*. 1993, 41,3 x 45,7 cm, óleo sobre madeira. [Página 48].

Figure 31 - Howard Hodgkin, *Arabian Sea*. 2008 – 2010, 51,1 x 59,1 cm, óleo sobre madeira. [Página 46].

Figure 32 - Howard Hodgkin, *Sunset*. 1990 – 1993, 57 x 65,5 cm, óleo sobre madeira. [Página 50].

Figure 33 - Howard Hodgkin, *The Last Time I Saw Paris*. 1988 – 1991, 113 x 127 cm. Óleo sobre madeira. [Página 52].

Figure 34 - Howard Hodgkin, *In Paris With You*. 1995 – 1996, 71 x 88,9 cm. [Página 52].

Figure 35 - Howard Hodgkin na Índia, *still* retirado do documentário da BBC sobre o artista. (Parsons, 2006). [Página 54].

Figure 36 - (Descrição das fotos no texto abaixo). Fotos retiradas de Howard Hodgkin Studio, Instagram oficial. [Página 55].

Figure 37 - Howard Hodgkin, *Indian Veg.* 2013 – 2014. Total: 23,5 x 104,8 cm. Esquerda: 23,5 x 33 cm; Centro: 22,2 x 35 cm. Óleo sobre madeira. [Página 56].

Figure 38 - Howard Hodgkin, *From the Terrace, Bombay.* 2015 – 2016, 41,9 x 52,7 cm, óleo sobre madeira. [Página 57].

Figure 39 - Howard Hodgkin, *Dark Moon.* 1982 – 1984, 31,4 cm (diâmetro). [Página 58].

Figure 40 - Howard Hodgkin, *Miami.* 1996, 43,2 x 48,2 cm. [Página 59].

Figure 41 - Howard Hodgkin, *Bombay.* 2015 – 2016, 148,6 x 168,3 cm, óleo sobre madeira. [Página 60].

Figure 42 - Howard Hodgkin, *Venice Sunset.* 1989, 26 x 30 cm, óleo sobre madeira. [Página 60].

Figure 43 - Howard Hodgkin, *Venice Evening.* 1984 – 1985, 37 x 44,5 cm, óleo sobre madeira. [Página 61].

Figure 44 - Howard Hodgkin, *In Bed in Venice.* 1984 – 1988, 98,2 x 119,1 cm, óleo sobre madeira. [Página 62].

Figure 45 - Howard Hodgkin, *Into the Woods, Summer.* 2001 – 2002, 203,2 x 133,3 cm, gravura. [Página 62].

Figure 46 - Howard Hodgkin, *Coast.* 2015 – 2016, 36 x 42 cm, gravura. [Página 63].

Figure 47 - Runa, *Gato a Dormir Comigo Debaixo dos Cobertores*. 2021. Acrílico sobre papel, 40,7 x 29,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 67].

Figure 48 - Runa, *Autorretrato (Homenagem a Howard Hodgkin)*. 2021. Acrílico, óleo e barra de óleo sobre papel, 29,7 x 40,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 67].

Figure 49 - Runa, *A Ilha*. 2020. (Crónica 50 dos Açores). Acrílico e óleo sobre tela, 116 x 81 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 68].

Figure 50 - Selfie na ilha do Corvo, Açores. Fotografia digital, 5827 x 4082 píxeis. Arquivo da artista. Publicada em Crónica 50 dos Açores. [Página 69].

Figure 51 - Runa, *Passeio de Canoa num Igapó*. 2020. (Crónica 55 da Amazônia). Acrílico, óleo e pastel de óleo sobre papel, 29,7 x 40,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 70].

Figure 52 – Foto digital da autora, tirada na Amazônia. 2048 x 1360 píxeis. Arquivo da artista. Publicada na Crónica 55 da Amazônia. [Página 70].

Figure 53 - Runa, *Vila do Corvo*. 2020. (Crónica 44 dos Açores). Acrílico e óleo sobre papel, 29,7 x 40,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 72].

Figure 54 - Runa, *Grande Senhor do Reino dos Pássaros*. 2020. Acrílico e óleo sobre tela não esticada, 26,5 x 63,5 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 74].

Figure 55 - Runa, *Melro, o Mensageiro*. 2020. Acrílico e óleo sobre papel, 29,7 x 40,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 74].

Figure 56 - Runa, *Serpenteando entre as Grandes Montanhas Verdes da Áustria*. 2020. (Crónica 1 - De bicicleta ao longo do rio Danúbio) . Acrílico e óleo sobre papel, 40,7 x 29,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 75].

Figure 57 - Runa, *Nights in Udaipur, India*. 2021. Acrílico, óleo, cera e barra de óleo sobre tela não esticada. 126 x 91 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 79].

Figure 58 - Runa, *Autorretrato no atelier*. 2021. Fotografia digital, 6000 x 4000 píxeis. Lisboa, Portugal. Arquivo da artista. [Página 82].

Figure 59 - Runa, *Ilha de Ataúro, Timor-Leste*. 2021. (Crónica 61 de Timor-Leste). Acrílico, óleo, cera, pastel de óleo e barra de óleo sobre tela, 126 x 91 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 85].

Figure 60 - Runa, *Going Far*. 2021. (Crónicas da Patagónia). Acrílico, óleo e barra de óleo sobre tela não esticada, 91 x 126 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 86].

Figure 61 - Runa, *Cocktail at Sunset*. 2021. Acrílico, óleo e barra de óleo sobre papel, 40,7 x 29,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 87].

Figures 62 e 63 - Runa, fotografias de estúdio de “*Going Far*”, em progresso. 2021. Fotografias digitais, dimensões variáveis. Arquivo da artista. [Página 88].

Figure 64 - Runa, exemplos de estudos digitais para “*Going Far*”, 2021. Dimensões variáveis, arquivo da artista. [Página 89].

Figure 65 - Runa, *A Minha Cabana no Amazonas*. 2020. (Crónica 67 da Amazônia). Acrílico, óleo e pastel de óleo sobre papel, 29,5 x 41,6 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 93].

Figure 66 - Runa, *Segredo*. 2020. Acrílico e óleo sobre papel, 29,7 x 40,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 94].

Figure 67 - Pequim, China. Foto digital com a autora, tirada por um anónimo, no 24º dia da viagem. 2048 x 1360 píxeis. Arquivo da artista. Publicada na crónica 128 da China. [Página 96].



Figure 68 - Runa, *Gruta do Natal - ilha Terceira, Açores*. 2021. (Crónica 105 dos Açores). Óleo sobre papel, 29,7 x 40,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 97].

Figure 69 - Runa, *Algar do Carvão, ilha Terceira, Açores*. 2021. (Crónica 97 dos Açores). Óleo sobre papel, 29,7 x 40,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 97].

Figure 70 - Runa, *Uba Budo Velho*. 2021. (Crónica 78 de São Tomé e Príncipe). Acrílico, óleo, barra de óleo e pastel de óleo sobre papel, 29,7 x 40,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 98].

Figure 71 - Runa, *Pulsão*. 2021. Acrílico e barra de óleo sobre papel, 29,7 x 40,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 99].

Figure 72 - Runa, *Jardim do Torel*. 2020. Acrílico e óleo sobre papel, 39,8 x 55,4 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 100].

Figure 73 - Runa, *The Secret Hideout*. 2022. Acrílico, óleo, barra de óleo e pastel de óleo sobre tela não esticada, 210 x 170 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 101].

Figure 74 - Runa, *Gruta das Torres, ilha do Pico, Açores*. 2021. (Crónica 83 dos Açores). Acrílico, óleo, barra de óleo e pastel de óleo sobre papel, 40,7 x 29,7 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 103].

Figure 75 - Runa, *O Limite*. 2021. (Crónica 7 da Gronelândia). Acrílico sobre papel, 35 x 35 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 108].

Figure 76 - Runa, *At Treetops Kenya*, 2021. (Crónica 3 do Quênia). Acrílico e óleo sobre papel, 42 x 58 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 113].

Figure 77 - Runa, *Riding the Bike (In Putrefaction)*. 2021. Acrílico sobre cartão, 37,5 x 37,5 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 114].

Figure 78 - Runa, *Memento Mori - Lembra-te que vais morrer*. 2022. Acrílico, óleo e barra de óleo sobre tela não esticada, 160 x 210 cm. Artist's collection. [Página 116].





FINE ARTS FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LISBON

Rute Norte

*The experience of place: its influence on the pictorial production of the artist-traveller,  
in the 21st century*

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