HELENA CORRÊA DE BARROS
Fotografia, a minha viagem preferida

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PHOTOGRAPHY AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY: HELENA CORRÊA DE BARROS, A WOMAN PHOTOGRAPHER

Filipa Lowndes Vicente

Could we consider Helena Corrêa de Barros to be an autobiographical photographer? At a very early age, she began writing diaries, as well as taking photographs, becoming the author of a photographic diary, in which she recorded family events, the people that were close to her, and her travels. Photographs of whatever was near at hand, but not herself. Can we think about her practice as being inextricably linked to her female identity, which, by determining both mobility and experiences, affected what women could see, write, create and produce? I am not talking here about a "female photography" or a pre-determined "woman's gaze", but instead about a photography that was frequently dependent on the historical, social and political places that women tended to occupy and from where they could produce knowledge or creativity.

The development of photography, invented in 1839 and then spreading far and wide in the second half of the nineteenth century, was contemporary to the politicisation of women's rights, their access to education, their possibility of frequenting universities and artistic academies, as well as their access to paid professions and careers and to political representation. The history of photography coincided in many ways with the growing visibility and presence of women in the public sphere. But, just as happened in all the other areas of intellectual and artistic production, their gender affected what activities were open to them and how they could perform them. Despite the existence of some exceptions in this initial period, such as Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879), most women photographed either "at home", taking as the themes for their photographs their own family environment, their immediate surroundings, or "in the studio", especially working as collaborators of their fathers and husbands. Clementina Lady Hawarden (1822-1865), photographing her daughters in her London home, is a typical example of this trend, which began to be developed at the very beginning of photography, but which, as we shall see in the case of Helena Corrêa de Barros, persisted throughout the twentieth century, when people's biographical paths continued to be largely determined by their gender, whether they were male or female.[1] Although, in the period when Corrêa de Barros was taking photographs, there already existed countless cases of women engaging in photography as a profession or an artistic career, there still persisted, as we shall see, the stigma of the "lady amateur". Her original and progressive education in the Portuguese context of that time, together with the cosmopolitanism that she inherited from her privileged Jewish origins, gave her the freedom and the space not to be hidebound by the constraints that most commonly affected the women from her circle who lived in Portugal. However, Helena took her photographs without overstepping the gender boundaries that were considered appropriate for a woman from her social milieu.

[1] ARMSTRONG, Carol – From Clementina to Käsebier: The Photographic Attainment of the Lady Amateur. *October*. Vol. 91 (Winter, 2000), pp. 101-139.

In this text, I shall focus on two themes: first of all, on her Angola album, a "family album" that must also be considered within the broad visual archive of the Portuguese colonial experience; and, secondly, on some of the approaches that have been made to the combination of these two identities, "photographer" and "woman", as well as to possible paths that might be followed in writing a history of the female photographic practice in Portugal.

1. The Angola album: photographing, selecting, pasting, writing captions

The Photograph Album: the Curatorship of Images and Words

"We left Lisbon on 29 September 1950 on the steamship Angola." This is how the narrative begins in the form of brief captions in the photograph album made by Helena Corrêa de Barros[2]. "Made" in every sense of the word – she was the photographer, but she was also the organiser of the album and the author of the phrases written in white crayon, so that they would stand out better on the sheets of dark cardboard onto which she glued the black-and-white photographs. The organisation of photograph albums was a practice that had been associated with photography ever since its invention. And, as a recent exhibition clearly demonstrated, it was also a female practice, appropriate to the domestic leisure enjoyed by women from the most privileged social circles, who knew about photography before its democratisation.[3] Not only in her albums of black-and-white photographs, but also in the classification and organisation of her colour slides, the photographer showed herself to be a methodical and organised curator of her own work.

The Angola album has a narrative and autobiographical dimension that is to be found throughout Helena Corrêa de Barros' work. But, while, in her colour slides, the individuality of each image always relates to the fragmentation of an experience, even if it also forms part of a broader narrative – a journey, for example – the album with its black-and-white images takes us through a space with a defined chronology, unifying an event and giving it a specific time and place. The leather-bound album-book keeps all the pictures in just one place and consequently obliges us to see them as a whole. Each page corresponds to one day. We turn the pages of the album just as we turn the pages of a calendar. Images and words, photographs and captions, the visual and the written, joined together in just one object for just one person.

The black-and-white photographs of her trip to Angola appear to form a contrast with the colour photographs of the leisure trips that she took around Europe, shared with her family and friends, on an excursion, in a group. These were like the words from the song *Kodachrome*, by Paul Simon, "makes you think all the world's a sunny day".[4] But her Angola was also an extension of her family and her emotional life – with visits to friends and outings – shown just as it was, and photographed in colour. The traveller's gaze was forever inseparable from that of the photographer. Photography was part of Helena Corrêa de Barros' leisure time, a constituent

[2] See Album 005 of the Helena Corrêa de Barros Collection PT/AMLSB/HCB/005, at http://arquivomunicipal.cm-lisboa.pt.

[3] *Qui a peur des femmes photographes? 1839 à 1945*. Paris: Musée de d'Orsay; Hazan, 2015. Catalogue of the exhibition that took place at both the Musée de l'Orangerie (1839-1919) and the Musée d'Orsay (1918-1945) between 14 October 2015 and 24 January 2016.

[4] Paul Simon wrote the lyrics and the music of the song "Kodachrome" (1973).

part of every exceptional moment in her day-to-day life. Colonialism in its modern configuration is contemporary with photography. The result of this combination is a vast visual archive to which this album belongs. Just like so many other photograph albums, this one is situated on the somewhat blurred frontier between the private and the public, both in the "Angola" that it shows through the photographs and in the very history of the object itself, a personal and private album that now belongs to a public space.

Passage to Africa

Under the first caption in the album – the boat with the same name as the destination of her journey, "Angola" – there appear the first four photographs in this visual book, taken while Helena was still in Lisbon, but already aboard the steamboat that would take her to Africa: two pictures of her family and friends who had come to bid farewell to them from the quay, but now seen from the deck above (the bird's-eye view that she was especially fond of), and two of the crowd, composed of the families and friends of all the others who were also about to leave. The port, as a place of arrival and departure, is a predominant theme of the history of twentieth-century Portuguese photography. There are the ships setting sail with emigrants to Brazil at the beginning of the century; the soldiers heading to the colonies to fight in the war in the 1960s; or the boats bringing back the containers with the material and personal remains from the colonial empire. But, as in these photographs by Corrêa de Barros, we can also see the Portuguese departing for the colonies, people with very different social and economic origins, who found a new way of life in the colonial space. These first photos are followed by pages with views of the boat and the brief stopover at the Reid's Hotel in Madeira; the life on board, consisting of dinners and dancing; the swimming-pool, the dolphin in the sea; in one of the photographs, the first sign of the Portuguese colonial experience – a black servant dressed in white, viewed from behind, contrasting with the white population photographed still on board the boat. A space that was shared by distinct social spheres: those who paid to travel and those who were working their passage, a form of subsistence.

The first place where they landed in Africa, on 8 October, was in São Tomé. "We disembarked in São Tomé (...) and we immediately set off to buy some colonial hats and then went for lunch at the Monte Café plantation". In the group photographs, they can already be seen wearing their hats. One of the men belonging to the group was photographed at the door of a poor-looking house, standing next to a black girl, the type of picture that was very commonly found in photographs taken in a colonial context, in which white men were photographed next to black women. Two days later, they arrived in Luanda. Three photographs record their arrival, just as they also announce what is to be the position of privilege from which she will "see" Angola: the white Portuguese friends, in whose house they will stay, and two views of the "terrace of the headquarters of the Bank of Angola".

Photographing Colonial Construction

The very next day, the photographs reveal the professional connections of her husband with Luanda as the *leitmotif* of the journey, showing the visit to the construction site of a C.U.C.A. brewery "which Omes is building close to Luanda". The women and men visible in the photographs are all black. They are not posing for the photograph, but working, with their backs to the camera, or

walking and carrying heavy weights on their bodies. This was to be the first visit of several others that would also earn the right to photographs to be glued to the pages of the album. On 17 October, they visited the branch of the Bank of Angola, in Silva Porto, and, once again, Corrêa de Barros' lens focused on the black men working on the building site. Two days later, they went to see another branch of the Bank of Angola under construction, this time in Benguela. Sometimes completely unaware of the presence of the camera, on other occasions stopping for a few moments to look straight at it, the workers make their appearance once again. Cars – their maintenance and breakdowns – or animals blocking off roads, were another of the themes of the album. Other characteristic themes of her photography that were also to be found in Angola were the means of transport and the buildings associated with geographical movement and tourism: the boat on the way out, the plane returning home, the hotels and places where she slept, and, above all, the broken-down cars revealing the added challenges of mobility in Angola.

On another car journey, she photographed the countryside and the landscape where human construction was not yet visible, although it was already announced in her caption – "The Biopio Waterfall where they are carrying out studies to build a dam". At the end of October, they visited the bridge at Bero, which was almost ready, and Helena photographed several views of the bridge and dyke. These images can be said to belong to a long tradition of photography, recording the material realisation of colonial projects. The construction of railways, ports or bridges in colonised spaces, in India or Africa, in the second half of the nineteenth century, frequently involved photographers being commissioned to record the engineering works as they transformed the landscape. The structure that Omes built for collecting water and deposits in the area around Porto Alexandre was also photographed. The process involved in the construction of a building or a bridge, the before and after, was something that fascinated Corrêa de Barros, as is also demonstrated by the album she compiled of the building of her house in Lisbon.

The Labour of the Colonised People

On the "beautiful trip" to Icau, the black population reappeared in the cotton and palm plantations and at a palm-oil factory. Five young black men momentarily stopped working in order to look at the camera. Only one of them is smiling. On other days, she photographed sisal and coffee plantations. Work was the main place for meetings between the colonists and the people whose land they were colonising, just as it was also a place of inequality, a very highly accentuated inequality that was also to be found in metropolitan Portugal, but which in the colonial space was further exacerbated by the racial differences and the endemic and naturalised racism that, even when it wasn't officially promulgated, was part of the everyday life of most colonial relations, as well as of people's language and discourse. Corrêa de Barros' lens bore witness to the contrast between these two types of work: on the one hand, the manual labour of the people, both men and women, the colonised and black people; and, on the other hand, the work of the administrators, the governors and engineers who designed and executed the projects and who supervised and paid for the labour of the others.

The history of work – from slave labour to forced labour and the ways in which the racialisation of work was structural in nature – has been one of the main lines of research in recent studies about colonialism. Photography captured the work of the colonised people in various ways: sometimes it appeared in postcards, books or leaflets as a form of publicity for specific companies or national

colonial projects; on other occasions, it appeared as a denunciation of the inhuman working conditions to which these populations were frequently subjected. Corrêa de Barros' images did not fit into either of these two categories, which were more commonplace and more studied. Her photographic gaze was not one of denunciation or propaganda; it was, indeed, the testimony of someone who was in the position of a visitor, someone who was passing through, and using the camera as an integral part of her experience.

Unequal Encounters

On another page, we see a dirt track stretching endlessly into the distance. There are no cars visible, but there are two black women carrying heavy loads on their heads. One of them is breastfeeding her baby. In a third photograph, another woman, interrupting her gesture of picking up some earth from the ground, looks into the camera lens. "Roadbuilding gang at work". On another page, also far from an urban area, four photographs show "some curious black men from this region", in a record made in a descriptive language and already rendered banal by one hundred years of "ethnographic" photography in the context of European colonialisms in Africa since the second half of the nineteenth century.[5] Some of the captions reveal the naturalisation of the fact that "some are more equal than others" and that the "others", in a historical colonial context, are, above all, black.

Day by day, photography accompanied her throughout her stay. On the morning of 12 October, Corrêa de Barros went walking "around the city", writing this in her captions: "The High School" and "The Market". In the afternoon, she left the city and went to the district of Candelabres, where she photographed the beach and the fishermen's village. On the back of the same cardboard sheet: the other side of the colony, the private and domestic life of the Portuguese hosts of Helena Corrêa de Barros, the mother with her two small children. The girls with their best white dresses, and a bunch of flowers in their hands. Snapshots of the life of the most privileged colonisers appear throughout the album: the children of friends, the visit to a waterfall, a lunch outdoors in the open air in the shade of a large tree – white people, with their family and friends close by, black people in the distance, the two photographic grounds mirroring the two social strata that were permanently coming across one another in countless different ways in the Portuguese territories in Africa. On a page of the album with only two photographs, Corrêa de Barros joined together what she understood as being the two colonial worlds. On the left, two black women with very full baskets, at the head of the group, are walking barefoot along a dirt track; on the right, a black man, with his back turned, is putting water into a large and handsome-looking car, with its bonnet open. By his side, a white man, probably the owner of the car, stands watching. "16 October: lunch in Bimbe and putting water in the car". On the one side, the world of the socially and economically privileged white Portuguese (and not the white Portuguese of inferior social origins, soldiers and colonial officers, who, in the colonial space, were able to deviate from what would be their normally expected life paths, enjoying greater social mobility than they did in the metropolis); and, on the other side, the world of the colonised black people, working on Portuguese projects, either in the construction industry or in agriculture, or engaged in the daily labour of eking out a livelihood, as was the case with the women. The last photograph in the

[5] For the Portuguese case, see the work of the thirty authors published in VICENTE, Filipa Lowndes (ed.), *O Império da visão: fotografia no contexto colonial português (1860-1960)*. Lisbon: Edições 70, 2014.

album is also her return home. This time not by boat, but by plane, the jagged shape of the coastline viewed beneath the clouds and bearing the following caption: "In sight of Lisbon".

The themes, places, people and events that Helena Corrêa de Barros photographed were less visible than many others, for they were the ones that still tended to be kept inside the houses of the families of the people who experienced them. There are thousands of visual fragments of the social life of this colonial elite living in Portuguese Africa, who enjoyed a comfortable economic status combined with the serenity of not being opposed to Salazar's political regime, living in private houses, and who still think of these pictures as "family memories" and not as "historical memories". But rarer than this are the groups of pictures created by one person, especially by one woman on her own, with the photographic awareness, the persistence and the solidity of an autobiographical-photographic project, as was the case with Helena Corrêa de Barros.

2. A history yet to be written: the relationship between women and photography in Portugal

The bibliography about the relationship between women and photography is already a very vast one, including, above all, the books that have been published on this subject in Great Britain and the United States. This does not happen by chance, for it is also here that we can find academic contexts and national museums where the history of photography and visual culture, on the one hand, and gender-based and feminist approaches to the study of the subject, on the other hand, have been more widely developed for some time. In Portugal, most of the studies on this theme, in the form of publications or exhibitions, are fragmentary in nature. Without seeking to make an exhaustive analysis of this question here, I should just like to mention some of the works published on this subject, as I consider that this may be a useful exercise for other researchers.[6] Rita Magalhães Barros, who is herself a photographer, wrote a small pioneering article, entitled "Portuguese women photographers".[7] Nuno Borges de Araújo, a specialist in nineteenth-century Portuguese photography, has been gathering together information about women photographers or women who photographed in Portugal and the bibliographical sources that mention them: from Madame Fritz to Maria Eugénia Reya Campos (the main subject of a PhD thesis by Carmen Almeida[8] and a Master's degree dissertation currently being written by Paula Viegas[9]), Rose Dabney,

[6] Researchers interested in this question will also have to look for references to female photographers in more general works, such as those by António Sena, *História da imagem fotográfica em Portugal 1839-1997*. Porto: Porto Editora, 1997; Luís Pavão, *The Photographers of Lisbon: Portugal from 1866 to 1914*. Rochester, New York: MFA Photographic Program School of Photographic Arts and Sciences, Rochester Institute of Technology, MA Thesis; History of European Photography 1900-1930. FOTOFO, 2010. 1º vol.; Emília Tavares, *Batalha de sombras: colecção de fotografia portuguesa dos anos 50 do Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea – Museu do Chiado*. Vila Franca de Xira: Câmara Municipal de Vila Franca de Xira, Museu do Neo-Realismo, 2009); Nuno Borges de Araújo, "Portugal", in Hannavy, John (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*. New York: Routledge Reference, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008. vol. II, pp. 1151-1154.

[7] Rita Magalhães Barros, "Mulheres fotógrafas portuguesas". *Ersatz*. Porto: Centro Português de Fotografia. Nº 3 (Março, 2000), pp. 24-27.

[8] Cármen Dolores Avó Baião Ferreira de Almeida, *A divulgação da fotografia no Portugal Oitocentista: protagonistas, práticas e redes de circulação do saber*. PhD Thesis in the History and Philosophy of Science from the University of Évora in 2017.

[9] VIEGAS, Paula Cristina de Pinho Coelho Cintra – *Pioneiras da fotografia em Portugal: as cartes de visite e os cabinets de Maria Eugénia Campos*. Master's Degree Dissertation in Art, Heritage and Restoration Theory, presented at the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon in 2018.

Marian Searl, Margarida and Mariana Relvas (respectively the wife and daughter of the great photographer Carlos Relvas[10]), Queen Dona Maria Pia of Savoy and Dona Amélia de Orléans. For the first half of the twentieth century, attention is drawn to one name in particular, Maria Lamas. A feminist, writer, journalist and also a photographer-traveller, the author of *As mulheres do meu país (1948-50)*, a pivotal book for the writing of twentieth-century Portuguese history, she has not enjoyed the exposure and attention that she deserves, as has already been mentioned.[11] This secondary importance is also due to the fact that the intellectual and creative work of Portuguese women from various historical periods tends to be considered a theme for "gender studies" or "women's history", instead of being incorporated into the thematic canons of Portuguese social and human sciences.

Exhibitions, *Salons*, Magazines and Newspapers: Where are the Women's Names?

A history of the photographic practice of women in Portugal will necessarily have to involve a search for women's names in exhibition catalogues, at *salons*[12], photographic competitions, or the authorship of photographs in magazines and newspapers. Even so, it will always be easier to find names rather than the actual works. In 1916, for example, the first *National Exhibition of Photography*[13] was organised in Lisbon. Promoted by a magazine with the name of *Arte Photographica* and displayed at the *Palácio Nacional de Belas Artes*, the exhibition presented just one female exhibitor alongside the many male photographers who were to mark this generation: Arnaldo Garcez, Jorge de Almeida Lima, Alvão and Dr. Vilarinho Pereira. In the section dedicated to calotype, one of the techniques of photographic reproduction, Mademoiselle B. Leitão presented two portraits and two landscapes, with these latter two pictures receiving an honourable mention. This is just one example of the many catalogues of photography exhibitions that took place in Portugal and in the Portuguese colonial area, or in Portuguese representations at international, universal and colonial exhibitions, abroad, both in the nineteenth and the twentieth century.

By the middle of the twentieth century, female participation in such exhibitions was still far too scarce to be noted. This was in clear contrast to what was happening in the equivalent sphere in other countries, such as Sweden or the United States where there was a

[10] VICENTE, António Pedro – *Carlos Relvas fotógrafo*. Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda, 1984; *Carlos Relvas (1838-1894): vistas inéditas de Portugal: os salões de fotografia Europeus*, curators Victor Flores, Ana David Mendes, Denis Pellerin, Emília Tavares. Exhibition currently on display at the Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea – Museu do Chiado, Lisbon (27 September 2018 to 20 January 2019).

[11] The scattered bibliography about Maria Lamas as a feminist, writer and journalist is a vast one. But Maria Lamas as a photographer and the author of a book where photography is given great prominence is far from enjoying the recognition and public visibility that she deserves, as, in fact, has already been written by several people in different ways: see the texts by Alexandre Pomar, "Maria Lamas no dia da fotografia" (10.8.2009) and, recently, "Maria Lamas fotógrafa" (1.1.2018), in *Blog Alexandre Pomar*; see the catalogue of the exhibition edited by Jorge Calado, which includes her as a woman photographer, *Au Féminin: women photographing women 1849-2009*. Paris: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian-Paris, 2009; see also the biography by Maria Antónia Fiadeiro, *Maria Lamas Biografia*. Lisbon: Quetzal, 2003; and the article by Manuel Villaverde Cabral, "Texto e imagem fotográfica no primeiro contra-discurso durante o Estado Novo: 'As mulheres do meu país' de Maria Lamas". *Comunicação Pública: Revista da Escola Superior de Comunicação Social*. 12, N.º 23 (2017), pp. 1-27.

[12] About this period and this photographic practice, see Emília Tavares, *Batalha de sombras: colecção de fotografia portuguesa dos anos 50 do Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea – Museu do Chiado*. Vila Franca de Xira: Câmara Municipal de Vila Franca de Xira, Museu do Neo-Realismo, 2009

[13] *Catálogo da primeira Exposição Nacional de Photographia, realizada em Novembro de 1916 no Palácio Nacional de Bellas Artes, Lisboa, e promovida pela revista Photographica.*

significant participation of women in the photographic salons of this period. In the magazine *Fotografia*, an article by João Martins in 1953 painted an overall picture about the "International Salons of Photographic Art" in recent years, listing all the names of the national participants. For 1950, the only woman was Dona Isaura Cameirão.[14] In 1952, no woman's name was to appear at all, while in 1953 it was João Martins himself who wrote that "in this year, there was a representation of Portuguese women with the names of the Marchioness of Fronteira and Helena Corrêa de Barros, the latter appearing with various entries". The two friends' names once again appeared together at the 1st International Exhibition of Photographs from Photo Clubs, which took place in Vienna in 1955.[15] The Marchioness had set up a photographic laboratory at the Palácio Fronteira, where she resided as the holder of the title, and, just like Helena, she had the possibility of purchasing the best photographic materials that were available on the market. While Corrêa de Barros photographed with a Leica, the Marchioness of Fronteira used a Rolleicord or a Rolleiflex, and it was she herself who printed her photographs at home, representing yet another case of a woman belonging to a Portuguese elite that had turned photography into a practice that was taken seriously, with an investment in knowledge, materials and time.[16]

Helena Corrêa de Barros is the most active of all the participants in the dozens of catalogues of photography exhibitions, both national and international, that are to be found in the Lisbon Municipal Photographic Archive for the 1950s. While the names of other women appear very sporadically, sometimes only once, hers is the only name that is to be found spanning the whole decade, revealing her investment, interest and persistence in going beyond the mere private domesticity of her photographic practice. Her initiative reveals some ambition in transforming the practice into a kind of professional "amateurism", or, in other words, seeking the approval of the public and social sphere in which the categories of "merit" and "quality" were defined. This legitimation came from the juries of the competitions and exhibitions that chose some works and rejected others; from membership of (predominantly male) clubs, where the social relations were based on a shared fondness for photography; from the public exhibition of the photographer's work, exposed to the gazes of complete strangers; and from seeing one's name in print as a "photographer". With this experience of hers, and based on the fact that the presence of women at the Portuguese photography clubs of this period was so rare, Helena Corrêa de Barros succeeded in passing some way beyond the most common photographic practices of women, namely those where photography remained in the private sphere and was seen only by family and friends.

[14] MARTINS, João – Os Salões internacionais de arte fotográfica (conclusão). II (os actuais expositores). *Fotografia: revista mensal ao serviço da arte fotográfica*. Lisbon. A. II N.º 9 (Jul. 1955), p. 23

[15] SENA, Eduardo Harrington, 1ª exibição internacional de fotografias de Foto Clubes. *Fotografia: revista mensal ao serviço da arte fotográfica*. Lisbon. A. II N.º 10 (Out. 1955), p. 30.

[16] Maria Margarida Canavarro de Menezes Fernandes Costa, Marchioness of Fronteira (1915-2004). I wish to thank my friend the architect Pedro George for the various pieces of information that he shared with me about the wife of his father, Frederico George (1915-1994), an artist, architect, designer, and even a photographer, from 1960 onwards. The photographic laboratory that she used for developing prints at the Palácio Fronteira was built at her own request in the mid-1950s. She frequently used Rolleicord and Rolleiflex, and these cameras are still in the possession of her family, just like some of her photographs, organised into albums (with the present-day Marquis of Fronteira, her nephew, José Maria Mascarenhas). Pedro lived at the Palácio Fronteira and remembers seeing them with their cameras hung around their necks. He himself was photographed by the Marchioness in 1964-1965.

The Stigma of the Lady Amateur

In order to better understand the relationship between photography and women, as a historically determined social experience, we have to think about the relationship that women had not only with the visual arts, but also with writing and literary production. The question of amateurism was central to the three practices until well into the twentieth century – painting, writing (since at least the sixteenth century, but especially so since the eighteenth century) and photography (at the beginning of the twentieth century, when photographic technology became lighter, easier and more accessible).[17] Women could paint, write and even take photographs, and sometimes they were actually encouraged to pursue this path, when they belonged to a social environment where there was time and money for leisure. But they were expected to do so within their own domestic and family space, where there weren't any commercial transactions, and where they weren't subject to exposure and public recognition or the scrutiny of specialist critics.

Professionalisation and prestige tended to be synonymous with the male world; amateurism, without any pretensions to establishing one's name in the artistic or literary field, and as a form of recreational domesticity, was confused with the feminist world. As was stated by the British art historian Griselda Pollock, who has written extensively on these questions, "women's practice in art has never been absolutely forbidden, discouraged or refused, but rather contained and limited to its function as the means by which masculinity gains and sustains its supremacy in the important sphere of cultural production".[18] Those women who aspired to enjoy an artistic or professional career had to challenge the power of the image of female dilettantism and the tendency – visible in the literary and artistic criticism of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – to attribute their lack of quality to the fact that they were women. If a woman artist or writer were considered "bad", this was attributed to the characteristics of her sex; whereas if the same thing happened with a man, the generalisation was not extended to the fact of their being "men", with such an assessment being limited to their individual identity.

The force of this category of amateurism associated with women also arose from the substantial increase in the number of women writing, as well as painting or taking photographs, from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. By becoming more visible in the public sphere, they succeeded in blurring the boundaries drawn between the different categories of artistic practices, and it became more necessary to draw distinctions between professional artists (implicitly male) and amateur artists (associated more with women). This dichotomy was obviously not a watertight distinction. Its dividing lines were drawn in a constant battlefield throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and until at least the mid-twentieth century. In many geographies, the gender questions always implied a negotiation: between the sphere of amateurism and professionalisation; between painting, photography or writing as a leisure activity, a private, intimate and domestic exercise, or, on the contrary, as a publication, an exhibition or a sale.

One of the options that women had to channel their creativity, minimising the subversive potential, was to transform the "home" into a studio and into a theme – home used here in its broadest sense, of a physical space such as the family sphere and the world

[17] VICENTE, Filipa Lowndes – Identidade artística no século XIX: a artista-amadora, a artista-operária e a artista-masculina. *A Arte sem história: mulheres e cultura artística (séculos XVI-XX)*. Lisbon: Babel, 2012. pp. 153-177.

[18] POLLOCK, Griselda; PARKER, Rozsika – *Old mistresses: women, art and ideology*. London: Routledge, 1981. p. 170.

of friendships, or of programmes and journeys undertaken in restricted circles. This was what happened in the case of Corrêa de Barros, just as it did with Ana Maria Holstein Beck (1902-1966), the protagonist of an exhibition that was held at the Archive some years ago[19], with the difference being that Helena went beyond that frontier through her experience of official "amateurism", in a world which was dominated by male photographers with ambitions to exhibit their work and earn recognition among their peers.

Equally indissociable from this negotiation between male and female identities was the idea of "quality" and "merit". Feminist approaches to literature and the arts, which had been developed since the 1970s, were to deconstruct these categories, so central to the history of art or literature.[20] "Quality" was a judgement that depended on the historical context in which it was enunciated and which was considered inseparable from the gender of the person who was being judged. As a result of the feminist interventions directed against the way that knowledge is formed, "history" itself – as happens in this exhibition and catalogue – has had to look at itself in the mirror and become aware of the ways in which it is produced. The history that is made of the past is always determined by the history of the present. It is therefore not by chance that this exhibition is being organised in Portugal in 2018, at a time when there has been a consolidation of a critical way of thinking that pays greater heed to the history of women and the feminist approaches to history, associated with a public interest that is increasingly attentive to the history of photographic practices in Portugal.

As has so frequently been repeated by the feminist approaches to knowledge, it is not enough just to talk about women or to organise an exhibition about a woman. In those historical contexts in which gender inequality was indissociable from artistic, literary or creative practices, we must also question in what way female identity determined the artists' paths, works, and, above all, the ways in which their work was (or is) studied, exhibited and recognised. Many men have also been forgotten, through the contemporary or later constructions of history. Some were then recovered and their reputations enhanced. But if their being forgotten was due to more or less subjective factors, then these certainly did not include the fact of their being men.

Exhibitions and Museums: Looking at the Same Things Differently

In questioning the male paradigm of knowledge, the role of museums and exhibition spaces has been decisive. In recent decades, on the part of the institutions that house objects and documents, there has been a greater critical awareness about the context in which the collections that they now possess were acquired, exhibited and known about, and about the need to challenge those discriminations that are indissociable from the historical contexts in which these same institutions were themselves created. This

[19] PAVÃO, Luís; CUNCA, Paula Figueiredo (eds.) – *Ana Maria de Sousa e Holstein Beck: fotografia privada 1912-1958*. Lisbon: Arquivo Municipal de Lisboa; Scribe, 2014.

[20] I touch upon these and other themes in my book *A Arte sem história* and in the following articles: Um espaço para pintar: Josefa de Óbidos e a genealogia de mulheres pintoras europeias dos séculos XVI e XVII. In HENRIQUES, Ana de Castro (ed.) – *Josefa de Óbidos e a invenção do Barroco português*. Lisbon: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga; Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 2015. pp. 41-50. Exhibition catalogue; VICENTE, Ana; VICENTE, Filipa L. - Fora dos cânones: mulheres artistas e escritoras no Portugal de princípios do século XX. *Faces de Eva: estudos sobre a mulher*. 33 (2015), pp. 37-51; Mulheres artistas: as possibilidades de criação feminina em 1915. In Steffen Dix (ed.) – *1915: o ano do Orpheu*. Lisbon: Tinta-da-China, 2015; História da arte e feminismo: uma reflexão sobre o caso português. *Revista de História da Arte, Práticas da Teoria*. N.º 10 (2012), pp. 210-25.

explains the proliferation of exhibitions dedicated to women artists and photographers that have taken place all over the world in the last decade. Many of these women's works already formed part of the collections of the institutions and were either not known about or not afforded much value. Besides the dozens of monographic exhibitions centred on only one female photographer, there was recently a large exhibition held about the relationship between photography and women in a broad geographical and chronological context.[21]

Beyond the academic world and that of the institutions, this awareness must also pass through the families that possess "archives", "estates" or "collections" at their homes, especially because the work of women is still largely to be found in the private sphere. The role of private individuals is decisive: both in the preservation of their written, visual or material collections and in the donation of these same collections to public institutions that can guarantee their preservation and unity, as well as offer the possibility of their public dissemination. Helena Corrêa de Barros did not need to be "discovered" like so many other women, nor did her work depend on pure chance for its dissemination, as happened in the extraordinary case of her American contemporary, Vivian Maier (1926-2009).[22] A woman who had spent her life working as a nanny, looking after various children, who had always taken photographs, especially street scenes with unknown people and who, when she died without any descendants or heirs, left her material possessions to the mercy of the commercial circuits, which would then dismember what it had taken a whole life to put together. Luck would have it that John Maloof, a connoisseur of photography, purchased the trunks containing 100,000 unknown photographs and, with great persistence and an unusual sense of curiosity, transformed them into a public legacy, while, at the same time, researching into the mysterious life of this woman who only became a "photographer" after her death, even though she had always been one. Helena Corrêa de Barros knew that she was a photographer, and that her identity reached beyond the frontiers of relatives and the friends that she had made through the exhibitions of photography clubs and the associations of "amateur photographers". But now, with this exhibition and catalogue, there will be many more people who know that she was also a photographer.

[21] VICENTE, Filipa Lowndes – Imagens desfocadas: Julia Margaret Cameron e outras fotógrafas para redescobrir. *Público*. (3 January 2016).

[22] See the site http://www.vivianmaier.com and the documentary film made by John Maloof and Charlie Siskel: *Finding Vivian Maier* http://findingvivianmaier.com (sites consulted on 17 August, 2018).