

kunstmuseum basel

Paula Rego

Power Games

Biography

1935

January 26 — Paula Rego is born in Lisbon. She grows up in a fairly affluent and cultured family. Since 1932, Prime Minister António de Oliveira Salazar has been the leader of an authoritarian dictatorship in Portugal.

1951

In order to give their daughter more opportunities than are available in orthodox Catholic, conservative Portugal, Rego's parents send her to school in Great Britain.

1952–1956

In London, Rego studies at the renowned Slade School of Fine Art. Here she meets Victor Willing, whom she marries in 1959. The couple have three children together.

1965

In December in Lisbon, Rego has her first solo exhibition in Portugal. She becomes widely known in her home country at the age of only thirty.

1966–1968

In 1966 Rego's father dies, with whom she had a close relationship. In 1968, her husband is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Rego suffers a phase of severe depression. At her doctor's advice she begins psychoanalysis according to Carl Gustav Jung, which is normally quite extended. In Rego's case it takes forty years.

1974

Rego has lived in London and Portugal for many years. After the Carnation Revolution, which overthrows the dictatorship in Portugal in a mostly bloodless coup, Rego and her family move permanently to London.

1976–1978

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon provides funding for an extensive research project on European myths, fairy tales, and stories, which has a sustained influence on her work.

1981

Rego's first solo exhibition in Great Britain opens at Air Gallery, London. Edward Totah Gallery subsequently offers to represent her work.

1987

Rego starts working with models after having mainly developed pictures from her imagination for a long time. Lila Nunes becomes her most important model. Nunes joined the family two years previously as an au pair to help care for the artist's husband, by then gravely ill. Rego works closely with Nunes until her death.

1988

Her husband, Victor Willing, dies of complications from multiple sclerosis.

1989

The National Gallery in London establishes a residency program for artists. The first fellowship is awarded to Rego.

1997

Tate Liverpool stages Rego's first major retrospective. Afterward the exhibition is also shown in Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon.

1998

In Portugal, the people are called to the polls to decide whether to legalize abortion. With a turnout of only slightly more than 30 percent, a small majority votes against the law. Rego subsequently thematizes illegal and hence dangerous pregnancy terminations in a series of pastels and prints that count among her best-known works.

2004

The Portuguese Republic honors Rego with the Grand Cross of the Order of Saint James of the Sword. It is the first of many honors from the state.

A large solo exhibition of her works takes place at the Serralves Museum in Porto. In response to overwhelming public interest, the museum keeps its doors open until late into the night.

2009

In Cascais, Portugal, the Casa das Histórias Paula Rego is inaugurated: a museum dedicated to the artist and her oeuvre.

2010

Queen Elizabeth II makes Rego a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire. At the time, she is one of few women artists to have received the honor.

2021

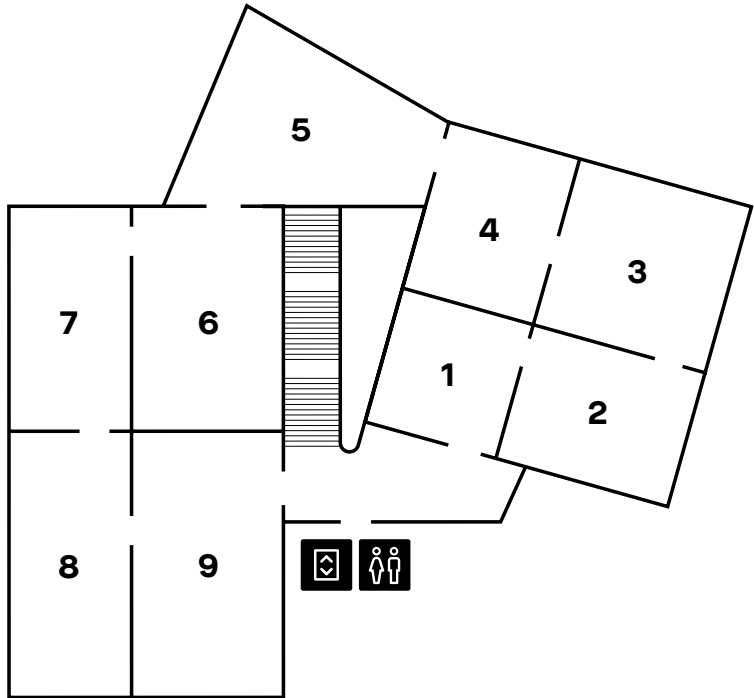
In July, a large retrospective opens at Tate, London.

2022

A selection of her work is on view at the central pavilion of the 59th Venice Biennale. Rego thereby becomes definitively known to a broad public in Europe.

Paula Rego dies on June 8 in London. Her funeral takes place on June 30. The Portuguese government declares a national day of mourning.

NEUBAU 2ND FLOOR



Power Games

In her native Portugal and in her adopted homeland, the United Kingdom, Paula Rego ranks among the most widely admired artists. Drawing on observations, personal experiences, and a lively imagination inspired by poignant stories, she created deeply moving works that defy convention and expectations to turn the spotlight on uncomfortable truths and repressed realities.

At the time of her death in 2022, Rego left an oeuvre she had built over seven decades. She herself remarked that her “favorite themes are power games and hierarchies.” This exhibition gathers the most outstanding works in which she delved into power dynamics at play in family life, politics, society, and relations between the sexes.

Please note that some works in the exhibition contain graphic imagery and deal with sensitive themes.

ROOM 1

Self-Portraits

Across her entire career, Paula Rego created only a few self-portraits. Most of them resemble a picture puzzle: one renders her striking a pointedly masculine pose; another features a mirror showing not Rego but her model; in a third, the figure with mutilated eyes is swept up in a vortex of fragmentary forms. Rare are the instances in which the artist directly presents herself. On a stylistic level, Rego's self-portraits reflect an uncommon versatility, which time and again enabled her to take her art in new directions.

Self Portrait I, 2017
Pencil and pastel on paper,
59 × 42 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

Self Portrait III, 2017
Pencil and pastel on paper,
59 × 42 cm
Mrs. Mariam Hache

Self Portrait IV, 2017
Pencil and pastel on paper,
59 × 42 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

Here can be seen three of five mercilessly honest self-portraits that Rego made toward the end of her career. Her face was marked with bruises caused by a fall down a flight of stairs. "It was misshapen, it now had a story to tell, and so I painted it." In the aura of the unfinished, the eighty-two-year-old artist conveys the confrontation with herself, with her fears—such as are present in many of her works—and with her acute awareness of her own physical fragility.

Under Milk Wood, 1954
Oil on canvas,
110 × 110 cm
UCL Art Museum, University College London

This work, a milestone in Rego's career, tied for first place in a 1954 competition at the Slade School of Fine Art in London. The subject is the eponymous 1954 radio play by Dylan Thomas, which takes place in a Welsh fishing village. Rego inflected this with childhood memories of the kitchen in her grandmother's house in Portugal.

Self Portrait in Red, ca. 1966
Oil, colored pencil, and paper on canvas, collage,
152 × 152 cm
Museu Nacional de Arte Contemporânea, Lisbon

Like paper cutouts, which Rego attempted frequently as a young girl, this self-portrait consists of elements that have been cut apart, painted, and glued on top of one another. The result is a collage of childhood memories. We see, for instance, her mother's hat and her cousin's form outlined in turquoise. The figure of Rego is recognizable at center.

The Artist in Her Studio, 1993
Acrylic on canvas,
180 × 130 cm
Leeds Museums and Galleries. Bought with support from The Art Fund, the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Leeds Art Fund, 1994

In this picture, the artist makes her presence known and claims her space in a manner that is often associated with men: her posture is strong, her legs are spread, and she smokes a pipe. At the same time, she is part of a stage-like studio assembly of living models, sculptures, and heads of cabbage.

Self Portrait, 1994
Pastel on canvas,
101 × 76 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

The use of pastel chalk, which in this self-portrait the artist literally pressed into the canvas, not only characterizes the bodily aspect of her art, but also marked a change in technique. Starting this year, she would work mainly in pastel on paper.

Border Patrol: Self Portrait with Lila, Reflection, and Ana, 2004
Pastel on paper on aluminum,
100 × 80 cm
Private collection

Rego here stages herself at work with Lila Nunes, who came to the family in 1987 to care for the artist's sick husband and became Rego's most important model. Through the "false" reflection, the two women's identities are overlaid. The extent to which the image of the artist is shaped by her model attests to a friendship spanning many years.

Film clip
Excerpts from interviews with Paula Rego,
duration: 02:28, courtesy Vitek Tracz
and Nick Willing, 2024

ROOM 2

Family Constellations

Family—for Paula Rego, the earliest memory associated with the word was her separation from her father and mother, who temporarily lived in the United Kingdom while she stayed behind in Lisbon with her grandparents. Years later, her parents supported her in her study at the renowned Slade School of Art in London. Rego always kept her work on her art separate from her life as a wife and mother to three children. Still, members of her family repeatedly appear as models in her works. In *The Family*, Rego lent the constellation of figures an eerie and psychological dimension. *The Dance*, meanwhile, reveals the alternation between solitude and relationships to be a rhythm of life.

The Family, 1988
Acrylic on paper on canvas,
213.4 × 213.4 cm
Private collection, courtesy of Eykyn Maclean

The artist originally wanted to call this painting "The Resurrection of Lazarus." It was created at a time when Rego's husband's life was coming to an end and only a miracle could have saved him. Still, the constellation of people remains mysterious, even detached from this personal reading. Set apart from the two active protagonists, another female figure observes the scene. Her figure is backlit against the window, and she casts a striking shadow across the floor.

The Dance, 1988
Acrylic on paper on canvas,
212.6 × 274 cm
Tate: Purchased 1989

The Dance counts among Rego's most famous works. She was working on it when her husband died from multiple sclerosis. In the catalogue accompanying this exhibition, her son Nick Willing describes how, as a young man, he modeled for the painting wearing his father's suit.

Drawing for *The Dance*, 1988
Ink on paper,
29.5 × 42.1 cm
Tate: Presented by the artist 1989

Drawing for *The Dance*, 1988
Ink and pencil on paper,
29.9 × 41.9 cm
Tate: Presented by the artist 1989

Drawing for *The Dance*, 1988
Ink and pencil on paper,
29.9 × 41.9 cm
Tate: Presented by the artist 1989

Drawing for *The Dance*, 1988
Ink and pencil on paper,
29.6 × 42.1 cm
Tate: Presented by the artist 1989

The preparatory drawings for the complex, multi-figure, large-format painting *The Dance* attest to the development of the composition. The circle made by the group of dancers dissolves into couples, a constellation of three, and a woman dancing alone.

Misericordia III, 2001
Pen, ink, and watercolor on paper,
41.9 × 59.4 cm
Mrs. Mariam Hache

Rego saw this drawing as a memento of her deceased mother, a form of mourning made shortly after her death. The title—meaning “mercy”—derives from her reading of Benito Pérez Galdós's *Misericordia* (1897) and refers to one of the most important virtues in the monotheistic religions: opening one's heart to another's need, and charitably ameliorating it.

Untitled (Mother Goose), n. d.
Pen, ink, and watercolor on paper,
21 × 15 cm
Courtesy Carmen Mueck

Carmen's Song Book, 1988
Pen, ink, and watercolor on paper,
12.5 × 17.5 cm
Courtesy Carmen Mueck

Rego made these watercolor-illustrated children's books for her granddaughter Carmen. *Carmen's Song Book* contains Portuguese and English nursery rhymes, while in *Mother Goose*, verses and accompanying pictures appear, for which Rego also created a series of prints in 1989 (see room 7).

Portrait of José Figueiroa Rego, 1954-55
Oil on canvas,
39.3 × 49.1 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

This painting of Rego's father, with whom she had a close relationship, was made when she was a student in London. José Figueiroa Rego was a liberal and a committed anti-fascist. He sent his daughter to London because he wanted her to have freedoms that were not available to women in Portugal at this time.

Love, 1995
Pastel on paper on aluminum,
120 × 160 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

For this work, Rego's daughter Victoria Willing posed in a dress that Rego had worn in 1959 at her wedding. The work belongs to a series of depictions in which individual female figures embody complex, contradictory emotions—in this case, a love that appears in no way romantic or simple.

ROOM 3 State Violence

The history of Paula Rego's country of origin and the mentality of its people profoundly informed her work; that is especially evident in her treatment of historical themes, including a regicide and the dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar, which had been supported by the church and the military. A giant tapestry interweaves Portugal's traumatic experiences from the distant past with present-day ills: created in the 1960s, when the country was waging a war against independence movements in its last remaining colonies on the African continent, the artwork recalls a battle against Moroccan troops in which a crushing defeat put an end to Portuguese expansionism in 1578.

Madame Lupescu Has Her Fortune Told, 2004
Pastel on paper,
130 × 102 cm
Private collection c/o Frankie Rossi Art Projects

Magda Lupescu was the third wife of Karl II, until 1940 king of the authoritarian state of Romania. The two were in exile in Portugal, in Estoril, in the late 1940s. Rego spent her youth in this town, and this is a possible source of inspiration for the work. The huge Portuguese flag together with the fascist salute of the figure in the background attest to her engagement with the history of her home country. Here, the situation in which the spouse of a former king has her destiny revealed by a socially lower-ranking employee exemplifies the hierarchical inversions that pervade Rego's oeuvre.

Interrogation, ca. 1950

Oil on canvas,

50.5 × 61 cm

Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

Rego was around fifteen when she painted *Interrogation*. In it she makes the faceless threat of a police state palpable. The woman's posture as well as the framing of the image draw attention above all to the psychological component of violence.

The Interrogator's Garden, 2000

Pastel on paper on aluminum,

120 × 110 cm

Private collection

During the Portuguese dictatorship of the Estado Novo (New State) that existed between the early 1930s and 1974, opposition was suppressed by a secret police force. Here, the figure of a woman getting dressed is pushed to the edge and into the background. In the foreground, an interrogation officer wearing a black leather uniform and carrying tools of torture enjoys a moment of relaxation. Or is this also a woman? Rego deliberately blurs the differences between the sexes, making political and sexualized power games clash all the more violently.

Battle of Alcácer Quibir, 1966

Wool, silk, cotton, various textiles and linen,

250 × 650 cm

Coll. Câmara Municipal de Cascais / Fundação D. Luís I / Casa das Histórias Paula Rego (Inv. T524)

In the battle of Alcácer Quibir in North Africa in 1578, the Portuguese army under the young King Sebastian I was decimated by Moroccan troops. Among the eight thousand dead on the Portuguese side were the king as well as a large part of the nobility. Rego took the battle as a starting point for this work, but the events appear more chaotic than heroic. The fact that Rego here worked with textiles—materials often regarded as typically feminine—can be understood as a deliberate distancing from the male-dominated war scene.

Iberian Dawn, 1962

Acrylic, ink, colored pencil, graphite, and paper

on canvas, collage,

72.5 × 92 cm

Helder Bataglia

A tank rolls upside-down along the picture's upper edge, across a strip of paper snippets reading "Hurrah!," "Victory!," and so on. The sun rising over the figures is on the ground. The disorientation resulting from the inversion of top and bottom conveys the feeling of a society under dictatorial rule, as Spain and Portugal experienced on the Iberian Peninsula for much of the twentieth century.

Regicide, 1965

Acrylic, wax crayon, and paper on canvas,

collage,

150 × 200 cm

Private collection

Here, the artist addresses the killing of King Carlos I of Portugal in 1908 by supporters of a republic. In Rego's family, a story was told about her grandfather's participation in the assassination plot. In Portugal, which at the time of the work's creation was an authoritarian state supported by the church, the military, and monarchists, *Regicide* was a provocation.

Scrap book of articles about the Carnation

Revolution in Portugal, 1974

29.5 × 21 cm

Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

The newspaper excerpts that Rego collected in this notebook report on the Carnation Revolution in Portugal. The events began on April 25, 1974, when the authoritarian dictatorship of the Estado Novo was toppled by left-leaning forces in the military. Subsequent profound changes included democratization and the end of the Portuguese colonial empire.

ROOM 4 Battle of the Sexes

The relationships between women and men in Paula Rego's art offer more illustration that her creative universe is not a happy place. Power and violence shape the dynamic between the sexes, even in the intimate sphere of eroticism. Animal figures stand in for antagonists or represent drives and physical needs. In grappling with infidelity or the strains of caring for her ailing husband, Rego drew on her own experiences. At the same time, the pursuit of dominance, vulnerability, and self-assertion appear in her art as integral to the human condition.

Lush, 1994
Pastel on canvas,
120 × 160 cm
Hollywood Fine Art

Like *Love* (room 2), *Lush* was part of a series of individual female figures that count among Rego's most significant works. The artist was then working with pastel chalk for the first time and drawing again from a living model, which also gives this work its immediate effect. The situation here remains unclear: Is the woman in a moment of relaxation, or is she near-senseless with exhaustion?

Girl with Little Man and Dog, 1987
Etching and hand-shaken aquatint,
paper: 42.7 × 38.1 cm, plate: 25.1 × 25.1 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

Four Girls Playing with a Dog, 1987
Etching and aquatint,
paper: 42.5 × 38 cm, plate: 25 × 25.2 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

Girl Sitting on a Dog, 1987
Etching and hand-shaken aquatint,
paper: 43.3 × 38 cm, plate: 24.9 × 25.1 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

Girl with Her Mother and a Dog, 1987
Etching and hand-shaken aquatint,
paper: 44 × 38.1 cm, plate 24.9 × 25.1 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

This etching revisits the “girl and dog” theme to which Rego had already devoted a series of acrylic paintings in the previous year. Here as well, motifs of dominance and submissiveness are evident. The aquatint technique produces areas of fine shading, and the unworked parts of the plate give rise to strong contrasts of light and dark.

Girl Lifting Her Skirt to a Dog, 1986
Acrylic and paper on canvas,
76 × 55.5 cm
Scheherazade Collection

Untitled from the “Girl and Dog” series, 1986
Acrylic on paper,
112 × 76 cm
Neville Shulman CBE and Emma Shulman

Untitled from the “Girl and Dog” series,
(*Little Girl Shaves the Dog*), 1986
Acrylic on paper,
112 × 76 cm
Scheherazade Collection

Untitled from the “Girl and Dog” series, 1986
Acrylic on paper,
112 × 76 cm
Millenium bcp Collection

This series, in which each image shows a scene with a dog and a girl, is often interpreted in connection with Rego's husband's need for care because of his multiple

sclerosis. On a symbolic level, not only can the dog stand generally for a male partner and for a relational dynamic between care and aggression; it could also represent the awakening of inner drives, which the girl in each case either cultivates or attempts to keep in check.

The Cadet and His Sister, 1988

Acrylic on paper on canvas,

214.3 × 152 cm

Private collection

The young man sits on a bench, lost in thought. Evidently, his departure is imminent. His sister kneels before him to tie his shoes. Although this posture implies a subordinate position, the red of her suit and her knowing smile point in another direction, and serve as an example of how Rego visually breaks up power structures—here, the traditional gender hierarchy. No matter how precisely the work seems to narrate everything, the depicted situation and the relationship between the two figures ultimately remain mysterious.

Butterfly Escapes Lion and Dog, 1981

Acrylic on paper,

68.5 × 101 cm

Courtesy Private Collection and Victoria Miro

Wife Cuts Off Red Monkey's Tail, 1981

Acrylic on paper,

68 × 101 cm

Waldemar Januszczak

Red Monkey Beats His Wife, 1981

Acrylic on paper,

65 × 105 cm

Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

The motif in these works is based on a toy theater owned by Rego's husband. The triangular constellation suggests relationship dramas.

The Bride, 1985

Acrylic on paper on canvas,

223 × 203 cm

Cathy Wills Collection, London

In this work, several essential features of Rego's art converge. Black outlines attest to the high value given to drawing; we see cartoon-like depictions, and strong, vibrant colors recalling earlier gouaches. The bride does not appear in virginal white, per convention. Rather, she is wild and masked in red, clasping between her legs the tail of the crocodile she sits on.

Fig, 1969

Textile with embroidery,

20 × 76 × 30 cm

Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

In many European cultures, the fig is a symbol of strength, abundance, fertility, and seduction. Rego takes up this symbolism in her embroidery, but she enhances the view of the inner life of the opened fruit with a phallus-like appendage. With the technique of embroidery—traditionally conceived as a feminine craft—Rego engages with gendered attributions in art production.

ROOM 5 Heroines

In the 1970s, Paula Rego immersed herself in the study of fairy tales, which became seminal for her art. Fabric dolls like the titular character of *The Princess and the Pea* and the pictures illustrating the Portuguese legend of the modest heroine *Brancaflor* mark the beginning of her lifelong search for inspiration in captivating stories.

Rego was fascinated by the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung's insight that tales told all over the world dramatize similar elemental psychological patterns in the adventures of heroes, magicians, or sages. Yet she subjected these patterns to radical reinterpretation, focusing on women who confront visible and invisible adversaries. In her late magnum opus, *Oratório*, and elsewhere, the lives of these complex heroines are shaped by the repressed and dark aspects of the collective unconscious.

Paula Rego's application for a grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
Submitted April 27, 1976
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation—Gulbenkian Archives, Lisbon

Red and blue Notebook, 1977 (first report)
36.5 × 25 cm
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation—Gulbenkian Archives, Lisbon

In 1976 Rego applied for a grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon to support a research project. She was interested in similarities in folktales across different countries. In the document presented here, she refers explicitly to the “collective

unconscious” as described by Carl Gustav Jung, and the interpretations of fairy tales by his colleague Marie-Louise von Franz. In the two notebooks that comprise the concluding report of the first grant, she collected examples, made a list of great illustrators, and briefly summarized the origins of folktales from different regions of the world.

Second report, 1978
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation—Gulbenkian Archives, Lisbon

Photo series of dolls, 1978 (second report)
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation—Gulbenkian Archives, Lisbon

Translation of *Brancaflor*, 1978 (second report)
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation—Gulbenkian Archives, Lisbon

Financial support from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation was extended through 1978. In this second grant report, Rego focused on illustrations of French fairy tales. Because it was difficult to obtain photocopies of the documented works, she made hand-drawn copies. In the same report, she included her English translation of the Portuguese fairy tale *Brancaflor*, which also formed the basis for the gouache series of the same title.

Puss in Boots, 1978

Fabric, wool, plastic, metal, sisal, and kapok,
72 × 57 × 16 cm
Rui da Silva Brito

Princess Donkey Skin or The Pregnant Princess,
1977

Fabric, wool, plastic, and kapok,
49.5 × 46 × 35 cm
CAM-Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian,
Lisbon

The Perfect Prince, 1977

Fabric, wool, velvet, plastic, and kapok,
98 × 18.5 × 47 cm
CAM-Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian,
Lisbon

The Princess and the Pea, 1978

Fabric, wool, plastic, metal, and kapok,
78 × 45 × 23 cm
Coleção Manuel de Brito

The fairy tale character dolls attest to Rego's penchant for fundamental reinterpretations; she disenchants the ordinarily ideal figures with humor and a dash of realism. Thus, among the characters can be found a pregnant princess and an imperfect prince. The naked princess who lies on the pea has grotesque, erotic features. Rego included in her second fellowship report photographs of unclear authorship that play, in their staging of these dolls, with effects such as dim lighting and dramatic shadows.

Brancaflor – The Devil and His Wife in Bed, 1975

Gouache on paper,
70 × 50 cm
CAM-Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian,
Lisbon

Brancaflor, 1974

Gouache on paper,
53.5 × 27.5 cm
Private collection

Brancaflor, 1974

Gouache on paper,
55 × 38 cm
Private collection

Brancaflor – The Seven Barrels of Wine, 1975

Gouache on paper,
69.9 × 49.8 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

Brancaflor – Boy Gambling with the Devil, 1974

Gouache on paper,
70.2 × 50 cm
CAM-Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian,
Lisbon

The folktales from her Portuguese homeland seemed to Rego especially dark. She observed that in them, good and evil form “a complex, inseparable whole.” Based on the tale *Brancaflor*, she created colorful gouaches that tell the story of the devil's daughter who uses her magic powers to help a young man master her father's impossible tasks. For Rego, such tales of heroines concern the challenges facing women in a world dominated by men. In the phase of political upheaval following the coup against the dictatorship, she perhaps also saw these stories as containing an alternate, subversive universe that could oppose the rigid conventions that continued to govern everyday life.

Oratório, 2009

Cabinet in wood with side panels on a base 48 cm high, comprising eight framed works in mixed media on paper and eight figures in costume, 332 × 349 × 81.9 cm

Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

Rego made this work for an exhibition at the Foundling Museum in London in 2010. It relates to the story of the Foundling Hospital, Britain's first home for abandoned children, and the associated themes of childhood and separation. From a distance, the work invokes curiosity on account of its size and draws visitors under its spell with the coloring of its large pastel panels and the theater-like stage for the central group of dolls. On closer viewing, the cabinet construction with open doors serves as a frame in the manner of an altar for a panopticon of women who, as they live through the horrors of reality, are subjected, martyred, and demeaned—but also become perpetrators.

Obituaries for Paula Rego, digital, 2022

When Rego died in 2022 at the age of eighty-seven, media outlets worldwide reacted with extensive obituaries: “Her pictures are crime scenes” (*NZZ*); “The woman for whom painting always took first place” (*PÚBLICO*); “Out into the world with the sword in her hand” (*FAZ*). Rego was honored not only as a painter but also as an anti-fascist and a feminist—a fitting tribute to the search for the heroine within the artist.

ROOM 6 Roleplay

The memorable and vivid stories we encounter as children implant ideals and role models in our heads that are hard to dislodge. Formats with a playful air, like fairy tales or Disney films, have all the more power over us. Paula Rego exposes those stereotypes with wit and irony, but her deep affection for the stories she adapts is also palpable throughout. Her Snow White sits alone on a pile of furs instead of riding off into the sunset on a white horse with the perfect prince. The Blue Fairy, far from kindly advising Pinocchio, approaches the child with a menacing mien. And she breaks the charm over the ballerinas whom Disney had mocked as twee ostriches, turning them into middleaged women with both feet firmly on the ground.

Snow White on the Prince's Horse, 1996

Pastel on paper on aluminum,
160 × 120 cm

Private collection

Disney's film *Snow White*, released in 1937, still to this day shapes the commonly understood image of the ideal princess. In Rego's painting, the pale yellow skirt, tightly laced blue bodice with puffed sleeves, and Bordeaux-red cape become a more contemporary ensemble. Rego's rebellious realism in this case extends to the horse, which she reinterprets as a pile of furs, astride which the middle-aged princess has seated herself.

Dancing Ostriches from Disney's "Fantasia"
(diptych), 1995
Pastel on paper on aluminum,
left: 162.5 × 155 cm, right: 160 × 120 cm
Private collection

Rego grew up without a television and saw her first Disney films—*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Fantasia*—in the cinema with her grandmother. *Fantasia*, released in 1940, was the third animated full-length feature film from Walt Disney Studios. It consists of eight parts, in which animations accompany well-known pieces of classical music. Rego here refers to the "Dance of the Hours," a ballet from the opera *La Gioconda* by the Italian composer Amilcare Ponchielli. By having various animals, including ostriches, take the stage, the film makes fun of the affected movements of classical ballet dancers.

Study for Dancing Ostriches, 1995
Graphite on paper, 29.7 × 42 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

This piece gives insight into Rego's creative process, from preparatory drawing to large format. A grid is laid over the figure sketched in pencil. On the ground layer of the actual work, she then draws a correspondingly larger grid and thus, through comparison, obtains visual orientation points for transferring and enlarging the sketch.

Fantasia book, 1940, family possession

This book was published in parallel with the Disney film of the same name. Rego received it from her father as a small girl. It had great personal value for her and continues to be in the possession of her family. The sixth chapter gives an overview of the plot of the opera *La Gioconda*, with illustrations including the ballerina ostriches in the film.

Ron Mueck, *Pinocchio*, 1996
Fiberglass, hair, and pigments,
83.8 × 20 × 20 cm
The Collection of John and Amy Phelan

This work was made by Ron Mueck, Rego's son-in-law. Rego chose the lifelike but diminutive sculpture of a child as the model for her *Pinocchio*—a wooden puppet that wishes to be a real boy. Rego's daughter Victoria Willing modeled for the Blue Fairy. The fact that *The Blue Fairy Whispers to Pinocchio* thereby has both a living and an inanimate model and, in addition, makes the story personal in a drastic way, contributes to the work's at once fascinating and disturbing aura.

The Blue Fairy Whispers to Pinocchio, 1995
Pastel on paper on aluminum,
170 × 150 cm
Margarida Marinho

The Disney film *Pinocchio* (1940), based on Carlo Collodi's book of 1883, made the Blue Fairy from the literary source into a blonde, ethereal being who, with friendliness and indulgence, gives *Pinocchio* a moral compass. Rego questions this role and seems above all interested in the fairy's darker traits. Here, she warns, "Take care, *Pinocchio*! Boys are always very ready to promise; but generally they are little given to keep their word." *Pinocchio* replies, "But I am not like other boys." The fairy responds, "We shall see. If you are disobedient, so much the worse for you. . . . Because boys who do not listen to the advice of those who know more than they do always meet with some misfortune or other."

La Traviata, 1983

Acrylic on paper on canvas,
239 × 202 cm

Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

Aida, 1983

Acrylic on paper on canvas,
241 × 203 cm

Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

Rigoletto, 1983

Acrylic on paper on canvas,
240 × 203 cm

Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

Rego discovered her love for opera through her father, and the dramatic stagings and characters would deeply influence her art. In this series of works, she takes as her subject three great operas by Giuseppe Verdi. The theatrical gestures and scenic structuring becomes, in Rego's handling, material for a linear narrative mode reminiscent of comics.

Fawn, 1995

Pastel on paper on aluminum,
150 × 150 cm

Collection LaMA, France

As we look at the half-naked kneeling man, the title *Fawn* evokes Disney's 1942 film *Bambi*. The reverential posture as well as the tan lines and belly challenge body ideals and clichés of masculine strength. Rego at times transformed people into animal figures, but here, as in *Dancing Ostriches from Disney's "Fantasia"* nearby, she takes the reverse direction in order to unsettle habits of seeing and unmask stereotypes.

ROOM 7

Unconscious

Undergoing psychoanalysis, Paula Rego engaged in a rigorous examination of her own inner life. She explored domains of the irrational and repressed that many people only glimpse in their dreams. Her works compellingly articulate the shadowy mental processes that underlie narratives like Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) or Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Peter Pan intrigued her with his refusal to grow up, while the triptych *The Pillowman* represents the psychological horrors and excesses of a grotesque literary interrogation scene.

Undressing, 2002

Colored lithograph,

paper: 93.5 × 67 cm, plate: 84 × 60 cm

Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts Gallery, London

Mr Rochester, 2002

Lithograph,

paper: 89.5 × 67 cm, plate: 83 × 64 cm

Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts Gallery, London

Come to Me, 2001/02

Colored lithograph,

paper: 99.5 × 67 cm, plate: 88.5 × 59 cm

Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts Gallery, London

Rego engaged with the story of *Jane Eyre* in more than two dozen lithographs. The novel of that title by the British writer Charlotte Brontë was published in 1847 under the pseudonym Currer Bell. Here, Rego gives insight into the psychic lives of the three main characters. She shows the domineering landowner Mr. Rochester high on horseback (for this purpose she rented the horse, a

hollow dummy, from a prop dealer). His wife, Bertha Mason, described as insane and violent, also lives at the manor, imprisoned as a sinister secret. Rego surrounds her with darkness. Jane Eyre, the young governess who falls in love with the man of the house, appears before the conflagration that destroys the property. Bertha dies in a fire that she herself started; Rochester is blinded in an attempt to rescue her. In Rego's presentation, Jane has lost more than her youth; it remains questionable whether she will return to Rochester.

See-saw, Margery Daw, 1994
Hand-colored etching and aquatint,
paper: 52 × 37.6 cm, plate: 31.7 × 21.2 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

See Saw Margery Daw,
Jacky shall have a new master;
Jacky shall earn but a penny a day,
Because he can't work any faster.

Rego made a large number of works, a selection of which can be seen here, inspired by historical nursery rhymes. The rhythm accompanies play on a see-saw. In Rego's presentation, play comes to halt because the power relationship has fallen out of balance. The wild little girl is held in the air by the weight of the heavy-set man.

Printing plate for *See-saw, Margery Daw, 1994*
32.4 × 21.5 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

On the metal printing plate one can recognize the motif that Rego incised in reverse. Meshes of closely hatched etched lines produce areas of darkness, while for the bright light in the forest, the plate remains unworked. The subtle colored accents were applied by Rego on the already-printed plate.

How Many Miles to Babylon, 1989
Etching and aquatint,
paper: 52 × 38 cm, plate: 32.2 × 21.1 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

A Frog He Would A-wooing Go I, 1989
Etching and aquatint,
paper: 52 × 38 cm, plate: 22.3 × 21.6 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

The Grand Old Duke of York, 1989
Etching and aquatint,
paper: 52 × 38 cm, plate: 32.4 × 21.2 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

Little Miss Muffet I, 1989
Etching and aquatint,
paper: 52 × 38 cm, plate: 22.6 × 21.3 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

In 1989, the year following her husband's death, Rego created a series of prints based on nursery rhymes, among them *Little Miss Muffet I*.

Little Miss Muffet
Sat on a tuffet,
Eating her curds and whey;
There came a big spider,
Who sat down beside her
And frightened Miss Muffet away.

In the text, the spider chases the girl away from her meal. Rego's depiction, however, is significantly more dramatic; she enhances the evil. The oversized spider here reaches toward the girl, in whose face fear and

powerlessness are inscribed. The spider at times stands symbolically for the mother, or also for a dysfunctional relationship between mother and daughter. Does it represent the loss of protection in a world perceived as menacing?

Flying Children, 1992

Colored etching and aquatint,
paper: 61.6 × 50.1 cm, plate: 27.9 × 19.9 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

Flying Out of the Window, 1992

Etching and aquatint,
paper: 42.7 × 32.2 cm, plate: 19.3 × 11.3 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

Sewing On the Shadow I, 1992

Etching and aquatint,
paper: 42.8 × 32.1 cm, plate: 19.2 × 11.3 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

The Neverland, 1992

Colored etching and aquatint,
paper 57.3 × 71.4 cm, plate: 29.6 × 44.8 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

The Return, 1992

Colored etching and aquatint,
paper: 63.4 × 54.2 cm, plate: 27.8 × 27.7 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

In the story by James M. Barrie, Peter Pan is a boy who does not want to grow up. Rego takes up key motifs from the tale: the sewing on of the shadow, which Peter Pan lost when flying out the window; children who in dreams can fly and can leave reality behind—an ability they gradually forfeit as they grow older; Neverland, an island of fantasy and eternal childhood, where Peter Pan lives; and the return to reality, where their quick-tempered father has remorsefully moved into the doghouse and awaits his children there.

In psychoanalysis, a refusal to grow up is called “Peter Pan syndrome.” The Zurich analyst Marianne Meister-Notter writes in the catalogue for this exhibition: “On the one hand, the story echoes episodes in Rego’s life; on the other hand, in exploring the tension between unbounded imagination and the constraints of reality, it touches on a universal theme that all humans contend with in the passage from childhood to adulthood.”

The Pillowman (triptych), 2004

Pastel on paper on aluminum,
each 180 × 120 cm
Kunstmuseum Den Haag—acquired with support of the Rembrandt Association (thanks in part to its Van Rijn Fund, its Titus Fund, its Thematic Fund Post-War and Contemporary Art and its Desirée Lambers Fund), the Mondrian Fund, the VriendenLoterij, the Friends of Kunstmuseum Den Haag and the Mondrian Business Club

In 2003, Rego saw a production of *The Pillowman* in London. The author of the play, Martin McDonagh, had achieved great renown as the director of the 2008 film *In Bruges*. She must have sensed a kindred artistic sensibility in McDonagh’s characteristic mixture of the gruesome with the comic. Rego mainly takes up the dark fairy tales that are woven into an interrogation scene. From that source, we recognize the apples bristling with razor blades as a murder instrument, the girl who wants to be Jesus, and the central figure of the Pillowman, whom Rego associated with her father in his bouts of severe depression.

Metamorphosing after Kafka, 2002
Pastel on paper on aluminum,
110 × 140 cm
Courtesy Christen Sveaas' Art Foundation

According to the famous first sentence of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1912), "One morning, when Gregor Samsa woke from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin." Remarkably, Rego does not show this moment as a surrealistic transformation into an insect. Instead, she brings forward the psychological components of the metamorphosis: excluded by his family because he has challenged the traditional social hierarchy, the young man now lies on his back, helpless and stunted.

The Company of Women, 1997
Pastel on paper on aluminum,
170 × 150 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Victoria Miro

For this work, Rego was inspired by the description of a priest from José Maria de Eça de Queirós's novel *The Crime of Father Amaro* (1875): "What he liked most was to be amongst women, snuggled up in the warmth of their skirts, listening to them talk about saints." Rather than the child who is described here, Rego shows the adult holy man. She created a number of works in which she engaged with the themes of this book, namely hypocrisy and corruption within the Catholic Church and nineteenth-century society.

ROOM 8 Defiance

At times, Paula Rego used her art as a tool of political resistance. She denounced the practice of female genital mutilation, which still remains widespread, and produced series of haunting pastels and prints that depict the dangers that illegal abortions pose for women. Created after more liberal abortion legislation had been rejected by a popular vote in Portugal in the late 1990s, those works helped shift public opinion ahead of a second referendum. When, in 2003, British participation in the Iraq War sparked the largest anti-war demonstrations London had seen in decades, Rego expressed her own protest in a work filled with activist intensity.

Birth, 1959-60
Oil on canvas,
101 × 127 cm
Patricia Bravo-Weiss

This work cries out against all euphemistic clichés about birth as a beautiful moment. The beginning of motherhood here is bloody and carnal, an act of bodily violence.

Stitched and Bound, 2009

Etching and aquatint, hand colored by the artist
paper: 119.5 × 108 cm, plate: 92 × 84 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

Circumcision, 2009

Etching and aquatint, hand colored by the artist,
paper: 119.5 × 108 cm, plate: 92 × 84 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

Night Bride, 2009

Etching and aquatint, hand colored by the artist,
paper: 119.4 × 108 cm, plate: 92 × 84 cm
Courtesy Ostrich Arts Ltd and Cristea Roberts
Gallery, London

The European Parliament's agenda already shows how urgent the fight against female genital mutilation still is: "Female genital mutilation (FGM) refers to procedures involving the partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genitals for non-medical reasons. Usually it is done by a traditional circumciser using a blade and without anesthetic. Although internationally recognized as a human rights violation, about 68 million girls worldwide are at risk of it by 2030. The girls are mostly under fifteen years old."

Source: URL: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/de/article/20200206ST072031/weibliche-genital-verstummelung-hintergrund-und-folgen#:~:text=Die%20weibliche%20Genitalverst%C3%BCmelung%20\(Female%20Genital,weiblichen%20Geschlechtsorgane%20ohne%20medizinische%20Gr%C3%BCnde](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/de/article/20200206ST072031/weibliche-genital-verstummelung-hintergrund-und-folgen#:~:text=Die%20weibliche%20Genitalverst%C3%BCmelung%20(Female%20Genital,weiblichen%20Geschlechtsorgane%20ohne%20medizinische%20Gr%C3%BCnde)

Untitled no. 4, 1998

Pastel on paper on aluminum,
110 × 100 cm
Scheherazade Collection

Untitled no. 5, 1998

Pastel on paper on aluminum,
110 × 100 cm
Private collection, courtesy of Eykyn Maclean

Untitled no. 6, 1998

Pastel on paper on aluminum,
110 × 100 cm
Private collection

Rego created a total of ten pastels in which she makes arrestingly visible the pain and compelled isolation of women who have had to carry out a pregnancy termination in secret because of restrictive laws. Rego experienced the effects of this legal situation with her own body, and also in her London community. In 2007, Portugal became one of the last countries in Europe to correct this deplorable state of affairs.

Untitled 1, 1999

Etching,
paper: 38 × 48 cm, plate: 19.6 × 29.7 cm
Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett,
Inv. 2024.81. Erworben mit Mitteln der Koegler-Stiftung

Untitled 2, 1999

Etching,
paper: 38 × 48 cm, plate: 19.6 × 29.7 cm
Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett,
Inv. 2024.82. Erworben mit Mitteln der Koegler-Stiftung

Untitled 3, 1999

Etching,
paper: 38 × 48 cm, plate: 19.6 × 29.7 cm
Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett,
Inv. 2024.83. Erworben mit Mitteln der Koegler-Stiftung

Untitled 4, 1999

Etching,
paper: 38 × 48 cm, plate: 19.6 × 29.7 cm
Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett,
Inv. 2024.84. Erworben mit Mitteln der Koegler-Stiftung

Untitled 5, 1999

Etching,
paper: 38 × 48 cm, plate: 19.6 × 29.2 cm
Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett,
Inv. 2024.85. Erworben mit Mitteln der Koegler-Stiftung

Untitled 6, 1999

Etching,
paper: 38 × 48 cm, plate: 19.6 × 29.2 cm
Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett,
Inv. 2024.86. Erworben mit Mitteln der Koegler-Stiftung

Untitled 7, 1999

Etching,
paper: 48 × 38 cm, plate: 29.2 × 19.6 cm
Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett,
Inv. 2024.87. Erworben mit Mitteln der Koegler-
Stiftung

Untitled 8, 2000

Etching,
paper: 38 × 48 cm, plate: 19.8 × 29.5 cm
Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett,
Inv. 2024.88. Erworben mit Mitteln der Koegler-
Stiftung

Rego made this series of prints in conjunction with the pastel drawings so that the images could be widely disseminated and shown in multiple exhibitions simultaneously. Her outrage is palpable in the depictions, which are precise and devoid of illusion. They do not, however, show women in the role of victim; posture and expression convey resilience even when the body has been defeated.

War, 2003

Pastel on paper on aluminum,
160 × 120 cm
Tate: Presented by the artist (Building the Tate
Collection) 2005

One immediate instigator of this work, in which Rego expressed her protest against the Iraq war, was a press image in *The Guardian* showing families fleeing after the bombardment of the city of Basra by the “coalition of the willing,” a Western alliance formed by US president George W. Bush.

ROOM 9

Fighting Spirit

In a series of seven pastels, Paula Rego illustrates how the battle against oneself, against forces within and without, can paralyze the spirit and weigh down the body. The protagonist seems to lack the energy to draw herself up. The color contrast between golden ochre and purple, meanwhile, is anything but feeble.

This battle for body, spirit, and soul stands in contrast within Rego’s oeuvre with an emblem of female strength. *Angel* is her most celebrated work. The figure of a woman in a wide skirt, her blouse suffused with a metal sheen, embodies complex and contradictory emotions. Benevolent and resolute, prepared to forgive as well as to fight, she symbolizes aspiration, determination, and combativeness.

Possession I–VII, 2004

Each work: pastel on paper on aluminum,
150 × 100 cm
Coll. Fundação de Serralves—Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto, Portugal. Donation by Banco BPI, Grupo Cerealis, Grupo Sonae, Grupo Têxtil Manuel Gonçalves, Grupo Unicer, João Vasco Marques Pinto, and Sogrape Vinhos, SA, 2005

She cannot rest, the woman in the purple dress, who tosses and turns on a sofa in the seven large-format pastel drawings of the *Possession* series. Her body’s different poses convey a wide range of physical and psychic tension and exhaustion: mind and body are “possessed” and oppressed. Lila Nunes, who worked with Rego for many years, here becomes a kind of stand-in for the artist. Rego bought the sofa on which

Nunes posed in the studio from her psychoanalyst. A replica was made for this exhibition. Any visitor, if they like, can thus become part of the series.

Angel, 1998

Pastel on paper on aluminum,

180 × 130 cm

CAM-Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian,
Lisbon

This is Rego's most widely known work. Anne Weber, author of the prizewinning *Epic Annette: A Heroine's Tale* (2002), gives this avenging angel, this awesome figure of feminine strength, a voice in the catalogue that accompanies this exhibition.

Translation: Elizabeth Tucker

Copy-editing: Lindsey Westbrook

We thank Jörg Schwarzenbach for painting the shadow gradients in rooms two, five, and nine.

Öffnungszeiten / Opening Hours / Heures d'ouverture

Di–So 10–18 Uhr / Tue–Sun 10 a.m.– 6 p.m. / Mar–Dim 10h–18h

Mi 10–20 Uhr / Wed 10 a.m.– 8 p.m. / Mer 10h–20h

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