

## Representing Memory in Exile: Vieira da Silva's City Landscapes 1939-1946

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This paper will discuss four major cityscape paintings by the Portuguese-born artist Maria Helena Vieira da Silva (1908-1992), with regards to the representation of memory through specific strategies for depicting space. Vieira was born in Lisbon and moved to Paris in 1928, where through exposure to the avant-gardes of Surrealism and abstraction, her career as an artist flourished. In 1939 with the onset of war, she decided to leave France and returned to Portugal, before leaving again this time for Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Vieira thematised her triple experience of displacement, initially as an émigré, consequently as a stateless artist, and lastly, as an artist in exile in the four following cityscape paintings: *Panorama de Lisbonne* (1939) [Pl.1], *Lisboa Azul* (1942) [Pl.2], *The Ancient City* (1946) [Pl.3] and *Bahia Imaginée* (1946) [Pl.4]. In contrast to the scholarly attention given to her Brazilian works that are characterized by the much exploited theme of war, such as *La Guerre* (1942) or *L'Incendie II* (1944), this paper considers that a more subtle element of self-perception develops in Vieira's cityscapes that narrate her struggle to cope with her state of exile.<sup>1</sup> A close study of these works suggests that Vieira's undertaking began as early as 1939 in Lisbon, contemporaneous to her first Lisbon landscape, when her status as an émigré artist was overlaid by that of an artist in exile and ended upon her return to Paris in 1947.

### The *Panorama de Lisbonne*, 1939

Vieira and Arpad left Paris in August, one month prior to the French and British declaration of war on Germany on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939. Vieira had already spent almost a year trying to recover her Portuguese citizenship.<sup>2</sup> In November 1939 Arpad converted from Judaism to Catholicism and re-married Vieira in Lisbon, under the precepts of the Catholic Church. In 1940, almost a year after their arrival in Portugal the couple was able to depart for Brazil as Portuguese citizens.

While completing their one year residence in Lisbon, Vieira received a commission for a painting inspired by the Portuguese capital from the state via the Secretary of National Propaganda, Antonio Ferro, to be exhibited at the 1940 colonial exhibition "Mundo Português".<sup>3</sup> The colonies continued to be very important to the economy and of national interest after Antonio de Oliveira Salazar became premier and dictator of Portugal in 1932. Moreover, the nationalist ideology that characterised the Salazarist regime deemed these vast regions under Portuguese sovereignty to be the source of prominence and pride for the Portuguese; for their colonial patrimony was the remaining spoils of an expanse empire.<sup>4</sup> Vieira's commission work the *Panorama de Lisbonne*, was consequently completed within a context of the celebration and historicization of Portuguese heritage by the colonial exhibition.

This painting depicts a vista of a downtown Lisbon neighbourhood with its regular block of apartment buildings, creating an architectural façade whose only access point is delivered through a set of ascending staircases. The plainness in the visual language, the static spatial framework, and the naïveté with which she renders her subject succeed in disguising the complexity of the urban reading in the subject depicted. For although *Panorama de Lisbonne* was originally completed to depict the political stronghold responsible for the success of Portuguese

history, Vieira, by means of stylistic execution and choice in subject matter, used it to render the complexity of her situation as an exiled artist forced to return to her native city.

Even though Vieira had voluntarily left Lisbon for Paris in 1928, she had continued to develop her career simultaneously in both cities. In fact it was in Lisbon, in 1935, that she held her first solo exhibit at Galeria UP. That same year Vieira received her first commission from Antonio Ferro; this time it was for the *Ano X* exhibition commemorating the first ten years of the Salazarist regime [Pl.5].<sup>5</sup> The significance of the discovery of these two commissioned works of 1935 is that they clearly set a stylistic precedent for *Panorama de Lisbonne* (1939). The realist depiction of the subject matters - a hospital ward and a child's dance - with the clarity of narrative form and use of linear perspective to emphasise depth, accentuate their alien status compared to Vieira's other 1935 Lisbon canvases, exhibited at the Galeria UP and in her studio show in 1936.<sup>6</sup> According to historian Margarida Acciaiuoli, the realism that pervaded the *Ano X* exhibition was due to the fact that modern and traditionalist artists alike were painting the same variations to a theme under state pressure, without questioning the essence of reality in their representations. She defines the work for *Ano X* as fundamentally propagandist, forcing artists to abandon their personal styles as exhibited in their ateliers.<sup>7</sup> However, Acciaiuoli acquits Vieira from this charge of producing propaganda, describing her work as "enlightening and eloquent."<sup>8</sup>

Despite Acciaiuoli's exoneration of Vieira's 1935 commission works, these three canvases do display a reduced play of the imagination and oneiric illusion that were characteristic features of her 1930's oeuvre. For example, in *Panorama de Lisbonne*, the extensive use of detailed forms, such as the depiction of balcony rails, the house number above each door frame, and window blinds, simply add to the material density of the objects depicted, making the allusion to oneirism as foreign as possible. Moreover, the heavily delineated horizon line renders the sky as a spatial frame, where nearness and distance become elements in the process of a stable visual space from the strict view-point of the observer. The inflexible architectural layout, in terms of the rigidity of the objects depicted: the symmetry of the buildings, the lined rooftops and the heavily delineated staircase, convey a sense of timelessness to which even the organic elements in the forms of palm trees on the rooftops seem to be frozen in time. A possible explanation for this visual deviation within Vieira's work may be found in her effort to re-integrate herself within the Portuguese artistic community- after a forced departure from the French scene- responding to the stylistic parameters set by her own Lisbon contemporaries. But, despite Vieira's efforts towards realism, *Panorama de Lisbonne* was deemed unsuitable for the occasion. Arguably, it was this rejection that gave Vieira the incentive to explore the subject of the urban landscape further once she arrived in Brazil. However, contrary to any of her subsequent urban representations completed in Brazil, *Panorama de Lisbonne* was to remain the only cityscape to be completed on location.

As we move away from examining stylistic elements in *Panorama de Lisbonne*, a more complex series of urban readings develops within Vieira's choice of location in her subject matter. A framework for the interpretation of this analysis may be found in Walter Benjamin's essay "On Some Motifs of Baudelaire" (1939). From Henri Bergson's studies on memory in *Matter and Memory* (1896) and Marcel Proust's autobiographical novel, *A la recherche du Temps Perdu* (1914), Benjamin clarifies the relationship between the *mémoire involuntaire* (involuntary memory) and the *mémoire volontaire* (voluntary memory).<sup>9</sup> Benjamin's reference to the *mémoire involuntaire* is one which has not been 'consciously' or been 'explicitly' experienced by the subject. Using Freud's writings from 1921 in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Benjamin draws the hypothesis which makes memory and consciousness irreconcilable, thus re-defining

Proust's *mémoire involuntaire* fragments as: "often most powerful and enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness."<sup>10</sup> Benjamin extends this analysis to a visual level where the effects of this rapport between memory and the unconscious surfaces as an "aura of associations" which "tends to cluster around the object of perception"; making its creative analogue correspond to the "experience which has left traces of the practiced hand."<sup>11</sup>

Alternatively to the *mémoire involuntaire*, Proust summarised the perception of the past in the *mémoire volontaire* as an experience beyond the boundaries of the human 'intellect' and could only be aroused by its presence in some material object. However, according to this analysis, the encounter with this object depends purely on chance. Benjamin extends Proust's analysis on 'chance' in formulating memory declaring it not an inevitable factor for: "man's inner concerns do not have their issueless private character by nature. They do so only when he is increasingly unable to assimilate the data of the world around him by way of experience."<sup>12</sup> Benjamin demonstrates this argument with the principles of journalism where its objective nature in the distribution of information isolates the experience of the event from that of the reader's.<sup>13</sup> In an attempt to describe a visual equivalent of the *mémoire volontaire*, Benjamin assigns the principles of a mechanically reproduced image to this memory form; "by means of these devices they make it possible for an event at any time to be permanently recorded in terms of sound and sight. Thus they represent important achievements whose practice is in decline."<sup>14</sup> This last statement is in reference to Benjamin's analysis of the effects of new developments in the dissemination of information, for these methods "reflect the increasing atrophy of experience".<sup>15</sup>

Although the *Panorama de Lisbonne* is not technically a photographic reproduction, one could make the case for it within Benjamin's definition of the visual attributes of the *mémoire volontaire*. For its pictorial features, such as spatial framing, emphasis on detail and static recording of organic forms parallel Benjamin's definition of a 'permanent recording' of objects. Moreover, the commentary by Margarida Acciaiuoli on the propagandist features of the commissioned works at the *Ano X* exhibition, relates directly to Benjamin's visual definition of impartial representation; in that particular instance, the putative objective outlook develops from the ideological lapse produced between the artist and its delegated subject. The reason in either case develops from a common motive: the principle of seemingly objective or journalistic documentation that nonetheless serves as an ideological purpose; in this case, to represent the traditional, time-honoured aspects of the capital city.

The ideological preoccupation with tradition within the context of the 1940 colonial exhibition derives from that which Boym describes as the "anxiety of a vanishing past".<sup>16</sup> It was only five years earlier that the Salazar government had organised the *Ano X* commemorating its first ten years in government. However, this event was overshadowed and undermined by the threatening force of Nazism in Europe, forcing the Salazar government to re-organise its nationalist propaganda methods. It is thus that in the 1940 exhibition Salazar's regime opted for Portugal's history as a propagandist tool to create a 'collective' sense of achievement amongst the Portuguese people and titled it accordingly, "Mundo Portugues". The end result, one may argue, was the historization of the Salazarist regime within Portugal's political timeline thus, validating and maintaining its position as the legitimate successor of Portugal's political and cultural heritage.

The historian Nevanlinna Kervanto links the practice of urban preservation directly to political strategy and notes that,

Historically, the selection and sometimes invention of tradition, related to a romanticist nostalgia for a past idealised as harmonious, involved the preservation of old streets and construction of street façades to harmonise their contours, roof materials and colours.<sup>17</sup>

Kervanto analysis of a culturally nationalistic frame of urban preservation is “altered to conform to a version of the past”.<sup>18</sup> Vieira’s choice of vista in the *Panorama de Lisbonne* aligns with Kervanto’s visual preservation of urban views, in the harmonisation of contour lines and patterning of forms creating a uniform architectural façade. Furthermore, the elevated topography in this case is suggestive of the historical significance of the landscape, for the slopes of Lisbon host the old neighbourhoods of the city: as an early guidebook said, “ancient Lisboa is to be found on the steep slopes of the chief hills”.<sup>19</sup> However, Vieira in her manipulation of the set subject, calls attention to another form of preservation where the operation of memory ceases to simply relate to the transmission of information alone, but to that of “experience” as well. Benjamin, in his analysis of the *mémoire volontaire* and *mémoire involontaire*, allowed for this combination of elements between the informatic and experiential form of memory to be classified as the ‘collective’ and the ‘individual’ accordingly:

Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past. The rituals with their ceremonies, their festivals (...) kept producing the amalgamation of these two elements of memory over and over again. They triggered recollection at certain times and remained handles of memory for a lifetime. In this way, voluntary and involuntary recollections lose their mutual exclusiveness.<sup>20</sup>

Arguably the context for which *Panorama de Lisbonne* was initially completed supports Benjamin’s designation of a ritual act, for the 1940 colonial exhibition was to serve as a collective reminder of Portuguese achievements. Nevertheless, Vieira’s choice in her Lisbon vista corroborates with Benjamin’s designation of the contents of a personalised form of memory; for Vieira’s non-specific downtown neighbourhood façade rather than relating to the ceremonial operation of collective memorization, corresponds to an inventory of individual experiences lived by the artist in Lisbon prior to her departure in 1928:

It was a sad period for Portugal; Salazar had not yet taken over (...) revolutions broke out continually, some provoked by the left, other by the right. The city had become a mess, even though her luminosity, her cleanliness, her white limestone, almost marble pavements, formed part of her beauty.<sup>21</sup>

The architecture of Lisbon for Vieira became a constant feature of her city experience. It provided her with a story which did not necessarily correspond to the transitoriness which governs human existence. The cobblestone roads, the white buildings and monuments were the remains of the past, whose continued presence in 1939, was testimony of their endurance through history. Vieira’s memory of Lisbon was one torn between revolutions and white tiled façades, indicative of the contrasting epochs in Portuguese history. Thereby, Vieira in eliminating the human figure from her Lisbon vista in *Panorama de Lisbonne*, reinforces those very elements which are representative of her experience of Lisbon, historical endurance and permanence. In this manner, Vieira in *Panorama de Lisbonne* confirms Benjamin’s predicament of the possibility of

a simultaneous response to both memory forms: the *mémoire volontaire*, in terms of style and form, and the *mémoire involuntaire* in her manipulation of the given subject of Lisbon.

However despite Vieira's effort towards conformity in terms of style and form, one may argue that it was her choice of location in the set subject, which eventually led to the elimination of the *Panorama de Lisbonne* from the exhibition. For there seems to be a conflict of interest between the aspirations of the Portuguese official's attempt to create a collective memory of Lisbon, and that of an individual's experience of the same city. Benedict Anderson refers to the need for historical narrative as following: "As with modern persons, so it is with nations. Awareness of being imbedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity...engenders the need for a narrative of identity."<sup>22</sup> The state's intentions in commissioning a painting inspired by Lisbon, was to parallel the objectives of the exhibition itself: to commemorate Portugal's past and thus through its recollection, generate a vision by which Lisbon would be appropriately remembered. Vieira's vision of the city however falls short from this expectation of historical veneration; for this commonplace setting of a downtown façade inspires neither wealth nor prosperity; but rather refers to her individual experience of that which symbolizes stability and constancy in her personal memories of Lisbon.

### **The Lisboa Azul, 1942**

If we compare the *Panorama de Lisbonne* to *Lisboa Azul*, a memory based landscape completed in 1942, we see that in the later canvas Vieira depicts a birds-eye view of Lisbon, capturing what may possibly represent an overall panoramic view of the city's layout. A central feature in this composition is the contrasting effect created between the open space of the city square and the compressed arrangement of the residential areas situated on the upper and lower section of the canvas. The blue stain on the right hand side corner may possibly represent Lisbon's river Tejo. Overall *Lisboa Azul* takes on a lighter tone in its composition and a less dense materiality in the objects depicted through the elimination of the contour line. Furthermore, Vieira sets herself to a detailed representation of the tactility of the architecture's surface, of tiled walls and cobblestone streets, rather than the spatial aspects of the panoramic vista of the city as in *Panorama de Lisbonne*. She achieved the regularity of the small repetitive squares on the canvas surface with the aid of a typing machine. Considering the physical distance at which Vieira depicts these objects, their material weight dissolves before the overpowering effect of the surface work. The detailed depiction of the sky transmits a similar material presence to the more earthly bound forms, rendering the variables between the architecture and empty space almost undistinguishable. In a later interview, Vieira defined the effects of the increased role of the imagination as a result of the physical distance between herself and the chosen object: "I paint places, but places seen from very far away...When you see from afar, you see things which are not very clear. That is what I want to paint from close up."<sup>23</sup> Vieira thus declares her awareness of the fact that the clarity of forms is overlaid by the effects of memory-work. In this manner, she subjugates any political inferences inherent in *Panorama de Lisbonne* to an almost oneiric representation of the same city in *Lisboa Azul*.

Benjamin's designation of an 'aura of associations' can be translated in Vieira's exiled works as nostalgia - the qualitative link between memory and loss. The literal definition of this word derives from the Greek word 'nostos' which means 'return home' and 'algia'- which means longing. Svetlana Bouym, author of the book *The Future of Nostalgia* re-defines the literal

definition as “a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it has also a romance with one's own fantasy”.<sup>24</sup> In view of Vieira's involuntary condition of exile in Brazil, Benjamin's analysis of the distancing effect in the memory-driven image relates to Bouym's description of nostalgia, as romanticized, resulting in the creation of what one could define as an idealised dimension in her memory generated image of the city of her birth.

Moreover, Vieira's emancipation from mimetism in *Lisboa Azul* accounts for the ability to accumulate within a single image an assortment of memories of the city for which clusters of objects are discernable, yet they do not necessarily respond to an immediate location in their original topos. As a result *Lisboa Azul* becomes a personal narrative of the artist's impressions and responses to the memory of Lisbon. The scope of the play of the imagination in terms of spatial strategies and frameworks become clearer when comparing *Lisboa Azul* to other local landscapes completed in Rio such as *Corcovado* and *Pain du Sucre*. In these pieces the viewer need only to place themselves in the position from which the artist completed the work, for the objective field to relate to that single vantage point. Vieira's alternative spatial strategy in *Lisboa Azul*, where memory works in moving, traversing and taking detours through a common topos, does not permit the illusion of a static spatial framework in its representation but responds to the non-linear progression of memory where according to Michel de Certeau; “memory is a sort of anti-museum, it is not localizable”.<sup>25</sup>

The precise but fragmented visual reconstruction of the city offered in *Lisboa Azul* can be set alongside A.C. Inchibold's description of Lisbon in his illustrated travel book *Lisbon and Cintra* (1908). Published one year after Vieira's birth, the visions of Lisbon Inchibold offers in his book coincide with the artist's childhood memories of the same city. In his book Inchibold guides his reader through the squares, streets and monuments of downtown Lisbon, offering a detailed explanation on the history which accompanies each of the objects encountered. In this manner, Vieira's fragmentary urban world assumes the role of a mnemonic screen for which each cluster of objects acquires an identity and narrative of its own. On close examination the general layout of squares in both of Inchibold's illustrations, *Praça de Dom Pedro* and *Praça de Comércio*, are consistent with Vieira's own depiction of a square in *Lisboa Azul* [Pl.6]. The most distinguishable attribute of all three works is their open areas of cobblestone pavement and sense of vacant space in contrast to the highly populated areas surrounding them. Moreover, the three works depict a general layout common to all Lisbon squares: a large monument before a government building. Both the *Praça de Dom Pedro* and *Lisboa Azul* depict these buildings in a clearly neo-classical style.

The staircases situated centre left on the canvas surface draw the viewer's gaze downwards towards a vast block of apartment buildings. Of the massed houses Inchibold makes the following claim, “whence the eye can feast on a variety of pictures which the colours of the massed houses blend into...through graduating tones of rose to pale salmon, of buff to cream, or grey to lavender and dazzling white.”<sup>26</sup> The colour scheme used by Vieira corresponds with Inchibold's reference to graduating tones of pale colours placed one beside another. A further description of Inchibold's vistas may also be found in *Lisboa Azul*: “many interesting old mansions are to be seen in that northern quarter of the eastern heights, as well as substantially built modern ones with their respective gardens.”<sup>27</sup> Arguably, the relatively larger houses in the upper section of *Lisboa Azul* parallel Inchibold's description of the old Lisbon mansions, more so, when it is the only section on the canvas surface that Vieira includes hints of the colour green.

De Certeau refers to the city's architecture as “characters on the urban stage”.<sup>28</sup> The fact that Vieira chooses to place the water fountain documented in Inchibold's *Praça de Dom*

*Pedro* in the lower right section of the canvas in *Lisboa Azul*, is indicative of the autonomous representational value of the object vis à vis its contextual memorization. Moreover, fountains suggest a provenance that draws a historical link to the presence of the Moors in the area. Until present day Lisbon the original Moorish word for fountain remains – *chifariz*. Their inclusion is therefore not only decorative, but also stands in for a narrative of the five hundred year old influence of North Africa in Portugal. With this view in mind, the autonomous representational value of the objects depicted in *Lisboa Azul* become metaphors of history rather than mere architectural memorabilia. The dark watermark dominating the upper right section of the canvas depicts the river Tejo, essential to the history of Portugal's empire. Akin to the re-positioning of the water fountain, Vieira manipulated the metaphorical value of the object depicted. Arguably, the invasive manner of the portrayal of the Tejo, where the boundary between land and water is almost unrecognizable, corresponds to Vieira's memories of various the accounts of life in Chiado, an old locality of Lisbon situated on the banks of the river: "People there always had the impression that the Tejo would come in through the windows."<sup>29</sup>

As much as Vieira dedicated this painting to her visual memory of the city in terms of localities, buildings and objects, she committed herself to the representation of the tactile surfaces of its architecture. The use of the dactylographic marks enhance the two dimensional perspective of the objects depicted, resulting in what Paul Klee defined as the 'flat effect'. Klee's notion of flatness was based on the practical considerations regarding space: "the spatial character of the plane is imaginary".<sup>30</sup> Depth thereby became a matter of illusion by means of 'overlapping planes' and space evolved into an illogical sequence of planes, ceasing to exist as a uniform recession into depth. As a result, Klee refuted the linear expression of time in painting objecting to Renaissance spatial representation defined by Erwin Panofsky as the "perspectival view of space," where essentially the artist negates the two-dimensional surface of the canvas and insists upon the projection of the picture plane in a "spatial continuum".<sup>31</sup> Klee defines this art form as monotonous and earth bound. Creation, is therefore based on the freedom of deviation from these rules for "the depth of our canvas surface is imaginary", gaining the power of what he defined as 'spatio-plastic' representation.<sup>32</sup> Thus, time, akin to space and depth in Klee's paintings and Vieira's *Lisboa Azul*, responds to a purely plastic temporality outside the realm of the earth-bound experience.<sup>33</sup> Accentuating this other-worldly temporality, Vieira has eliminated all pervading signs of human existence in *Lisboa Azul*: it is a city marked by the absolute emptiness of life. This desert of architecture, seemingly untouched by modernity, lends *Lisboa Azul* its particular hold on the imagination, indefinitely suspended in the past. On a similar subject, Hubert Damisch in his examination of *La Città Ideale*, (possibly dated around the beginning of the sixteenth century) made the claim that in works where everything speaks of man yet is devoid of the feature itself, the operation of art has been interrupted and "the painting thrown backward into an indeterminate time".<sup>34</sup>

Vieira in *Lisboa Azul* retains the memory of Lisbon in the past, refusing to submit to the irrevocable progression of time. This recognition of lost time drives her to describe the physical topos which forms the experiential backdrop to her childhood years. The significance of having completed this painting while in Brazil is that it comes to show how distance drives her to narrate a story of the past, reconstructing emblems and themes of home in an attempt to spatialise the very concept of time for as Svetlana Boym herself quotes: "for those living abroad clocks stop at the hour of exile."<sup>35</sup> Moreover, this distancing operation becomes more decisive when considering the sentiments which accompanied Vieira in 1939 when she completed her first landscape *Panorama de Lisbonne*, for it was during her stay in Portugal that Vieira

apprehended the implications involved if she wished to pursue her career as an artist in Lisbon. Meanwhile Paris in 1942 remained under German occupation making the prospect of her return to Europe an overall difficult affair. It is with this view in mind that one may designate, *Lisboa Azul* as Vieira's most nostalgic painting completed in Brazil.

### ***The Ancient City, 1946***

In 1946 Vieira re-visited the Lisbon panorama as a subject and completed *The Ancient City*. In this work Vieira enhances the oneiric illusion that had already begun taking shape in her earlier *Lisboa Azul* painting. The dense nebulous aura with which Vieira depicted the sky in 1942 in this painting ceases to hold a pre-determined role and envelopes the composition from all corners, revealing a partial cityscape in the middle of the canvas. But, despite the compressed architectural forms, stylistic affinities with *Lisboa Azul* cannot go unnoticed. Vieira once more illustrates the busy surfaces of the architectural forms with the aid of a typing machine. Each cluster of forms is therefore recognisable through individual patterns and colour rather than the use of a contour line. And once again Vieira draws a clear line between the densely populated apartment buildings from the open city squares and re-introduces it in the form of an enlarged balcony in order to render the sense of an elevated topography.

Vieira's deliberate re-titling of Lisbon as *The Ancient City* in 1946 consolidates her previous inferences to the 'past' in her Lisbon panoramas. Arguably, her persistent return to the subject of Lisbon narrates a quality of self-liberation from the subject matter. The decline in Vieira's use of detail work in *The Ancient City* is suggestive of the time elapsed between her previous memory-based cityscape *Lisboa Azul* in 1942, and this last painting in 1946. Moreover, in *The Ancient City* Vieira indicates by way of the title of the painting and the remoteness of its visual representation, her disengagement from her need to belong to Portugal, for the liberation of Paris in August 1944 gave Vieira the hope of a prompt return to her city of choice.<sup>36</sup> Although Vieira remained in Brazil until 1947, Lisbon, or rather the memory of Lisbon for Vieira no longer posed a threat but simply remained in her memory as the present face of the past.

### ***Bahia Imaginée, 1946 – Conclusion***

According to historian Katharine Hodgkin "It is in the indiscriminate idealization of the past and lost place that has angered nostalgia's critics, and engendered vitriolic denunciation of nostalgic memory as 'reactionary', 'sentimental', 'inauthentic' and 'escapist'."<sup>37</sup> Although Vieira did not specifically relate the notion of escapism to nostalgia, she did associate it with the pictorial language of the past in the art of the Old Masters, saying: "these things are no longer ours. They give us the pleasure of escapism."<sup>38</sup> Amongst the Old Masters, Vieira referred to specifically the Italian Sieneese painters after her trip to Italy in 1928: "when I went to Italy, particularly to Siena, I discovered the art of the moderns in the paintings and the landscapes of the ancients."<sup>39</sup> While the Sieneese trip was a revelation for a young and impressionable artist like Vieira, her continued source of reference was a book she owned: "I own this superb big book on the Sieneese. For one thing, its reproductions are fantastic."<sup>40</sup> Vieira's enthusiasm for the works of the Trecento Masters was founded on the belief that they represented "the source, the place" which gave rise to modern painting in Paris.<sup>41</sup> Although this conviction was

shared by many of her contemporaries, that which is of significance in this quote is Vieira's admission to owning a book on the Old Sieneese Masters, allowing us to assume the possibility of her using its reproductions as exemplary works to her own creations.

In *The Ancient City* Vieira sought to reconstruct her memory of Lisbon in the past and titled it accordingly. In two paintings of 1946 completed in Brazil, Vieira deliberately bridged the gap in time between the works of the Italian Masters and her own urban landscapes, *Bahia Imaginée* and an untitled work [Pl.7]. In *Bahia Imaginée*, Vieira recapitulated the notion of the past inherent in her earlier Lisbon landscapes and rendered it by way of style and form as well as in subject matter. For the city of Bahia located in the North-eastern province of Bahia embodies the results of the Portuguese presence in Brazil. Founded in 1549, Bahia flourished with the development of sugar plantations and soon after became the leading centre of colonial Brazil. Despite its early riches Bahia was slow to industrialise and remained dependent on the production of primary goods, lagging behind the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro after the country declared its independence from Portugal in 1822. Arguably, Vieira found in the history of Bahia a similar narrative of past riches, and thus akin to her Lisbon representations, renders this last urban representation as a city untouched by modernity. This deliberate visual parallel between two historically inter-connected cities – for Brazil represents an extension of Portuguese practices abroad - permits us to consider this time-bound memory characteristic of her Portuguese inspired cityscapes. Moreover, one may argue that this characterisation of Lisbon and Bahia as urban visions suspended in the past reflect the artist's own reservations towards the agent responsible in both instances: Portugal's political heritage.

Vieira's outlook towards Portugal becomes significantly more evident when comparing *Bahia Imaginée* to her earlier Lisbon landscapes. For although Vieira has never been to Bahia herself she does not desist from incorporating Lisbon's tiled façades of tightly knit apartment buildings and tiled walls as part of Bahia's architectural landscape. Nevertheless, that which distinguishes this last painting from her earlier cityscapes is her use of bright colour and extensive light along with the inclusion of street life; all features which seem to be particular to her Brazilian experience. In *Bahia Imaginée* Vieira depicts a colourful bird's-eye view of the city. The entire composition is brought together by an ascending road connecting the foreground to the background. Assembled apartment blocks throughout the composition are awkwardly placed one on top of the other responding to an elevated topography. Against the sky in the background, Vieira depicts depth by force of reduction simply rendering the reflection of light on the objects depicted, creating a mirage extension of the same city. The colour is bright, although the houses akin to her *Lisboa Azul* paintings are mainly rendered in white and blue, creating a contrasting effect with the sienna coloured surroundings.

The untitled work reveals similar pictorial features to *Bahia Imaginée*, indicating the possibility that it may have served as a study to the larger, more complete canvas. Firstly, the allusion to the road in both pieces joins the foreground to the background providing a coherent overall spatial panorama. Secondly, on both occasions Vieira seemed to hesitate between the boundaries of elevation and perspective to which the forms in the background lose their material structure. And thirdly, similar architectural structures can be located in the upper right corner of both canvases.

The change in the overall emphasis of the architecture, from Vieira's earlier detailed patterned surfaces of walls and floors to the general rhythmic apparition of openings in windows and doors indicate a different source from that which inspired her earlier Lisbon paintings. Vieira's extensive use of archways and colonnades in this untitled work, a feature missing from

her Lisbon landscapes, as well as the decorative use of crenulations throughout the composition, suggest that these artistic devices may have been directly borrowed from Siennese artist Ambrogio Lorenzetti's panel *Effects of Good Government in the City and the Countryside* (1338-9) at the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena. Furthermore, despite the fact that Lorenzetti's panel was meant to be viewed from a lower vantage point than Vieira's, there are certain affinities to the spatial constructions of both paintings. Lorenzetti clearly articulated the planar continuity between the foreground figures and background landscape as indicated by the two figures on horseback located in the centre of the panel. Comparably, Vieira in her untitled piece articulated the notion of linear progression implied by the presence of a figure on the road, bottom left corner of the canvas. A similar spatial development may be observed in Vieira's undated work *Enterrement à Sienne*, the only work Vieira ever titled in direct reference to her 1928 Italian experience. Along with her untitled work, Vieira depicts the tunnelling effect of the road with the encroaching forms of its architecture upon the figures articulating a forced progression of space.

Embroiled in a resistant relationship to the present, Vieira's deliberate modelling of her untitled painting on Lorenzetti's panel assigns her vision of pictorial 'escapism' to a focus of personal value. In other words, in *Bahia Imaginée* Vieira contextualises the implications of this visual homage to the Italian Old Masters with the subject matter of a Brazilian colonial city. According to the historians Hirsch and Spitzer, "the animating vision of nostalgia greatly simplifies, if not falsifies the past."<sup>42</sup> As Vieira witnessed with the organisation of the 1940 exhibition, Portuguese 'escapist' tendencies were largely inclined towards Brazil, for although it had declared independence from Portugal as early as 1822, it was the only (ex)colony to be invited to exhibit.

With this view in mind, one may argue that in *Bahia Imaginée* Vieira exemplifies Portuguese nostalgic tendencies by arresting time, drawing the city within an indeterminate time frame rendering it as a retrospective mirage. On the other hand, this artificial, yet almost idyllic urban re-construction represents Vieira's disapproving regard towards Portugal's continued escapist practices of dwelling over the spoils of the past. It is thereby in this last urban representation of Bahia, a city to which Vieira has never been to, that she is able to successfully transfer the emotional charge of nostalgia to an entity other than her own, representative of a concluding stage in her struggle with exile. For Bahia, is presented as a metaphor of Portuguese nostalgia rather than her own. Furthermore, one could argue that *Bahia Imaginée's* inherent element of closure is essentially dictated by the presence of features and visual characteristics used in her earlier Lisbon landscapes, summarised within a single visual image. For example, from *Panorama de Lisbonne* Vieira adopted urban spaces as a reflection of political and cultural practices. In *Lisboa Azul*, Vieira developed the ability to represent cityscapes as subjects to memory and screens of nostalgia. Lastly in *The Ancient City* Vieira was able to submit to the qualitative effect of time, rendering the image almost inapproachable by its distant memory. The manifestation of this distance in *Bahia Imaginée* is represented in the very nature of its 'plasticity' for the material existence of the objects depicted is as compelling as the title of the painting itself.

Vieira returned to Paris in 1947. It was not until 1957 that she exhibited her work again in Lisbon. Moreover, she was never again to return to Brazil. She acquired French citizenship in 1956 and diligently continued completing urban landscapes as her contribution to the post-war School of Paris. However, as her memory distanced itself from Portugal and Brazil, her urban

language yielded to more abstract terms to articulate the image of an accelerated modern city as the reconstruction of Europe continued.

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<sup>1</sup> Important publications on Vieira's Brazilian period are D. Vallier, *Vieira da Silva: Chemins d'Approche*, Paris, 1971 and N. A. Aguilar, *Figuration et Spatialisation dans la peinture moderne brésilienne: le séjour de Vieira da Silva au Brésil (1940-1947)*, Lyon, Université Jean Moulin, thèse de doctorat, décembre 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Under the Portuguese Civil code Vieira automatically resigned her Portuguese citizenship when she married Arpad in Paris in 1930. With the political occurrences which were to take place in Hungary due to the threat of war, Vieira da Silva and Arpad Szenes lost their Hungarian nationality and thus become alien residents in France.

<sup>3</sup> According to the newspaper report in *Diário da Manhã*, 28/1/1936 (commemorative number) other participant artists at the Ano X exhibition were Albertino Guimarães, Alberto Lacerda, Armando Lucerna, Augusto Pavia, Fernando David, Fernando Santos, Federico Aires, Gustavo Vasconcelos, H. Santos Junior, Ricardo Benasaúde, Jose Augusto de Sousa, Portela Junior, Tomás Pelayo and Valera Altemira.

<sup>4</sup> In 1940 the Portuguese empire consisted of East Timor, Macau, Mozambique, Angola and Guinea Bissau.

<sup>5</sup> "A Exposição do Ano X da Revolução Nacional", *Diário da Manhã*, 28/1/1936. (Commemorative number).

<sup>6</sup> In Galleria UP exhibit of 10-20/6/1935 Vieira exhibited the following canvases: *Interior* (1935), *Pim Pam Pum!* (1934), *Bicha* (1935), *Gaiola* (1932), *Extremidade de uma Ponte* (1931), *Natureza muerta* (1930). From her Atelier exhibit with Arpad, the only surviving image is *Composition* (1934).

<sup>7</sup> M. Acciaiuoli, *Exposições do Estado Novo, 1934-1940*, Lisbon 1998, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Acciaiuoli, *Exposições*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> W. Benjamin, "On Some Motifs of Baudelaire", *Illuminations*, London 1999, 154.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin, "On Some Motifs of Baudelaire", 157.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin, "On Some Motifs of Baudelaire", 182.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin, "On Some Motifs of Baudelaire", 155.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin, "On Some Motifs of Baudelaire", 182.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin, "On Some Motifs of Baudelaire", 155.

<sup>16</sup> S. Bouym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York 2001, 19.

<sup>17</sup> N. A. Kervanto, "Cities as Texts: Urban Practices Represented or Forgotten in Art History", in Reinink, Wessel and Stumpel (eds), *Memory and Oblivion*, Amsterdam 1996, 376.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> A.C. Inchbold, *Lisbon and Cintra*, London 1907, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin, "On Some Motifs of Baudelaire", 156.

<sup>21</sup> A. Phillipe, *L'éclat de la lumière: entretiens avec Marie-Hélène Vieira da Silva*, Paris 1978, 67. All translations are by author unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>22</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1991, 205.

<sup>23</sup> P. Schneider, *Louvre Dialogues*, Paris 1971, 160.

<sup>24</sup> Bouym, xiii.

<sup>25</sup> M. Certeau and L. Giard, "Ghosts in the City", in *The Practice of Everyday Life Vol. 2: Living and Cooking*, Minneapolis 1998, 106.

<sup>26</sup> Inchbold, *Lisbon and Cintra*, 45.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Certeau, "Ghosts in the City", 135.

<sup>29</sup> Anon., *Expresso*, 17 March 1970.

<sup>30</sup> P. Klee, *Notebooks Vol. 1: The Thinking Eye*, London 1961, 14.

<sup>31</sup> E. Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, New York 1991, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Klee, *Notebooks*, 53.

<sup>33</sup> Vieira's first encounter with Klee's works and writings was in 1933.

<sup>34</sup> H. Damisch, *On the Origins of Perspective*, London 1995, 213.

<sup>35</sup> Bouym, 327.

<sup>36</sup> Vieira was urged by her French dealer Jeanne Bucher to remain in Brazil after the liberation of Paris in 1944 due to poor living conditions throughout the city.

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<sup>37</sup> M. Hirsch and L. Spitzer, 'We would have never come without you': Generations of Nostalgia', in K. Hodgkin and Radstone Susannah (eds), *Politics of Memory*, New York, 2003, 82-83.

<sup>38</sup> Schneider, *Louvre Dialogues*, 160.

<sup>39</sup> L. Vezin, 'Entretien Vieira da Silva: les naissances successives', *Beaux-Arts Magazine*, n. 61, Levallois-Perret 1988, 39.

<sup>40</sup> G. Weelen, 'Vieira au Fils des Jours', in *Monographie*, Paris 1994, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Philippe, 100.

<sup>42</sup> Hirsch and Spitzer, 'We would have never come', 82.

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The following images have been removed from the online version of this article for copyright reasons:

Pl. 1. Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, *Decoration, Panorama de Lisbonne*, 1939, oil on wood, 150x217,5cm, Jeanne Bucher Gallery, Paris.

Pl. 2. Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, *Lisboa Azul*, 1942, collage, gouache and typing machine on wood, 53x40cm, Jeanne Bucher Gallery, Paris.

Pl. 3. Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, *The Ancient City*, 1946, gouache collage and typing machine on paper, 25x23cm, Jeanne Bucher Gallery, Paris.

Pl. 4. Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, *Bahia Imaginée*, 1946, Tempera and oil on canvas, 92x73cm, Jeanne Bucher Gallery, Paris.

Pl. 5. Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, *Hospital*, 1935, Jeanne Bucher Gallery, Paris.

Pl. 6. Stanley Inchbold, *Praca de Dom Pedro*, Jeanne Bucher Gallery, Paris.

Pl. 7. Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, *Untitled*, 1946, gouache, 37x24cm, Jeanne Bucher Gallery, Paris.