

## **MODERNISM AND THE PORTUGUESE TEATRO DE REVISTA**

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### **Abstract**

*Largely due to the conservatism of audiences and critics, Portuguese theatre was mostly indifferent, if not downright hostile, to the avant-garde theatre coming from elsewhere in Europe. Therefore, naturalistic theatre and historical drama were the staple of Portuguese theatres until the 1950s, with the only exception of the plays of Almada Negreiros and symbolist plays by Fernando Pessoa, Raul Brandão and António Patrício.*

*However, modernism found its place on stage in one of the most typical Portuguese theatre forms: «Revista à Portuguesa», the Portuguese revue theatre, which welcomed the first generation of Portuguese modernist painters to work as set and costume designers. Artists like Jorge Barradas, Milly Possoz, José Barbosa, among others, took the influence of the Ballets Russes of Diaghlev, and the avant-garde visual arts, to change the appearance of the most typically Portuguese theatre genre, Revista à Portuguesa.*

*With this paper I will try to document how modernist painters gained entry in «Revista à Portuguesa» and created an art that fused the commercial interests of theatre entrepreneurs, the tastes of the bourgeois audiences and their own artistic sensibilities.*

**Keywords:** Modernism; Theatre; Set Design; Almada Negreiros; António Ferro

### **Introduction**

The avant-garde movements of the beginning of the XXth century had a defining influence upon several artistic and non-artistic areas of life. No longer art restricted itself to artistic areas, but it tried to influence and have an impact on all areas of living, and let itself be influenced by all human endeavours and works. Its foremost pioneers came from the visual arts, at the time feeling the competition and impact of mechanical reproductions in their own work, and, at the time, also trying to deal with the shock of Romantic sensibilities facing the rapid industrialization of Europe.

It can be said that Modernism started with an enthusiastic embrace of progress and the rapid transformations that society, culture and technology were facing.

Modernist artists were trying to express a new sensibility that included the Romantic tradition, but didn't reject all the advances they were discovering in science, engineering and social organization, or the ideas of thinkers like Sigmund Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson and many others.

The arrival of Modernist ideas in Portugal was surprisingly fast for a small minority of artists, but much slower for the larger majority of the population and of the artistic landscape of the country, and namely for the artists who depended more on public support or state financing. In fact, the naturalistic taste in arts in Portugal would last until the middle of the 20th century. This was more evident in arts more heavily dependent on the audience applause or government support, as happened with the performing arts.

In fact, the principles of Modernist theatre would take a long time to be well received in Portugal. There were a few attempts at Modernist theatre in Portugal in the beginning of the 20th century. For instance, França notes that the future of the magazine *Orpheu*, the first Modernist magazine in Portugal, also entailed an ambitious programme of conferences and a theatre festival<sup>1</sup> that never took place. And one of the protagonists of Portuguese Modernism, José Almada Negreiros (1893-1970) had a deep interest in theatre and was writing, directing and designing for theatre in the 1920s, but the lack of opportunities and interest among audience and artists, at the time, ultimately discouraged him and made him move abroad for a while.

Therefore, for the first 30 years of the XXth century, modernism didn't take hold in Portuguese theatre, except in one area: the stage and costume design of one of the most popular and traditional Portuguese theatre forms – *Teatro de Revista*. In fact, several of the most important Portuguese, early Modernist artists, like Jorge Barradas, Milly Possoz, José Barbosa, Sarah Affonso, Stuart Carvalhais and even Almada Negreiros, had an important role redefining the stage and costume design of Portuguese *Teatro de Revista* around the 1920s, and, in this paper I will try to document the origins, reasons, evolution and influence of this change.

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<sup>1</sup> França, José-Augusto (1991) *A Arte e a Sociedade Portuguesa no Século XX (1910-1990)* Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, p. 13-14

## Teatro de Revista

The «Teatro de Revista», also called «Revista à Portuguesa», is a very popular Portuguese form of a satirical sociopolitical theatre, which strives to reenact and satirize some of the most popular, well-known and controversial current affairs and events of a society. Its influence was so deep that even in the beginning of the XXI century his hold on the Portuguese imagination is strong, with most population still conflating theatre with Teatro de Revista and its old celebrities as an example of theatre performers, and its political and financial support a relevant issue<sup>2</sup>, even if Teatro de Revista itself is today an agonizing theatre genre, with most of its practitioners retired and its staged closed or degraded.

The origin of Teatro de Revista can be found in France in the end of the XVIII century. Amidst the turmoil of the French economic and social crisis, and the subsequent revolution, theatre became a popular tool to inform and reflect about the events than taking place in France. A specific type of theatre started appearing, called the *revue de fin d'année*<sup>3</sup>, that was used to tell, show and comment on the main political and social events of the previous year. Combining popular songs, humor, and current affairs, *revue de fin d'année* became a massive popular hit, as it satisfied the wider audience's need of entertainment and information and quickly spread across Europe.

The revue arrived in Portugal in the middle of XIX century, with the first one being, according to Luiz Francisco Rebello<sup>4</sup> "Lisboa em 1850" ("Lisbon in 1850), which premiered at January 11, 1851, in the Teatro do Ginásio. This theatre was already popular for staging vaudeville and *opera bufa*, and *revue de fin d'année* was the next logical step, immediately becoming very popular among the audience, with the piece being staged for a full month and being repeated during the Carnival. This success ensured that the *revue de la année* quickly stopped

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<sup>2</sup> In 2001, the mayor of Lisbon, Pedro Santana Lopes, created a casino in the city just with the ostensive purpose of supporting the recovery of the degraded area of Teatro de Revista's theatres, Parque Mayer. This areas should have been recovered with a project by the architect Frank Gehry, but, although the casino was created and opened, the rebuilding of the theatres never actually took place.

<sup>3</sup> SANTOS, V. Pavão dos (2000) A revista modernista. Lisboa: Museu Nacional do Teatro. P. 2

<sup>4</sup> REBELLO, Luiz Francisco (1984) História do Teatro de Revista em Portugal. Vol. I Da Regeneração À República. Lisboa: PEA. p. 55

being just an annual event, but became a commercially successful enterprise, that happened multiple times a year, through several productions. Virgílio Ribalta<sup>5</sup> describes Portuguese Teatro de Revista has being full of colourful set designs, exchanged in quick succession, and a choir of scantily-clad women wearing gaudy costumes, all under a sense of dynamic movement and constant change, which would satisfy the appetite of a popular audience of magnificence and sexual innuendo.

Its popularity also insured that it was one of the few theatre genres in Portugal that could thrive without government backing, even if the number of performers, set designs and costumes made it an expensive production to stage, that, when successful, had long stage careers that still demands the constant search of novelty that could keep the audience's interest and made them return more than once to see it. Usually, this interest was sustained through popular songs, guest stars, new sketches, etc. Obviously, its satirical addressing of current affairs – namely during the First Portuguese Republic, with its numerous political crisis, affairs and rebellions and uprisings – also added to the public interest in Teatro de Revista.

Dramaturgically, Teatro de Revista had a very specific and stable structure. Usually, each piece was divided in two parts, each one with a specific, although broad, theme. The first part would start with a musical opening by the orchestra, followed by the first song. Then, several different scenes would take place, mixing songs, dance scenes, theatrical scenes inspired by political, social or theatrical events, or scenes combining all these. These scenes could be connectes by the character of the *compère* or *comère* – an actor or actress that, in between scenes, would walk to the front of the stage and, while in the back of the curtain the setting was being changed, he or she would have a humorous dialogue with the audience or with another actor, that created some thematic bridge between scenes. One of the scenes would include a guest star, usually a well-known fado singer. Then, there would be some "street scenes" about daily life in Lisbon, which would end with a festive parade.

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<sup>5</sup> In ALVAREZ, José Carlos (2010) *A República Foi ao Teatro*. Lisboa: Museu Nacional do Teatro. P. 25)

After that, there would be a second part, with a very similar structure to the first part, which would end also with a sort of festive parade, although shorter than the one at the end of the first part, where all the cast would be on stage, in a very hierarchical order, with the choir girls on the side and in the back, and the *compère* and *comère*, and guest stars being on center stage on the front line.<sup>6</sup>

It was, therefore, a highly festive theatre, involving several dozen performers, and a very detailed, multiple and complex set design, that should impress the audience by the magnificent and surprising visuals, but also be easily replaceable, to allow for the quick succession of different musical, dancing and theatrical scenes.

Its popular impact in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was undeniable: between 1910 and 1926, about half of all theatre production in Lisbon and Porto was composed of pieces of Teatro de Revista<sup>7</sup>, many of its performers were celebrities and several of its songs become popular hits or were inscribed on the cultural memory. Teatro de Revista even became the model and inspiration of Portuguese comedy films that would be made in the 1940s. And it even helped turn «fado», which at the time was a despised popular music genre in Portugal, usually connected to sailors, prostitutes and criminals, into a music genre closely related to national identity, when it began being used in Teatro de Revista, from the 1870s onwards, to help illustrate the bohemian side of Lisbon's life at the time.

Despite its popularity, and despite the fact that Portuguese audiences mostly rejected Modernist performing arts, as we will see, Teatro de Revista was also the first theatrical art form to welcome, search and popularize the first modernist artists in theatre in Portugal.

## **Modernism in Portugal**

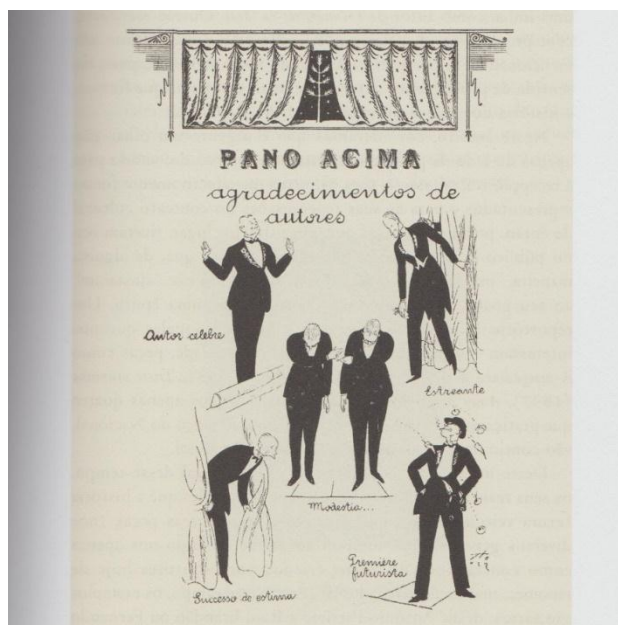
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<sup>6</sup> ALVAREZ, José Carlos (2010) A República Foi ao Teatro. P. 26.

<sup>7</sup> ALVAREZ, José Carlos (2010) A República Foi ao Teatro. P. 34.

Modernism, in Portugal, was at first welcomed by a small clique of artists, usually connected to the magazine *Orpheu*, like Fernando Pessoa, Mário de Sá-Carneiro, Santa-Rita Pintor, Amadeo de Souza Cardoso, among others. Most of them had lived in Paris, and knew and were influenced by the new Modernist ideas coming from there. But their ideas and works were mostly rejected – or even made fun at – namely in theatre. It is well-known that the first number of *Orpheu* was regarded as an “insanity” at the time and even became a small success mostly for scandalous reasons, not for any real appreciation of the audience for the aesthetics it promoted. We can also note that the presence of theatre in *Orpheu* was also ambiguous, as it only included a theatre play, *O Marinheiro (The Sailor)*, by Fernando Pessoa, which was clearly more influenced by the symbolism of Maeterlinck, than any Modernist aesthetics.

In theatre, such rejection also happened among audience and critics. In *Figure 1* we have a caricature published in one of the foremost theatre magazines of the time, joking about the reception of futurist authors in Portugal by hostile audiences.



**Figure 1.** A caricature in the *De Teatro* magazine, showing how the playwright

should thank the applause after the première. On the lower right, the futurist or modernist author is showed bravely enduring the rain of tomatoes and other vegetables thrown by the enraged audience.

Such hostility was present even regarding foreign productions, as it happened with the Ballets Russes, as I will try to describe.

The Ballets Russes was a Russian dance company, founded in 1909 and managed by Sergei Diaghilev. It was the foremost and more influential dance company of the time, having distilled classical ballet into a more wide-appealing form, working according to Modernist principles, and partnering with some of the most important modernist artists of the time, like Léon Bakst, Henri Matisse, Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, which created the costumes and scenarios of "Parade" (1917) and "Le Tricorne" (1919) for that company, André Derain, Joan Miró, Salvador Dalí, Jean Cocteau, Robert and Sonia Delauney, and several of the most important composers and choreographers of the time, like Igor Stravinsky, Claude Debussy, Eric Satie, Nijinsky, or even having costumes designed by Coco Chanel. It was a fortunate mix of clever commercial success, being able to court the support of rich and powerful sponsors, and attracting a wide audience through acclaim and scandal.

Modernist art was fascinated and inspired by dance, namely through the use of movement of the human body, but also because it created art through the use of existing elements, like the human body, like in a collage, its sensual elements, the use of different artistic materials, its mass appeal, the idea of collective, but also the absence of spoken language, that gave it a more irrational, subconscious appeal. All these, were, of course, defining traits of modernist aesthetics.

The Ballets Russes, able to find a wide audience, from the aristocracy to the bourgeois, plenty of funding for their extravagant and exotic productions, through were innovative dance and openness to collaboration with the most avant-garde artists, and willingness to shock and provoke, became the most acclaimed performative troupe of the time working under modernist principles and a magnet for Modernist artists.

Sasportes<sup>8</sup> notes that the Portuguese artists that were living in Paris at the time, like the poet Mário de Sá Carneiro, the architect and painter José Pacheco, the architect Raul Lino and the painter Amadeo de Souza Cardoso, were fascinated by the performances of the company. And therefore, the Modernist artists were enthusiastic when the Ballet Russes came to Portugal in the end of 1917.

While the First World War was taking place in Central Europe, the Ballets Russes found themselves in a difficult situation, having difficulty finding sponsors and places where to perform. Diaghilev tried to solve the problem making the company tour South America and then Portugal and Spain.

When the Ballets were coming to Portugal, on 14 October 1917, Almada wrote a long article for the first and only edition of *Portugal Futurista*, the new Modernist magazine he directed, where he described the company as one of the “most beautiful landmarks in the civilization of modern Europe”<sup>9</sup> and then, in a very emotional and impressionistic text, described the work of the company, even if he – not having had the opportunity to be in Paris - never had actually seen it live, but knew it only through the photos published in newspapers and magazines<sup>10</sup>.

However, the presence of Ballets Russes in Portugal, despite all the hopes and enthusiasm of the Portuguese modernist artists, was mostly a fiasco. The company arrived on December 2, to premiere in Coliseu dos Recreios on December 6. However, on December 5, started the rebellion of Junta Militar Revolucionária, directed by Sidónio Pais, against the government of Afonso

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<sup>8</sup> SASPORTES, José (1979) *Trajectória da Dança Teatral em Portugal*. Lisboa: ICLP. P. 57

<sup>9</sup> My translation.

<sup>10</sup> SANTOS, V. Pavão dos (1993) *O Escaparate de Todas as Artes ou Gil Vicente visto por Almada Negreiros*. Lisboa: Museu Nacional do Teatro. P. 14

Costa, paralyzing Lisbon for three days, and forcing the company to stay indoors at their hotel, supposedly in the company of some Portuguese modernist artists like Almada Negreiros, the composer Ruy Coelho or the architect Carlos Ramos.

Therefore the premier would only take place on December 13<sup>th</sup>, in a heavily damaged Coliseu de Lisboa. The company was seemingly unhappy with the working conditions, but nevertheless presented *Les Sylphides*, which is usually considered the first abstract ballet, *Schéhérazade*, a sensuous and exotic piece, *Le Spectre de la Rose*, *Warrior Dances of Prince Igor*, *Le Soleil de Nuit*, based on Russian folk themes, *Le Carnaval* with costumes by Bakst, and based on characters of Commedia Dell Arte, which would have a deep impact on Almada Negreiros and become the best received piece of the troupe in Portugal, *Thamar*, based on a legend of Georgia, *Le Femmes de Bonne Humeur*, which daringly combined erudite dance, folk dance and daily gestures, among a few others pieces.

There would be 8 presentations in the Coliseu de Lisboa between 13-27 December 1917, and 2 more presentations in the equally damaged Teatro São Carlos on the January 2 and 3 of 1918. But despite the heavy promotion, and the access to the prestigious Teatro São Carlos, at the time attended by the cultural and social elites of Lisbon, these performances seemed to have been a failure. Most presentations had half-empty auditoriums, almost no profits, indifferent audiences and hostile reviews. One reviewer, Álvaro de Lima, compared the set design to the «ridiculous blots of “futurist” paintings»<sup>11</sup>. Another reviewer, F. Rodrigues Alves, described *Le Soleil de Nuit* as being “a madhouse fantasy, obviously cartoonish. Sort of a futurist ode, created by fakes and danced by crazy people. Worthless set design.”<sup>12</sup>

Obviously, the main defenders of the show were Portuguese modernist artists, like the writer and journalist António Ferro and, specially, Almada Negreiros.

The writer and artist Almada Negreiros was already an admirer of Ballets Russes, which he knew from the French magazines to which he subscribed, and

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<sup>11</sup> SANTOS, V. Pavão dos (2000) A revista modernista. Lisboa: Museu Nacional do Teatro. P. 4 (My translation)

<sup>12</sup> SANTOS, V. Pavão dos (1993) O Escaparate de Todas as Artes ou Gil Vicente visto por Almada Negreiros. P. 19 (My translation)

through an intense correspondence with Robert and Sonia Delaunay. This couple of artists had moved to Portugal, to the northern town of Vila do Conde, in 1915, to escape the First World War. Robert Delaunay was already a famous Modernist painter, and his wife, Sonia Delaunay, was also a painter and costume designer. Both of them would be involved, later in the set design of the Ballets Russes.

It can be said that the Russian artist Sonia Delaunay had a strong influence on Negreiros. Not only did Sonia also worked for the Ballets Russes, therefore inspiring directly and indirectly the Almada's interest in stage design under modernist principles, but it can also be recognized that the style of Delaunay influenced later stage designs of Almada and also of the modernist Revista, as we will see later.

Almada Negreiros and Sonia Delaunay even developed a dance project, influenced by *simultané* principles that were proposed by Robert and Sonia, called *Ballet Veronese et Bleu*, which never actually took place<sup>13</sup>. But Almada, which was well-connected to the Portuguese aristocratic and bourgeois elites, was already directing a series of small dance pieces with young girls of aristocratic families. Obviously, these had been small, intimate affairs, with very restricted audiences, during aristocratic parties, which one of the participants would later describe as a "little entertainment"<sup>14</sup>. However, in 1919, Almada, with the financial support of the patroness Helena Castelo-Melhor, actually staged a dance performance in Teatro São Carlos, composed by two dance pieces called *Bailado do Encantamento (Dance of Enchantment)* and *A Princesa dos Sapatos de Ferro (The princess of the iron shoes)*, with music of the composer Ruy Coelho and set design of Raul Lino, and the participation onstage of the always daring Negreiros. These presentation was a minor success, with three repetitions and the presence of most of the elite of Lisbon and even of the then President of the Republic, Sidónio Pais.

Later, Almada would give up choreography and dance but would not lose his interest in theatre. He started doing posters for some theatre troupes, like

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<sup>13</sup> SANTOS, V. Pavão dos (1993) O Escaparate de Todas as Artes ou Gil Vicente visto por Almada Negreiros. P. 10

<sup>14</sup> SANTOS, V. Pavão dos (1993) O Escaparate de Todas as Artes ou Gil Vicente visto por Almada Negreiros. P. 12

Companhia Lucília Simões, and later he would go on doing illustrations and covers for the most important theatre magazine of the time, *De Teatro*. He was also writing for drama under modernist principles, with plays like *Os Outros* (*The Others*), *Pierrot e Arlequim* (*Pierrot and Arlechino*) where he displays his obsession with the characters of Commedia Dell Arte, *Portugal* or *Deseja-se Mulher* (*Wishing a Woman*). However, in spite of his own efforts and the efforts of others, most of his plays seemed to not been staged through most of his life, and were only staged from the 1960s onwards, therefore evading the scope of this essay, which is mostly focused on the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As an aside, let me state that António Ferro, who was a theatre critic and later, during Salazar's dictatorship, would be responsible for the Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional, the ministry that promoted the arts and culture under that dictatorship, also was an admirer of the Ballets Russes. When he created the Portuguese dance troupe "Grupo de Bailados Portugueses Verde Gaio", in 1940, he was obviously inspired by the Ballet Russes, and even called them the Portuguese "Ballet Russes", according to Castro<sup>15</sup>.

Another aside, but of a greater significance, the show at the Coliseu had a brochure with illustrations by Jorge Barradas, which would become one of the most important set designers of Teatro de Revista in Portugal, as we will see later.

### **Modernist set design and Teatro de Revista**

According to França<sup>16</sup>, the Teatro de Revista had an important presence in Lisbon. There were at least 10 theatres that were devoted solely to Teatro de Revista, and most of them were run by the same entrepreneur: António de Macedo. This means that Teatro de Revista was a commercial enterprise that demanded numerous audiences, attending regularly the performances. The

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<sup>15</sup> CASTRO, Maria João (2009) A influência dos Ballets Russes na criação do Verde Gaio. [http://www.fundacaoantonioquadros.pt/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=65&Itemid=34&limit=1&limitstart=17](http://www.fundacaoantonioquadros.pt/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=65&Itemid=34&limit=1&limitstart=17) Access 24 December 2014

<sup>16</sup> FRANÇA, José Augusto (1992) Os anos vinte em Portugal. Lisboa: Ed. Presença. P. 103

required the employment of celebrities, famous tunes, addressing current affairs and novelties that could raise the curiosity of the audiences. One of the most revealing examples of the use of these novelties that could draw the attention of the audience, is the *Revista Ó da Guarda*, which, in 1907, used the new technology of cinema in one of its scenes, to stage a fictional drama of one its most famous actresses being kidnapped, and using the moving image to show things happening outside the theatre, supposedly simultaneously and in real time.

It is likely that one of the reasons of *Teatro de Revista* being the first genre of theatre in Portugal to employ the work of modernist artists in its costumes and scenography is, likewise, the need of novelty and of causing the awe of the crowds.

According to Pavão dos Santos<sup>17</sup>, until the 1920s, most set design of *Teatro de Revista* was made by Eduardo Machado and Augusto Pina, as well as Luís Salvador, and the costumes were mostly made by Manuel Francisco dos Santos. Machado and Pina kept to the style of Portuguese cartoonist and satirist Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro (1846-1905) and Francisco dos Santos owed his success mostly to the fact that he had a huge wardrobe that he rented, combining the materials he had and was needed, without giving particular thought to artistic styles or aesthetic considerations. However, shortly after the visit of the Ballet Russes to Portugal, and even in spite of the bad reception the dance company received, something new took place.

This change seems to have been in a way promoted by António Ferro. In 1925, Ferro, who at the time was writing theatre reviews, started criticizing openly the conventional set design of most plays, on the theatre reviews he wrote for *Diário de Notícias*, clearly promoting a new Modernist aesthetics. This caused great controversy, namely among the set designers of the time, who protested in newspapers and even threatened to boycott any help or collaboration with Modernist artists.

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<sup>17</sup> SANTOS, V. Pavão dos (2000) A revista modernista. P. 2

And, on the same year, Almada Negreiros made the set design for the Revista *Chic-chic*, in what is usually considered the first truly modernist set design in Portugal.

The change was clearly in the air, as, on the same year, Eduardo Malta, then considered a modernist painter, made the set design for the Revista *Tiroliro*, which was lauded by Ferro.

Almada Negreiros would create several other set designs for theatre, but in 1927 he left for Madrid, where he hoped to promote his career as a visual artist and as a playwright. Therefore, most modernist aesthetics that would happen in Portugal and mainly take hold on at Teatro de Revista would be the work of other modernist artists.

Among these artists we find Jorge Barradas (1894-1971), the same painter who had drawn the illustrations of the Ballets Russes's brochure at the Coliseu, who would collaborate with Negreiros in a Revista of 1926, *Pomada Amor*, and who would have some important contributions for the set design of the revista *Sete e Meio* in 1927. And in the 1929, he, along with Stuart Carvalhais, Barata Feio e Rui Gameiro made the set design for *Ricocó*, which was largely praised by António Ferro<sup>18</sup>.

He would go on to work even more during the 30s, creating other set designs and costumes for Teatro de Revista, like *Lua Cheia* (Figure 2).

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<sup>18</sup> FRANÇA, José Augusto (1992) Os anos vinte em Portugal. P. 104



**Figure 2.** Detail of a set design, with actors, of Jorge Barradas, for the play *Lua Cheia* (1934).

Barradas was drawn into Teatro de Revista by his work illustrating several magazines. His ability for satirical drawings and, later, for decorative drawings, made him a perfect fit for Teatro de Revista. He also became very in demand by the Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional, de António Ferro, for his ability to mix the modernist techniques with the ability of portraying the popular themes of national identity, and would become famous for decorating several well-known Portuguese landmarks.

Another artist, José Barbosa (1900-1977), son of another set designer of more conventional style, Barbosa Júnior, became also a prolific and renowned set designer, and his drawings for *Água Pé* (1927) drew general praise and, supposedly, even made the audience applaud the settings during the shows. *Água Pé* would be on stage for a full year, which was an enormous success at the time, and Ferro would commend the modernity of the piece, even if he

complained about it being “too Russian”, that is, too clearly inspired by the set design of the Ballets Russes<sup>19</sup>.

This clearly marks *Água Pé* as the first triumph of Modernist aesthetics on the Portuguese stage and, namely, in Teatro de Revista. From this moment onwards, the Modernist style would become predominant in Teatro de Revista and the audience would expect it.

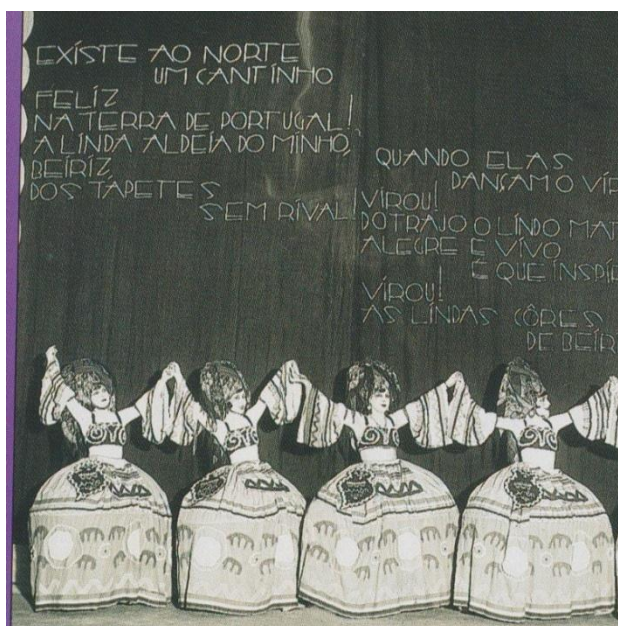
Such success would make José Barbosa draw other sets and costumes for several other pieces of Teatro de Revista, like *O Sete e Meio* (1927), in a partnership with the architect, painter and director Leitão de Barros. On a side note, *O Sete e Meio* was also the debut of a Portuguese actress called Beatriz Costa featuring a Louise Brooks hairstyle, which also signed the changing times in fashion.

José Barbosa would work non-stop in the set design and costume design of Teatro de Revista, and, from 1927 until 1950, he worked on 21 pieces of Teatro de Revista, including *A Rambóia* (1928), *Chá de Parreira* (Figure 3), *Areias de Portugal* (1932) among many others.

His success opened to him the doors of the national theatre, so, from the 1930s onwards, he would also work on dramas, tragedies, operas, ballet and classical theatre, and was even called to do set and costume design for the Companhia Portuguesa de Bailado Verde Gaio that Ferro had just created.

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<sup>19</sup> SANTOS, V. Pavão dos (2000) A revista modernista. P. 6



**Figure 3.** Detail of José Barbosa's set and costume design for the play *Chá de Parreira* (1929).

Other artists in the same style working in teatro de Revista were Maria Adelaide Lima Cruz (1908-1985), António Amorim (1898-1964), Jorge Herold (1907-1990), Laierte Neves (1914-1981), Pinto de Campos (1908-1975), just to name some of the most famous and with larger experience, although other modernist artists also had an occasional hand on some plays, like Alice Rey Colaço (1893-1978), Raul Lino (1879-1974), António Soares (1894-1978), Milly Possoz (1888-1967), Sarah Afonso (1899-1983) and Frederico George (1915-1994), most of whom would turn the Teatro de Revista into a showcase of Modernist visual arts in the 1930s and 1940s.

While a detailed overview of individual style and work of these artists is outside the scope of this article, it is possible to detect a strong inspiration in motifs of Portuguese folk lore or tradition, heavily stylized through the geometrical patterns of modernism, and a strong closeness to the picturesque image of Portugal that was heavily promoted by Estado Novo.

There is also a notorious emphasis in representing the multitude, the crowd, and luxurious and the grandiose, with the purpose of causing an impression on the audience, through strong contrasts of colours and deeply contrasting shapes and repetitions of the human body.

All this created an art that was instantly appealing for the audience, at the same time looking fresh and familiar, which may explain the growing acceptance these style developed in most plays of Teatro de Revista from the end of the 1920s onwards.

### **Regional appropriations**

Although it seems somehow puzzling that the Modernist style would dominate one of the most commercial genres of theatre in Portugal, several reasons can be given for that.

One reason was the ease with which Modernist artists devoted themselves to design and decoration in more industrial settings. This was part of Modernist's ideology of embracing progress and mechanization of life. Sonia Delaunay was the model for that, employing her technique of *simultané*<sup>20</sup> not only in her art works, but also to the set design for the Ballets Russes, in the fashion design and other types of design she worked on later in life. This availability of artists allowed many Modernist artists to work also in decoration and set design, like Almada Negreiros and Jorge Barradas, for instance. Like Rodrigues<sup>21</sup> notes, most artists of the first Portuguese generation of Modernist artists worked between caricature drawing, illustration, painting, set design, poster design, advertisement, book illustration and even songbooks of popular songs. I would argue that many were drawn to Teatro de Revista precisely for doing this type of work, as it happened with Barradas or António Amorim.

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<sup>20</sup> JAMIE, Kathleen (2015) Sonia Delaunay: The avant-garde queen of loud, wearable art. <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/mar/27/sonia-delaunay-avant-garde-queen-art-fashion-vibrant-tate-modern>. Access March 27, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> RODRIGUES, António (1995) Jorge Barradas. Lisboa: INCM. P. 30

Another reason was the constant need of Teatro de Revista's entrepreneurs to surprise their audience. This demanded a constant search of novelties that could awe, interest and attract audiences. These novelties could involve celebrities, new scenes, but also new set designs and new costumes, and all could give a new breath to old pieces, and attract new audiences or returning audiences. Modernist art, through the embrace the spectacular, the dynamic movement, the embrace of new technologies and techniques was especially able to do that.

Another reason was the predisposition of Modernist Art to presenting deep contrasts, luxurious settings and awe-inspiring works that could be used to awe the audience of Teatro de Revista, most of whom looking for distraction, entertainment and a break in the monotonous life of Portugal under the Military Dictatorship. In a way, Modernist art served as escapism and dreamlike art that could seduce and fascinate the audience.

One last reason was the embrace of National motifs that could better seduce the audience, looking for a more grandiose reenactment of the traditions and daily life it knew and the Teatro de Revista deftly explored through humorous and musical sketches. One only has to note the example of Jorge Barradas, whose drawings displayed a strong interest in presenting the popular types of Lisbon, the same popular types that fueled so many sketches of Teatro de Revista. Barradas not only made this drawings which would be published in some of the newspapers and magazines of the time, like *ABC*, *Ilustração*, *Diário de Lisboa*, etc.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, it is possible to believe that, following the ideas of its main promoter, António Ferro, and the strong influence of the Ballets Russes, the Teatro de Revista became one of the main promoters of Modernist Art in Portugal. This was a more popular art that was embraced by Teatro de Revista as a mirror of daily life that could awe and draw crowds.

## Conclusions

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<sup>22</sup> RODRIGUES, António (1995) Jorge Barradas. Lisboa: INCM. P. 42

Although the examples presented obviously display the individual tastes and styles of each artists, it is possible to identify some trends and currents in the Modernist set design and costume design of Teatro de Revista from the 1920s and following decades.

First of all, the use of contrasts, in colours and shapes, in a way which is very reminiscent of the style of Sonia Delaunay. Comparing the pictures that remain of the settings of the time, we can see a strong preference for primary colors and contrasting colors to create dynamics and the illusion of movement.

Second, a taste for the exoticism and a stylized representation of exotic locales and cultures that could cause an impression on the audience, and displayed some of the influence of the Ballets Russes.

Third, and paradoxically, a taste for the local and tradition-bound. Many of the settings and costumes of Teatro de Revista had to represent, in a cartoonish or sentimental style, the familiar neighborhoods or scenes of Lisbon and other typical Portugal places. Displaying a more nationalistic trend that was already part of the first waves of Modernism, the Modernist style of Teatro de Revista was also able to do that. In fact, in such a persuasive and efficient way that several of the set designers and costume designers of Teatro de Revista would later work on some of the propaganda works of the nationalistic and conservative government of António Salazar. Barradas would work on the Stand of Portugal in the Latin-American Exhibition of Seville, Barbosa would work at the National Theatre, Lima Cruz would work on the decoration of public buildings, etc.

Fourth, the influence of António Ferro, who, even if he was mostly a marginal figure of the first and second Portuguese movements of Modernism, would become deeply influential, as a theatre reviewer and as a politician, heavily promoting a more nationalistic brand of Modernism that could be used as a tool of propaganda of Salazar's dictatorship. And although the ability of Teatro de Revista to criticize the political *statu quo* was also one of the reasons of its

popularity, the existence of theatre censorship<sup>23</sup> taking place before the premiere of each show and with the power of causing damage to the financially vulnerable Teatro de Revista, ensured that such criticism could only take place through the subtlety of the text and actors and very rarely through set design or costume design.

Fifth, although Modernist set design and costume design became ubiquitous in Teatro de Revista, and although the dance routines of it were also influenced by the Russian and Modernist dance<sup>24</sup>, the dramaturgical structure of the genre did not change. In fact, the texts and authors of Modernist theatre were notoriously absent from the Portuguese stage well into the 1960s.

But, in a way, this also reflects the fact that the Modernist aesthetics seems to have found greater audience acceptance in the visual arts and in architecture than in other arts, namely in literature, playwriting, music and others. That is why Almada Negreiros had to endure the fact that his plays were being ignored or passed on by several theatre troupes for several years, and only actually have some of his plays be staged towards the ends of his life. Like, in 1963, *Deseja-se Mulher*, which was staged by Casa da Comédia, under very restricting conditions and for a very limited audience. However, it is undeniable that he helped bring the Modernist revolution to the stage of Teatro de Revista still at a young age, and, therefore, help popularizing and allow the Portuguese appropriation of the Modernist ideas that, at the time, were shaping the aesthetics, thinking and life of Europe.

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<sup>23</sup>There were several layers of theatre censorship in Portugal at the time. The first stage would be the reading and vetting of the text for the play. Second stage would be the viewing and vetting of the last general rehearsal before the premiere. As the writing of the text was already paid, and the general rehearsal meant that the production of the play was already fully completed, with weeks of rehearsal, and all the props, costumes and sets already made, and the play advertised, any play rejected at this stage would be a serious blow to the theatre troupe, financially. Finally, it could happen that during the season of the show, censors would come to watch it, and they could close the performance if they felt something went against the moral and political values of the State.

<sup>24</sup>This change happened mostly through the choreographer Francis Graça, who was the choreographer of *Água Pé*, and would become the choreographer of the Companhia Portuguesa de Bailados Verde Gaio, but the impact of Modernism in Portuguese Dance is outside the scope of this paper.

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