



ALEXANDRE CONEFREY

*It's not a landscape
It's a battlefield*

17.09 | 06.11.2021

Painting as a Game and as Field of Battle

Night advances over the city, as the drawing-board is slowly covered with green spaces, closely-observed landscapes in vivid colours, but there is no sign of human activity. One person only is alive and present, but is out of the picture – it is the artist, producing strong, lively images for the theatre of ghosts where we, late-coming spectators to the secret process of creation, will come face to face with the terrible beauty of the Void.

An exploration of the hundreds of works that Alexandre Conefrey produces, in which painting and drawing are often superimposed, leads us to see him as a compulsive personality. A compulsive creator can be a compulsive player if we consider, as I think we should, his work to be a permanent game – a succession of apparently different games played on different boards but which are actually series with their own internal logic and unified by a set of common rules.

There is something strange to be seen when we first look, caused by the artist's wide-ranging approach to themes and ways of making – his "styles"; then comes the recognition of the unifying logic, justifying and defending the signs that point clearly to an unswerving and indomitable originality.

These marks are exactly the same as those left on the battlefield when hostilities have ceased. Not just because a significant proportion of the work of Alexandre Conefrey has, from its first public appearances, taken war as its most immediate theme; but because the process by which he draws his subject-matter out takes the form of a metaphor of a game of military strategy: there are moments of rapid progression of movement and others of unexpected suspension in time, operations of camouflage and disguise, surprise attacks, the scattering and loss of focus, the creation of voids and of the sudden reunion of forces in the terrain (on the surface) of the representation.

All of this, which goes on from series to series (and might still be considered reasonable) occurs again and again inside each series of works, causing an effect of overall strangeness: objects or solutions that repeat or contradict themselves, returning or metamorphosing, to disappear forever or never to be repeated.

A concrete example of this is provided by the works in this exhibition in which there is an extreme variability of styles, points of view and visual pretexts, united by the same theme – golf courses and greens. Dominating the materials at his disposal with the hand of a master, Alexandre Conefrey makes use of a series of languages, and it is in the history of art that he looks for the wisdom to manage his resources until he is able to achieve the antithetical objective that he is seeking: that of the abstraction of the theme that figurative representation supports. The history of art functions within him as a source of inspiration for his risky plastic manoeuvres. In



this series, the artist tries out some approaches that are more peacefully naturalist, more daringly impressionist (going as far as pointillist) and finally, getting aggressively close to fauvism and expressionism, and in a rather melancholy fashion, to symbolism, and more explicitly in the *maniera* of Hockney.

Such a huge range of strategies can only be justified for the entertainment of the artist acting as a player and enjoying the pure pleasure of doing/seeing the images grow on the *screen* of the paper, enabled by the multiple possibilities at his disposal. This is an abstract pleasure, achieved through an infinity of themes and contradictory resources; just as the choice of theme is, at the start, superfluous. In this case, which came about from the banal reality of a place where he went on holiday, the artist creates a metaphor of a greater reality in which all the themes that he is working on converge.

The pleasure is also abstract because Alexandre Conefrey achieves it by means of the obsessive nature of his work (as shown by the number of pieces, number of series, speed of creation and hours worked every day). Then we have the initial (and later, chosen) ignorance of the specific rules of the complex game that is really being played out on those green boards – which are like casino tables. They are vast boards, open to the elements, swaying in the wind and continuously growing – boards made of living vegetation – a condition needed for the success of the warlike metaphor that the artist has endowed them with.

The golf courses, like any of the other landscapes, real or represented, are constructed landscapes; they take that artificiality to rare extremes, at times implying that there is a threat to natural and socio-historic resources (water, agricultural crops, original cultural creations) belonging to the areas in which they are located and which they transform. They attract a new population, the players and their *entourage*, generating inter-personal and sporting competition, both professional and amateur, within each golf course, and business and economic competition between the different golf courses, creating and becoming part of national and international networks. For this reason alone they are also battlefields.

By presenting them empty of players, like a board without pieces or a screen before a game, Alexandre Conefrey seems to deny the energy of his own gestures or of the multi-coloured *féerie* of each drawing and leads us, using these seductive methods, towards the trap created by the holes on a green, set for us to fall in to.

We find, throughout his work, each of the realities that are evoked by this series (compulsivity, game, abstraction, a diversity of languages, historical justification of the images, internal tension and the illustration and metaphor of war) – and it is this permanent diversity that gives Alexandre Conefrey the indisputable mastery that is so evident in his work.

João Pinharanda
Lisbon, 19 August 2021



ALEXANDRE CONEFREY, Lisbon, 1961. Lives and works in Lisbon.
1993 – 1995 Drawing Course at Ar.Co, Lisbon, Portugal.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2021 *It's not a landscape | It's a battlefield*, Galeria 111, Lisbon, Portugal
2020 *Água Pesada*, Arpad Szènes – Vieira da Silva Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal
2019 *A Leste do Paraíso*, Galeria 111, Lisbon, Portugal
Anima Mea, Galeria Ala da Frente, Vila Nova de Famalicão, Portugal
2018 *E...*, Galeria Belo Galsterer (Project Room), Lisbon, Portugal
2017 *Peso*, Galeria Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon, Portugal
2016 *Anima Mea*, Galeria do Parque, Vila Nova da Barquinha, Portugal
Fear knot fear, Appleton Square, Lisbon, Portugal
2015 *Grazie Mille, Mille Grazie*, Galeria Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon, Portugal
The Pit: dois abismos – um poço fitando o céu, EDP Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal
2014 *Mockingbird*, Casa Museu Nogueira da Silva, Galeria do Jardim, Braga, Portugal
2013 *Plus*, Galeria Miguel Nabinho, Lisbon, Portugal
2012 *To cut a long story short*, Giefarte, Lisbon, Portugal
2011 *Que horas são?*, Giefarte, Lisbon, Portugal
2009 *La Badinage*, Casa Museu Nogueira da Silva, Braga, Portugal
2007 *Lyrical*, Galeria Miguel Nabinho, Lisbon, Portugal
2004 *Hide and Seek*, Galeria Pedro Cera, Lisbon, Portugal
2003 *Natureza Morta*, Galeria Pedro Cera, Lisbon, Portugal
2002 *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, Galeria Presença, Oporto, Portugal
2000 Andrew Mummery Gallery, London, United Kingdom
Galeria Sala Alternativa, Caracas, Venezuela
1999 Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Paris, France
Consulado Geral de Portugal, Vigo, Spain
São Brandão e outras histórias, Galeria Pedro Cera, Lisbon, Portugal
1998 *Mon Pére*, Galeria Pedro Cera, Lisbon, Portugal
1997 Galeria Paula Fampa, Braga, Portugal
1996 Galeria Alda Cortez, Lisbon, Portugal

Group Exhibitions [selected list]

- 2021 *Um estranho aqui cheguei*, Galerias Municipais de Lisboa, Pavilhão Branco, Lisboa | Lisbon, Portugal
2020 Drawing Room, Sociedade Nacional de Belas Artes, Lisbon, Portugal
2019 Drawing Room, Sociedade Nacional de Belas Artes, Lisbon, Portugal
2015 *Um Horizonte de Proximidades – uma topologia a partir da Coleção António Cachola*, Arquipélago, S. Miguel, Açores
Oracular – Spectacular, CIAJG, Guimarães
2014 *Animalia e Natureza na Coleção do CAM*, Centro de Arte Moderna, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisboa
2013 *Abecedário – 40 Anos do Ar.Co*, MNAC– Museu do Chiado, Lisboa
2012 *Traços, Pontos e Linhas_ desenhos da Coleção António Cachola*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Elvas, Elvas
2010 *O Fio Condutor: Desenhos da coleção do CAM*, CAM, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisboa
2003 *Guardi – A Arte da Memória*, Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisboa



2001 EDP Arte, Prémio Desenho/ Prémio Pintura – II edição, Fundação de Serralves, Porto

Grants and Residencies

Exchange Program between the Royal College of Art, London, and Ar.Co, Lisbon, subsidized by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Public Collections

Ar.Co, Lisbon, Portugal

Banco Privado Português – Serralves Foundation, Oporto, Portugal

Caixa Geral de Depósitos, Lisbon, Portugal

CAM/ JAP, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal

Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

António Cachola Collection, Elvas, Portugal

EDP Foundation, Lisboa, Portugal

Figueiredo Ribeiro Collection, Abrantes, Portugal

Benetton Foundation, Italy

Carmona e Costa Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal

Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, Lisbon, Portugal

Coleção Manuel de Brito, Lisbon, Portugal

FLAD – Fundação Luso – Americana para o Desenvolvimento, Lisbon, Portugal