

Performing the (private) archive, rethinking history, and rewriting memory

Arquivos privados: Repensando a história e reescrevendo a memória através da performance

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This visual essay reflects on the importance of private photographic archives in the rethinking of history and the reshaping of memory. It demonstrates how performance can be used as a valid research tool in the study of photographic images.

The photographic albums of two families, my grandparents (my mother's and father's parents), represent a period in Portugal's history (1940-1975) scarred by one of the longest fascist dictatorships. The photographic work approaches the photographs in the family albums from both families, in an iconographic analysis. Focusing specifically on the images of my two grandmothers, as representative of two women's lives during this historical period. Both women lived under the same dictatorial regime, but one lived in mainland Portugal (Antonieta Fernandes) and the other in Portuguese overseas territories, India (1951-61) and Mozambique (1962-75) (Gisela Janeiro). The images in this essay refer to the period she lived in India.

The starting point was to investigate and analyse the archives. The images from both families' albums were juxtaposed to create diverse narratives from the original album ones. The second part was the performative interpretation of the images. This process began with acts of mimicry and a re-enactment of the same gestures which were revealed in the archive photographs. The performance was constructed in several stages: Stage 1: mimicry/mimesis; Stage 2: repetition; Stage 3: embodiment; Stage 4: deconstruction. The images presented form the project titled *The Archive Is Present*.

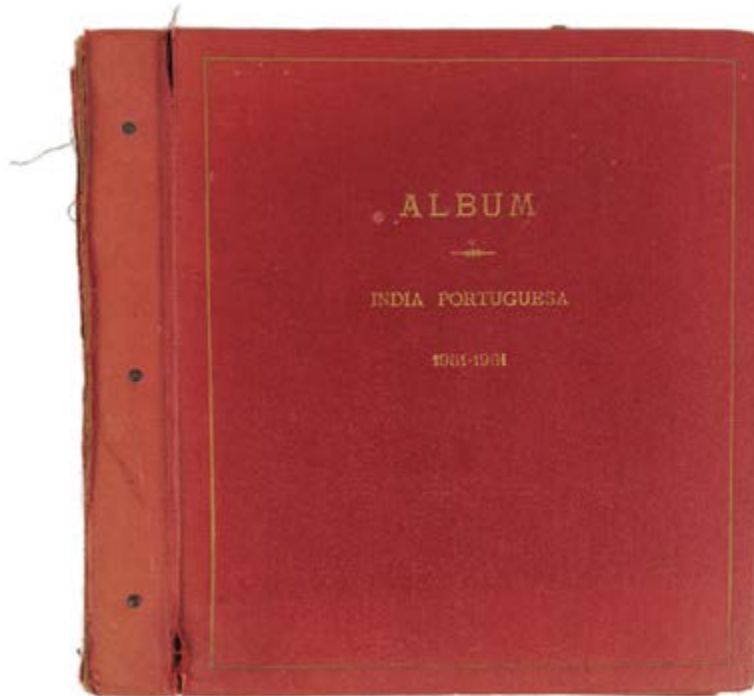
The historical contextualisation of the archive was crucial to understanding the politics of the New State's regime over women and their bodies. Representations of women in media and propaganda were restricted to the housewife. The New State would generate the hierarchy of the household, creating concepts of femininity such as the good mother, good housewife, submissive, and polite, all under the selfless ideal of caring for others in self-abnegation.

Understanding that the family was indeed permeable to the influence of the visual propaganda strategy was crucial and one of the critiques developed in the acts of performance. The composition of the images, the *mise en scène* (often symmetrical), and the clear influence of the regime's iconography on the photographs and the regime's policies on women's bodies are ingrained in the family archive. The juxtaposing of the two women's photographs demonstrated, through the iconographic analysis, that the iconography of the propaganda influenced only the images in the Fernandes archive.

Ultimately, for the acts of performance, this meant that only the images of Antonieta went through a process of deconstruction. None of Gisela's selected poses are enacted through stage 4. It is not a coincidence and certainly not random, although it was not intentional. The intuitive character of the performance weighed on which steps were developed through which poses. The fact that Antonieta's poses were the only ones that needed to be taken further and decodified meant that they were more coded to start with. Some of Antonieta's poses were physically difficult to mimic, her postures so distant and unfamiliar to my own body. In the enactments, I needed not only to identify with Antonieta's poses, but also to deconstruct them, whilst in Gisela's there was never a need for deconstruction. Gisela's images were already familiar. There was no rigidity of pose visible in them and therefore, no need to free myself of them. There was no imprint of the dictatorship in them.

Just as the family archive intertwines official history, I needed to involve myself in the interpretation of the archives and the images in them. Using embodiment was a crucial part of the method. Positioning myself within an "other" body was decisive to fully comprehending the meaning and influence the dictatorial regime had had on, not simply my family, but my country and my culture. Recognizing otherness through myself and discovering meaning and peace within this otherness and within myself.

Janeiro



Fernandes



Antonieta
Fernandes



Sintra, Portugal, c. 1955

Gisela
Janeiro



Damão, India, 1950



Amarante, Portugal, c. 1956



Goa, India 1957



Portugal c.1953



Goa, India, February 1952



photograph, Fernandes archive



MPF summer camp
("Recordação de Férias," 1941)



Detail of photograph, Fernandes archive



Menina e Moça (Maiden and Modest)
nº 24, April 1949



photograph, Fernandes archive



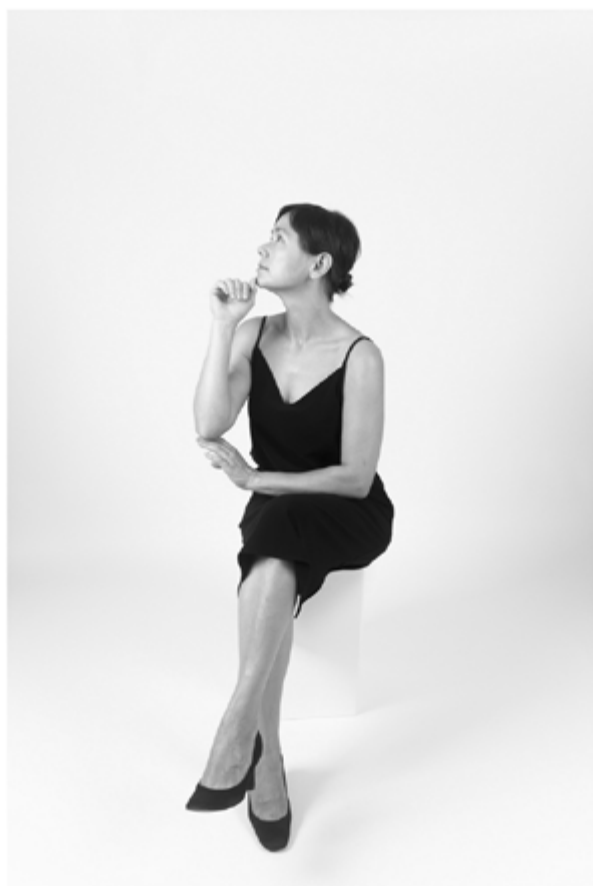
From Album Portugal 1940

Antonieta Fernandes





The Archive is Present

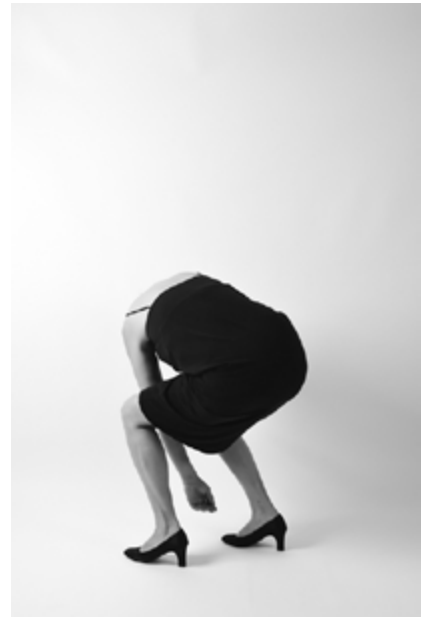
















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Biographical note

Ana Janeiro is a photographer, artist, teacher and researcher. She develops her work and artistic research within self-portraiture and performance photography. She holds a PhD from the University of Westminster (2019) and an MA in Photography from the KIAD (currently UCA) UK. She studied fine Arts at the Universidade de Lisboa, in Lisbon. She teaches at the School of Communication and Media Studies of the Lisbon Polytechnic and in IADE. Exhibiting regularly since the 2000's, he has exhibited in Portugal, UK, India, Brazil and Belgium. She is represented in several art collections.

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