

# MARIA HELENA VIEIRA DA SILVA

Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Marais, Paris: 20.09.2019 - 16.11.2019

Waddington Custot, London: 30.11.2019 - 15.02.2020

Di Donna Galleries, New York: 27.03.2020 - 29.05.2020

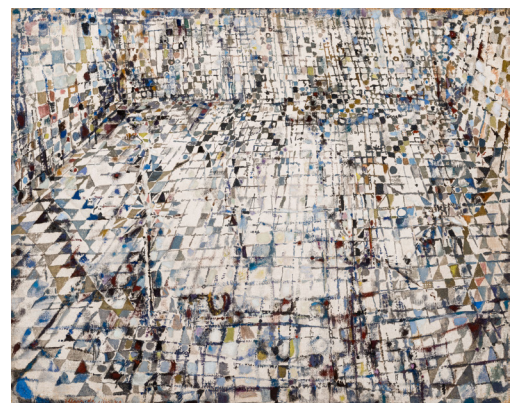


Figure de ballet, 1948, oil and graphite on canvas, 27 x 46 cm. Private collection.  
Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris

*"I look at the street and at people walking on foot with different appearances advancing at different speeds. I think of the invisible threads which manipulate them... I try and see the machinery which organises them. I think this is in a way what I attempt to paint."*

Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris, Waddington Custot, London, and Di Donna Galleries in New York are pleased to present a landmark travelling exhibition between France, Great Britain and the United States. In a first-of-its-kind collaboration between the three international galleries, the exhibition will present important works by the Portuguese-born painter Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, who was naturalized French in 1956.

Bringing together key paintings and works on paper from throughout the artist's career, the exhibition will explore Vieira da Silva's unique approach to depicting space through poetic, semi-abstract compositions. There is a labyrinthine quality to her paintings' structures, which play with space and perspective and invite the viewer to roam within the multidirectional spaces, to penetrate a system that reveals the complexity of the world by exploring every viewpoint of it, including the most intimate. Vieira da Silva herself said, *"Perspective is a way of playing with space. I very much enjoy looking at space and rhythms. There's a connection between a city's architecture and music. Both have long times and short times. Little windows and big windows."* Vieira da Silva's works reflect the Play of the World, whose cards are ceaselessly reshuffled, like accumulations of knowledge and memories, shaping thoughts and dreams, sciences and games, laws and treaties... of theologies and astronomies.



Sans titre, 1949  
Oil on canvas  
65 x 80 cm

Courtesy Waddington Custot, London

Vieira da Silva became an integral member of the expressive abstract movement in Paris following the Second World War. Studying and assimilating the early Modern styles of Cubism, Geometric Abstraction and Futurism, she embraced ambiguity between lyrical and geometric form in amalgamations of illusionistic space and defined her own personal visual vocabulary, unique in the world of painting.

As one of many émigré artists living in Paris in the post-war period, the infinite perspective of her compositions could be understood as revealing Vieira da Silva's fundamental exploration of space's recesses and connections, be they intimate or distant. Setting down a loose convergence of lines, without any preconceived subject in mind, Vieira da Silva coaxes the eye to identify emergent images, based on her memories and an intuitive sense of rhythm and pattern. This fractured representation of reality creates a psychological space that captures how the mind recalls and restructures memory, referring to not only her life in Paris, but to the sensory experiences of her youth in Lisbon, famous for its streets of captivating tiles, and her keen eye for everything around her.

While there is an underlying structure and order beneath her works' compositions, which maintain a sense of deep space and perspective, Vieira da Silva blurs the lines between representation and abstraction so that spaces reminiscent of familiar rooms or aerial city views never fully describe a single location or view, but a convolution of visited places. In today's world, defined by ever-accelerating speed and fluctuation, Vieira da Silva's works remain relevant and contemporary for their evocation of a constantly renewed and mesmerising reality. We embark on a tour of parallel spaces that stand alongside one another, providing for each other in a never-ending musical ballet.

Vieira da Silva certainly paints her astonishment at being alive, moving, persevering, at opening up to light and exchanging with everything around her. In her paintings' growing organic tissues, where lines cross over and over again, Vieira da Silva always finds new sources of light, the empty/full, the destination of unknown presence she has explored since the beginning of her work. In her works from the 70's to the 90's especially, an ascending trajectory becomes more evident, as if our lives were similar to the road less travelled.

Just a few years after Vieira da Silva's arrival in Paris in 1928 she became acquainted with Jeanne Bucher, who was the first gallerist to show her work and to whom Vieira da Silva remained faithful through the generations, until her death in 1992. The gallery has been defending her work ever since. Through this important exhibition, and to underline the rare pictorial universe of a woman painter in an international context, the Paris gallery Jeanne Bucher Jaeger joins in collaboration with Waddington Custot and Di Donna Galleries. This unique exhibition tours the three spaces, thus reshuffling each time the cards of works that are deeply contemporary for their global vision of a space made of countless interwoven connections.



*Composition aux damiers bleu*, 1949  
Gouache on paper  
48 x 62 cm  
Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris



*Sans titre*, 1955  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 73 cm  
Courtesy Waddington Custot, London



*Chemins de la paix*, 1985  
Oil on paper mounted on canvas  
73 x 100 cm  
Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris



*Le Jeu de cartes*, 1937  
Oil on canvas and graphite  
73 x 92 cm  
Private collection  
Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris

## BIOGRAPHY

Maria Helena Vieira da Silva (b. 1908, Lisbon, Portugal; d. 1992, Paris, France) enrolled at the Academia Nacional de Belas Artes, Lisbon, in 1919 to study drawing with Emilia Santos Braga. She moved to Paris from Lisbon in 1928 to study sculpture under Antoine Bourdelle and Charles Despiau at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. There she met her future husband, Hungarian painter Árpád Szenes, and in 1929 gave up sculpture for painting. Living in Paris, she absorbed a variety of influences, from the geometric abstraction of the group Cercle et Carré (Circle and Square, 1929–33) and Joaquín Torres-García, to avant-garde Cubism. Vieira da Silva began to paint rectangular patches of colour to recall the Hispano-Arabic Azulejo tiles, undulating cobbled pavements and tiered architecture of Lisbon. In 1933, Vieira da Silva had her first solo exhibition at Galerie Jeanne Bucher, Paris; the gallery remained her main dealer throughout her career.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Vieira da Silva and Szenes fled to Portugal before moving on to Rio de Janeiro. Jeanne Bucher organised her first solo exhibition in New York at Marian Willard Gallery in 1946. She continued to paint and exhibit in Brazil until her return to Paris in 1947. In the 1950s, Vieira da Silva's paintings echoed the grim realities of post-war Europe. Titles such as 'La gare inondée' (The flooded station) (1956), 'La traboule' (1957) and 'Ruines' (Ruins) (1956) reflect the flooded and razed cities, claustrophobic corridors and altered landscapes after the war. Vieira da Silva became a French citizen in 1956, and was awarded the Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 1962. She was the first woman to receive the French Grand Prix Nationale des Arts in 1966.

Vieira da Silva has had retrospectives at Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover, in 1958; Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, in 1969–70; Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1977; Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, in 1988, touring to Grand Palais, Paris; and Fundación Juan March, Madrid, in 1991. Important exhibitions were presented at Fundação Árpád Szenes – Vieira da Silva, Lisbon in 2015, and at Musée d'Art moderne de Céret, in 2016.

During the course of her career, the French State acquired several of her paintings, three of which hang in the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris. In 1994, Guy Weelen and Jean-François Jaeger's two volume catalogue raisonné and monograph of Vieira da Silva's work was published by Skira. Her works are held in important collections throughout the world, including Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.