

WADDINGTON CUSTOT

Press Release

Maria Helena Vieira da Silva

Paris: 20 September – 16 November 2019
Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris

London: 30 November 2019 – 15 February 2020
Waddington Custot, London

New York: 26 March – 29 May 2020
Di Donna Galleries, New York



“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.”

Waddington Custot in London, Jeanne Bucher Jaeger in Paris, and Di Donna Galleries in New York are pleased to present a landmark travelling exhibition of important works by the Portuguese-born painter Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, in a first-of-its-kind collaboration between the three international galleries.

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’ imaginary grid-like structures which play with space and perspective and disorient the viewer by pulling the gaze in multiple directions, both inviting us deeper and shutting us out. As the artist described:

“Perspective is a way of playing with space. I take a lot of pleasure in looking at space and its rhythms. The architecture of a city has connections to music. There are long notes, and short notes. There are small windows, and large windows.”

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.

The indistinct perspective of her compositions could be understood as revealing Vieira da Silva's sense of dislocation as one of many émigré artists living in Paris in the post-war period. 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 distorts 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.

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 interior rooms or aerial city views never fully describe a single location or view. 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 shifting and mesmerising reality.

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 with whom the artist would have a decades-long and faithful relationship until her death in 1992. Through this important exhibition the Paris gallery Jeanne Bucher Jaeger joins in collaboration with Waddington Custot and Di Donna Galleries, cementing Vieira da Silva's position on the international stage.

NOTES TO EDITORS

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 traboules' (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. 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. Important exhibitions were presented in 2015 at Fundação Árpád Szenes – Vieira da Silva, Lisbon which was created to study and to diffuse the knowledge of Vieira da Silva work, and at Musée d'Art moderne de Céret, in 2016.

Credit Line

Maria Helena Vieira da Silva is at Waddington Custot from 28 November 2019 – 15 February 2020
waddingtoncustot.com

Image

Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, Les figurants, 1948, oil on canvas , 19.2 x 27.2 cm Courtesy Waddington Custot

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Exhibition:	Maria Helena Vieira da Silva
Address:	Waddington Custot, 11 Cork Street, London W1S 3LT
Dates:	30 November 2019 – 29 February 2020
Opening Times:	Monday to Friday, 10am–6pm; Saturday: 11am–6pm
Admission:	Free
Travel:	Piccadilly, Green Park or Bond Street