Almada Negreiros and the musical iconographic representation: the case of the Church of our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Fátima in Lisbon

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The Church of our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Fátima: a brief state of the art

In relation to the Church of our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Fátima, several studies have been carried out so far with the most diversified topics: architectural concerns, political issues, liturgical matters or even artistic matters.

The reasons for classifying this temple as an important research subject are easy to understand.

The Church of our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Fátima was the first church to be built in Lisbon after establishment of the Republic in 1910. This church, dedicated to Our Lady of Fátima, consecrated by the end of the thirties (1938) was situated in the confluence of several important avenues: Avenida de Berna, Marquês de Tomar, Barbosa du Bocage e Rua Poeta Mistral. This was an ideal place due to the urban integration, which would enhance the aesthetic value of the building. The church is the result of the project commissioned to architect Porfirio Pardal Monteiro in 1933, which took one year to be completed before starting the construction in 1934.

The selection of this architect was only one of several factors which caused a wave of protest concerning this catholic temple, built under orientation of Cardinal Cerejeira, Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon who was later associated with the regime of António de Oliveira Salazar. Although being a figure often characterized as a "man of the regime", Paulo Costa tells us in his important article "The Church of our Lady of the
Holy Rosary of Fátima and modern art in Portugal" that the relationship of this man to power would actually have been a kind of symbiosis, in which both the artist and the political power were able to take advantage of the best available characteristics, without any of the parties really giving up their values. Indeed, Mariana Pinto dos Santos also refers to this close connection between the artist and power, stating that Pardal Monteiro was highly requested as an artist by the regime and that it was therefore easy for him to work with the artists he pretended.

Pardal Monteiro was greatly influenced by foreign trends, especially those originating from Auguste Perret and Tony Garnier. The matter of the influence of these names on Monteiro is not to be underestimated, since both were masters in the creative use of reinforced concrete - let's recall that some of the international models for our Lady of Fátima are the churches of Raincy and Montmagny, both built by Perret. This influence, possibly caused by Monteiro's fascination for Perret, was also mentioned by Alberto Estima in an article in 2003, where he states that these international contacts allowed the Portuguese architect to "have access to privileged information in difficult times, namely regarding economy, information and culture" (Estima 2003: 156). The external structure of the church consists of similar elements, of which must be highlighted the use of reinforced concrete, a characteristic of both Raincy and Montmagny, and an indicator of the foreign influences in the construction. Nonetheless, these similarities can also be observed in the interior, which can be described as ample and wide spaces with significant height and openness. The upper parts of the churches stand out as in both cases they are equipped with stained glass panels of considerable dimension (although the panels of Raincy are larger). Additionally the options chosen for lighting of both temples are similar: the lights are formed by circles, which contain the lamps.

Due to the fact of this being the first church built after establishment of the republic, already well into the period of the military regime, and due to the fact that the political circumstances were demanding a consolidation of its own political and cultural expressions, it is not surprising that this church represented for Cardinal Cerejeira, in the words of Paulo Costa, "the beginning of a new era and the transformation of all religious art" (Castro, 2000: 413). It was therefore Cardinal Cerejeira himself, having an open vision towards modernist movements, who in the
name of the Catholic Institution defended the architects who were part of the project and the construction of the temple, at the moment of the heavy protests directed towards it. Some of the critical views were based on the conviction that despite the attempted modern lines, the building was still revealing a cold character and was lacking in innovation in its interior and especially not showing enough "typical portuguese traits". In regards to this, let's recall the words of the writer and lawyer Tomás Ribeiro Colaço as early as February 1939 in the portuguese journal Arquitectura Portuguesa: "Therefore, to demonstrate how ugly the new church is, ..., it is sufficient to show that it is lacking a feature that would be essential to its beauty. It couldn't be easier for me or any other person, as the new church is lacking any and all really typical portuguese traits. (...) Far from portuguese reality - what we find there appears to be an anti-portuguese direction. This would be enough to consider its art as false and its beauty as ugly [...]" (Colaço, cited by Costa 2000: 425). Other voices raised condemning the lack of "typical portuguese traits" in the Church of our Lady, like the voice of Arnaldo Ressano Garcia (President of the National Society of Fine Arts), a fierce critic of the modernists who refers to the huge design of Pardal Monteiro in a similar way as he refers to Almada as "that futurist who many consider half crazy and half presumptuous" and whose stained glass panels were of a "simultaneously violent and lyrical dramatism" (Garcia, cited by Costa 2000: 425). António Oliveira Salazar also condemned this temple, which in his view was bold and mischaracterized, distant from the corporative style of the Estado Novo.

In order to defend the artists and the project, Cerejeira said that those involved might not be practicing catholics (the architect himself publicly admitted not being religious, defining himself as a secular citizen, which resulted in criticism from the more conservative sectores of the Church) but would have grown up in families with tradition of religious education, granting that they had knowledge of the needs of a religious temple. Furthermore, this project received advice from figures linked to the Catholic world, like the belgian D. Martin (who travelled to Lisbon on purpose for the inauguration of the church; it is further important to mention that the connection of this church to the MRAR – Movement of Renewal of Religious Art - might have had its origin in D. Martin, who according to Alberto Estima would have known about the liturgical modernization advocated by the French representation of this movement; it
has to be recalled that the MRAR only comes to Portugal in 1952; we also have to mention the counselling by Monsenhor Pereira dos Reis, Rector of the Seminary of Olivais; according to the National Secretary of the Pastoral of Culture, both men were connected to the Liturgical Movement, enabling them therefore to offer advice related to the desirable architecture of a building with such characteristics and purposes. As an example, we can speak about the symbolism present on the structure: we find the baptismal chapel on the right side of the church and the mortuary chapel at the left side. Like this, one would emerge to the catholic faith by being baptized on the baptismal chapel, grow on its faith alongside the structure of the church, and ending one’s life on the mortuary chapel, forming a circle. Even the location and projecting of the baptismal chapel was thought: one would enter it by descending stairs, a symbol of the diving in the baptismal water, and get out by climbing those same stairs, symbolizing the emerging of a new man.

In this way, it should be possible to achieve the triple ambition of Cerejeira: “While building the church of our Lady of Fátima, we wanted it to satisfy the following three conditions: be a church, be a modern church, be a modern and beautiful church.” Several Portuguese artists collaborated in regards to this church: Pardal Monteiro and Rodrigues de Lima (architecture), Francisco Franco, Leopoldo de Almeida, Barata Feiro, Raúl Xavier and Anjos Teixeira (son) for sculpture, Almada Negreiros for the stained glass art and finally Henrique Franco and Lino António for the frescos. In the words of Father Miguel de Oliveira, all of them agreed to recognize the Cardinal Patriarch as the great mentor of this work: "The master of all of us, with a soul so big and a vision so deep, who often went ahead of our conceptions and always completed and retouched them further, doesn't have any tombstone in there. But he was the greatest of all, with his presence, his counsel and his encouragement: the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon" (Oliveira, s.d, 4).

2 - The artist and his work:

It is not a simple task to talk about Almada Negreiros, creator of all of the stained glass which can be found in the The Church of our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Fátima. Almada is an artist who fosters the idea of the total work of art; for him all kind of art is a performance, or "espectáculo" in Portuguese, which relates to the latin word spectare for "to contemplate". He is an artist who "covers all kind of arts", writing,
dancing, acting, drawing and painting. Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa thinks that Almada has towards life "an attitude of defiance and the desire to shock the audience, a totally irreverent and even iconoclastic attitude." (Sousa 1993: 9). This stands in accordance with the words of Mariana Pinto dos Santos who defines him as "protagonist of himself", someone who is constantly playing a role - often the role of himself.

His work consists of elements that are very varied, such as drawings, caricatures, mural paintings, studies, poetry, theater, ballet, geometric studies - something which the Portuguese painter Fernando José Neves de Azevedo, departed in 2002, characterizes as a "dazzling distraction". Almada had by himself an innate interest to cover a whole range of different kind of arts, on which he worked abundantly. This tendency could, according to the words of Mariana Pinto dos Santos, be related to the need of the artists to adapt to the requests and cultural orientations of the regime; it turns out to be necessary to learn and master a whole set of techniques which meet the preferences of the political power in order to ensure that work was ordered.

The collaboration between Porfírio Pardal Monteiro and Almada Negreiros didn't occur solely on occasion of the church of Our Lady; these two artists collaborated in other places, like the maritime stations of Alcântara and Rocha de Conde de Óbidos, both carried out under the direction of Duarte Pacheco, Minister of Public Contracts. The project of both stations was, like the church, commissioned to Pardal Monteiro and Almada Negreiros was also invited by the architect to be the artist responsible for the paintings which decorate the stations.

Almada was an eclectic artist and had the opportunity to participate in several cultural and intellectual networks, surrounding himself and socializing with the most diverse Portuguese artists of the time. We can mention his participation in the avant-garde magazine Orpheu (which had only two issues), a magazine where the idea of "artistic collaboration" which Almada defended could be possible. In Orpheu, which was described by Luiz de Montalvôr, founder of the magazine, in his introduction as "an exile of temperaments of art", Almada was able to work closer with figures like António Ferro (an editor, who became afterwards the target of a strong attack by Almada Negreiros), Fernando Pessoa or Mário de Sá-Carneiro. Almada also started to socialize with Santa-Rita Pintor (Guilherme de Santa Rita) or Amadeo de Souza-
Cardoso, both painters. In the end it could be said that he had a close connection to the so-called "geração d'Orpheu".

In the artistic production of Almada Negreiros, musical iconographic representation can be found frequently and appears in numerous shapes and styles. For example, in the station of Alcântara it is possible to admire musical representation in the form of a guitar (similar to the Portuguese guitar) and an accordion along the scenes representing the Nau Catrineta poem. But is also possible to observe the presence of music in other pictures. This applies to the painting “Autoretrato em Família II” where we can see the artist’s son holding a violin. Other works feature characteristics more related to the employment of lines and geometry, with strong similarities to the Cubist style. In fact, one of the main characteristics of the work of Almada is the use of geometrical shapes. For Vasco de Castro, the line, an element that can be found constantly in the work of Almada, represents a basic need of the artist, essential to the representation. In the words of this author "the glory of the purity of the line [was] his first and clearest obsession. Even where the fingerprints of the brush are visible, everything seems to be organized in an internal synthesis of a skeleton of which the designer takes care of" (Castro 1993: 38). We can find other instruments represented in works with these characteristics, like in the untitled work from 1940 in guache technique, where an instrument appears that could refer to the double aulos (according to the title shown on the platform "Modernismo - Arquivo Virtual da Geração de Orpheu", this painting could possibly represent Euterpe playing a diaulo).

There are even more significant similarities of some of his creations with works of musical representation by Picasso, like his painting Harlequin, from 1918, or the work "Arlequin e Guitarra" (1919), from Juan Gris; indeed, a major focus of musical representation in the work of Almada Negreiros can be found in his series of drawings and paintings related to street entertainers and harlequins (take for example his painting from 1923 where he represents one of these figures playing the guitar).

The topic of music is really employed quite often by this artist, just like his contemporaries did.

The Church of our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Fátima was no exception.

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1 Visto que existe uma primeira versão do quadro, esta sem representação musical.
Bearing in mind that music has always been associated with the practice of divine worship and that there can be found several references in the Bible, it is not surprising that Almada decided to include it by means of innumerable details along the stained glass that he designed for this building.

**The stained glass of the Church of our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Fátima:**

The stained glass that Almada Negreiros designed for the Church of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Fátima are distributed along the space of the church; we find several topics represented on them, such as the Holy Trinity, the Calvary, Our Lady of Mercy (in the chapel dedicated to her), the representation of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Queen of Christians and finally stained glass windows and Eucharistic symbols in the apse.

Why this fascination with stained glass? Bearing in mind what was said before about artists needing to adapt to the demands of political power for granting means of subsistence, we recall once more the words of Mariana Pinto dos Santos, curator of one of the most important exhibitions about Almada Negreiros, "Uma maneira de ser moderno". According to this art historian, art work in form of stained glass and mural paintings enjoyed renewed importance during the Estado Novo, due to being a kind of artistic expression that was popular and precious for regimes which wanted to get their messages across in a very clear manner. It is therefore not surprising that the project would contemplate this kind of art, as in 1933 had already been approved the new political constitution which later would come to be called Estado Novo and which concretizes the ideals of Salazar, inspired in corporativism, nationalism and religion.

Although Almada was the author of all stained glass in the church, only in two places he decided to represent musical topics. Let's talk about the representation that exists on the stained glass The Holy Trinity, a set of three panels located in the high choir; and also about the 5 panels of stained glass on the high altar. Starting with the representation of the Holy Trinity, Almada's final work shows us two angels, both having turned their backs, playing trumpets, an instrument typically associated not only with the Apocalypse (let's recall the seven trumpets, in the hands of
the seven angels, according to the description in the Book of Apocalypse) but also with moments of praise to God.

In terms of colors, we encounter a work with vibrant and bold colors ranging from green, golden, red and blue. This way of representing the Holy Trinity is one of the many existing possibilities, showing God the Father on top of it, the dove representing the Holy Spirit in the middle and finally the crucified Son below.

There are, however, previous studies where he employs musical representation much more frequently, besides using a different topic. These studies differ in regards to the chromatic variations used. In one of these studies, where he employs a very diversified color palette based on red, blue and yellow/golden, we can see what appears to be an ascension to heaven, as on the central location we solely find an empty staircase with a triangle crowned by white stars on top of it. It is therefore possible that we are looking at the representation of the Assumption of Our Lady, although traditionally there are twelve stars, not ten, as in this previous study. In this study, carried out with guache on plywood, on a total of three planks, Almada represents a harp, a violin, an accordion and a lute, where the predominant colors in the lower part which contains the musical representation are mostly red and yellow, while the color blue, maybe for its celestial symbolism, is only applied in the upper part of the study, representing the ascension.

There is another study about the same topic but with some differences, like the lack of the star crown or the color palette used, which is mostly based on golden. However, in this study the musical representation is quite fruitful, being represented eight trumpets, strummed instruments (guitar and lute), an accordion, an organ, bowed string instruments (a violin and a cello) and finally a harp, creating a much richer sound perception or suggestion than in the previously mentioned study, due to the presence of two instruments which traditionally have been associated with the musical practice of basso continuo in more distant historic periods.

It is especially interesting to point out in these two studies the question of the hidden eye representation - and yet so visible - which they contain. Almada was fascinated with eyes, one of his own most distinct physical attributes and which he managed to capture and distinguish so well in many self-portraits. According to his own words "my eyes are not mine, they are the eyes of our century" (in A invenção do dia claro,
1921), and "spotlights policing the infinite" (in *A o quadrado azul*, 1917). In both studies for stained glass for the church, we can observe how Almada arranges the angelic figures in the upper part in order to create a circle, which appears to refer to the iris of the human eye, with the pupil being visible in the inner circle, which contains a triangle. While this is not the only occurrence within the work of Almada (let's recall the way the painter inserts the representation of eyes in the scaffolding in one of the paintings for the station of Rocha do Conde de Óbidos) it is interesting to point out this detail, or suggestion, because of the size of the stained glass - it would then represent a giant eye, that observes the interior of the church. Almost like a divine eye, taking into account the place for which the work was designed. And it is important to point out that although these studies were not the chosen ones to be represented at the church, on the Trinity panel we can observe as well this eye-representation. And we could even speculate that at the main altar, each one of the angels is represented inside an circular eye, just as the one we can observe either on the previous studies or at the Trinity panel.

Speaking now of the musical representation that Almada portrays on the high altar, we can observe the presence of five panels of 3 columns per 5 rows, where the instruments appear several times. On the five panels, the last four rows are free of instruments, being designated mostly to praying or singing angels, and two angels responsible for the incense. Almada Negreiros carefully planned the positioning of the angels, since at the center of the altar we can find a structure where before the Blessed Sacrament was exposed to be honored: like this, along the five panels of stained glass, all the angels, regardless being instrumentalists, prayers, or singers, are perfectly positioned to look at and worship God.

On the first two rows across the five panels, we can find two cellos, five violins, four harps, two guitars, three lutes, three accordions, one drum, one lyre, one flute and six trumpets. Regarding vocal representation, present at the remaining rows, we can find seventeen singing angels, mainly at the left side of the altar, holding in their hands papers with musical staves on them. Almada doesn't represent all instruments in the same way. Notice for example the angels with cellos: there is the suggestion of a different sound pitch caused by the position of the hand on the strings, where one would result in a lower pitch while the other would result in a higher pitch. In the
same way, the representation of the angels with harps is made placing their hands in different positions, which makes it possible to imagine different harmonies. Regarding representation of plucked string instruments, it is interesting to point out that one of the angels holds the guitar in a position which is typical for the cello, ignoring the correct way of playing this instrument: could this detail be explained as a provocative gesture by the artist? Although this cannot be said with total conviction, as for now it remains only a theory without foundation, it is still important to mention this detail, as in the whole set of panels it is the only one where a representation of a performance is made in a way that is so distant from the reality of music. We can further discuss the suggestion which seems to be made concerning the degree of security, or confidence, of the instrumentalists; while there are cases where they demonstrate total knowledge of the instrument and the playing technique, being represented with eyes closed and the head reclined onto the instrument, in an attitude of delight and almost contemplative of their own performance, there are other cases (like the angel with a green tunic playing the cello, for example), where Almada depicts the eyes wide open, paying great attention to the gesture which they are performing. We cannot tell if that attentive look is the result of a hypothetical insecurity or if it demonstrates the execution of a passage with more difficult technique. Without a detailed description by the artist, on this level it is only possible to make assumptions and establish theories in a merely speculative way. There are some aspects common to all stained glass panels, with or without musical representation. They are all very much based on the line as geometric shape, just like Almada himself. They are stained glass panels, which although not predominantly showing geometric characteristics, still make us think of the idea of the line, be it straight or a curve, not showing a tendency to be fluent – more of many geometric forms creating a bigger picture. Furthermore it has to be pointed out that there is a characteristic from neorealism, an aesthetic trend corresponding to the third generation of the modernist movement in Portugal and which begins in the forties; in fact, this aesthetic trend will focus on the common man, the working man, the economically and socially less favored man, the worker and the farmer. This trend, according to Mariana Pinto dos Santos, glorifies the most important working means of people - feet and hands - which can be seen in
other works of Almada, such as in the depiction of varinas on murals of the maritime station of Alcântara. Indeed, also in the stained glass panels of this church, the hands of the angels - fundamental means to be able to play the instruments for which they are responsible - are depicted in large dimensions. The hands of these angels playing musical instruments are therefore their working base in praising to God and Almada doesn't hesitate to provide them with considerably sized hands.

Before ending this brief essay about the musical representation on the stained glass panels which Almada Negreiros designed for this church, it has to be mentioned that he depicted most of the instruments for which there is a reference in the Bible: this includes the harp (Psalm 92:3 - "Praise the Lord with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings"), the voice, the trumpets (Psalm 98:5-6 "Sing praises unto the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the voice of a song; with trumpets and the sound of the horn"), string instruments (Psalm 150 "Praise him with stringed instrument and harp"). However, there are no references to instruments from the family of the accordion, which is certainly justified by the time this instrument appeared. Nonetheless, this doesn't prevent Almada from adding this musical instrument to the collection of instruments with which these angels praise God.

Being this a first approach to these matters of musical iconography in the work of Almada Negreiros, centered on the Church of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Fátima as object of study, there certainly is much more to be done and to be studied.

However, to conclude, it would be interesting to recall the words with which Pardal Monteiro referred to Almada Negreiros, his partner in so many occasions: «In his stained glass, in the mosaic, in the mural painting and even in the iron, his talent produced works that put him definitively in the forefront of the renovators and the promoters of national art ... For the collaboration he gave me, for the much that he ennobled and valued my work, I once again witness to my admiration and my appreciation to the one whom my colleague Cottinelli Telmo called the most architect of the Portuguese painters, the painter Almada Negreiros». (Pardal Monteiro about Almada Negreiros)²

² http://www.citi.pt/cultura/artes_plasticas/pintura/almada/igreja.html
Bibliography


