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Maria Helena Mendes Pinto and the Encounter with Japan: an Analysis of the Semantic and Plastic Concepts of her Exhibitions
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In the 21st century, in the context of a globalisation that tends to abolish frontiers and where examples of geographical, civilisational and cultural isolation are increasingly rare (if they exist at all!?), it is almost impossible for us to imagine what an *Encounter* between completely different people, who had never set eyes on each other before, would be like, as was the emblematic and remarkable case in 1543, the year that marked the Portuguese arrival in Japan and the beginning of an interaction between the two cultures.

Maria Helena Mendes Pinto developed her studies about this field in the light of this encounter, which was reflected in a rich and unique artistic and communicational expression, thus revolutionising the history of Portuguese Museology and Museography.

Many of her scientific activities and their subsequent presentation have taken place along this passionate and inspiring path, providing interesting, intense and perspicacious studies in the field of Portuguese museology. At a certain point, an avid fascination for this fabulous *Encounter* between these two peoples is clearly evident, with a singular plastic and physical argumentation.

In fact, her work and research are of undeniable importance in terms of the history of Museology. All the exhibitions that will be analysed in this study reflect a specific moment and the prevailing policies, justifications and choices that characterised a time and space.

Thus, Maria Helena Mendes Pinto was curator or co-curator, or participated, oversaw, co-ordinated and even served as courier for extremely important pieces such as the *Namban byobu*, or simply provided advice about questions pertaining to expositional discourses or concepts in various exhibitions about *Namban* themes. These exhibitions can trace, in a global way,
paradigmatic visions and even certain tendencies of “fashions” that characterised an age, which we will limit here to between the 1980s to the mid-1990s.

Each and every one of the exhibitions that are presented here, as the most emblematic displays of the theme in question, have a common characteristic that is mentioned by their curators in every catalogue. Apart from the apparent fascination associated with this *Encounter* that is reflected in important state and private collections of *Namban* art, which are very often brought together in order to broaden this vision, a major concern is clearly evident: that of an altruistic sharing of this adventure and these objects in order to ensure a constant dialogue and understanding between cultures, which is aimed at culminating in a major symbiosis of understanding for a future that will hopefully be stronger and more solid and that is, essentially, a constant reaffirmation of the original *Encounter*.

The exchange and cordiality between peoples, a growth in national and international dialogue, the development of links between Portugal and regions where the Portuguese established their presence, a mutual understanding, an awareness of other sensibilities, concepts, visions of the world and other cultures, i.e. a greater proximity between different civilisations, constitute what we could call the ethical dimension of space and the museal or expositional message, which is clearly recognised by all those who were involved in these exhibitions.

Apart from the particular features of each exhibition, as we shall see, in terms of the message and construction of the displays, generally, all the large exhibitions related to the theme of the *Encounter* evidence three aspects, i.e. fundamental nuclei constituted and determined by the groups of pieces of this dynamic that include: screens, or *byobu* (in Japanese), as a meticulous documental record of the arrival of the Portuguese and the interaction between Portuguese and Japanese; the *Namban* objects for use by Japanese that reveal their iconographic fascination for the strange and fabulous *Nambanjin* who bring marvellous products and objects in their enormous black boat, shrouded in an aura of mystery, surprise and fascination that also confers upon them, especially through their clothes and accessories, customs and physical characteristics, a symbolic-magical character, one of innovation or even that of a trend, tendency or fashion (quickly assimilated by the Japanese who closely interacted with this presence); and the objects for the export market that merged European tastes and desires and the refined techniques and materials of the traditional Japanese arts. We shall see how these groupings determined and influenced the plastic concepts and the messages of these specific segments that portray the dynamics of *Namban* art.

The exhibition on “Namban Art” held at the hall for temporary exhibitions (level 0) of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 1981, organized by
the extinct Museography and Exhibition’s Service and with the collaboration of the Museum Calouste Gulbenkian, as part of the commemorations of the 25th anniversary of the Foundation, was put together with the collaboration of Maria Helena Mendes Pinto. Numerous pieces of Namban lacquer-ware and screens from the National Museum of Ancient Art were on display, reflecting the Japanese fascination for foreign tastes that clearly influenced aspects of everyday life, such as handicrafts, clothing, lacquer-ware, ceramics and metalwork, which constituted Namban arts and crafts. Here, as can be seen in the catalogue, this set of pieces combining traditional Japanese arts with Western influence, mainly created between 1590 and 1614, clearly reflected the world of Namban art. This travelling exhibition brought two collections together; both of which were originally private collections: that of the Civic Museum of Namban Art of Kobe, earlier the Ikenaga Museum founded by Hajime Ikenaga himself in 1938, which was donated to the city of Kobe in 1951 and the collection of the Namban Museum of Osaka or the Namban Bunkakan, founded by Yoshio Kitamura in 1968.

These two large collections of Namban and Kirishitan art, ranging from the 16th century to the 18th century, are presented in the exhibition catalogue, where they are divided into six large groups: Namban screens; Western style painting and other art; lacquer-ware; ceramics; metalwork and Namban clothing, which structured the exhibits and the message of the exhibition. The pieces from the Japanese collections were complemented by works from the Portuguese collections of the National Museum of Ancient Art, the Soares dos Reis National Museum and the Caramulo Museum, thus ensuring a more comprehensive display.

In 1983, the XVII European Exhibition of Art, Science and Culture of the European Council was held in Lisbon, on the theme “The Portuguese Discoveries and Renaissance Europe”, which would pave the way for large exhibitions around the same topic, in terms of semantic and plastic concepts. Moreover, it represented the crystallisation of a vision that still continues today, with large-scale exhibitions that combine pieces from numerous collections worldwide and involve many sectors.

This exhibition was a watershed in Portuguese Museology on account of the dimensions of the exhibition and the response of the public. Essentially,

3 See the general catalogue: XVII Exposição Europeia de Arte, Ciência e Cultura – Os Descobrimentos Portugueses e a Europa do Renascimento (general catalogue of the five nuclei of the exhibition: the Madre de Deus Convent, the Casa dos Bicos, the National Museum for Ancient Art, the Belém Tower and the Hieronymite Monastery, held between May and October 1983), Lisbon, Montepio Geral, 1984.
as was mentioned by Pedro Canavarro, the Curator, a cultural, urban and architectural discourse was established via the different nuclei of the exposition, which was scattered over five exhibition centres in Lisbon: the Madre de Deus Convent, the Casa dos Bicos, the National Museum of Ancient Art, the Belém Tower and the Hieronymite Monastery.

This articulation, around five major centres along the Tagus River, resulted in a coherent and extremely well structured exhibition. Fundamentally, the displays traced the history of the Portuguese Discoveries according to five poetic slogans centred in each exhibition space: “The voice of the land yearning for the Sea”; “Man and Time are One”; “Earth opens itself in sounds and colours”; “The Hand that ripped the veil off the West” and “The Promise of the Sea was fulfilled”.

Thus, the first two exhibition sites traced the context and background of the Discoveries; 4 the National Museum of Ancient Art (whose annexe was remodelled for this exhibition and where an additional floor was built) presented themes revealing the contacts made by the early discoveries; 5 military aspects were presented at the Belém Tower; 6 framed within the defensive structure of the monument, and, finally, the Hieronymite Monastery hosted an exhibition on the theme "Art on the Route to the Orient", 7 where Maria Helena Mendes Pinto was the co-ordinator for nucleus II.

"Art on the Route to the Orient” was constituted by: "Afro-Portuguese Art”, “Indo-Portuguese Art” “Chinese Art”, “Namban Art”, “Missionary Con-texts”, “The Luso-Oriental World” and "Literature and Evangelisation”, which

4 The following themes were presented at the Madre de Deus Convent: naval construction, agricultural implements, commercial activities, imports, instruments of exchange and contacts, writings and books, religious architecture, paintings, popular paintings, sculpture and travels and pilgrimages. At the Casa dos Bicos, which was rebuilt specifically for the exhibition and with two new floors added to the original structure (which was very controversial at the time), the following themes were on display: an introduction to the Casa dos Bicos; King João I, King Manuel I, 16th century paintings, objects from everyday life in 16th century Portuguese paintings, interiors in 16th century paintings, numismatics and table settings in the 16th century, 15th-16th century civilian jewellery, Queen Catarina of Austria, King João III, Empress Isabel of Portugal, King Charles V and the Avaiz family.

5 On the themes: artistic expressions of the 15th-16th centuries, gold jewellery and ornaments from the 15th-16th centuries; tapestries from the church of São Vicente de Fora, tapestries and paintings - the exotic world of the 15th century, works of art commissioned in Flanders and Italy, 16th century Portuguese paintings; Renaissance sculpture, Mannerist paintings, musical instruments and news of the Discoveries in European literature.

6 On the themes: 16th-17th century armour, African and Indian coins, cannons and ships, rifles, swords and helmets and diverse armaments.

7 A Arte na Rota do Oriente – XVII Exposição Europeia de Arte, Ciência e Cultura – Os Descobrimentos Portugueses e a Europa do Renascimento (catalogue of the exhibition held at the exhibition site of the Hieronymite Monastery in Lisbon between May and October 1983), Lisbon, Presidência do Conselho de Ministros/Comissariado para a XVII Exposição Europeia de Arte, Ciência e Cultura/Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1983.
concluded the sections dedicated to cartography, construction and naval architecture and numismatics along the route to India and navigational instruments. As Maria Helena Mendes Pinto has mentioned, the XVII European Exhibition was organised on the basis of a geographic and chronological layout that ended with Japan and the relations established there, these objects being ample proof of this. The exhibition thus offered an agreeable experience for a diverse public.

With regard to the nucleus of Namban works on display, which combined collections from diverse sources, both at the level of institutes and countries, one can observe how the structure works around the three large groups, with all the typological diversity inherent to each one, that were on display: screens, Namban art destined for use by the Japanese and Jesuit Namban art or art for the export market.

It is important to highlight that the XVII European Exhibition represented a crucial moment in Portuguese museology, both due to the aforementioned factors, as well as at the level of joint efforts of various entities and specialists in diverse fields who were all involved in such a vast initiative, which sought to offer a multidisciplinary and trans-disciplinary approach.

The role of architects was decisive in the creation of the five exhibition sites. The exhibitions were produced under the general supervision of the architect Cassiano Neves and there were unusual and unique structures within these centres. There were common elements in the conceptualisation of the displays at all sites, which one could define as exhibition trends: the presence of large glass showcases, the construction of the exhibitions around the architectural perimeters of the sites and thus the impossibility of showing...
three-dimensional pieces in a 360° view, prominent bases to support the pieces on display and the vast expanses of the exhibition halls. The halls were not broken up into smaller modules (which one feels was indubitably linked to concerns about the circulation of large numbers of visitors) and this feature played a decisive role in the horizontal nature of the displays.

However, there were particular elements and unique construction solutions that are worth highlighting. From the predominance of the colour red at the Madre de Deus Monastery, without a great plastic relevance in terms of space, one can move on to the displays at the Casa dos Bicos that, by means of a careful setting that resorted to the construction of structures to support the displays with interesting architectural features coupled with dramatic, focused lighting, managed to achieve spaces that were rich in chromatic elements and enabled labyrinthine circuits (in stark contrast to the open spaces of other exhibition sites and the diffused lighting of other glass display cases).

The National Museum of Ancient Art owes much of its present design to the XVII European Exhibition, especially the layout of the halls, which remain the same even today. The remodelled annexe and the construction of an additional floor provided vast halls in which pastel shades and earthy tones (beiges and browns), without a great deal of contrast, combined with a dark ambience and a grid across the roof (to conceal technical elements) had a great visual impact and influenced the use of this space, which became longer and more closed in mental terms, and more horizontal in spatial terms. In this wing, there is a truly interesting characteristic, which is an effective tool: the large blow-ups of images that place the pieces on display in their lands of origin, thus clearly revealing their functional characteristics and symbolic importance.

The Belém Tower, with its display that presented armour and military objects, is still a benchmark for success even today. The structures that supported the pieces on display were truly harmonious in terms of form, style and materials, while the pre-existing space was an ideal site for such an exhibition. The display cases, which were well constructed and custom-built for the pieces they held, revealed a high-tech plastic approach, especially when combined with the intelligent lighting, in which metal reigned supreme, and the colours and lights transported the viewer to a futuristic space. This harmony between the pieces on display and the supports occurred as the

8 See the important photographic record of the interiors of all the exhibition sites in: *XVII Exposição Europeia de Arte, Ciência e Cultura do Conselho da Europa – Os Descobrimentos Portugueses e a Europa do Renascimento* (general catalogue of the five exhibition sites: held at the Madre de Deus Convent, Casa dos Bicos, National Museum of Ancient Art, Belém Tower and the Hieronymite Monastery, from May to October 1983), Lisbon, Montepio Geral, 1984.
structures and plinths around the objects were built of wood when the theme focused on naval construction and ships.

In the dining hall of the Hieronymite Monastery, the architect Cruz de Carvalho mounted the pieces on display in consultation with Maria Helena Mendes Pinto. Greatly influenced by the architecture of the structure that hosted the “Art on the Route to the Orient” section, the expositional solutions were based on the construction of large “aquarium-style” glass display cases, whose interiors manifested, in plastic terms, different degrees of complexity, frequently resorting to plinths whose physical presence stood out. The insides of the display cases, with plastic and semantic compositions based on diverse typologies of objects, revealed a great diffusion of light, which hindered the viewing of each individual object and accentuated the presence of the “aquarium” in which it was displayed. However, it is these kinds of elements, combined with the limited contrast that was achieved (which was also due to the chromatic element that was chosen) and overly large exhibition spaces with displays arranged around the perimeter of the architectural structure that, in hindsight, determine exhibition trends and are what make them easily identifiable.

In a final analysis, the XVII European Exhibition on “The Portuguese Discoveries and Renaissance Europe” was the most important exhibition ever held in Portugal, which had an extraordinary range in chronological and
geographic terms. As co-ordinator of the second section on "Art on the Route to the Orient", nucleus II, held at the Hieronymite Monastery, Maria Helena Mendes Pinto ensured an intelligent combination of objects and knowledge that will be difficult to replicate.

It is exactly twenty years since the Namban Hall of the National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon was inaugurated (18 May – International Museum Day), which is the direct heir to the experience of the XVII European Exhibition.

The task was hindered by the limited spatial dimensions destined for the Namban collection, of the newly-built additional floor of the Museum’s annexe and thus Maria Helena Mendes Pinto studied diverse possible solutions. Her collaboration with the architect Cruz de Carvalho once again proved to be decisive and a new exhibition hall was created for the Namban art collection with interesting and unique features, which can be seen even today.

Fig. 3 – View of the entrance to the Namban Hall, at the National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon, which concludes the museum circuit of "The Arts of the Portuguese Expansion".

The context was an important element in this conceptualisation and thus it was decided to recreate a Japanese ambience in order to showcase the collection. The low ceilings, the floor covered with wooden parquet, walls covered with rice paper (imported specially for the purpose) and the recreation of two windows with Japanese proportions characterise the contextual inspiration that enables the exhibit to replicate the period and atmosphere of the pieces on display.10

10 The newspaper "O Dia" dated 20.1.1987 had an interesting report about the Namban Hall of the Museum.
Fig. 4 – The restrained and intimate ambience of Japanese culture is recreated by means of the construction of glass display cases around the centre of the hall and the arrangement of objects at a low level that, with the aid of careful lighting, enables the viewer to behold the collection from the centre of the hall.

Keeping in mind the characteristics of the collection and the dimensions of the screens, they sought to articulate the two pairs of screens, along with another screen that was part of another pair (dating from a later period), with the two groups of Namban objects, which were made for use by Japanese and for the export market, respectively. Thus, the interior of the hall is constituted

Fig. 5 – The first two sections of the Namban Hall: the pair of screens by Kano Naizen (Kano School, 1603-1610?) and the group of Namban objects made for the Japanese market, next to the Japanese-style window.

11 About the screens belonging to the collection of the National Museum of Ancient Art, see Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, Biombos Namban, Lisbon, IPM, 1993.
by four sections and one can discern a fifth section, outside the hall, where pieces of porcelain and the other half of a pair of screens are displayed.

The Namban Hall is part of the section entitled “The Arts of the Portuguese Expansion” at the National Museum of Ancient Art, which is housed in the new floor in the museum’s annexe and comprises the collections that reflect the Portuguese presence in Africa, India (the museum has an outstanding collection of Indo-Portuguese art), Ceylon, China and, finally, Japan.
The circulation within this floor in terms of geography and chronology follows a clockwise direction. Once again, and obviously due to the space available, the entire exhibit has been arranged around the architecture. If this facilitates viewing the objects on display, especially the screens, one could also consider this option to be less innovative in terms of spatial modulation.

Fig. 8 – Map of the Namban Hall at the National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon. Note how there are two possible circuits within the hall and within the circuit on this floor, where the exhibit is housed. The ‘A’ marks the presumed start of the circuit in the corridor, leaving behind the sections dedicated to Africa, India, Ceylon and China and taking the viewer to the final stage of the exhibition trail of the ‘Arts of the Portuguese Expansion’, which ends at point “B”. The five sections of this exhibit are meant to be viewed in the direction marked in blue, however, there are several other possibilities, marked in red. If, on the one hand, the Namban display is not dismembered, since one can perceive the thematic and chronological division (due to the different chronologies of the pieces and themes of the various groups of objects), the fact is that, in the global context of this floor, it is clearly possible to begin at “B”, the end of the circuit, and move towards “A”. In any case, the precise and easy to read signs and the thematic or geographic grouping of each collection would allow the reconstruction of these “Arts of the Portuguese Expansion” in a manner that ensures an overall panorama for the visitor in a global circuit.

What one could term the contextual stylisation of the Namban Hall, with its formal references inspired by Japanese culture, is largely evident in the ambience that the museum sought to create in 1986. However, this could also hinder the situational reading of the objects, namely those that are situated at a significantly lower level of visualisation due to the style of the culture of
origin. On the other hand, the tendency towards adopting large “aquarium-style” glass display cases, in detriment to cases that were custom-built to fit the pieces, especially around the walls, does not allow a complete appreciation of three-dimensional objects.

Due to the invaluable assistance of Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, the Namban Hall of the National Museum of Ancient Art is undoubtedly one of the high-points of the diffusion of objects that resulted from the Encounter between Portugal and the Land of the Rising Sun. The exhibit has a thematic and chronological grouping that facilitates a personal appreciation of these marvellous pieces and does not overload the visitor with information, thus enabling a more intimate and individual connection between the viewer and the piece on display. The stylisation of the display, inspired by the original context of the pieces, plays a fundamental role in the presentation of the exhibit and enables the creation of an innovative space for “enjoyment” that, in the words of Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, is one of the main objectives of Museums.

In 1986, Maria Helena Mendes Pinto accompanied the byobu from the National Museum of Ancient Art to Japan, where they participated in the exhibition entitled “Namban Art of Japan – Paintings and Screens”, held at the National Museum of Art in Osaka. This interesting exhibition, of which it proved impossible to find photographic images, revealed the technical and thematic influences of Western painting in Japan. The Japanese fascination with realism, perspective, the use of shadows and the effects of depth, as also an overwhelming curiosity about Christian themes, decisively influenced the output of traditional schools of art, such as the Kano, Tosa or Hasegawa schools, amongst others. Thus, this exhibition evolved around three sections: Western painting, Western-style painting by Japanese and Namban screens.

In 1987, the III Japanese Culture Week was held in Lisbon from 9 to 18 October, organised by the Portugal-Japan Friendship Association, with Pedro Canavarro as President and Maria Helena Mendes Pinto as Vice-President. Ambitious plans were prepared that reflected a great awareness and knowledge of Japanese culture, which afforded a series of events that showcased an extremely rich cultural dynamism on the part of the Association. At the time, an exhibition entitled “Diplomats in Japan - The Memory of Objects” was held at the Galveias Palace, which was part of a series of initiatives

that included: Buddhist ceremonies with bronzes from the Narita temple, presided over by Shogui Yamasaki; demonstrations of martial arts, ikebana and origami; diverse workshops such as the one by Maria de Lurdes Modesto entitled “Japan - The Art of Cooking”; the screening of Japanese films and a concert with traditional Japanese instruments by ladies of the Japanese community in Portugal.\textsuperscript{14}

It is clear that the management of the Association took great pains to meticulously develop a plan of activities that were not only related to each other but that enabled an overall panorama of the context of the exhibition. Initiatives like this, where a stringent plan ensured that the themes and activities complemented and intersected with each other, with a range of events, enable a more profound dialogue, a more complete understanding and more meaningful exchanges between peoples and cultures.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{kimono_room_galveias_palace}
\caption{The kimono room at the Galveias Palace during the exhibition entitled “Diplomats in Japan – The Memory of Objects”, in which one can note a circuit around the walls of the building’s structure, thus suggesting a circuit that accompanied the perimeter of the exhibition space. The typological or thematic division of the display sub-grouped other distinct elements that complement an ideology and context that, here, hints at ikebana art, directly linked with the floral themes of the kimonos.}
\end{figure}

The exhibition facilitated an appreciation of Japanese culture not merely in artistic terms but also in anthropological terms by means of the typologies of the objects on display and the strategies that were employed during the exhibition. The underlying concept was to reveal the reality that Portuguese diplomats encountered and the objects they collected on their journeys

\textsuperscript{14} A fact that emphasises the capacity for communication of the Japanese community in Portugal and the interaction between the two worlds, extremely important aspects in the context of cultural activities and exhibitions.
through Japan, in order to identify, in the words of Pedro Canavarro, different historical periods and the atmosphere of diplomatic missions through the ages. The exhibition highlighted diverse sensibilities, characters, personalities and personal tastes that were reflected in the objects these emissaries collected. The display amply reflected the timelessness of Japanese culture and its material manifestations, such as popular arts or other arts that are more complex at a material, technical or conceptual level, with a significant or symbolic aesthetic dimension.

The choice of pieces, with the collaboration of the Association’s president, and the layout of the exhibition and catalogue organised by Maria Helena Mendes Pinto brought together elements from diverse private collections and presented them thematically according to the following categories: books and prints; kimonos; furniture; Luso-Japanese tableware; everyday Japanese objects; landscapes and the animal world – eternal themes in Japanese art; the solemnity of black and gold lacquer-work; the Japanese world – from the refinement of silver miniatures to the art of serving saké; paintings on satin on rolls of paper; the austerity of bronze and the delicateness of ivory and, finally, the marvellous world of Japanese porcelain.

Greatly influenced by the structure of the palace’s halls, the design of the exhibition was characterised by display modules around the contours of the perimeter of the halls and the presence of glass showcases that were perfectly adapted to the specific themes of the object groupings. The most interesting element, once again a typical characteristic of Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, was the importance given to the context of the objects. Apart from being complemented by the innumerable parallel activities that were held alongside this event, the exhibition resorted to interesting replications of ambiances. Thus, an appreciation of the context was facilitated by information about the effective functionality of the pieces on display.

The *Encounter* between the West and the Far East continued in 1989, although, unfortunately, no photographic records were available for this study. However, one can highlight the exhibitions: “Pilgrims in Japan” and the huge exhibition within the scope of the Europália 89-Japan event, entitled “*Namban* Art – The Portuguese in Japan”, which was also displayed in Lisbon in 1990, at the National Museum of Ancient Art.

One can understand the discursive intentions behind these exhibitions on the basis of the catalogues of the latter exhibition, and, above all, through

Fig. 10 – A replica of a Japanese room in which a meal is being served enabled a dialogue between different typologies of objects as well as a more immediate and realistic reading of the set of pieces on display. Note how a simple ambience, in which structures are evocative both at the level of the materials used as well as the morphology of the display, enables the transmission of diverse and complementary information. The exhibit allows a situational reading of the objects while skilfully articulating the group on display. Note the masterful use of the costumes and their interaction with the table setting, which permits this scene to serve as an effective contextual setting.

the texts by Pedro Canavarro, the curator of the Portuguese Exhibition in Belgium. Maria Helena Mendes Pinto was assistant curator of the Belgian project and was later responsible for the Lisbon exhibition and catalogue. The pieces reflect a thematic dialogue and echo the feelings and journeys of Portuguese travellers and the religious, scientific and mercantile contexts of the exhibition, which had an elevated artistic and scientific aesthetic level. The objects on display were “samples” of an age that is interpreted through these same works, while they simultaneously elicited wonder (the object as a work of art) and reflection (the object as a witness to history).
As a large international exhibition, the collections on display included objects from libraries and archives, diverse public institutions, museums and private collections and were grouped into the following categories: maps and documents; Namban screens and paintings; military accoutrements and firearms and, finally, Namban lacquer-ware. The eternal preoccupation with establishing the geographical and chronological context of the theme on display was ensured at the very outset with illustrated chronologies (with the assistance of a large blow-up of a map of the Orient from the collections of the Naval Museum, combined with a time chart, which in Brussels was preceded by an interesting wooden bridge that served as a metaphor for a passage from the Western world to the Far East).

In 1991, the exhibition entitled “Via Orientalis”\(^{16}\) was held in Brussels as part of the Europália 91 exposition and the same display was later mounted in Japan, in 1993. The exhibition traced the entire geographical and chronological course of the Discoveries and contacts from Lisbon to Japan. Maria Helena Mendes Pinto was the curator of both these exhibitions.

Once again, in the ambit of these large international exhibitions that enabled the prize pieces of the best collections in the world to be brought together under one roof, this exhibition represented a high-point in museology and was universally acclaimed both in Belgium as well as in Japan. The cross-referencing of the objects, which were divided according to geographical nuclei in the exhibition that corresponded to different chronologies (Lisbon, West Africa, East Africa, India, Ceylon, China and Japan), was skillfully developed in the catalogue according to different themes that shed light upon the underlying notions of the exhibition: Lisbon (the context of the beginning of the Discoveries, very similar to the XVII European Exhibition); Nautical Sciences and Portuguese Cartography; armaments used during the Portuguese Discoveries; nautical instruments used during the age of the Portuguese Discoveries; Africa and the Portuguese during the age of the Discoveries; the book of the fortresses of the Portuguese Empire by António Bocarro; Indo-Portuguese art; Mughal art; Ceylonese-Portuguese ivories and furniture; China; porcelain in the context of commercial relations between Portugal and China and, finally, Japan during the Namban age.

The 180 pieces that originally comprised the Brussels exhibition would be augmented by many other pieces from Japanese collections when the exhibition travelled to the cities of Tokyo, Shizuoka, Kyoto and Oita. These additional pieces were not necessarily always the same, as they varied from site

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\(^{16}\) *Via Orientalis – Europália 91/Portugal* (catalogue of the exhibition held at the Galerie de la CGER – Caisse Générale d’Epargne et de Retraite, from 24 September to 15 December 1991), Brussels, Fondation Europália Internationale, 1991.
to site, which enabled a wealth of experience for the team that accompanied Maria Helena Mendes Pinto. Thus, while on the one hand the basic framework of the exhibition was established at the very outset, with the collection that travelled from Europe to Japan, the variations that occurred in the displays while the exhibition travelled to various Japanese cities would confer a “mutable” character upon the exhibition, especially at the level of design, the adaptation of spaces, the articulation between objects and the very objects themselves.17

Fig. 11 – In Brussels, at the Galleries of the CGER – Caisse Générale d’Epargne et de Retraite, the exhibition revealed a very particular plastic expression: the interesting use of wooden structures, that were not concealed, but whose surface was treated, which shows a deliberate attitude towards this material, visible in the large structures and showcases as well as in the diverse plinths for the objects. Here, there were three distinct sections: Lisbon and arms during the age of the Discoveries; Africa and Afro-Portuguese Art and India and Indo-Portuguese Art.

17 The catalogue of the exhibition held in Japan: Via Orientalis (catalogue of the exhibition held in various Japanese cities in 1993: in Tokyo, at the Sezon Museum of Art; in Shizuoka at the Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art and in Oita at the Oita Prefectural Hall of Arts), Tokyo, NHK, 1993.
Fig. 12 – Corridor and corner with a display of Namban art. Observe the ingenious solution, absolutely essential given the dimensions of the gallery corridor, that strategically placed a wooden screen that enabled the utilisation of the reverse side of the showcase for another theme (which obviously drastically reduced the reading of certain objects) and the articulation between different chests with stands of different heights, coupled with a careful lighting scheme, always with the use of large "aquarium-style" glass showcases.

Maria Helena Mendes Pinto revealed how the modulation of space is far more versatile in Japan, possible due to the available materials, which easily relate structures and solutions that articulate diverse panels and display cases. This is where one can observe a pleasant individualisation of modules according to colours: Lisbon, where white predominated, with touches of other colours to highlight certain pieces; Africa, where green was the colour of choice that minimised the presence of supports and individual showcases; India and Ceylon, once again, where white was preponderant and where simple lines at the level of the composition of groups of objects was the norm, along with the limited number of pieces on display; China, with evocative modules in blue and Japan, where, likewise, white predominated and where one could observe versatile and more complex modules, with great structural openings in some cases, as well as the use of “aquarium-style” showcases.

In 1994, Maria Helena Mendes Pinto was part of a scientific team at the National Museum of Ancient Art that co-organised and hosted an exhi-
Fig. 13 – The chromatic identification of the different nuclei: Africa – green (at the Museum of Kyoto); China – blue plinths (at the Oita Prefectural Hall of Arts); India – white (also in Oita). Note that apart from the constant presence of large glass display cases along the walls, the construction of custom-built glass showcases, personalised for the objects on display, is now more common, thus allowing a greater individualisation of the presentation of the piece, its interpretation and accompanying information.

Fig. 14 – The chronological and geographical context is an element that is always highlighted by Maria Helena Mendes Pinto. The intersection between time and space with additional information and illustrations of references to pieces easily allows a visualisation and understanding of the display on the part of the public (here, at the Sezon Museum of Art in Tokyo).
Fig. 15 – The nucleus of Namban objects for the export market or Jesuit lacquer-ware, with complementary pieces from Japanese collections, was placed in a large glass display case whose white background contrasted with the structure in dark wood, thus creating a clear dialogue with the objects. On the other hand, the Jesuit cape appears as a discourse related to the objects, permitting a clearer comprehension of the context without necessarily resorting to a plethora of additional information. The white supports and the careful lighting enabled a greater contrast and ensured a greater focus on the pieces on display (at the Museum of Kyoto).

Fig. 16 – At the Oita Prefectural Hall of Arts, the presentation of the screens scored in terms of amplitude and the possibility of being able to view the pieces from a distance, but lost out in terms of a neutral presentation, which was not very dramatic or appealing and in the unfortunate placement of the screens in large “aquarium-style” glass display cases.
Fig. 17 – The Namban textiles and costumes, such as the ones in the picture from the collection of Dr. Tanno Montou at the Sezon Museum of Art in Tokyo, were skilfully displayed, keeping in mind the indispensable questions of preventive conservation. The low and controlled lighting ensured adequate conditions for the preservation of the piece while enabling the viewer to focus on the object itself (since the utilisation of lower levels of lighting also requires a greater focus). The solution of a careful inclination of the supports is very effective and this composition, with a drum decorated with images of the Unsung playing cards, which were taken to Japan by the Portuguese, in the centre, is a truly well-balanced one.

A exhibition on Namban Costumes. Held within the scope of the commemorations of Lisbon 94 – European Cultural Capital, this exhibition was part of a larger exposition entitled “Confluences”, organised by the EU-Japan Fest Committee, which amply focused upon mutual influences in the history of these cultures from the Western World and the Far East.

The Namban byobu are an important record of these influences that resulted from this Encounter. The particularities, richness and splendour of the costumes of the Nambanjin would decisively influence a diversification of Japanese dress, according to convenience and functionalities. Furthermore, this fascination with these different people, associated with good luck and prosperity (reflected in their exotic and luxurious appearance), ensured that the assimilation of various elements of their attire and accessories became increasingly popular and accepted as “fashion statements” on the part of the Japanese.

18 Traje Namban (catalogue of the exhibition held at the National Museum of Ancient Art within the scope of the Lisbon 94 – European Cultural Capital events), Lisbon, IPM/Refroscan, 1994.
Fig. 18 – Near the Namban Hall, original examples of Japanese costumes that were influenced by the Nambanjin and that reflected this symbiosis of trends, both at the level of techniques and in terms of formal aspects, were on display. (From left to right in the showcase) Jinbaori made of red wool, 16th century, Jinbaori made of green wool, 17th century (both pieces belong to the Nanbu family - Town Hall of Marioka) and Jinbaori with a design of six oak leaves, 16th century, used by Nobusada Obata (Shoji Izawa Collection). The simple and functional design of this exhibition revealed an elegance and constant evocation of the original Japanese context that was visible, above all, in the materials used, such as the woods.

This exchange defined a series of neologisms related with costumes, which were used by the Japanese, such as: jerkins, capes, raxa, stockings, buttons, etc. and, essentially, translated into novelties introduced into Japanese attire both at the level of new pieces of clothing as well as at the level of sewing techniques, fabrics or materials and the manner of using the clothes. Some examples: the high, raised neck and the buttons on the elegant and refined Jinbaori used by the samurai over their armour; the pleated necks (very often used by Japanese under their kimonos, normally found in their most common colour, white, but also, less often, in green or red); the use of textiles (wool, silks, cotton and raxa, or red wool, and imported fabrics dyed red with crimson); the cut and embroidery of clothes; diverse accessories amongst which crucifixes stand out (and a series of other accoutrements that would portray the Nambanjin, such as the Namban objects that were made to be used by Japanese); the famous baggy pants, breeches and other, shorter pants that resemble knee-length shorts that were quickly assimilated into the art of Japanese dress; and the jerkin with a high neck, in a typically Spanish style, which was deliberately used under the kimono but with the high neck always placed outside in order to draw attention to it.
In this manner, one can see how Maria Helena Mendes Pinto was at the forefront of exhibitions, as the supervisor of innumerable activities related to Japan and the world of Namban art (without touching upon her extensive scientific activities and exhibitions related to other stages of the Discoveries and to Portuguese and foreign furniture from Europe and Asia\textsuperscript{20}). These activities reveal her astuteness and immeasurable human and scientific worth, during an interesting period in the history of Portuguese museology in which the internationalisation of the collections witnessed a high-point, with pieces that participated in the most important international exhibitions of the time.

Curiously, during the course of the research for this study, one constantly came across various parallel activities that only served to highlight Maria Helena’s painstaking efforts to clarify the contexts of the collections as well as her constant efforts to promote Japanese culture in Portugal.

\textsuperscript{20} For further information about the studies and career of Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, see \textit{Peregrinações – de Portugal ao Japão: Artes decorativas entre os séculos XVI e XIX – Homenagem a Maria Helena Mendes Pinto} (catalogue of the exhibition held at the Museum of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 2003), Lisbon, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2003.
On 25 November 1989, a singular, for Portugal, Incense Ceremony was held at the National Museum of Ancient Art, organised by the Jutoku Gakuryo Institute (a Kyoto school linked to Zen culture, which was touring Europe at the time). This Kodo (whose origins date back to the 7th century when it was initially dedicated to Buddha and which later became a form of entertainment for the Japanese nobility) was, in its courtly aspect, a good-luck ceremony at the court of Nara. It consists of an initial moment of dance, Gotenmai, to promote the happiness and prosperity of the family, and beseeches the gods to drive away diseases, bring good-luck in war and good harvests (the dance has two stages: Mai – without any movements and Odori – with a lot of movements).
The second part of the ceremony is then constituted by the Incense Ceremony, which has three stages: **Kioko** – an offering to ancestral spirits and to the gods; **Kuko** – the fumigation of the site; and the interesting **Ganko** or “incense games” in which a lively interaction takes place with the spectators in an attempt to identify and distinguish the different perfumes of the incenses.

Amongst other activities, such as the presentation of the Tea Ceremony in 1990, on 14 July 1986 a celebration took place that was linked to the enthusiasm aroused by the recently concluded **Namban Hall**: a **Namban Festival** with the members of the National Museum of Ancient Art.

In my view, this constituted one of the most interesting moments of an authentic experience, both in terms of the museum surroundings and the

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**Fig. 21** – The detailed recreation by the staff of the National Museum of Ancient Art of the arrival ceremony at a Japanese port depicted on the second screen by Kano Domi. Note the captain-major, perfectly portrayed, under the parasol, and the presence of the chairs, which were also brought from China to Japan, by a colleague wearing the typically Portuguese baggy breeches.
participation of its professional staff, as well as at the level of the collections on display.

In the gardens of the Museum, staff members recreated the procession of Nambanjin upon their arrival on Japanese soil, heading for the Jesuit residence, with various offerings for the missionaries, the local daimyo or the Shogun.

It is moments such as these that testify to the enthusiasm and sense of initiative that characterise Maria Helena Mendes Pinto in every aspect of her spirit and professional activities, which infect everyone with whom she interacts. The Namban Festival represented a true dynamisation of the collections of this Museum. During the festival, apart from establishing a lively dialogue with Namban art, the museum staff placed themselves in the shoes of those who were the main protagonists of the original Encounter.

Fig. 22 – The act of offering gifts of diverse products by captains (as portrayed in great detail on the second pair of byobu by Kano Domi) was faithfully reproduced at the Namban Festival. Upon closer observation one can perceive that the Namban food box was re-interpreted here by means of a modern Tupperware with several compartments, just like the original box. The Namban icon, which conferred an aura of good-luck upon the object, and was a source of fascination, a ‘fashion statement’, a witness to this precious moment, was not neglected and was rendered in an amusing manner.
Fig. 23 – Maria Helena Mendes Pinto was also personified in a reinterpretation of the *Namban* icon, present on various objects that appeared in this Festival. This unique moment of museal inspiration reveals a very peculiar creativity. Note the silhouette and the composition in which one can find a tall hat with a black brim; the enormous pleated neck (here in citrus yellow), which was a trademark of the fashions of the *Nambanjin*; the jerkin, richly worked in luxurious fabrics over a shirt (which is visible on *Maria Helena Mendes Pinto*, while at the time it was never seen!); the baggy pants, or breeches, that reveal a glimpse of smooth, dark stockings (faithfully reproducing the 16th century originals, at a time when etiquette forbade revealing unclad legs) and some shoes, undoubtedly in velvet, as was the custom amongst noblemen. The choice of accessories for the collage, ranging from a walking stick to a fork, along with the Western dish beside it (one does not know if this was the choice of the protagonist!!), point to a rather curious interpretation of the identity of the Southern Barbarians.
In conclusion, one can highlight some aspects that were essential to the preparation of this article. Maria Helena Mendes Pinto played a vital role in a scientific and museal scenario that was characteristic of the age. It is up to us, “museum specialists in the 21st century”, not to let this contribution be forgotten and it is important to realise the value of her endeavours, which have shaped our present activities and have provided important plastic and semantic concepts for the future.

This particular moment was based upon a policy underlying our cultural heritage that enabled the circulation of pieces that characterised a singular and important period in the history of Portuguese museology, with the internationalisation of Portuguese collections that frequently travelled abroad. This is difficult to reproduce nowadays as, in the specific case of the Namban byobu belonging to the National Museum of Ancient Art, they have been classified as National Treasures, a fact that raises issues of preventive conservation and restoration that would not permit them to leave Portugal, and the Museum itself, easily. For this reason alone, the experiences of Maria Helena Mendes Pinto with regard to the handling, packaging and transportation of objects and the entire process of unpacking, checking the piece, identifying possible damage and finally mounting an exhibition, is a tangible asset for specialists in Museology.

As one has seen, apart from all her activities and studies about other artistic questions (on Portuguese and foreign furniture and other stages of the Discoveries and pieces from these periods), Maria Helena Mendes Pinto played a decisive role in scientific knowledge about the Namban Encounter and Japanese Culture in general, and also fomented the circulation of this knowledge via a broad range of activities and exhibitions, as also through diverse publications.21

In the light of prevailing policies and in the context of large international exhibitions, it was possible to trace exhibition discourses that revealed the mutual fascination and influences that took place due to the interaction between Portuguese and Japanese, always keeping in mind the chronological and geographical context of the pieces on display, along with skilled attempts to recreate the original ambience of their land of origin. Her work with different architects enabled Maria Helena Mendes Pinto to develop solutions that can be viewed, in hindsight, as characteristic moments and recurring trends in the field of exhibition design. The large “aquarium-style” glass display cases with their range of internal layouts and the visual disadvantages of focusing on the horizontal plane, as well as the viewing circuits that were

largely determined by the architectural structures of the sites that hosted the exhibitions, in which the circulation of visitors tended to flow clockwise around the perimeters of the halls, were a veritable fashion during the 1980s and 1990s.

Maria Helena Mendes Pinto’s enduring enthusiasm is undeniable and there is no doubt about the scientific value of her endeavours that made the public more aware of Japanese and Namban culture, the constitution of the Namban Hall at the National Museum of Ancient Art being a cultural high-point in Portugal. This display is still an international reference for the quality and richness of the pieces that comprise the collection (the two pairs of screens and a single byobu and the Namban objects for use by Japanese and those made for the export market). Her creativity and initiative, widely recognised, gave rise to diverse activities that enabled the consolidation of knowledge and ensured a permanent dialogue between Portugal and the Land of the Rising Sun.

With admiration, my heartfelt thanks for the inspiration and experience that Maria Helena Mendes Pinto has shared with all of us. In addition, my thanks to Maria Rosa Figueiredo and Maria Fernanda Passos Leite (both from the Museum of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation) and a special gratitude to Maria da Conceição Borges de Sousa (National Museum of Ancient Art), for her friendship, constant support and advice with regard to my studies and proposals.

May this Encounter always be a perennial source of wonder and curiosity and may the reading, rereading, personal appropriation and first-hand experience of these fascinating Namban pieces continue to be the legacy of the extraordinary work of Maria Helena Mendes Pinto.

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Browsing the collections of the MNAA: http://matriznet.ipmuseus.pt/Matriznet/MWBINT/MWBINT02.asp


Abstract

Maria Helena Mendes Pinto played an important role during a critical juncture in the history of Portuguese Museology. Thanks to her museum exhibitions, which emphasised the context of the pieces on display, she was responsible for nurturing a growing interest in studies related to the fascinating Encounter that took place between Portuguese and Japanese, from 1543 onwards, by means of innumerable exhibitions and other activities.

The vivacity and sense of initiative that are so characteristic of Maria Helena Mendes Pinto afforded an increasing internationalisation, re-interpretation and awareness of Namban collections, which are fascinating reminders of the original Encounter.

Resumo

Maria Helena Mendes Pinto protagoniza uma conjuntura particular na história da Museologia portuguesa. A ela se deve um crescente estudo, divulgação, contextualização e exposição do fascinante Encontro entre Portugueses e Japoneses, que se deu a partir de 1543, através de inúmeras exposições e de outras actividades.

A iniciativa e vivacidade, que caracterizam Maria Helena Mendes Pinto, proporcionaram uma internacionalização, leitura, reinterpretação e vivência das coleções namban, que são os fascinantes testemunhos deste Encontro original.

要約

マリア・ヘレナ・メンデス・ビントはポルトガル博物館学の歴史における転換期に重要な役割を果たした。女史が計画した展示などを通して1543年以降に行われたポルトガル人と日本人との「出会い」に関する研究の発展に大いに貢献した。

マリア・ヘレナ・メンデス・ビントの活気と独創性が初期の「出会い」の魅力ある思い出である南蛮コレクションの国際化、再解釈と認識をもたらした。