Pictorial (Re-) Creations: From the 4th Centenary of India (1898) to Expo’98

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Abstract
This paper aims to map out the artistic output – particularly painting – produced within the context of the great 20th century exhibitions organised to commemorate the Portuguese colonial empire. Chronologically bounded by the 4th centenary of the discovery of the maritime route to India (1898) and Expo’98, this series of transnational events owed much of its success to the creativity and fantasy of the Portuguese artists that participated in it, most of whom had never left the metropole to visit the overseas territories far away. Thus, most of the paintings commissioned were created indirectly from photographic, graphic or literary sources, which served as inspiration for a (re-) creation of a colonial experience that was more idealised than real. For the population of Lisbon and the foreigners that visited it, these pictorial representations generated an unusual image of the overseas possessions, which could be used by the political power as a vehicle of propaganda. Hence, the triangle Creativity-Fantasy-Intelligence became the matrix from which the right-wing dictatorship defined a whole ideological-artistic strand, often very successful and within limits that we know.

Keywords: Art, Colonial Empire, Painting, Exhibitions.