

# ANYWHERE ELSE BUT ME

## art and introspection



In this exposition I deal with some of the most abiding aspects of my research as an artist, choosing series of paintings, videos and songs that I make with the musician Jobo Taborda, where the relationship between art and self-awareness is more evident and plays a central role in the conceptual process and scope of the works.

My ideas flow between videos, songs and paintings, and the song's lyrics often happen to start being made whenever I'm thinking about what I'm doing, as a kind of reasoning that is produced by someone who finds this the best and most thorough means of expressing his thoughts, a kind of weird surrogate for philosophy that, while bearing no outward resemblance to philosophy, I believe to have equivalent enlightening qualities.

In this exposition, the relationship with Duchamp's work is mostly drawn upon as a way of creating a space for conceptual relations. My own work is obviously what I have to share, while Duchamp's work brings to everyone, for many years and many years to come. Duchamp left the man subject here, and neither is my own work as an artist: both my work and that of Duchamp are parts of a game that is played in an ambiguous territory.

It is ambiguous, just like Duchamp's titles, whose conceptual range is as wide as their apparent tightness. "Tongue in cheek", serious humor, opens a wider range of possibilities than if it were otherwise.

"Besides, it's always the others that die": this was the epiphany that Duchamp chose for his tombstone.

This posthumous statement by an artist who declared that, more than being an artist, he enjoyed the experience of being an individual, eloquently expresses what being an individual meant to him.

Still, through this existential condition of being an artist, he was probably defining what an artist is. One possible interpretation of Duchamp's position is that to be an artist is to exercise the fact of being an individual. Of course, this is a task performed by everyone, but perhaps artists are those who turn it into a professional activity, as their task is to make things that reflect the complexity inherent in the awareness of being an individual.

"Besides, it's always the others that die": it's not Duchamp who dies, when he dies: it's everyone else that dies. By opting for this colloquial statement as his epitaph, Duchamp may well have found a way of contradicting the undeniable fact that our own death is not an experience that we can have and also talk about. At the same time, he adds emphasis to the fact that he can only witness the death of others. But, due to this conversational tone, we are led to imagine Duchamp experiencing his own death and informing us how it was. In the ambiguity of his statement, by telling us that it is the others who die, we may discern a way of defining him as a person and also as an artist. By saying that it's the others who die, when it's him who actually dies, he may be saying that, for him, those who die are everyone else, or even that it is everything around him that dies – at the least, the people or the things to whom he is related, and perhaps beyond that. And, at the same time, he's probably telling us that he is made of everyone else, that his identity is defined by everyone else's. He is everyone, or, at least, he is everything that is related to. And, as everyone is related to other people and things, this may lead us to assume that he means everything that might exist or can be imagined.

Admitting that, when you die, it's everyone else that dies, you may wonder: what if, instead of me, I were someone else, anyone else but me? Who would I be? Or, who could I be? Who would I be able to be? As such, rather than being someone else, I become someone whom I had the potential to be instead of me. That is to say, to be someone else that might already be in me, waiting for the possibility to reveal himself. Or anyone else who I might be able to imagine. My speculations on who I could be instead of me only extend to the range of what I can imagine. Therefore, whenever I can imagine to be, instead of me, is always familiar to me in a certain way. Being able to experience to be at least in my imagination, entitles that inside my mind waiting for my imagination to awake them from their quiet existence.

The video *song If I wasn't an Artist* (2001), besides showing me as a head inside my head, reveals, by its lyrics, that by enumerating a series of things that one might be instead of being an artist, I might well be defining what an artist is – that is, I am, as I am, myself, as if I were the furthest thing from specialism.

Here, the artist is defined by anything else (when one dies, "It's always the others that die").

When Duchamp created the character *Rose Sélay* he was looking for something that would be as far removed from him as possible. But in the world of art, which is often made clear that, in reality, there aren't such things as opposites, if we are looking for the reverse of ourselves, we might expect to see our own face in the mirror. Or, instead, we might finally realize that we're a kind of concentrated but incomplete reflection of everything else, the personification of things that have no boundaries, really acting like the gas that flows within Duchamp's *Large Glass*, seeking for a vessel that might give it a shape, a body with which we can identify and relate.

Rose Sélay: "rose c'est la vie", life that is a colour, and a colour that is a thing because it is a rose. When roses are rose, when the name of the colour coincides with the name of its object, when we reach such a coherence, it is like finding ourselves much nearer to the essence of things, in a time when things were much simpler, but also when concepts were at their highest degree of concentration, with their highest potential for complexity, like the universe just before the Big Bang.

"If I wasn't an artist what could I be? A house or a home or a whole family." House, home, whole family. Three different things, denoted by different words, but only aspiring to the diversity that you might attain if you were to escape for the way to home.

"Wing of a bird, wing of a bee": different wings, but both wings nonetheless. And what could you do if you were just one wing? It takes two to actually fly. But the idea of a wing and, consequently, the idea of flight, takes only the slightest.

"The ugliest flower, prettiest tea": this is less about the relativity of things than it is about the absurdity of taste.

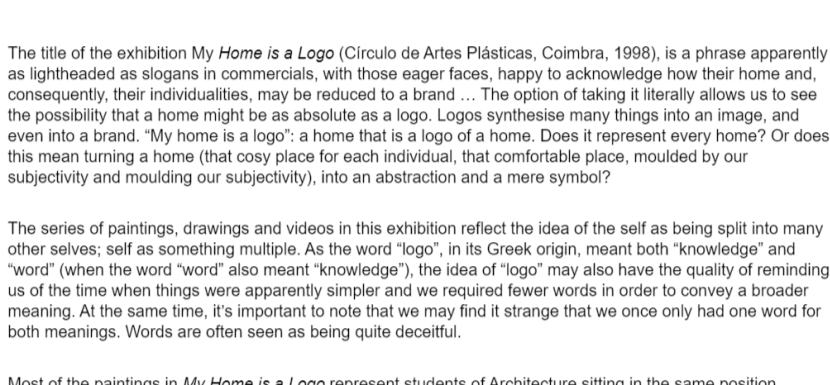
"Hat of a stranger, strangest me": a hat fits a head, almost as a mould for the place where we believe thoughts to happen. "Strangest me" is the most familiar stranger and also the strangest self. Feeling like the hat of a stranger is perhaps the most relatable of all things. By looking at you, but knowing nothing about you, I may feel like a hat that simply sits on a head, knowing nothing of what happens inside, not even guessing ... A hat that knows its place, that stays where it is and doesn't dare to go beyond the surface. And, here, the hat as a metaphor might tell us that it is the stranger himself who is the "strangest me", as everyone other than me might be seen as obscure variations of myself.

"A fish in the ocean, a shoe in the sea": the shoe is the goofiest avatar for a fish (especially when it comes to fishermen pulling them up). Things can be avatars of other things, words can be avatars of other words, not every sea is an ocean.

Duchamp's *Fresh Widow* (1920) probably shouldn't be seen as less of a sculpture than it is a readymade. Having been given a base like a sculpture, the window is turned into an object that looks more material than a window; we can walk around it and view it from every angle. While it is indeed a window, its displacement turns it into an image of a window, but an image that is paradoxically more material than the object that it represents.

A "French window" is misspelled to become a "fresh widow". This widow is a person, its widowpanes covered with black leather, its sensually emphasising the fact that we are actually looking at a person, not a window anymore. In those black-leathered widowpanes is the white interior of a home, as though a subjectivity could be compressed into a plane, becoming a two-dimensional being, and as though subjectivity could be synthesised into a surface (a quality that we find in painting).

But every window has someone to sit, to enter and enter. And the home of that widow, in the sensuality of the leathered widowpanes, seems to invite us in. Ultimately, it could potentially invite anyone. No one has been invited in yet, so anyone can aspire to enter. Meanwhile, the place is filled with the infinite possibilities of who might come in and make it his or her home. Thus this home becomes an abstraction of a home – anyone's home, the domain of anyone who succeeds in getting inside and sharing it with that mysterious widow – a person as a home – while also being a home for each individual, one's own home. But it is a home to each person taken on their own terms, not to people as a crowd.

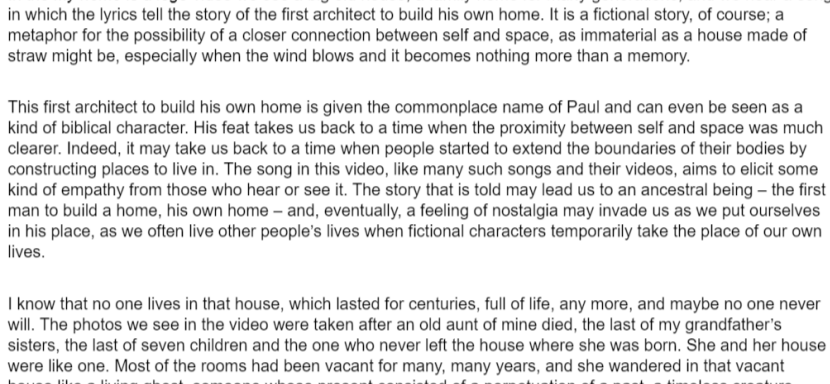


The title of the exhibition *My Home is a Logo* (Círculo de Artes Plásticas, Coimbra, 1998), is a phrase apparently as light-hearted as slogans in commercials, with those eager faces, happy to acknowledge how their home and, consequently, their individualities, may be reduced to a brand ... The option of taking it literally allows us to see the possibility that a home might be as absolute as a logo. Logos synthesise many things into an image, and even into a brand. "My home is a logo": a home that is a logo of a home. Does it represent every home? Or does the word "logo" mean the word "knowledge", the idea of "logo" may also have the quality of reminding us of the time when things were apparently simpler and we required fewer words in order to convey a broader meaning. At the same time, it's important to note that we may find it strange that we once only had one word for both meanings. Words are often seen as being quite deceitful.

Most of the paintings in *My Home is a Logo* represent students of Architecture sitting in the same position, emphasising the morphological differences between people. These differences are amplified by the fact their bodies are pretexts for formal exercises, exploring the expectations of art being a creative thing. The statement "My home is a logo", written on each canvas, may be seen as a statement made by each of those people, as a strong affirmation of individuality to the point of aiming to be absolute.

Yet at the same time, even as they present themselves as organic constructions, these bodies may be seen as homes themselves: each person as a home; each person as his or her own home.

In drawings representing faces, each one adds calligraphic variations to the morphological variations that we can find in each face and, consequently, also adds compositional variations created by the awareness of the effect that each gesture has in relationship with every other gesture and its position within the drawing. The statement "My home is a logo", which appears written over each mouth, relates not only to those faces but also to the way in which they are drawn. The way in which they are drawn forms part of their identity as people who are also artefacts.



In the *My Home is a Logo* video we see a big old house, a family home for many generations, and we hear a song in which the lyrics tell the story of the first architect to build his own home. It is a fictional story, of course; a metaphor for the possibility of a closer connection between self and space, as immaterial as a house made of straw might be, especially when the wind blows and it becomes nothing more than a memory.

This first architect to build his own home is given the commonplace name of Paul and can even be seen as a kind of biblical character. His feat takes us back to a time when the proximity between self and space was much clearer. Indeed, it may take us back to a time when people started to extend the boundaries of their bodies by constructing places to live in. The song in this video, like many such songs and their videos, aims to elicit some kind of empathy from those who hear or see it. The story that is told may lead us to an ancestral being – the first man to build a home, his own home – and, eventually, a feeling of nostalgia may invade us as we put ourselves in his place, as we often live other people's lives when fictional characters temporarily take the place of our own lives.

I know that no one lives in that house, which lasted for centuries, full of life, any more, and maybe no one never will. The photos we see in the video were taken after an old aunt of mine died, the last of my grandfather's sisters, the last of seven children and the one who never left the house where she was born. She and her house were like one. Most of the rooms had been vacant for many, many years, and she wandered into that vacant house like a living ghost, someone whose present constituted a perpetuation of a perpetuation of a past, a timeless creature whose mind no longer distinguished between what happened yesterday and what happened 50 years ago, and didn't even care to do so. When she died, the house seemed to have died with her. This story was obviously a personal motivation behind these videos, but I believe that images of a very old house that is clearly unhabitable have enough metaphorical potential to suggest multiple possibilities that are universally experienced due to people's relationships with places like that.

In Duchamp's painting *Sad Young Man in a Train* (1911–12), the presence of the young man can only be guessed due to the effect of movement. The figure becomes a cloud of movement traces. Here, too, we might also notice the possible presence of a landscape. The figure and landscape are merged into one by movement, or the figure becomes landscape. Where is the train going? How can we guess? We can't see the train in the painting; we're only told the young man is in it, but that doesn't make the train any less important, being the main catalyst, the main cause and the component that, by its movement, makes that image possible.

That young man is heading somewhere, as he is in a train. No one goes on a train without heading to go somewhere. But in this painting we only see this ghostly image of someone – we are told it's a young man (indeed, Duchamp revealed that it was himself – and we do not have a clue where he's going. Even if we try to guess the direction in which his body is facing, there is always admit the possibility that the train is going in the opposite direction.

In the series of paintings and video that make up the exhibition *Heading West* (Appleton Square gallery, Lisbon, 2015) I shadow with the possibility of being both here and somewhere else, or at least aiming to be somewhere else.



Heading West, he's determined to walk as far as he can.

Heading West, she realises how afraid she is of looking back.

Heading West, she suddenly stops.

Heading West, he looks down, following the path of his thoughts.

Heading West, he bumps into John and keeps on going.

Heading West, his eyes try to focus where Jane used to be.

Heading West, feeling the southern breeze on her cheek.

Heading West, he believes North.

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