

The Architecture of Resistance: Paula Rego and Propaganda

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between propaganda and the work of Portuguese-British visual artist Paula Rego, analysing how mechanisms of persuasion, visual rhetoric, and political imagery shaped both the content and function of her art. It addresses this in two dimensions. Firstly, it considers how the propaganda of the Portuguese *Estado Novo* regime informed Rego's early experiences and how its ideological frameworks, spatial conventions, and social constructs surfaced in her imagery. While Rego referenced the structures and narratives of the authoritarian state, she also subverted them, transforming her work into an act of political resistance and a form of anti-propaganda. Secondly, the paper explores Rego's role as a propagandist in her own right, particularly through her engagement with women's rights and her contribution to shaping public opinion during campaigns leading to changes in Portuguese abortion law. In this context, I argue that Rego mobilised propagandist techniques to advocate for social justice, deploying visual persuasion to rally support for causes central to her practice and identity. Methodologically, the paper conducts a visual analysis of selected *Estado Novo* propaganda, drawing on visual rhetoric to examine their linguistic, literal, and symbolic messages and the cultural connotations embedded within their political context. It then juxtaposes these with Rego's 1990s works, many set in domestic interiors, to demonstrate how she reconfigured familiar spaces as sites of dissent. Ultimately, this paper argues that Rego's art is inherently political: it exposes social injustices, constructs visual networks of resistance, and contributes to the struggle for gender equality.

Keywords: dissidence, domesticity, feminism, politics, visual rhetoric