

Paula Rego: The Domestic Interior as a Stage

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Abstract

This paper explores the significance of domestic interior spaces in the work of Paula Rego, examining how these environments serve as a stage for the enactment of familial and domestic dynamics. It further examines architectural and visual elements drawn from Portuguese iconography and Estado Novo propaganda, including prescriptive literature on home design. Rego's compositions subvert normative gender roles and critique the socio-political and economic conditions of women in Portugal from the 1930s onwards. Drawing on memories of childhood spaces, her paintings use the domestic interiors as an essential element of the narrative, revealing mechanisms of control and resistance. Through an in-depth analysis of selected works and employing feminist art historical frameworks, this study situates Rego within a lineage of artists who chose to represent women within the confinements of domestic settings, serving as a metaphor for their restrictive social condition. It further demonstrates the intimate relationship between spatial composition and storytelling, highlighting how interiors contribute to the symbolic depth of Rego's narratives. Underpinned by literature in the field of spatial theory, this paper investigates the interplay between body and space, revealing how Rego used various spatial mechanisms to create uncanny interiors, reflecting the constrained realities of Portuguese women. Initial findings uncover how notions of national identity and gender roles were constructed through depictions of domestic space. This work demonstrates how art can expose social injustices, foster networks of resistance, and contribute to the struggle for gender equality, empowering women.

Keywords: architecture; domesticity; women; identity; space