

Exhibition

Some Stories



Vasco Araújo

30.01 \ 2026
20.06 \ 2026

Opening

29.01 \ 2026



Fundação Leal Rios

www.lealriosfoundation.com
Rua do Centro Cultural, 17-B
1700-106 Lisbon, PORTUGAL

T \ +351 218 822 573
I \ @fundacaolealrios
E \ contact@lealriosfoundation.com

Some Stories

Vasco Araújo

30.01 \²⁶ — 20.06 \²⁶

— EN —

Vasco Araújo: Telling Stories, Remaking the World

Texto by José Bértolo

In a recent interview with Vera Appleton, Vasco Araújo states:

Reality doesn't exist. What we call reality is a theoretical — and, of course, practical — construction that allows us to understand one another. Isn't it? We speak a language... it's a code for mutual understanding... Because everything is a performance. Reality is staged. It's false. It's perfectly constructed. I am interested in precisely these things — how we construct our identity, how we build ourselves as human beings. How we act as human beings, in society, with one another.

With his usual candour and *panache*, the artist condenses, in just a few sentences, a significant part of the philosophical foundation of his work. For Araújo, reality functions as a system: a network of conventions, languages, and rituals that allow us to coexist and to make shared meaning out of the world. Everything is mediated and represented. The performative nature of experience — an experience that in turn shapes human identity — is reflected in Araújo's recurring engagement with theatre, opera, and performance, as well as in his use of quotation and reference to pre-existing texts.

Everything in Araújo's work points toward the symbolic dimension of life. Without denying the phenomenological aspect of human experience, his art foregrounds discourse as the arena in which the human world is continually made and remade. If there is such a thing as truth, it resides first and foremost in action. The "substance" of reality lies in the "forms" through which it is performed. In *Insula* (2010), one of Araújo's most reflexive works, this phrase appears on screen: "Truth is not discovered. It is created." What is at stake in almost all of his work is a notion of reality and a notion of art that are fundamentally inseparable. Both are rooted in fiction, creation, and potentiality, rather than in any mimetic attempt to represent the world as it is.

If the Romanesque tradition — culminating in opera, Vasco Araújo's first great passion — and later humanist theatre (the line "To be or not to be, that is the question" recurs throughout Araújo's body of work, and *Hamlet* [2004] is in fact one of his titles) taught us that life and the human condition are composed of stories lived by characters who are, to some extent, also the authors of their own narratives, and that those character-authors are each one of us, then modernity brought that awareness decisively into art by making it one of its central concerns. In this sense, Araújo's work

may be understood as an artistic inquiry into the human condition: how we create reality by living and recounting the stories that shape it, and how, in doing so, we construct ourselves both as singular beings and as collective identities.

The method through which the artist explores these ideas often involves fiction. In truth, Vasco Araújo is a storyteller-artist whose works stage the very act of narration. More than that, they reveal the potential inherent in storytelling: the capacity to help us make sense of the world and of existence, and to graft new and unexpected meanings onto them. What interests him most is measuring what new stories owe to ancestral ones, which is another way of saying how modern humans owe so much to the ancients. The world of Vasco Araújo is one of the eternal return of episodes, characters, and gestures. Yet he approaches this not as a historian or theorist, but as someone who tells the stories that fascinate and animate him, the stories that shape his worldview, his imagination, his dreams, and

his own reading of the past, of the present world, and of its social, political, and psychological structures.

Vasco Araújo is a contemporary bard who, having read his Walter Benjamin, strives to resist the philosopher's famous claim that "the art of storytelling is coming to an end", and to affirm that this art can still endure in the age of post-information and post-truth. That stories can still, and increasingly must, enchant and unsettle us. For Araújo's works are indeed stories, but they are also, simultaneously, a personal and political affirmation of the possibility and the responsibility of continuing to tell them: a privileged way of fostering encounters, of creating a genuine "community of listeners" who may, through an act of shared attention, dream of new "models for the world's becoming" (Benjamin, "The Storyteller").

Regarding the title of this exhibition, "some stories", the phrasing is significant. There is no claim to totality here. Bringing together disparate works suits an oeuvre that is grounded in fiction, precisely because



1 \ *Todas as Histórias \ All the Stories*, 2018
 Vasco Araújo, Video Installation, Video, screen, projector table, 4 chairs,
 Video 16/9, Duration 17'39", Variable dimensions.
 © Courtesy Galeria Francisco Fino, 2026



2 \ *Eco*, 2008, Vasco Araújo, Video 16/9, Duration 12'18", Variable dimensions.
© FLR - Fundação Leal Rios, 2026

it embraces multiplicity and resists overarching narratives. Above all, it reflects the principles that underpin Araújo's poetics: a practice based on assembling echoes and forming a constellation composed of small, otherwise autonomous points.

This principle is embedded in the exhibition's spatial design itself. Occupying the entire ground floor of the Fundação Leal Rios, the videos are distributed across four contiguous rooms, with no doors separating them. As a result, the light from the different projections traverses the space, travelling between rooms and allowing the films to *touch* one another through that very light which is, ultimately, their material substance. Sound — which, as the vehicle of music, voice and text, is always a crucial element in Vasco Araújo's work — likewise moves between rooms, inevitably crossing over. When a viewer is watching and listening to a given film, they are also, unavoidably, watching and listening to the remaining films at the same time, and are thus compelled into an exercise of attention (Vasco Araújo is, quite evidently, not an artist for the inattentive). Operating through porosity and contamination, the exhibition mirrors the polyphonic structure of

Araújo's oeuvre: the central idea that each work, while autonomous, functions as part of a network (another term for the previously invoked metaphor of the 'constellation'), and unfolds as an efflorescence from a single core — the mind of Vasco Araújo — across which all elements are in constant relation.

Interestingly, the diversity of the works presented in this exhibition resonates with some of the artist's central thematic concerns.

Hereditas (2006) stands out as the fairy tale of the ensemble, and perhaps the most emblematic example of a lyrical, dreamlike, non-discursive tendency that, although rarely dominant, permeates Araújo's entire body of work. Hovering between the gothic and the surreal, it is a silent film (as dreams are usually silent) of lost children in a forest, haunted houses, skeletons that resist being pieced back together...

Eco (2008) gives voice to another, more dominant line of inquiry: self-reflective, or operating in a *Narcissus-like* register (Narcissus and his echo-reflections return in *Pathosformel* [2021]). It is a philosophical tale. Araújo lends his voice to several characters seated around a table, each one a kind of reflection of

the artist himself. They discuss, or rather Araújo discusses with himself through them, questions that, while central to his artistic reflection, can also be recognised, not without a touch of melancholy irony, as the “great questions” of philosophy and of humanity. In an almost programmatic gesture, it is the child (and childhood is a recurring motif across the films gathered here) who poses the questions: What is reality? What is rhythm? What is instinct? What is making? What is echo? What is love?...

Hipólito (2003) is the political tale, with allegorical overtones. Image and text engage in an intriguing play of (dis)junction: on the soundtrack, we hear only the hero’s lines from Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, which, extracted from the play, invite us to question his heroic status; the images, meanwhile, show a strange scene of seduction (or is it simply innocent play?) between a boy and a girl, both wearing the uniform of the Mocidade Portuguesa. This is one of Araújo’s most disarming works, prompting reflection on tensions and power dynamics within communities, on desire and the dominance of passion over reason (how such forces could destabilize the polis was, indeed, what most interested Racine in his 17th-century reworking of the myth in *Phèdre*), on gender, and on the ways myths are appropriated and distorted across history. Here, the abuses of fascist regimes and their appropriation of classical heroes as paradigms of masculinity, strength, and power exemplify how the complexities and flaws of the

original myths were deliberately erased.

Finally, *All the Stories* (*Todas as Histórias*, 2013) is the metafictional tale, the one that embodies the epic breath running through Araújo’s entire body of work. It is the film that most clearly gives form to the line of thought I have tried to develop here. A kind of art history and literature lesson set inside the British Museum and structured around ceramic pieces from Ancient Greece, it offers a meditation both on and through the legacy of classical narratives, but also on the history of humanity, historical memory, and the human as a transhistorical “thing”. As if Oedipus, Hippolytus, Narcissus, and so many others were also ourselves. And indeed, they are, as any attentive viewer of Araújo’s work will eventually recognise.

Yet *All the Stories* should not be mistaken for a film about fiction and the human as nothing more than a playful collection of gestures. Reflexivity, as a process, is far from being at the centre. In this sense, Araújo is post-Calvino. As a storyteller, he does not simply recount stories or reflect on their place within reality. Following Benjamin, his aim is to help create a community of active, attentive, critical, generous, open, and unsettled human beings and spectators. All of Araújo’s works seek, as we hear in this final film, “to conceive a principle of perplexity. To live in perplexity. Forcing us always to choose the path of knowledge over that of ignorance”. Because “knowledge is tragic, but it makes us all more human”.



3 \ *Hipólito*, 2003

Vasco Araújo

Video 4/3

Duration: 15' 16" Loop

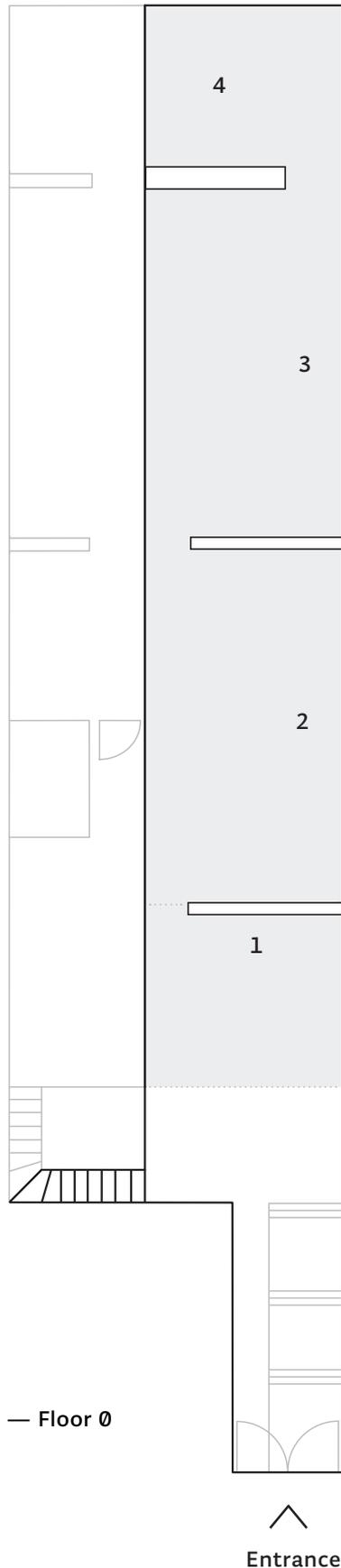
Narrator: José Costa Ideias.

Text: Excerpt of the tragedy of Euripides, “*Hippolytus*”

Variable Dimensions.

© FLR - Fundação Leal Rios, 2026

Captions

**1 \ Hereditas, 2006**

Vasco Araújo

Video: 16/9

Performed by: Joana Teixeira

Duration: 12'14"

Variable dimensions.

Courtesy: Galeria Francisco Fino, Lisbon

2 \ Eco, 2008

Vasco Araújo

Video 16/9.

Duration: 12'18"

Actors: André Gomes; André E. Teodósio; Cláudia Jardim; Diogo Bento; Gustavo Boldt; Pedro Penim.

Voice: Vasco Araújo.

Text: Based on Cesare Pavese's "Dialogues with Luécó".

Variable dimensions.

Collection FLR - Fundação Leal Rios

3 \ Hipólito, 2003

Vasco Araújo

Video 4/3

Duration: 15' 16" Loop

Narrator: José Costa Ideias.

Text: Excerpt of the tragedy of Euripides, "Hippolytus"

Variable dimensions.

Collection FLR - Fundação Leal Rios

4 \ All the Stories, 2018

Vasco Araújo

Video Installation

Video, screen, projector table, 4 chairs

Video 16/9

Duration: 17'39"

Voice: Paula Sá Nogueira

Text: From the tragedies of Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles, and with quotations from the article "Silent cowardice" by João Sousa Monteiro.

Variable dimensions.

Courtesy: Galeria Francisco Fino, Lisbon

Biographies

Vasco Araújo

Vasco Araújo was born in 1975 in Lisbon, where he is currently based. He completed his first degree in Sculpture in 1999 at FBAUL (Lisbon University School of Fine Art), and attended the Advanced Course in Visual Arts at Maumaus in Lisbon, from 1999 to 2000. Since then, he has participated in various solo and group exhibitions both in Portugal and abroad, also taking part in residency programmes, such as The University of Arts, Philadelphia (2007); Récollets, Paris (2005); and the Core Program (2003/04), Houston. In 2003, he was awarded the EDP Prize for New Artists.

His work has been published in various books and catalogues and is represented in several public and private collections, such as the Centre Pompidou, Art Institute Chicago (USA); Musée d'Art Moderne (France); Berardo Collection Museum, Modern and Contemporary Art (Portugal); Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Portugal); Serralves Foundation (Portugal), among others.

www.vascoaraujo.org

José Bértolo

José Bértolo is Assistant Researcher and Professor at the NOVA School of Social Sciences and Humanities (NOVA FCSH), NOVA University Lisbon. His essayistic work has focused primarily on questions of representation and materiality in photography and cinema, with a particular emphasis on the Portuguese and Japanese contexts. He is the author and editor of several books, including *Espectros do Cinema: Manoel de Oliveira e João Pedro Rodrigues* [Spectres of Cinema: João Pedro Rodrigues and Manoel de Oliveira] (2020) and *Assombrações: A Inscrição do Fantasma* [Hauntings: The Inscription of the Ghost] (2024, with Clara Rowland). Together with Pedro Alfacinha, he curated the exhibition *Ichi-go Ichi-e: One Moment, One Encounter* at the NOVA Rectorate, which was accompanied by the book *Ichi-go Ichi-e: Portuguese Photographers in Japan* (2025). As a photographer, he is the author of the photobook *Moraesu St.* (Documenta, 2024).

<https://www.josebertolo.com>

Credits

Director

Miguel Leal Rios

Assistant Director

Duarte Tiago

Text & Translation

José Bértolo

Production

FLR - Fundação Leal Rios

Production Assistants

Caio Guedes

Ícaro Pavan

Layout and Graphic Design

MIGUELRIOS_DESIGN

Production



Fundação Leal Rios

Exhibition visits

Thursday to Saturday
2:30 pm. — 6:30 pm.

Fundação Leal Rios

www.lealriosfoundation.com
Rua do Centro Cultural, 17-B
1700-106 Lisbon, PORTUGAL
T \ +351 218 822 573
I \ @fundacaolealrios
E \ contact@lealriosfoundation.com

Transportation

Buses

717 — 731 — 735 — 745
— 750 — 755 — 767

Subway

Green Line (Station: Alvalade)