

**Maat**

Museum  
Art  
Architecture  
Technology

**Ana Léon  
Gestos**

Ana Léon, who appeared on the Portuguese art scene during the 1980s, settled in Paris in that same decade and still lives there today. The artist works with drawing and film in parallel. Using analogue technology (film and a Super 8 camera), she creates stop motion animations where she uses the images she captures one by one to recreate the movement of bodies. Léon has always developed languages of great simplicity and austerity of means in both fields.

In this exhibition (whose title can be translated as “gestures”), presented in six successive rooms, a significant number of male figures, almost always framed in a medium-long shot and dressed in very simple clothing, perform a limited number of repetitive gestures on a loop. It is hard to tell these figures apart. The sensation of depersonalisation is emphasised by the fact that the figures are repeated from one video to the next, performing different pieces (or different scenes from one same piece) with the same wardrobe, the same temporality, gestures, set design, colour scheme, lighting and background sound.

In post-romantic imagination and imagery, the human-machine relationship became (aesthetically and ontologically) significant, unfolding in countless examples, ranging from literature to film or from painting to choreography. But it is also true that the tradition of the inert model imbued with life is as old as the narrative of divine will in the book of Genesis or is demiurgic, as in the Greek myth of Pygmalion (if we restrict ourselves to Western tradition).

The models that Ana Léon uses are from the famous *Action Man* range. They are around 25 cm tall, made entirely of plastic and

metal components and perfectly articulated (neck, arms and legs, wrists and ankles). They reproduce idealised bodies, sporty and muscular, with a highly varied military wardrobe and a vast range of accessories, both very true to life. From the 1960s on, millions of Western teenagers had these figures (based on the original American model, *G.I. Joe*, created in 1962) and used them in their war games and adventures; through them, they developed, transformed and consolidated their image of the world, their relationship with their body and concept of gender – *Action Man* is to the stereotype of traditional masculinity what *Barbie* is to the female stereotype.

Of course, it is more than likely that their original intention was frequently altered and adapted by the children and teenagers themselves, calling into question the role of these figures as heterosexual models and heroes. Ana Léon also boycotts the conventional role of traditional animated figures by denying them any narrative dimension. In fact, in her short films, nothing happens, or what happens is exclusively descriptive in nature. The films also confirm the relationship established between modernity and utopia (or dystopia) in the mechanisation of bodies and, in parallel, the relationship with contemporary dance and music, which the artist highlights.

It is worth mentioning that the choice of dolls with which Ana Léon works is not determined by the fact that they are male models, but by the neutrality of their expressions (or their inexpressiveness) and the physical mobility that defines them. However, all these readings (and others that each visitor is free to make) are left open by the artist, who refuses to develop verbal and

interpretive discourses around her oeuvre – as if everything she observes and transcribes in detail, painstakingly staging in each film the different micro-temporalities of a banal, everyday life, happens without effort and purpose.

João Pinharanda



*Tomber*, 2014; 2 min 27 s, loop

*Avancer*, 2024; 2 min 20 s, loop

Super-8 films digitised with added soundtrack, HD video projections

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Ana Léon (Lisbon, 1957) lives and works in Paris. She has a degree in Painting from the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Lisbon and a Masters in Aesthetics from the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.

Her artistic work has developed between drawing and film. She has been exhibiting since 1982, both individually and collectively. Solo exhibitions include *Azulvermelho* (with Pedro Calapez, Galeria Diferença, Lisbon, 1982), an installation at the *Ménagerie de Verre* (Paris, 1992), *Metamorfoses* (National Museum of Natural History and Science, Lisbon, 1994), *Drawings and Films* (Centre Culturel Portugais / Fondation Gulbenkian, Paris, 2003), *7 Filmes* (Cinamateca Portuguesa – Museu do Cinema, Lisbon, 2005), the film *Strip-Tease* (Théâtre du Rond-Point, Paris, 2007), *Bodies* (CAPC – Círculo de Artes

Plásticas de Coimbra, 2021). Group exhibitions include *Instalação* (Galeria Metrópole, Lisbon, 1983), *Arquipélago* (SNBA – Sociedade Nacional de Belas-Artes, Lisbon, 1985); *Lisbonne aujourd'hui* (Musée de Toulon, 1988), *Lá Fora* (Museu da Presidência da República, Lisbon, 2009), *Variations Portugaises* (CAC Meymac – Centre d'art contemporain, 2017), *Half the sky* (Fundação Arpad Szenes – Vieira da Silva, Lisbon, 2019), *All I want – Portuguese Women Artists from 1900 to 2020* (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, 2021), and *Histories of a Collection – Modern and Contemporary Art from CAM* (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, 2023). Ana Léon's work is represented in collections such as CAM – Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian, Caixa Geral de Depósitos, Museum of Lisbon, Fundação Carmona e Costa and Serralves Foundation.

Ana León

Gestos

26/02/2025 → 02/06/2025

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Agenda

Guided tour with João Pinharanda:  
31/05/2025, 11.30-12.30




Publications

The Ana León - Gestos catalogue is  
part of a series published by the  
museum to accompany the exhibitions  
held in the Ashpit 8 space. This book  
is available in the museum shop.

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exhibition guide



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