



YSP

Teacher's Notes

Joana Vasconcelos: Beyond

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About This Resource

Joana Vasconcelos is the most prominent Portuguese artist of her generation. She produces vibrant sculptures on a monumental scale, which explore her Portuguese heritage and culture, women's roles in society, and the relationship between art and craft.

These Teacher's Notes contain:

- An introduction to Joana Vasconcelos and her work
- A focus on 8 key artworks. Each section contains factual information, enquiry questions, images and suggestions for comparisons with other works in the exhibition.
- Interesting facts
- A glossary of terms
- Further reading



Joana Vasconcelos, *Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi*, 2014.
In studio © Unidade Infinita Projectos

The questions and ideas in this resource are a springboard for teachers to explore the themes in Joana Vasconcelos's work and can be used either in the gallery or the classroom. The enquiry questions can be used to stimulate ideas, discussions, and creative activities before, during, or after a visit to the exhibition. Teachers can adapt and select from these suggestions as appropriate to their group's needs and key stage.

Further ideas and playful suggestions can be found in our creative [Drawing Together](#) and [Talking Together](#) resources, which are suitable for all.

Yorkshire Sculpture Park

To find out more about YSP, explore the resources on our YouTube channel with your class. Here you can find short videos about the park, which will help your pupils gain a sense of the unique relationship between sculpture and the beautiful Yorkshire landscape in which it sits. There is also a library of videos and artist talks from previous exhibitions which you may find useful.

@yspsculpture

YSP's IGTV channel on Instagram also contains artist interviews and give a fascinating insight into their work, life and reasons for choosing to become an artist.



Joana Vasconcelos, *Pop Galo*, 2016. Photo © Jonty Wilde

An Introduction to Joana Vasconcelos and her Work

Joana Vasconcelos is a Portuguese conceptual artist who lives and works in Lisbon. Her work highlights commonalities in human experience, articulated through a Portuguese cultural lens, which transcend cultures and borders. Vasconcelos's work asks us to consider female experience and empowerment, and how women's roles in society have evolved over time. The history and culture of Portugal is a key theme in her work and is articulated through her adoption of folk tales and heritage crafts. Vasconcelos interprets these ideas in a compelling, playful and often monumental way. Born in Paris in 1971, she was brought up in a more traditional, pre-digital era. The decline in many historical, cultural and heritage processes during her lifetime have been brought about by cultural shifts, converging international influences and progression in new media and technologies. Culture, craft, tradition, materiality, storytelling and interpretation are key components to Vasconcelos's work, and are perfect for discussions, debates and project starting points for your class.

The observer may at first recognise many of the immediate representations in her work, i.e. giant shoes, a rooster, diamond ring, animals and household objects. However, on further exploration there are multiple layers of meaning and intrigue in each work.

"I like to create a space for discovery, a first moment where you capture what is obvious in the piece, where you can consume it in the first instant. But as you come closer, you discover there's more to it and you start to deconstruct it."¹

The concepts, materials, cultural heritage and social practices referenced in the work, create relevant and meaningful connections for the viewer to engage with. The traditional culture and identity of Vasconcelos's home country plays a vital part in her artwork and this is often exemplified by her use of crafts and materials. Vasconcelos's use of traditional domestic female craft and its presentation in contemporary art galleries across the world elevates its status, and in turn can be seen to challenge the use of traditional masculine sculptural materials (bronze, marble, steel).

A number of the works include a soundscape that further amplifies the meaning and immerses the viewer by filling the gallery space. For example, traditional Portuguese Fado folk songs sing out as *Red Independent Heart* gently rotates, and the sound of ringing phones project from the objects themselves in *Call Center*.

These works reflect the many ways we engage with the world, through visual, auditory and emotional stimuli.

The *Atelier Joana Vasconcelos* in Lisbon employs about 60 people who assist in the production of the traditional crafts of knitting, crocheting and sewing, along with engineers and architects. It is a collaborative working environment with a strong sense of community, where everyone stops work to eat lunch together. The work of the studio is keeping traditional Portuguese heritage alive and has played an important role in maintaining and reviving traditional Portuguese industries.

"Europe is very present in my work. I feel like a European artist. I have lived all over the world, but I am part of a culture which is defined by a history, traditions and symbols which are all European."²

The studio employs skills that have been passed on by Portuguese women from generation to generation and can be seen in her artwork constituting, covering and embellishing domestic objects, animal, human and abstract forms. Vasconcelos highlights this creative means of self-expression for women. This is extended further in *Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi*, the title of which references the life of a woman who achieved financial independence through creative making and enterprise.



© Atelier Joana Vasconcelos

Vasconcelos is inspired by many materials from the oldest Portuguese traditions, (filigree jewellery, faience, azulejos, ceramics and wrought iron) and enriches them with new meaning. She proudly embeds this tradition in her work, not as a reconstruction of the past, but as an original fusion with contemporary culture.

Vasconcelos became internationally known for her arresting work *A Noiva* (The Bride) (2001-05), a chandelier made from thousands of plastic-wrapped tampons, exhibited in the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005. Vasconcelos's career to date has been as pioneering as her work. She was the first woman and youngest artist to present a solo exhibition at the Palace of Versailles, Paris (2012), and was the first Portuguese artist to present a solo exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao (2018).

Her work has since been recognised in major exhibitions worldwide. Vasconcelos represented Portugal at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 with her work, *Trafaria Praia*, a passenger ferry covered in hand painted blue and white tiles depicting the Lisbon skyline. Inside it was filled with lights and materials symbolic of her other works from the *Valkyries* series, and it sailed around the canals of Venice as a floating Pavilion.

“Art is a reflection of our time. This idea of reflecting on the time or the space in which you live, on your environment, is very strong, and by not following others but by going my own way it has given me a great deal of freedom that has opened my work to the public, not just to the art world.”₃

Vasconcelos runs a foundation called *Fundação Joana Vasconcelos* whose mission is to support those who ‘choose art as their path’. The foundation aims to not only preserve and archive the artist’s work, but also promote the development of arts and cultural education, award grants and collaborate with other organisations to support causes that benefit society.

These Teacher’s Notes focus on eight key works from the exhibition, *Joana Vasconcelos: Beyond*, which are exemplars of different aspects of her practice. Lines of enquiry are provided to kick start and stimulate your planning, to promote interesting approaches and be adapted to your classroom need. The breadth of Vasconcelos’s artistic practice lends itself to the discussion of a wide range of themes and topics.



Joana Vasconcelos, *Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi*, 2014. © Atelier Joana Vasconcelos

Culture and heritage, and the influence these have on our personal, national and international identities, is a central theme in Vasconcelos’s oeuvre. Her work shines a lens on traditions and contemporary society and provides a catalyst to initiate conversations around cultural capital and its relevance and meaning to your class. Vasconcelos’s work references myths, folktales and national symbols, providing an ideal route into ideas around storytelling and exploring national identity. Domesticity, gender roles and love are also key themes, providing rich material for questioning, personal exploration and expression.

“If it does not transcend its culture, it is not a work of art. I believe that a work of art is ultimately a piece of multiculturalism. In other words, it is something that gets communicated beyond culture...”₄

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Solitário

Solitário [Solitaire] is a seven-metre-tall ring made from 110 golden alloy car wheel rims with a single jewel that consists of 1149 crystal whisky glasses, supported by an iron and steel frame. Each wheel rim is marked with the logo of Vasconcelos's company, a variation on the infinity symbol or number 8, which holds particular significance for her. It is designed using the primary colours, plus green, to reflect the colours of the Portuguese flag. *Solitário* sits majestically on top of the mound outside YSP's Bothy Gallery and visitors can view the rolling landscape through the circular aperture of the ring.

The assemblage of luxurious items shapes the meaning of the work. They invite us to think about society's ambition to acquire wealth and material possessions. The work highlights stereotypical notions of male desire for women, luxury items such as fast cars and whisky, and in turn, the assumption that women desire to be married to rich men who are able to provide material wealth and associated lifestyle. The work unites these symbols of luxury which bridge social classes. The monumental scale encourages us to question the value and status that we attribute to the material world and invites us to consider the scale of our own bodies in relation to it. The sculpture frames the landscape and asks us to consider how material wealth has come to shape our relationship with the natural world.

The sculpture's title translates as '*Solitaire*', a term used for jewellery with a single diamond. This type of jewellery has come to mark significant occasions in life and is most associated with an engagement proposal. Joana's focus on our desire for material objects plays with the name *Solitário*, asking us to consider how when people have acquired all their heart's desire, that they might still feel alone.

“The theme of the work Solitaire is based on people’s basic wishes. That is, the ring is based on encrypted wishes, wishes that are stereotyped and cross all social classes. Like the ambition to own a big car ... to access luxury products, such as very expensive bottles of whiskey, or rings with big diamonds.”₅

Image: Joana Vasconcelos, *Solitário* [Solitaire], 2018.

18" light alloy golden wheel rims, crystal whisky glasses, metallized and thermo-lacquered iron, stainless steel, tempered and laminated glass. 720 x 604 x 209 cm. Photo © Jonty Wilde

Lines of Enquiry

Explore concepts of luxury and what this means in different times, places, and cultures.

Consider how material and emotional wealth shape our ambitions and desires.

What do you think of when you look at a diamond ring? What does it symbolise?

How and why might we accessorise love?

Discuss the differences and similarities between material and emotional desire.

What does desire mean today?

How might this sculpture's position, framing the landscape at YSP, comment on what we hold dear?

How might the meaning of *Solitário* change if it were only 1 metre in height?

Explore the phrase 'the trappings of wealth'.

How do you feel about the disparity of wealth in our society today?

How does wealth affect our status in society?

Consider how we define wealth. What does it mean to be 'wealthy'?

Besides money, what other things offer us wealth?

Are these more important than money and possessions?

How do we express symbols of wealth?

What are your ambitions for your future?

Is it important to be ambitious?

Consider the sculptures below in relation to *Solitário*:



Joana Vasconcelos, *Precious*, 2018. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Marilyn*, 2011. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Vista Interior*, 2000. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Solitário [Solitaire]* (detail), 2018. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Solitário [Solitaire]* (detail), 2018. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Solitário [Solitaire]*, 2018. Photo © Jonty Wilde

Pop Galo

Pop Galo [Pop Rooster] is a 9m rooster, covered by 17,000 Portuguese glazed tiles, or *azulejos*, arranged in a variety of patterns and illuminated by 15,000 LED lights. The artist has taken two icons of Portuguese national culture – the Rooster of Barcelos and ceramic glazed tiles, to make a contemporary pop art statement that injects new life and drama on a grand scale into these national symbols.

The rooster is associated with a folk tale of a Catholic pilgrim en route to Santiago de Compostela, who was falsely accused of stealing. To prove his innocence, he claimed that a dead rooster would rise up and crow three times at the moment of his execution. The rooster rose up, crowed, proving his innocence and the pilgrim was freed. The Rooster of Barcelos has been adopted as an unofficial symbol of Portugal and represents honesty, integrity, justice, luck and trust. Vasconcelos has adapted the rooster to include coloured lights, accompanied by interconnected music composed by Jonas Runa. Since antiquity, the rooster has been, and still is, a sacred animal in some cultures and deeply embedded within various religious belief systems. The rooster is also a traditional symbol of other countries and cultures, for example the Gallic rooster of France and is a symbol in the Chinese Zodiac. In Portugal, the Barcelos Rooster usually takes the form of a small ceramic domestic ornament and is also found in souvenir shops on key rings and printed on tea towels.

Azulejos are a type of traditional Portuguese glazed ceramic tile, found on both the interior and exterior of buildings across Portugal, and is one of the most characteristic public art forms of the country. The word *azulejos* is derived from Arabic and means polished stone. Azulejos first came to Portugal in the 15th century when parts of the peninsula were still under Moorish rule. Portugal adopted this Hispanic/Moorish art form and made it uniquely their own.

Pop Galo highlights values that are universal to humanity, which transcend cultural differences: integrity, justice, luck and trust. Vasconcelos prompts the viewer to consider these values through the lens of Portuguese culture. This encourages us to think about how these same values and ideas are articulated in our own and other cultures.

Since 2016, *Pop Galo* has been exhibited outdoors in urban settings in Lisbon, Beijing, Bilbao and Barcelos. At YSP it can be seen for the first time against a backdrop of 18th century parkland.



Joana Vasconcelos, *Pop Galo* [Pop Rooster], 2016.
Viúva Lamego hand-painted tiles, LED, fibreglass, iron, power supply units, controllers.
Sound and light by Jonas Runa. 900 x 372 x 682 cm. Photo © Jonty Wilde

Lines of Enquiry

Consider the benefits and challenges of using symbols to represent cultural identity.

Why do we use symbols to represent the places we are from?

How and why do different cultures appropriate different symbols?

Are symbols universal? Consider how ideas translate across cultures, time, and space. How do we use art and design to connect to a place?

Do we need to understand the legend to fully understand the artwork?

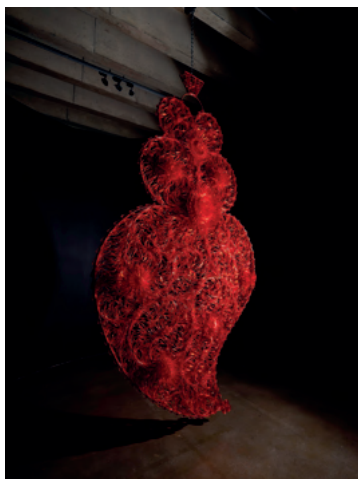
Why do you think particular animals are used to represent certain countries, groups and companies?

What meaning might the patterns and adornments on *Pop Galo* have?

Vasconcelos uses the LED lights in her works 'to represent a central nervous system or flow of blood through arteries and veins.' Why might this be an important aspect of connectivity for a national symbol?

How might a large super-sized sculpture of a rooster about honesty and integrity be seen to be our 'wake-up call'?

Consider the sculptures below in relation to *Pop Galo*:



Joana Vasconcelos, *Red Independent Heart*, 2013. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Marilyn*, 2011. Photo © Jonty Wilde

“One truly crucial question, one that will unquestionably have repercussions far into the future, is that of identity. Insofar we are embarked on a process by which it is being whittled away, today it constitutes one of the most difficult aspects to preserve.”⁶



Joana Vasconcelos, *Pop Galo*, 2016. Photo © Jonty Wilde

Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi

The monumental 12-metre-long *Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi*, which hangs suspended from the ceiling, is one of a series of dramatic works that represent 'Valkyries'. Valkyries are Norse mythological female warriors, deciding who lives and dies in battle, and which of the slain warriors should enter the afterlife of Valhalla.

Made from multicoloured woollen crochet, fabric and flamboyant embellishments with tentacle limbs that reach out across the gallery floor, *Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi* embodies the power of these figures through a dynamic mass of texture and colour that is intended to be both menacing and protective.

This sculpture was commissioned by the fashion brand Marina Rinaldi, which is part of MaxMara. It is named after the founder, whom having lost all the men in her life, started sewing to make ends meet, establishing her own haute couture atelier in the 1850's. Today, the brand Marina Rinaldi focuses on a collection for plus size women. This sculpture incorporates textiles from the Marina Rinaldi Collection.

"We are passing through a time in which the poorest classes are constantly solicited to buy everything, junk food, where McDonalds spring up all over the city, while fashion models incite us to keep slim and eat healthily."⁷



Joana Vasconcelos, *Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi*, 2014.
Handmade woollen crochet, fabrics, ornaments, inflatable, fans, power supply unit, steel cables.
405 x 480 x 1244 cm. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi* (detail), 2014. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi* (detail), 2014. Photo © Jonty Wilde

Lines of Enquiry

Consider the strength of women and how they are depicted in both historical folk lore and contemporary society.

How is the duality of the Valkyrie, a foreboding menacing force to some that offers protection to others, represented in this work?

How might this sculpture encourage us to think about the way women are perceived in contemporary society?

How might strong female archetypes benefit society?

Explore how materials can be used to subvert traditional power structures. Consider the traditional hierarchy of materials. How might the scale, mass, shape and form of the Valkyrie challenge the tradition of masculinity in sculptural materials?

How does the male/female lens shape the reading of these artworks?

What might the rich fabrics, voluptuous forms and vibrant colours of the Valkyrie say about the fashion industry's relationship with notions of femininity?

Consider notions of glamour and beauty across body types and genders. How might this sculpture support us to challenge society's ideals? Consider ways of abstracting different facets of identity (emotions, feelings etc.)

How does Joana's interpretation of the Valkyrie compare to Wagner's musical interpretation *Ride of the Valkyries*?

Consider the sculptures below in relation to *Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi*:



Joana Vasconcelos, *A Barroca*, 2014. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Marilyn*, 2011. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi* (detail), 2014. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Valkyrie Marina Rinaldi*, 2014. Photo © Jonty Wilde

Marilyn

Marilyn references one of the most notable American actresses to symbolise female sexuality, Marilyn Monroe. Made from 996 stainless-steel saucepans (from the domestic to the industrial scale) the 297cm high stilettos ask us to question social conventions and expectations of women's roles in the domestic and public spheres. *Marilyn* is part of a series of large-scale stiletto sculptures named after iconic female characters (Dorothy, Betty Boop, Carmen Miranda and Cinderella) for whom the shoe catalyses or signifies a transformation. Joana Vasconcelos encourages us to consider women's role in contemporary society, and how these contrasting ideals are amplified in portrayals of women in 'popular' culture (film, cartoon, fairytales etc.) *Marilyn* has been positioned in Gallery 2 to direct the viewers gaze towards *I'll Be Your Mirror* in the outdoors at YSP.

"I first thought about what it means to be a woman today. I wanted to translate the complex female identity in our contemporary world. Women can combine a private, domestic identity reflected in this sculpture by the kitchen utensils, and a professional, public identity linked to work and luxury, represented by the shoe."⁸

Lines of Enquiry

Consider the stereotypically traditional roles of women and men.
Discuss their relevance in today's society.

Discuss the status of domestic labour and the term 'housewife/househusband'.
Consider the context of the term 'domestic goddess' and what we mean by this.
Discuss how responsibility for domestic labour has changed over the past 50 years.
Consider how society treats people with perceived 'low-level' jobs.
Why are some jobs considered to have less status than others?
Consider who might determine what jobs have high/low status.

Consider why we choose to conceal parts of ourselves, but happy to reveal others.
Consider the benefits/challenges of keeping some elements of ourselves private.

One of the iterations in Vasconcelos's stiletto sculpture series is called *Cinderella*.
Consider the dichotomy between Cinderella's liberation from a scullery maid to the wife of a prince.
Discuss the roles of women in the home pre- and post-marriage.
Consider who we dress for — ourselves or others?



Joana Vasconcelos, *Marilyn*, 2011.
Stainless steel pans and lids, concrete. (2x) 297 x 155 x 410 cm. Photo © Jonty Wilde

Consider the sculptures below in relation to *Marilyn*:



Joana Vasconcelos, *Solitário [Solitaire]*, 2018.
Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Purple Rain*, 2017.
Photo © Jonty Wilde



Red Independent Heart #3

The stunning and elaborate *Red Independent Heart* is a representation of another well-known Portuguese emblem, the Heart of Viana. This symbol has religious origins in Portugal and first appeared in the 18th century. The distinctive shape that sits atop the heart represents a stylized version of flames, that burst out of a heart full of love, like the burning heart of Jesus. The Heart of Viana symbolises honesty and generosity and is depicted in traditional Portuguese gold filigree jewellery, acting as a lucky charm for brides who pass their jewellery on to their daughters.

Joana has taken this personal and emotional symbol and created a heart over three metres high. Hanging from the ceiling, the sculpture rotates in the purpose-built space in the gallery. It is made entirely of red plastic cutlery, which has been abstracted to such an extent that the lattice work appears as if it were the quilled threads of filigree jewellery.

Dramatically lit, it is accompanied by recorded Portuguese fado songs. Fado music is a hallmark of Portuguese identity. A melancholy tune and lyrics, often about the sea or the life of the poor, which speak of love, loss and the conflict between emotion and reason. The three songs that play in this installation, *Estranha Forma de Vida* (Strange Way of Life), *Gaviota* (Seagull) and *Maldicao* (Curse) are by Amalia Rodrigues, who is celebrated as 'Rainha do Fado' (The Queen of Fado) and whose popular music made fado famous worldwide. Fado music is traditionally performed in the intimate setting of a fado house, where traditional food and drinks are also served. Joana's use of plastic cutlery in this sculpture echoes this link between fado music and the dining experience. All sound of clinking cutlery stops when the fado singer begins.

“The epic journeys of the Portuguese en route to the Indies, started out as utopias, like poetic deeds, but whose destination was at the time unknown. This wanderlust, this love of exploration, of discovery, are fundamental values, (...) I have no idea what awaits us at the end of our journey.”⁹

Image: Joana Vasconcelos, *Red Independent Heart*, 2013.
Translucent plastic cutlery, painted iron, metal chain, motor, power supply unit, sound installation.
371 x 220 x 75 cm. Photo © Jonty Wilde

Lines of Enquiry

How might a culture's intangible heritage – social practices, performing arts, traditional craftsmanship, emotion and expressions, knowledge and skills – shape an artwork?

How might this sculpture symbolise different facets of love?
How has strength of desire and fragility of emotion been represented?

Are concepts and expressions of love and loss universal across cultures?

Fado music is said to be 'the heart of the Portuguese soul'.
Does one artform succeed in representing emotion more successfully than another?
Why might this be different for different people?

How does the use of plastic material in this artwork ask us to question what we consider precious in everyday life?
What does the use of plastic in lieu of gold say about longevity and beauty?

Fado songs tell tales of lost loves, betrayals, voyages, sagas, and bravery.
Is falling in love a brave journey into the unknown?

Consider the works below in relation to *Red Independent Heart*:



Joana Vasconcelos, *Red Independent Heart*, 2013. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Heart of Viana. Traditional Portuguese filigree jewellery
<https://nasvete.com/portuguese-filigree-jewellery/>



Joana Vasconcelos, *Solitário [Solitaire]*, 2018.
Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Vista Interior*, 2000.
Household objects, PVC blinds, metallized and thermo-lacquered iron, acrylic glass, plywood. 236 x 184 x 184 cm. Photo © Jonty Wilde

Vista Interior

Vista Interior is a collection of household objects from the year 2000 that act as a time capsule, representing the lives of a young couple living in a small flat in the outskirts of a Portuguese city. The glass box and metal shutters reference the many balconies in Portuguese cities which have been enclosed in glass as residents adapt their homes to create more living space, where the exterior becomes the interior. These balconies become a window into the private world of the residents, as they occupy this new space with their belongings.

Each layer of objects in *Vista Interior* presents a specific room in the flat; bathroom, living room, kitchen and bedroom respectively. This collection of objects provides a snapshot of a couple's life at a specific time and place. The objects give a glimpse into their domestic life and prompt us to consider their status in society, the life they can afford and their hopes for the future as they embark on life together. The designs of many of the brands and items that are displayed in the case have now changed or are no longer available. The work asks us to explore how much of our domestic setting is for private viewing, to reflect on how the world has changed since the millennium, and how the economy shapes opportunity for young people.

“My ‘palette’ employs poor materials through which I rethink the notion of power.”¹⁰

Lines of Enquiry

Discuss how *Vista Interior* could be seen as a self-portrait.
Why might the objects presented in this artwork be valuable?
Why do we attach value and meaning to certain objects?
Consider the meaning of the term ‘luxury object’.
Consider the value we attach to other elements of our lives.
How do our possessions reflect our identity?

Consider *Vista Interior* as a house of importance, where similar objects sit on the same shelf, but rooms and purpose are separated onto ‘floors’.
What is the link between the objects on each level of the cabinet?
How have these objects changed over time?
If you were to create a time capsule to represent your life now, what would you include?
Is it important to preserve memories?

Consider the sculptures below in relation to *Vista Interior*:



Joana Vasconcelos, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, 2018. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Destermido*, 2019. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Call Center

Call Center takes the form of an enlarged Beretta pistol (made famous by James Bond) comprised of 168 rotary-dial telephones. Embodying ideas of power and dominance, the gun is animated by the incorporation of an 'electro-acoustic symphony' by composer Jonas Runa, which rings out from the telephones.

This work asks us to consider the importance of communication in modern life and to explore the extent to which we have become dependent on telecommunication. The pistol form suggests how a break in communication with each other and the world can feel like a death, as we lose our identity and ability to function and communicate.

The work also asks us to consider how technology shapes our daily experience over time. The rotary dial telephone is almost obsolete analogue technology and as an object, has become lost in translation when shown to younger generations. The title *Call Center* invites us to think about the structures and workforce that enables connectivity in the world today.

Call Center has been positioned to draw the visitors eye towards further artwork in the adjoining gallery space.

"I play with the history of these materials, the way they resonate in our minds, I change the discussion through the material."¹¹

Image: Joana Vasconcelos, *Call Center*, 2014-16.
Analogue telephones, metallized and thermo-lacquered mild steel, sound system, oscillators driven by microcontroller. 210 x 80 x 299 cm. Photo © Jonty Wilde

Lines of Enquiry

Consider the importance of communication in the 21st century. Think about why Vasconcelos has used rotary dial telephones to make this work.

Rotary dial telephones were invented in the late 19th century. Consider how our methods of communication have changed over the last 100 years.

What impact have these changes had on the way we live our lives?

Consider why the handsets are hanging. What might they represent? If we picked up the receivers, who might be speaking on the other end of the line?

What feelings and emotions does the soundscape evoke? Consider how the meaning of the artwork might change if it wasn't accompanied by sound.

Consider the title of the work – *Call Center*. Does the title alter the way you view the artwork?

What would be the similarities/differences if *Call Center* were made of smartphones? Consider the many ways we are able to communicate in the 21st century. Discuss the benefits/disadvantages of communication? Can communication be dangerous?

Consider the sculptures below in relation to *Call Center*:



Joana Vasconcelos, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, 2018.
Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Marilyn*, 2011.
Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Call Center* (details), 2014-16. Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *A Barroca*, 2014.
Stainless steel shower heads, handmade woolen crochet, ornaments, polyester.
248 x 94 x 50 cm. Photo © Jonty Wilde

A Barroca

A Barroca [The Baroque] is a pair of stainless-steel shower heads joined by an embellishment of blue, white and gold handmade woolen crochet, embroidery and ornamentation. This intricate embellishment spills from the shower heads and represents continually running water, prompting us to consider how we consume and value this vital commodity. This work is part of the *Shower Heads* series, which along with the *Sinks*, *Washbasins* and *Urinals* series, utilize domestic objects that are embellished with a variety of textile adornments or covered in traditional Portuguese crochet. The cleaning of this specific set of sanitary fixtures and fittings is traditionally carried out by women. By covering these objects in high quality domestic craft, Joana highlights often overlooked female creativity in the domestic setting.

Many of the works in this series feature a pairing of the same object i.e. two shower heads, two urinals or two sinks positioned side by side. These pairings suggest how we are connected through our daily sanitary rituals (cleaning ourselves, our homes) and highlight the importance of water to humanity and the luxury of having access to clean, running water.

This series of works draws on Nouveau Realisme, a movement founded in the 1960s associated with the inclusion of objects into artworks and a legacy of Marcel Duchamp's readymades. Vasconcelos's use of domestic sanitary objects, directly references *Fountain*, a urinal signed R. Mutt submitted to the American Society of Independent Artists in 1917 by Marcel Duchamp and believed to be the first readymade. This specific re-appropriation of the readymade with bathroom products, raises questions about women's creativity being overlooked, both in the domestic setting and the art historical canon.

“The objects used in my works are disembodied, lost in their ordinariness and from which regular use has obliterated all of their potential aura. I am interested in these iconic little everyday articles, these codes which we all share, and which build a community of signs”

Lines of Enquiry

Consider how water might be seen as a luxury.
How different would our lives be without accessible clean water?
Consider our relationship to water.

How has Vasconcelos used these materials to represent flowing water?
Why do you think the artist has used two shower heads in this work?
What could they represent?
Why might they be joined together by the blue crochet embellishment?

What happens to the status of everyday objects when we embellish them or change their appearance?
How and why do we embellish our own appearance?

Consider the traditional gender roles of domestic labour.

Think about the skill required to make the embellishments, crochet, and lace you see in the exhibition. Discuss the value placed on these traditionally female pursuits and skills.

Consider the sculptures below in relation to *A Barroca*:



Joana Vasconcelos, *Precious*, 2018.
Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *Inséparables*, 2018.
Photo © Jonty Wilde



Joana Vasconcelos, *A Barroca* (details), 2014.
Photo © Jonty Wilde

Interesting Facts:

- The whisky glasses in *Solitário* have been specially fabricated for the sculpture and contain lead to help them withstand inclement weather.
- The emblem found on the wheel rims of *Solitário* is the logo for Vasconcelos's company. It is a variation of the infinity symbol or the number 8, which has particular significance for the artist. The logo has been designed with the primary colours, plus green, to reflect the colours of the Portuguese flag.
- *Pop Galo* features five different compositions of light and sound. The sound was created by Portuguese composer Jonas Runa. Four of the compositions are individually associated with each of the four colours on the sculpture (red, yellow, green and blue), whilst the fifth represents the interconnectivity of the four colours.
- Azulejos tiles are used as a form of decoration on the facades of buildings, but also have a functional use, helping control the temperature in people's homes. As the tiles are usually displayed on a 2-dimensional surface, Vasconcelos and her team had to overcome technical difficulties when covering the rounded 3-dimensional form of the Rooster.
- Beautiful examples of the Hispanic/Moorish artwork on azulejos tiles can still be admired at the Alhambra Palace in Granada.
- The stainless-steel saucepans in *Marilyn* have had their copper bottoms removed to make the overall structure lighter.
- *Red Independent Heart* is made with 5,300 – 5,800 pieces of plastic cutlery and took two people 4-5 months to make.
- *Call Center* consists of 168 rotary-dial telephones. After losing her iPhone, Joana Vasconcelos was struck by the subsequent loss of communication with the outside world and was inspired to buy these phones in a local flea market.
- *Finisterra* consists of an assemblage of coloured knitted forms, the largest of these took about 2 months to make.

- Portugal and England (succeeded by the UK) have a long alliance dating back to the Middle Ages. The Anglo-Portuguese Alliance was ratified at the Treaty of Windsor in 1386, by King Richard II of England and King John I of Portugal. It is the oldest alliance in the world that is still in force, with the earliest treaty dating back to the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of 1373.
- The Treaty of Windsor was established as a pact of mutual support between the two countries, guaranteeing the security of both nations and strengthening commercial ties. Portugal and the UK have never waged war against each other or participated in wars on opposite sides as independent states since the signing of the Treaty of Windsor.
- *Diana* (2020) references the heiress of the Bretton Estate, Diana Beaumont (1765–1831) née Wentworth. She was the illegitimate child of Sir Thomas Wentworth and greatly expanded the size of the estate and mansion, adding many glass houses and conservatories. The Dome Conservatory built in 1827 was the largest in the world at that time. It was later demolished by her son Thomas Wentworth Beaumont after her death. She was also a keen horticulturalist and had a plant named after herself, *Beaumontia grandiflora*, which she brought to the UK from subtropical India.
- *Beyond*, the title of the exhibition, is inspired by an album of the same name by Tina Turner. The album is a collection of Buddhist and Christian prayers which ask us to look beyond ourselves and our everyday reality.
- Joana Vasconcelos used to work as head of security for a team of bouncers and practiced karate while she was growing up. These past experiences informed *Una Dirección*, which comments on methods of control and security, and how traditionally, public safety is connected to men, whereas private safety in the home, is connected to women.

Glossary

AZULEJOS

A type of Portuguese and Spanish painted tin-glazed ceramic tilework. The word azulejo stems from Arabic roots, meaning 'small, polished stone'. Azulejos are deeply embedded in Portugal's history and culture and are used to decorate the interior and exterior of public buildings and private homes.

BIENNALE

A Biennale is an event held every two years and is most associated with large, international contemporary art fairs. The most famous of which is the Venice Biennale, which was founded in 1895.

CERAMICS

The art of creating objects from earthen materials such as clay, which are then hardened by baking them in a kiln at very high temperatures. Pots, sculptures, tiles and crockery are commonly made this way.

CONCEPTUAL ART

Artwork where the idea or concept is more important than the aesthetic or material qualities of the work. As an art movement, it is associated with the 1960's and 1970's, but the first piece of recognised conceptual art was Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, made in 1917.

CRAFT

A form of making which requires particular skills and produces objects which have a purpose e.g. crockery, jewellery, knitting.



Joana Vasconcelos, *Diana* (detail), 2020.
Photo © Jonty Wilde

CROCHET

A needlework technique using a crochet hook to draw yarn or thread through intertwined loops.

CULTURAL CAPITAL

In the field of sociology, the term 'cultural capital' describes an individual's social assets, such as education, intellect and style of speech and dress, which contribute to social status and power. The term was coined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in the late 1970's. In relation to education, Ofsted's school inspection update of 2019 states it is "the essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said, and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement."

EMBELLISHMENT

A decoration added to something to make it more beautiful or interesting.

FABRICATION

Assembling, forming, manufacturing, or inventing something. Art fabrication refers to the process of artists producing complex works by outsourcing resources, labour, or specialised machinery.

FAIENCE

Glazed earthenware or pottery decorated in highly colourful designs with an opaque glaze (seen on the right).



Image: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faience>

FIGURATIVE

Figurative art describes artwork which portrays the human figure or references the real world.

FILIGREE

A form of intricate metalwork using a fine wire of gold or silver, found in jewellery and other forms of ornamental metalwork (see image below).



FIRE

(Ceramics) To bake clay and glazes at a very high temperature.

FOUND OBJECT

Borrowed from the French phrase *objet trouvé*, a found object in art is a natural or man-made object which already exists in the world and is repurposed by an artist and presented as an artwork. Joana Vasconcelos uses found objects in her work e.g. the telephones in *Call Center* and the saucepans in *Marilyn*.

GLAZE

A ceramic glaze is an impervious, glassy coating used to decorate, colour and waterproof ceramic objects. The glaze is fused to the ceramic object through a process of firing.

KILN

Oven in which ceramics are fired.

KINETIC ART

Artworks which have moving parts that are driven by air currents, motors and gears, or the viewer themselves.

LACE

A decorative open fabric made from cotton or silk, which is knitted and looped into delicate patterns, either by a machine or by hand.

MAQUETTE

A small, preliminary model of a sculptural work.

MIXED MEDIA

The term used to describe an artwork which contains more than one media or material.

SCULPTURE

Three-dimensional art made using one of the following four processes: carving, casting, modelling, or constructing.

SOUNDSCAPE

An atmosphere or environment created by or with sound.

VALKYRIE

Valkyries are Norse mythological female warriors, deciding who lives and dies in battle, and which of the slain warriors should enter the afterlife of Valhalla.

WELDING

Welding is a fabrication technique used to join two materials together at a very high temperature, which then fuse together as they cool. Welding is usually used to connect metals or thermoplastics.

Image: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filigree>



Joana Vasconcelos, 'I'll Be Your Mirror', 2018. Photo © Jonty Wilde

References

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5. Joana Vasconcelos, Film: J Vasconcelos_video#3_SOLITARIO_PT_EN 00:13 YSP Image Archive
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Further Reading

Joana Vasconcelos exhibition page:

<https://yvsp.org.uk/exhibitions/joanavasconcelos>

Joana Vasconcelos's website: <http://www.joanavasconcelos.com/index.aspx>

Joana Vasconcelos Beyond Exhibition Guide. Louise Lohr. Yorkshire Sculpture Park (2020)

Joana Vasconcelos: Material World. Enrique Juncosa & Crispin Sartwell. Thames and Hudson Ltd. (2015)

Joana Vasconcelos: Maximal. P. Blümel, A. Sommer, J. Vasconcelos, F. Voßkamp, J. Wilhelm. Hirmer (2019)

Joana Vasconcelos: I'm Your Mirror. Joana Vasconcelos. La Fabrica (2019)

Joana Vasconcelos: VERSAILLES. Collective. Skira Paris, (2012)

With thanks to Anne-Louise Quinton, Freelance Art Education Consultant, for contributing to this resource.

Find Out More

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CULTURA



MR. PETR AVEN

