

# if not even you

17 and 18 December 2023

**IF NOT EVEN YOU** explores the interplay between language, materiality, and identity.

The title quotes a line by the Portuguese author Almeida Garrett — *Ninguém, se nem já tu me conheces\** — which reports that someone who should know the speaker well, in fact no longer recognises nor understands them. The speaker, having returned home after two decades away, asserts that who he now is depends upon his recognition by the listener, described as his 'loyal servant', who had witnessed his growth in earlier life.

This sensation of not being recognised by someone who once knew us well, combines feelings of alienation, transformation, and loss. Our identity and sense of being has evolved such that even those with whom we were once familiar now struggle to perceive what we have become. Change manifests itself as a form of disguise.

This exhibition presents diverse approaches through which artists engage with, distance themselves from, accept, collect, and interrogate their memories, culture, language, and sense of place. The artists employ various media, including drawing, painting, printing, sculpture, performance, and photography, utilising visual and written language, materiality, objects, and imagery that resonate with their experiences.

**Filipa Tojal** has developed her painting practice across various countries worldwide. The choice of location holds significance for her, providing pictorial possibilities and resources to develop distinct bodies of site-specific work. The exhibition features pieces from Portugal, Japan, and Australia. Tojal uses traditional fabrics, paper, and lightly bound pigments to capture the purest essence of colour found in nature, preserving a piece of the land she works in. Despite changing environments, there is a sense of permanence in Tojal's work. Moving from Portugal to Japan, followed by many other places, prompted reflections on the similarities between the unfamiliar culture of those countries and the land she left behind.

**Catarina Fontoura** takes a different approach. *In 154 Cork Oaks Marked to be Felled* – the inaugural chapter of a collaborative venture in creative practice and land stewardship – Fontoura reconnects with her homeland, exploring themes of loss and memory. Rooted in the heart of Alentejo, Portugal, this project unfolds in the region's emblematic 'montado' – a cork oak forest with a rich habitat of indigenous flora and fauna. The montado is a human-crafted natural ecosystem, an intrinsic part of the local heritage. This place, once flourishing with cork extraction and cattle rearing, is now changing. As the landscape undergoes transformation, Fontoura's artistic exploration serves as witness to the evolving narratives of the land, capturing not only the historical richness but also the contemporary shifts that shape its identity.

**Ana Mendes** presents assembled paper maps from former colonies of specific empires, loosely stitched together to form a larger, fragmented territory. This work serves as an exploration of her identity as a Portuguese citizen within a post-colonial context. After relocating to England in 2010, where discussions on colonialism are more prevalent than in Portugal, Mendes engages in reflective scrutiny, re-evaluating her connection with these complex issues. *Self-Portrait* is a performance in which an anonymous voice systematically queries Mendes on personal details, including aspects of her life, medical history, preferences, and identity documents. The interrogation delves into various events in an alienating and invasive manner. Here, the construction of identity unfolds through the lens of border controls, ethnicity forms, and documents that substantiate knowledge and consensus. This work investigates the intersection of personal identity, bureaucratic procedures, and the invasive nature of data collection.

**Catarina Cubelo**'s work incorporates processes of alienation and linguistic manipulation to craft playful and absurd experiences. In collaboration with Olivier Rodriguez for this exhibition, she presents ordinary objects – napkins – correlating them with the flavours listed on the menu of the Pho Hanoi restaurant, also invented by them. The text on the napkins combines words and reconsiders everyday utterances to suggest an emotional connection, while at the same time exposing the strangeness of language when shaped by context and subjectivity. Cubelo and Rodriguez transformed words into sensations that become lost in translation. The napkins invite viewers to reconsider the interplay between text and haptic experience, within the context of familiar objects and situations.

**Ana Teles** appropriates both religious and civil death ceremony rituals and documentation to affirm the mechanisms through which identities are constructed. In this work, she symbolically concludes her student identity by proclaiming the death of her student life and the emergence of her next, non-student identity – a process described as "setting oneself free," marking "a de-categorization of the self". Teles signs a death certificate and reads her own eulogy – written by Babak Ghazi, her MA tutor – who also contemplates his identity in relation to the dynamics of student-student and student-tutor relationships. This exploration emphasises the interdependence inherent in these relationships, as expressed by the tutor: "In speaking about her, I speak about myself." The ritual serves as an examination of the metamorphosis of identity within the context of educational and personal evolution.

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\* Ninguém, se nem já tu me conheces is a sentence, familiar to most Portuguese school children, spoken by D. João de Portugal, from the play *Frei Luís de Sousa* (1843), by Almeida Garrett.

There is no contemporary English translation of the play, nor is there a consensus as to the correct translation of this sentence. Various Lusophone artists and friends have suggested:

- Nobody, if not even you knows me now
- No one, if you no longer recognise me
- Nobody, if not even you know who I am
- No one, if not even you knows me