

TRACING THE ARTISTIC JOURNEY: FROM ALMADA NEGREIROS' PRELIMINARY STUDIES TO THE 1949 MURALS PAINTED AT THE ROCHA DO CONDE DE ÓBIDOS MARITIME STATION, LISBON (PORTUGAL)

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Abstract

This paper examines the preparatory studies carried out by Almada Negreiros for the 1949 mural paintings at the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Station, focusing on the evolution of the artist's choices in terms of composition and the use of colours. By comparing these studies with the final work, the aim was to add new information regarding Almada's creative process, offering new insights into his methodology and artistic decisions. The work was based on collating drawings from several archives and collections. Results showcase examples of how these studies can be seen as autonomous works, in some cases as ramifications and in other cases as a process of revisitation of recurrent themes of Almada's visual and literary practice. Results also show how drawings became progressively more geometrical as the studies progressed, moving away from the more naturalistic figuration, and how colour followed the same path, becoming more vivid and sometimes unrealistic.

Keywords: Almada Negreiros; Mural art; Preparatory studies; colour scheme

Introduction

Almada Negreiros (1893-1970) was a prolific artist with an important role in Portuguese modernism. He had an intense and uninterrupted production throughout several decades: he wrote poetry, plays, manifestoes, conferences and a novel, alongside being a visual artist with drawings, paintings, illustrations, set and costume design. He also accomplished several public large-scale commissions on different materials, such as stained glassworks, incised and painted murals, and tiles. Considering his vast and polysemic work, attempts to define him within a style or univocal reading have always been problematic. This is also the case when considering the commissions that he accepted for the dictatorial regime that spanned over forty years in Portugal (until April 1974). Almada's modernist, polemic and defying spirit of the first decades of the 20th century earned him a respectful position within the country's cultural elite, allowing him to keep relationships with relevant figures of the regime even when he disagreed with them [1].

Between 1941 and 1945, invited by architect Porfirio Pardal Monteiro (1897-1957), Almada Negreiros worked on a major mural painting commission for the Alcântara Maritime

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Station located on the riverbank of Lisbon. Unlike the work contract, which has not yet been found, more than sixty preparatory studies by Almada have been located. In 1946, Almada began working on a new set of mural works for the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Station, also by Pardal Monteiro, completing them in 1949. All the official contract documentation was found for this project, but only around thirty-five of Almada's preparatory studies were located in different archives. Most of these works are neither dated nor signed, which is common in the author's practice.

Figure 1 is an elevation section of Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Station by Pardal Monteiro's atelier. It is the only found document from the architect's atelier bearing decoration and it showcases three of the six murals Almada would be responsible for painting.

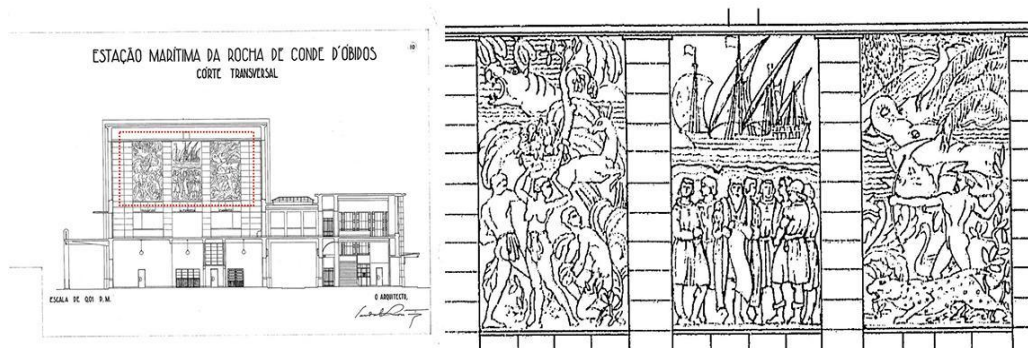


Fig. 1. General and detailed view of the western wall elevation with mural decoration, signed by the architect Pardal Monteiro. This drawing is part of the official documentation for the construction of the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Station

The representation is coherent with the “mythicised image” that the dictatorship would expect, “suitable to the country’s vision glorified by propaganda [2],” but it bears no relation to Almada’s final options (Fig. 2).

When comparing Fig. 1 of the murals of Alcântara Maritime Station to the murals of Rocha do Conde de Óbidos, the latter is not as in tune with a state commission, with less nationalistic or picturesque connotations, with bolder subjects, composition and colour. As Fig. 2 shows, the two triptychs are characterised by a more bidimensional overlapping of objects, characters and landscapes that are condensed in a foreground-background space and there is an overall more graphical approach to representation, with strong outlines and colours, conjugating cubism and graphic arts [3]. These features are reflected in the few preparatory studies found for the mural works. There is, however, a disparity between the number of sketches for the two triptychs: nine for the eastern triptych, *Quay* and twenty-six for the western *Coastline*. Overall, these are still small numbers, given the magnitude of the endeavor and considering that Almada designed more than sixty studies for the first Maritime Station, painted in 1945.

This collation does not deplete the number of preparatory studies carried out or existent, as many of Almada’s works belong to private collections and are therefore difficult to locate; still, it is representative of several aspects of the author’s methodology. In terms of their materiality, the preparatory studies for Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Station are quite heterogeneous: we can find graphite, gouache, crayons, watercolours, or Indian ink on different types of paper and cardboard of several different dimensions, up to around 50 to 100 cm.

With this paper we intend to present and examine these different studies, comparing them to the final work done on the walls. The aim is to contribute to a better understanding of the author’s methodology for this specific project at Rocha do Conde de Óbidos, a controversial work

[4, p. 328] but also one that Almada himself significantly singled out: “I don’t believe I have ever accomplished better, nor have I ever made an artwork that was more my own” [5]¹.



Fig. 2. Overall view of the murals at Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Station: eastern and western walls with the triptych entitled *Quay*, on top and *Coastline* on the bottom (c. 780×380 cm each panel)

¹ The original reads: “Creio não haver antes cumprido melhor, nem feito obra que fosse mais minha” (translation by the authors).

Methodological approach

The search for preparatory studies was carried out at the Center for Studies and Documentation Almada Negreiros Sarah Affonso (Centro de Estudos e Documentação Almada Negreiros Sarah Affonso - CEDANSA), using a digital archive of the author's estate, currently under cataloguing process. This archive includes works deposited in CEDANSA - NOVA FCSH; MAC/CCB Museum of Contemporary Art; Modern Art Center of Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CAM-FCG), National Museum of Contemporary Art (MNAC), as well as Almada's works in the CAM-FCG and MNAC collections. This search excludes works in private collections unless previously published in exhibition catalogues, which are referenced in the image credits. All the images were compiled and compared using the open-access platform mural.co.

The catalogue reference ANSA refers to images digitised and available in the virtual online database modernismo.pt and deposited either in CEDANSA - NOVA FCSH or in MAC/CCB. The catalogue reference DEP_AN refers to works deposited in MNAC and the catalogue reference DEP-AN refers to works deposited in CAM-FCG, all of which are in Lisbon, Portugal.

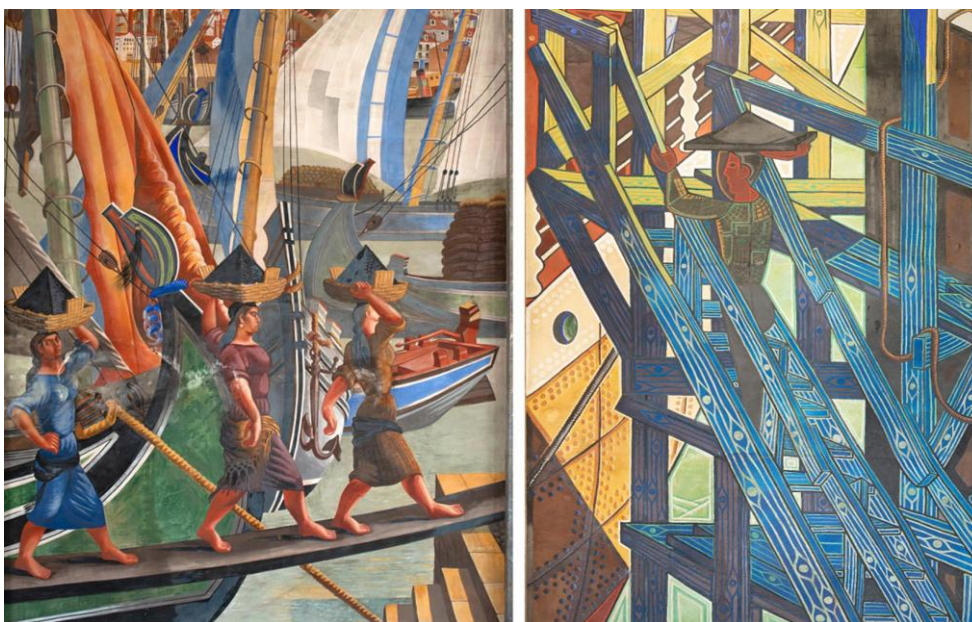


Fig. 3. Details of Alcântara and Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Stations' murals (left and right, respectively) showcasing working people.

Results and discussion

Preparatory drawings

Quay.

The triptych *Quay* (Fig. 2), also known as *Emigrants Departure*, sets out a single scene, where a ship spans through the background of the three panels. The left panel shows the bridge of the ship, its captain and a sailor, as well as some people inside the ship, looking out at a large group of people in the foreground, at the quay, saying their goodbyes and consoling each other. The center panel shows the deck, packed with people as the access bridge is lifted above them, as well as another group in the foreground, still on the quay, waving goodbye; two characters stand on a higher deck looking down at the scene and two sailors mingle in the background. The

right panel shows the bow of the ship with a sailor in charge of the anchor and, in the foreground, climbing a superimposing scaffold structure, a central figure carrying coal. This figure echoes the three main characters on the left panel of one of the triptychs of Alcântara Maritime Station (Fig. 3).

There is only one preliminary study of the whole triptych on a single sheet of paper (Fig. 4). In it, the characters have no details; they are merely sketched (only the captain and the person carrying goods directly resonate with the mural) and the groups of people at the quay saying goodbye don't exist. The body of the boat is more clearly identifiable throughout the three panels with no foreground activities and a more visible background (sky or sea), allowing for a less constrained composition. It sets out the general idea, but it is far from the murals' final options and especially its details.



Fig. 4. Almada Negreiros, detail of study for *Quay*, 1946-1949, graphite, Indian ink and water-based colours on paper (50×65 cm)

There is a group of three studies for *Quay* (one for each panel) with a more careful technical finish and a more graphic use of strong outlines, similar to the mural. Still, the representation of people is not detailed and the groups at the quay are non-existent. Moreover, the coal carrier, the central figure of an otherwise almost figureless panel, is not present in these studies. Although there is a grid, in graphite, that could indicate they were to be transferred to a larger drawing, they are still preliminary compositions when compared to the mural. Each panel of the triptych *Coastline* has an individual preparatory study with the same characteristics (support, materials and dimensions) as the studies for the opposite triptych. It is likely that all six (Fig. 5) were completed at the same time and were the reference for the same tapestry commission (225×100 cm each), although only one documented tapestry stemming from these works was located (on an auction dating from 2022), with little information regarding its commission. Besides these, there are several other tapestries, commissioned after Almada's death, namely in 1979 by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, based on the final works of the Maritime Station, all of which were executed by Portalegre Tapestry Manufacture.

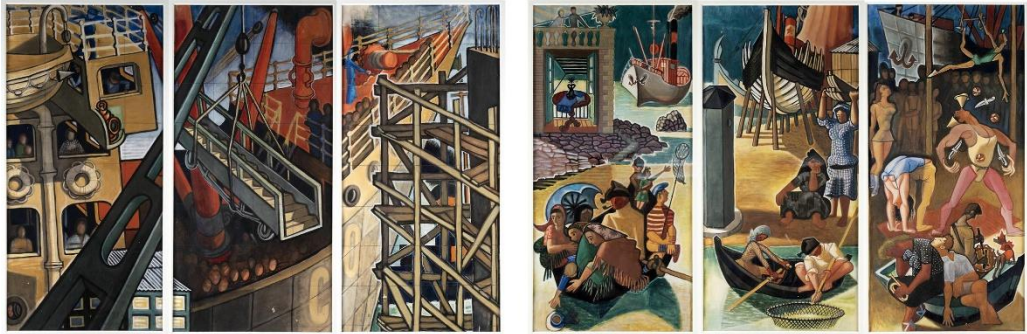


Fig. 5. Almada Negreiros, Studies for *Quay and Coastline*, 1946-1949, graphite and gouache on paper (115,5x74cm each)

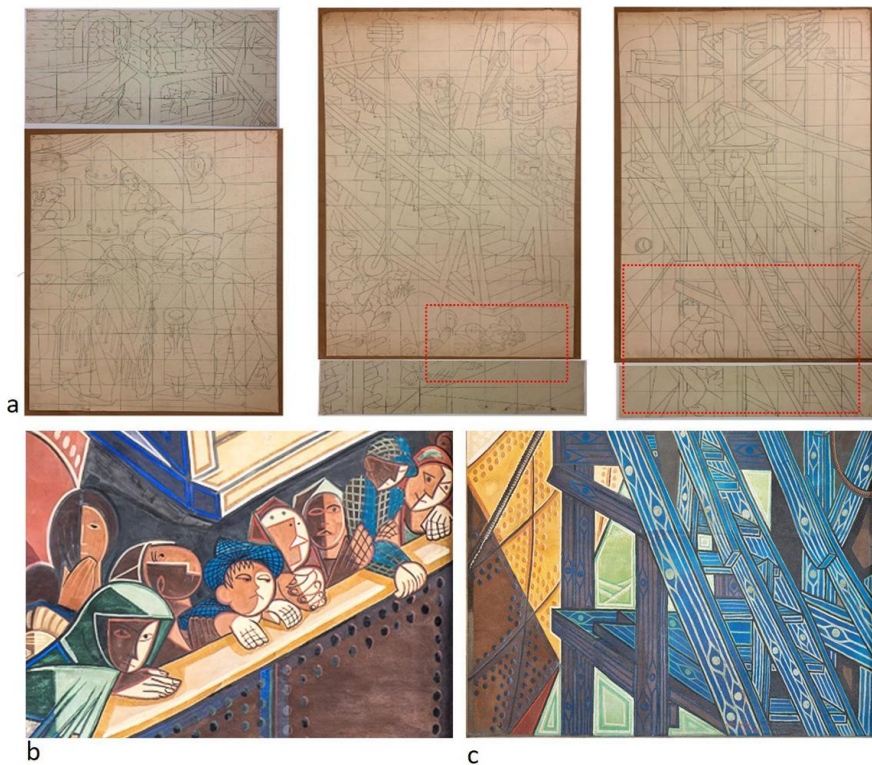


Fig. 6. From top to bottom: a) Almada Negreiros, studies for *Quay*, 1946-1949, graphite and ballpoint pen on paper (c. 100x60 cm each); b) and c) two details of the mural paintings, showing the variations that occurred in relation to what was initially foreseen in the drawings (red rectangles)

The drawings closest to the final work are set out on two sheets of paper for each panel (Fig. 6a), carried out in graphite and ballpoint pen and with a graphite grid that might have served to pass them to real-scale cartons. Although without any colour, the overall composition and details are practically identical to the murals. This shows that, in this case, coloured preparatory studies are not the later ones in the author's creative process. When compared with the murals, there are only three main differences:

i) The three characters on the lower right edge of the central panel were only lightly sketched and then erased from the preparatory study. These figures were added later to the models that were transferred with the *poncif* technique to the walls, as the remnants of this technique show in the mural (Fig. 6b).

ii) the preparatory drawing for the right panel does not show the rope that rests on the scaffold.

iii) more significantly, in the preparatory study, the right panel included another character that was apparently discarded already on-site during the transfer of the composition to the wall: a man with a bottle under the scaffold (Fig. 6c). By raking light, it is still possible to see the marks left by the *poncif* technique on the fresh mortar when tracing the figure's hair and head. Such a significant change at an advanced stage of work is an unusual procedure, so this raises questions about the reason behind it (personal decision or external constraint).

There are two more preparatory studies of details for the left and central panels (Fig. 7). The first is incompletely coloured and lacks a grid, but considering its dimensions (42,5×58 cm), it probably served as an overlap to the study in Fig. 6a: as a correction of the top section or as a colour trial. The second is a detailed rendering of three characters from the foreground of the central panel. Its dimensions (50×50 cm) bear no relation to the other studies; the fact that it is finished in crayons on cardboard and that the details on the faces surpass the murals could indicate that it was intended as an autonomous drawing, stemming from the studies.



Fig. 7. Almada Negreiros, two details of coloured sketches for the triptych *Quay* (1946-1949).
On the left, graphite and water-based colours on paper (42,5×58 cm);
and on the right, crayon on cardboard (50×50 cm)

Coastline

The triptych *Coastline* (Fig. 2), also known as *Sunday Lisbon*, shows three separate scenes that repeat a pattern of having people in rowing boats in the foreground and other people in different activities, on land, in the middle and background.

In the left panel, a packed vessel stands out, bursting at the seams with four women, four children and an impassable man smoking a pipe, rowing; in the background, there is a distant ship with the Portuguese flag and, on the left, on land, a couple stands on a balcony. The center panel shows two young people on a tiny boat, fishing, and in the background, along with a ship under construction and a military barrack, the strong figures of two African women, one standing and one sitting, both looking straight at us, the observer. The right panel entails three seemingly crestfallen musicians or street performers with a dog on a small boat and, in the background, four circus characters under a circus structure, with a large audience looking at them. For this triptych, there are more preparatory studies in general and, specifically, of individual scenes that can be

related to other artworks by Almada. Two preliminary studies include all three panels on the same sheet of paper.

Figure 8 shows a sketched ship on the left panel; a ship under construction (similar to the mural), two female fishmongers and a juggler on the center panel; the right panel shows an ongoing construction with a scaffold in the background and an acrobat and a guard in the foreground. Interconnecting the left and central panels, we can see a quay in front of which two figures on a rowing boat are lightly sketched in the middle ground. These figures jump to the foreground in the final work as the juggler moves to the right panel and the female fishmonger moves to the middle ground. Interconnecting the central and right panels is a circus tent over both the juggler and the acrobat. In the final work, they are together on the right panel, where there is no guard (whose barrack is moved to the central panel). Finally, in the background of the right panel, there is a sketched figure climbing the scaffold. In the Maritime Station, such a figure can be seen on the triptych *Quay*, as the aforementioned person carrying goods on the right panel.

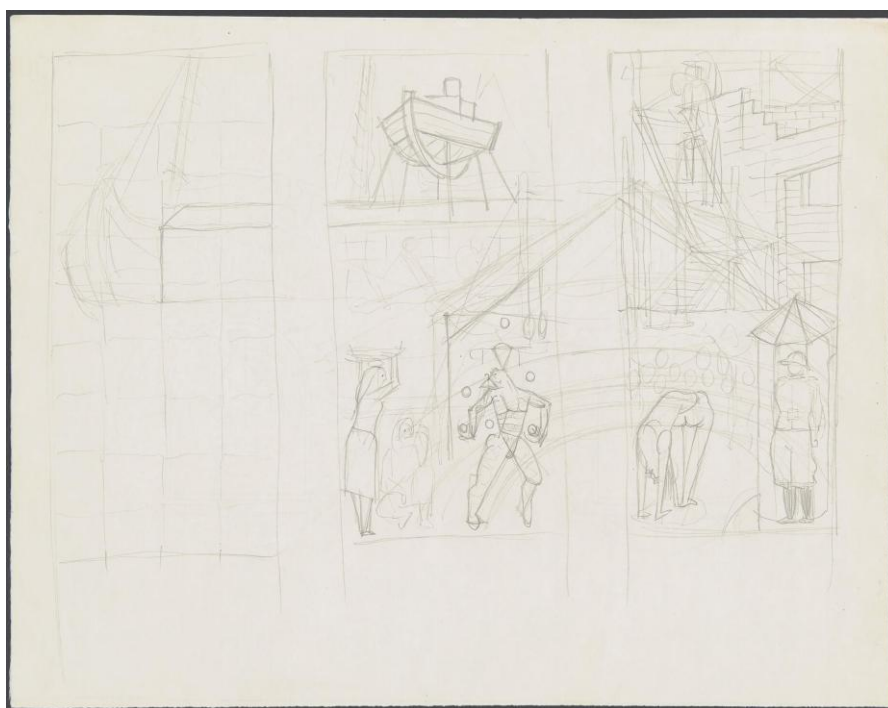


Fig. 8. Almada Negreiros, study for *Coastline*, 1946-1949, graphite on paper (34,5×46 cm)

The left panel accounts for five studies of group scenes or details. One is for the whole upper half of the mural and is very close to the final options (Fig. 9a); another focuses specifically on the open window through which we can see a small table with a book and a jar with a flower (Fig. 9b). Associations can be established with a much earlier work: Almada's drawing for the cover of Joaquim Manso's *O fulgôr das cidades*, published in 1924, where we can see a similar table (although squared instead of round) with a book and a jar with a flower on top, next to an open window (Fig. 9c). There is a similarity between these compositions and a gouache work from 1946 where the table and objects are replaced by a female figure (Fig. 9d, published in [4]). In both, we can see a balcony window with three glass panes, with the balcony itself, stylised blinds and a similar ornament on the window top. There are several other works in which these elements are incorporated (namely the blinds or the window and table), such as, for example, in

the tile panels Almada designed, between 1951 and 1953, for a private residence in Rua de Alcolena, Lisbon (Fig. 9e and 9f). We can then find elements of the mural's composition in both previous and later works. This process of self-quote or revisitation has been pointed out [6] and Almada's interchange between pictorial and literary production has also been the subject of recent studies [7, 8].

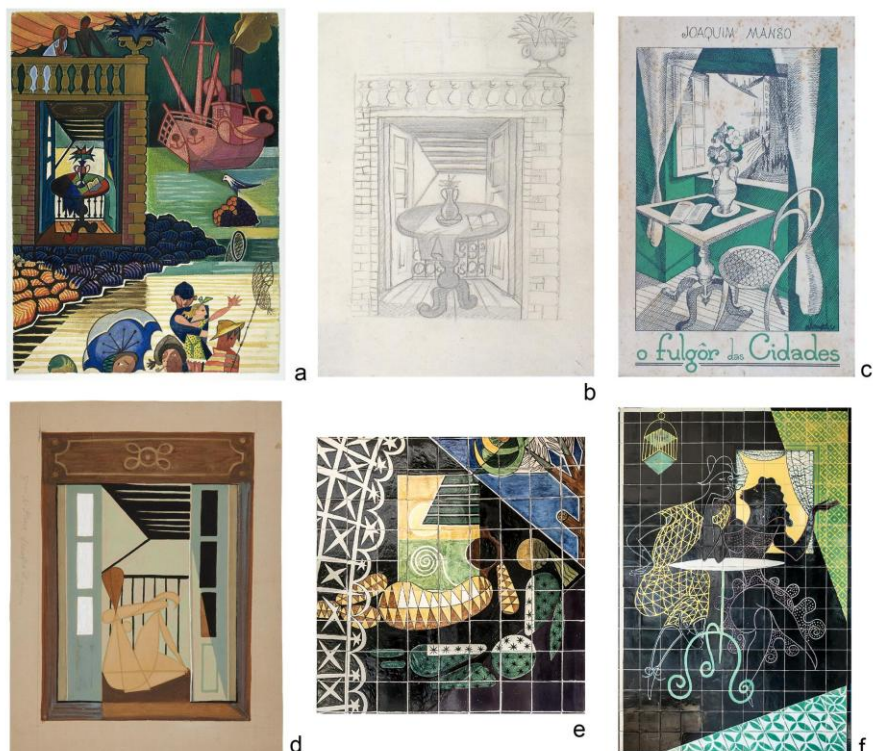


Fig. 9. Top, from left to right: a) Almada Negreiros, study for *Coastline*, 1946-1949, graphite, crayon and gouache on paper (78×57,7 cm); b) Almada Negreiros, untitled (detail), n.d., crayon on paper (45,5×35,5 cm); c) Joaquim Manso, *O fulgôr das cidades (Hespanha e França)*, Lisboa, Livrarias Ailland e Bertrand, 1924. Cover by Almada Negreiros; bottom, left to right: d) Almada Negreiros, untitled, 1946, gouache on paper (58,5×45 cm); e) and f) Almada Negreiros, tile panels at Rua de Alcolena, n°28, Lisbon (by architect António Varela), 1953

The lower half of the same panel accounts for three preparatory studies; two of them represent the scene where nine people are packed on a small rowing boat and the other is a detail of just three of the characters (Fig. 10). Some colours are, once more, far from the final works (namely the blue shirt of the character furthest to the left, which becomes red in the mural painting) and there are little changes between them and the final work, although some are more geometrised than others. In fact, Fig.10 illustrates how some works can be dated earlier or later in line with their geometrization: the left image being an earlier work and the central, and right images, being later works (closer to the mural's solutions). This progressive geometrization is in tune with a larger movement in Almada's artistic praxis, particularly from the beginning of the 1950s onwards [9], so these murals can be seen as a place for preliminary experimentation of the author's interest in geometry. In Figures 5, 9 and 10, as in the mural, it can be seen a blue parasol held by one of the characters. As another example of Almada's process of revisitation, we can compare this element to an undated work where a woman stands in the foreground holding the same parasol (Fig. 11, left). This is particularly relevant as in the background of this undated

drawing there is a shop assistant or apprentice, just like the one figuring in a painting dated from 1939, dating several years before the mural paintings (Fig. 11, center). In Alcântara Maritime Station, Almada had already included a blue parasol (Fig. 11, right).



Fig. 10. From left to right: Almada Negreiros, study for *Coastline*, 1946-1949, tempera on paper (102×67,5 cm); Almada Negreiros, study for *Coastline*, 1946-1949, Indian ink and gouache on paper (73,4×59,2 cm); Almada Negreiros, study for *Coastline*, 1946-1949, mixed media on cardboard (63×50 cm)

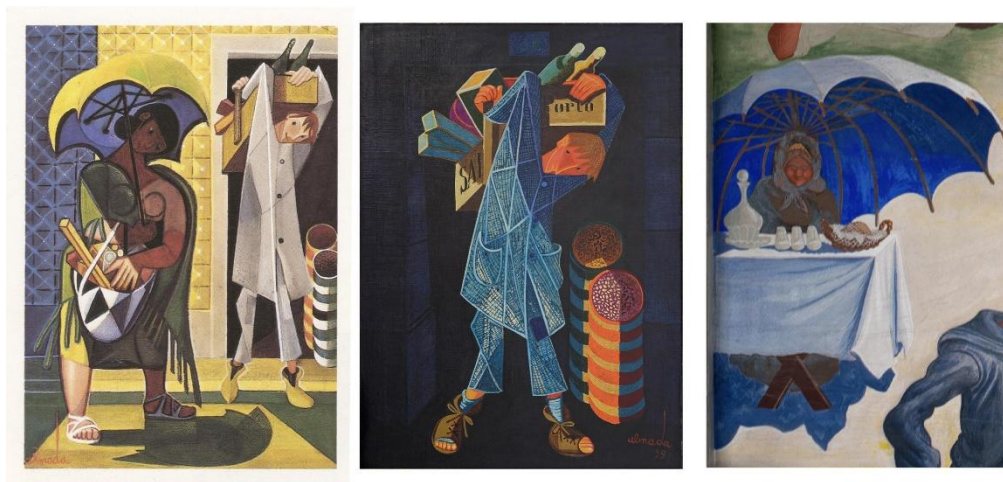


Fig. 11. From left to right: Almada Negreiros, *Mulher com compras e marçano* (attrib.), n.d., gouache and crayon on cardboard (160×65 cm); Almada Negreiros, *Marçano* (attrib.), 1939, oil on canvas (181,2×131cm); Almada Negreiros, detail of the murals of Alcântara Maritime Station, Lisbon, 1941-1945

Regarding the central panel, there is another complete study, besides the one in Fig. 5. The only identified image of it is published in the exhibition catalogue *Almada* [10] (Fig. 12a). Although the catalogue reproduction is black and white, it seems to be a coloured work and its

composition is closer to the mural solutions than the one in Fig. 5. This would make it the only intermediate complete panel study for *Coastline* between those in Fig. 5 and the painted murals.

The central panel accounts for two preparatory drawings for the boat under construction (Fig. 12b and 12c). The first shows a quay immediately in front of which we can see two figures on a rowing boat, just like in Fig. 8. The dominating characters of this panel in its final form - the two African female figures in the middle ground—are not present, indicating that these are early preliminary studies. There is also a preparatory study that focuses solely on the two foreground figures (Fig. 12d); it is quite close to the mural solutions but only drawn and painted on the lower half of the page. Corroborating the idea that some of these works can be seen as autonomous, there is a gouache study representing only one of the two characters in the boat (Fig. 12e) that was used as a reference for a 1985 tapestry [11]. This is the only identified case where preparatory work of a small detail led to such a commission.

There are four representations of the two African women: a full-body composition of each of them and two portraits of the woman that stands. More than just preparatory studies, considering their dimensions, materials and execution, they can be seen as autonomous works that stem from the creative process of the Maritime Station commission. There are several other relatable representations of female fishmongers and cole carriers, many of which can be traced back to the first Maritime Station commission, where female working women have a prominent presence in several panels (e.g. Figure 3). Figure 13 presents the studies that are clearly identified with the figures in the painted murals.

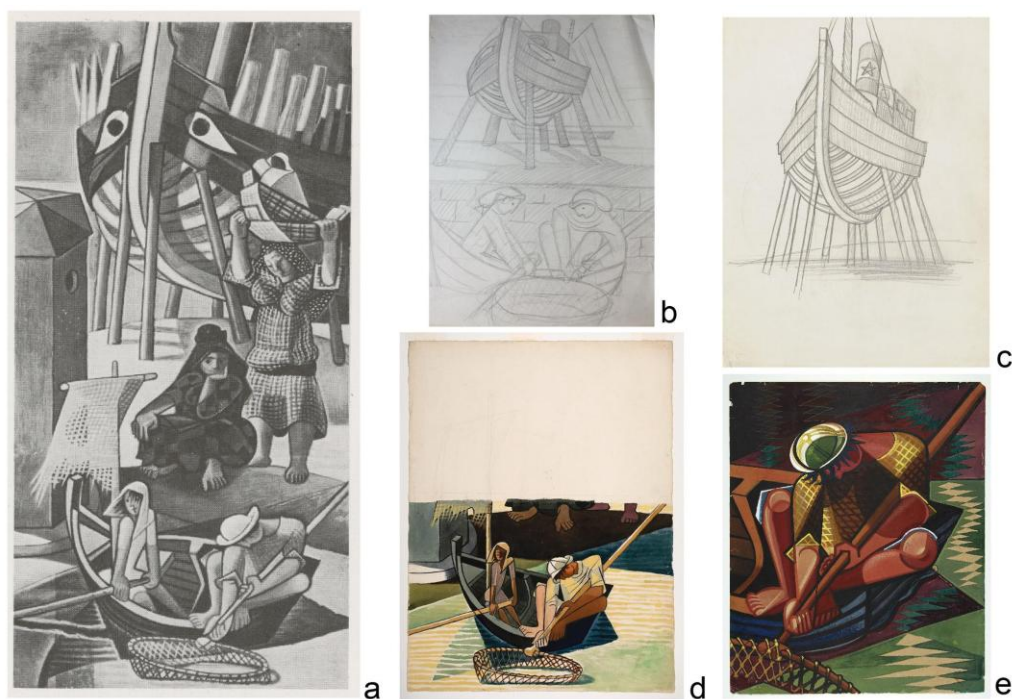


Fig. 12. Almada Negreiros, studies for *Coastline*, 1946-1949. From left to right:
 a) drawing published in [10-12] with no page number and no further information available; top:
 b) graphite on paper (46×35 cm); c) graphite on paper (45,8×34,6 cm); bottom:
 d) mixed media on cardboard (42×58 cm); e) graphite and gouache on paper (63,5×51 cm)

Regarding the panel on the right, in addition to the complete study in Fig. 5, there is another in graphite and Indian ink (Fig. 14a) that presents the same composition as the mural and

includes a grid, making it comparable to the studies referenced for the opposite triptych (Fig. 6a). This suggests that similar studies for the left, and center panels of the *Coastline* triptych, probably exist or once existed.



Fig. 13. Almada Negreiros, studies for *Coastline*, 1946-1949. From left to right:
 a) published in [13], p. 159, with no further information available;
 b) graphite, gouache and water-based colour on paper (63,5×51,2 cm);
 c) crayon and gouache on cardboard (50×50 cm);
 d) Indian ink, crayon and water-based colour on paper (100×65 cm)

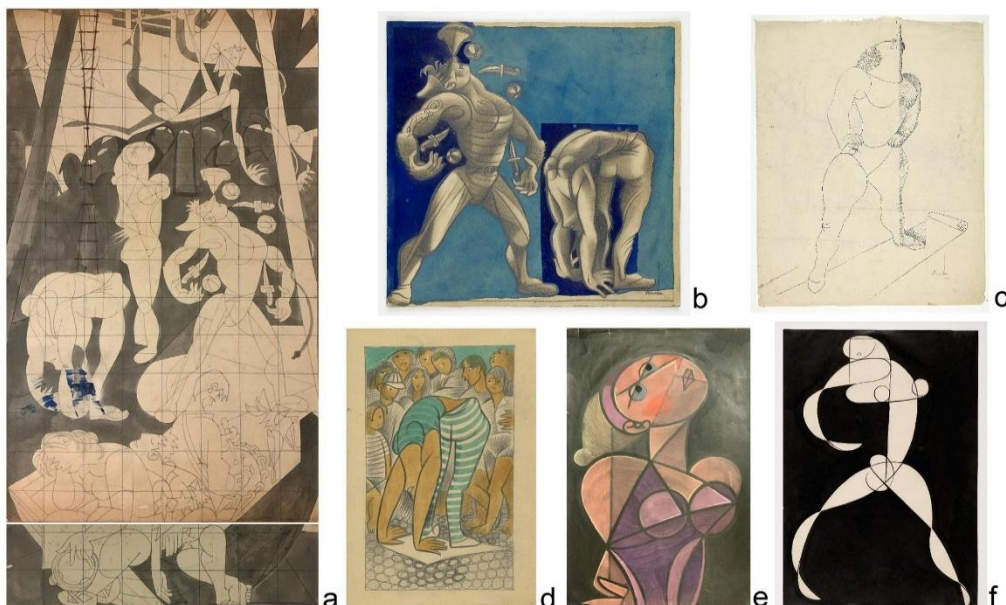


Fig. 14. a) Almada Negreiros, study for *Coastline*, 1946-1949, mixed media on paper (100 x 60 cm);
 b) Almada Negreiros, study for *Coastline*, 1946, graphite, gouache and water-based colour on paper (63,5×51,2cm);
 c) Almada Negreiros, untitled, 1933, Indian ink on paper (34,5×26,6cm);
 d) Almada Negreiros, study for *Coastline*, 1946-1949, graphite and gouache on paper (32×21cm);
 e) Almada Negreiros, study for *Coastline*, 1946-1949, Indian ink and crayon on paper (100×65cm);
 f) Almada Negreiros, *Bailarina*, 1948 (attrib.), graphite, Indian ink and water-based colour on paper (53×37cm)

The right panel also accounts for two detailed studies of the acrobat, the juggler, and the dancer. The first, shown in Fig. 14b, depicts the juggler and the acrobat in reverse order compared to the mural. It is also the only signed and dated work of the entire group of preparatory studies. The posture of the juggler can be related to a more naturalistic drawing of a performer from 1933 (Fig. 14c). The second detailed study, shown in Fig. 14d, depicts the acrobat being closely observed by a crowd, with very different colours and not as geometrised compared to the painted mural.

Regarding the dancer, in Fig. 8, she is absent; in Fig. 5, she is almost in the background, and in Fig. 14a, she takes a central position in the composition, as if she progressively became a protagonist in the preparation for the mural works. This culminates in an individual portrait (Fig. 14e), a distinction otherwise only shared by the two African women. The composition of Fig. 14e can be related to a more geometrised work, possibly from the same period as the Maritime Station commission (Fig. 14f).

Another preparatory study that includes all three panels of the triptych *Coastline* (Fig. 15a) also presents a composition that differs from the final painted work:

- In the left panel, the lower scene is identical to the mural, while the upper scene is comparable: two ships are docked at a Maritime Station in Lisbon, as indicated by a stylised city flag.

- The central panel, on the other hand, bears no resemblance to the mural's composition: the upper scene features a ship with a man tied to the mast, surrounded by three sirens, under the title *Ulisses* (Ulysses); in the lower scene, a bull stands over a reclining female figure, surrounded by elements of classical architecture.

- The right panel depicts a dragon flying over a ship steered by a helmsman. On the deck, four pillars are tied together, bearing the names of the Portuguese navigators Diogo Cão, Vasco da Gama and Bartolomeu Dias. These stone columns, bearing heraldic and inscriptions, were intended to affirm Portuguese sovereignty in the locations where they were placed during the European maritime expeditions of the 15th and 16th centuries.



Fig. 15. Almada Negreiros, studies for *Coastline* and *Mensagem*, c. 1943-1949. From left to right: a) graphite on paper (70×100cm); b) graphite on paper glued on cardboard (50×50cm); c) is a page from an illustrated mockup for *Mensagem*, n.d., ink on paper (21×15cm)

The flag of Lisbon, the myth connecting Ulysses and the city's name (Lisboa as a derivation of *Ulysses: Ulisseia-Olissippo-Lisboa*), and the dragon (a reference to the city's castle, which is named after St. George, who, according to the legend, defeated a dragon) all contribute to an overarching interpretation of this composition as a tribute to the city. In the first Maritime Station, painted in 1945, there is a triptych dedicated to the city of Lisbon and, in a preparatory study for these murals, a stylised city flag and a depiction of St. George slaying the dragon can also be found [4, p. 330].

Some of the elements seen in Fig. 15a remain consistent across all preparatory studies and in the final painted work, such as the nine people on a small boat; other elements can be traced back to the first Maritime Station (such as the flag or the dragon); and there are also elements that were ultimately abandoned (such as Ulysses). All elements appear as if they are independent pieces of a puzzle that could be assembled in different ways.

The allusion to the theme of the abduction of Europa, where Zeus disguises himself as a bull, is also abandoned in the mural work. However, its inclusion here is highly relevant, as it can be linked to an illustration for Fernando Pessoa's *Mensagem*, published in 1934. That same year, a full page of the literary supplement of the newspaper *Diário de Lisboa* was dedicated to *Mensagem* and featured three drawings by Almada, illustrating three of its poems [13]. Although none of these refer to the abduction of Europa, in the author's estate there are drawings of the abduction of Europa with quotes from *Mensagem* (Fig. 15b represents one of them), as well as a mockup project for an illustrated edition of *Mensagem* that includes this theme (Figure 15c).

Colour Scheme

In general, the colour palette used in the preparatory works does not match the colour scheme of the scenes painted on the walls of Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Station. As with the drawings—which become more stylised as the studies progress, moving away from the naturalistic figuration—the final colour scheme follows a similar trend and becomes more vibrant and unrealistic. The only colour correspondences can be found in the garments and parasols of some figures in the detailed sketches for *Coastline* (Figs. 10, 12 and 13) and the sailors in the central scene for *Quay* (Fig. 7, left). Here, the chromatic selection of warm and cold tones is close to the final painted work (Fig. 2).

The most dramatic colour changes between the preparatory works and the final paintings are observed in the backgrounds – whether ground, sky, or water. In the former, the background is dark blue, and the boat's main colours are red and brown, whereas the mural, the background is green, and the boat appear in a lighter red and ochre hues (Figs. 2, 4 and 5). The ladder and scaffold structures that overlap are generally brown or black in the studies, but in the mural, their main colour is blue, with yellow and light green wood veins, which may evoke the stylised eyes of Almada Negreiros (Fig. 3, right) [14, p. 328].

The final colour options of the backgrounds offer a lighter sense to the compositions but also contribute to their flatness, as they make foreground and background elements less discernible (Fig. 2). This lack of depth of field - where the boat is intertwined with the foreground and background into an almost bidimensional scene - seems intentional and is even more accentuated in the murals painted compared to the preparatory studies. This effect is achieved not only through colour but also with a more geometric and graphic approach to representation. The reason and meaning of these changes are unknown, as no writings on the subject have been found in the artist's estate.

The six murals are characterised by:

a) the bold use of primary colours (yellows, blues and reds) and their combinations (greens, oranges and purples) against earth tones (such as ochres and umbers);

b) the strategic use of black to outline figures and geometric shapes, providing definition and contrast and of white to create highlights and disrupt the intensity of the other colours.

Almada also makes effective use of complementary colours, such as red and green, yellow and purple, or blue and orange, enhancing contrast and drawing the viewer's attention to figures or motifs. All these elements are combined to create a sense of rhythm and dynamism in the overall composition. Two examples can be seen in the women and children trying to catch the hat that has fallen into the river and in the swinging trapeze artist on the first and third murals of *Coastline* (Figs. 2 and 16). The use of vivid and contrasting colours, combining warm and cold hues in the characters clothing, figure outlines, or surrounding backgrounds, reinforces the sense of movement, as if they were frozen in the middle of the action. The use of geometric patterns with distinct colours that intertwine also increases the sensation of continuity and fluidity (Fig. 16). The final work painted on the walls not only reveals Almada's careful consideration of how different colours would interact and balance each other in the final composition but also highlights the increased importance they play.



Fig. 16. From left to right: a) overview and details of one of the coloured studies for the coastline made with tempera on paper (102×67.5 cm CAM DEP151) and b) the final result painted on the walls, likely in a mixed technique.

In both cases, despite the differences in some colours and on the binders used, Almada achieved very similar optical effects by the simultaneous use of very opaque and more fluid brushstrokes

Coloured studies were common practice before painting was carried out on site and many have been found among the estates of other 20th century artists [15-18]. This (very practical) aspect was also constantly advised in 19th and early 20th century painting manuals when it came to planning and preparing a mural painting [19-21].

In a mural painting, especially with the fresco technique due to its technical characteristics, there is not much room for reflection, improvisation, or last-minute changes. Or at least large-scale changes, as this meant the inevitable removal of plaster and consequent delays in the work to be carried out. Everything should be ready in advance including the colour scheme.

In the first Maritime Station commission in 1945, Almada was photographed on at least two occasions with the final coloured drawings on site – on the ground floor and on the scaffolding. For the 1949 commission, however, only one photograph has been identified so far (Fig.17) [22]. This image, dated 1956, shows Almada observing the coloured drawings of two of the six murals painted at Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Station. No details are provided about the exact origin of the photographic document, nor about the fate of these drawings, which are believed to have been destroyed or scattered in private collections. Although only a small portion of the drawings is visible, it is interesting to note that there are still colour differences compared to what was ultimately painted on the walls, particularly in the greens (Fig.17).

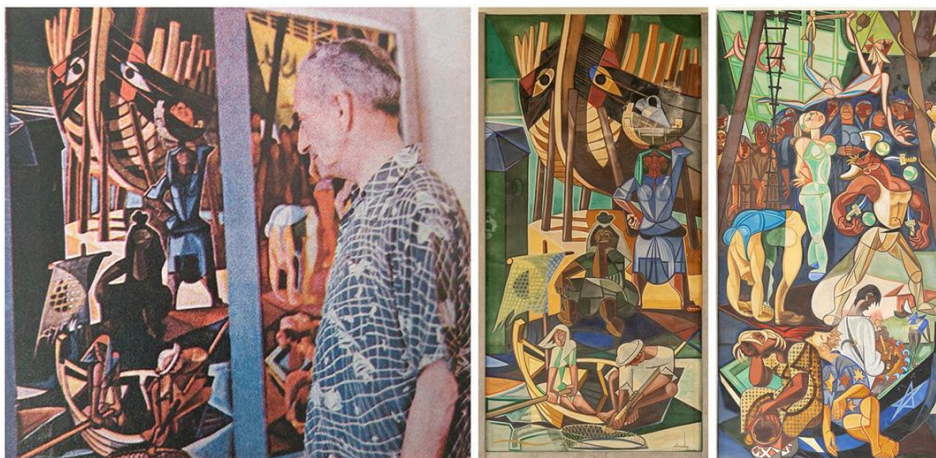


Fig. 17. On the left, a photograph of Almada Negreiros observing coloured sketches.
On the right, the final painted murals.

At Rocha do Conde de Óbidos, ongoing studies suggest that Almada may have gone beyond fresco execution and used a mixed technique [23]. Even so, deciding on the final colour scheme on-site would have been risky, given the large scale of the paintings. Furthermore, it is known that Almada executed these panels in just 29 days, making it even more surprising that he might have made colour decisions during the painting process [23]. Almada spent more than two years preparing in his studio before he felt ready to start painting on the walls. He must have had everything ready, perhaps allowing only minor adjustments, particularly in the final brushstrokes. In mural paintings, the greens are usually the last colours to be applied; could that have been the case here?

The pigments used are also relevant in this context, as many go beyond the traditional fresco palette of earth pigments. Earth pigments, such as ochres, sienna and umbers, are among the most stable and durable materials in an alkaline environment, which justifies their historical use in this type of painting from the very beginning [19-21, 24]. Almada used them in early

painting commissions and at Rocha do Conde de Óbidos, as recent research has shown, but they weren't the only ones [23, 25-30]. The artist also resorted to a variety of modern synthetic pigments, such as ultramarine blue, Cadmium pigments and Cr-based pigments (viridian and Cr oxide) and emerald green. With this range of modern pigments available to artists from the end of the 19th century, Almada was able to achieve brighter hues on site, as in some of the coloured drawings, in layers of opaque paint and with greater transparency (Fig.16). All the coloured sketches found were made with crayon, water-based colour, or gouache on paper, allowing Almada to test various colour combinations and values (i.e., the relative lightness or darkness of a colour). His technique also involved layering colours to achieve a wide range of optical effects (shade, sense of volume, texture, depth and movement) throughout the entire composition (Fig. 16). No colour tests were found on supports more in line with a mural painting technique or with pigments in powder. Perhaps it was because Almada already had a wealth of experience gained from previous mural painting commissions, or simply because the experiments were destroyed after the painting was completed. Of all Almada's work as a muralist, only the chromatic palettes from his first fresco accomplishment, on the Diário de Notícias Building (1939), survived on the wall behind wooden cabinets and are currently on display [25, 27].

In 2019, many of the powdered pigments believed to have been used in his mural production were discovered in the artist's studio and have been studied and compared to the paint layers [25, 27, 31]. More than 40 full to half-empty rusty cans of different sizes were identified as pigments in powder for fresco painting from the renowned French brand LEFRANC-Paris (known after 1965 as Lefranc & Bourgeois). Figure 18 shows, on the left, seven cans found with pigments inside and, on the right, the collection of 26 different pigments retrieved in 2019, with their label identification.



Fig. 18. Examples of Almada's painting materials found in his studio. On the left, an overview of three rusty cans containing powdered pigments for frescoes by LEFRANC-Paris, and on the right, a collection of 26 different pigments retrieved in 2019. In the image, the pigment labels are placed over the container.

Similarly, to what has been found on the walls, the colours range from warm to cold hues obtained with natural and synthetic pigments [31]. According to the manufacturer, this range of powdered pigments was available to artists in the 1930s and since then the record of its production

and use has been lost. The date of purchase is unknown, but it is possible that it was acquired between 1938/39, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, for his first fresco commission in 1939 [25, 27]. Almada Negreiros' large-scale mural painting commissions—including the one at Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Station—are dated 1939-1949, which would justify an early acquisition and the large number of cans found.

Conclusion

This article provides a first in-depth comparative analysis of the preparatory studies for the mural paintings at Rocha do Conde de Óbidos Maritime Station. The studies were found in major public and private collections that house Almada's work, as well as in various exhibitions catalogues dedicated to the author. The systematization of these materials made it clear that there are probably more studies (particularly coloured final sketches) that have either been lost or are yet to be located. The research also highlights that the commission for Rocha do Conde de Óbidos exemplifies three key methods that are characteristic of Almada's creative process. These methods are interconnected, often overlapping and reflective in nature. Namely:

a) The artist frequently revisited previous works, as seen in the illustration for *O fulgôr das cidades* and the illustration(s) for *Mensagem*. Similarly, he later reinterpreted the themes and compositions of the Maritime Stations' murals in subsequent works, such as the tile panels for the residence in Rua de Alcolena, as shown in Fig. 9e and 9f.

b) Almada freely moved individual elements around (characters, objects, or compositional arrangements), experimenting with how they can better work together during the process of constructing the final image. The circus tent, the barrack, the guard, or the dancer in *Coastline* illustrate this approach, as they appear in different configurations, almost like pieces of a puzzle that could be assembled in different ways.

c) Unlike what could be expected, more detailed, or coloured, drawings do not necessarily indicate a later stage of the creative process. Instead, many of these studies appear to have been developed both as independent works and as components of the broader image construction process.

The comparative analysis of the preparatory studies and the painted murals reveals a progressive geometrization of forms, which helps to establish a timeline of Almada's creative process. This progressive geometrization - in tune with a larger movement in Almada's later artistic praxis- makes the Rocha do Conde de Óbidos murals a precursory endeavour of the author's consistent purpose for the next two decades, one that holds geometry at the centre of many of his theoretical and artistic efforts.

Regarding colour, the comparative study of the coloured drawings reveals not only how Almada's palette evolved over time but how colour became an integral aspect of his creative process. The progressive abandonment of naturalistic colours in favor of a more unrealistic palette - combined with the geometricity of the line - helped build the rhythm of the composition through the ingenious use of warm and cold hues in different chromatic combinations. The use of vivid colours, enhanced by the contrast between natural and modern synthetic pigments, further reinforced this effect.

Both composition and colour are treated in a coherent manner to create a strong sense of flatness, where the geometrization of shapes and vivid colours contribute to a graphical sense of representation. These formal elements set this commission apart from the previous Maritime Station murals, marking a bolder approach that contributed to the commission's controversial reception at the time and, simultaneously, to its longevity and prominence in the context of European mural art.

Acknowledgments

This research was made in the framework of project PTDC/ART-HIS/1370/2020 Unveiling the Mural Painting Art of Almada Negreiros (1938-1956) [DOI identifier <https://doi.org/10.54499/PTDC/ART-HIS/1370/2020>] financed by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) through national funds.

The authors also want to acknowledge: a) FCT through projects UIDB/00657/2020 with the DOI identifier 10.54499/UIDB/00657/2020; project UIDB/04449/2020 and contract program of Ref. CEECINST/00069/2021; project UIDB/00657/2020 with DOI identifier 10.54499/UIDB/00657/2020 and b) Instituto Público (PCIP)/Forte de Sacavém for the use of the image of Fig. 2 with the Ref. PT PICP/SIPA DGEMN: DES.00054063.

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Fig. 11: Left: private collection, published in [12, p. 140]; center: Collection Millennium BCP, published in [4, p. 166].

Fig. 12: a) Published in [10] with no page number and no further information available; b) ANSA-A-240, CEDANSA - NOVA FCSH / © Estate of José de Almada Negreiros; c) ANSA-A-385, CEDANSA - NOVA FCSH / © Estate of José de Almada Negreiros; d) private collection deposited in MNAC, Lisbon, DEP_AN 02, © Estate of José de Almada Negreiros; e) private collection deposited in CAM-FCG, Lisbon, DEP-AN 208, © Estate of José de Almada Negreiros.

Fig. 13: a) Private collection, published in [13, p. 159]; b) private collection deposited in CAM-FCG, Lisbon, DEP-AN 148, © Estate of José de Almada Negreiros; c) private collection deposited in CAM-FCG, Lisbon, © Estate of José de Almada Negreiros; d) ANSA-A-1347, CEDANSA - NOVA FCSH / © Estate of José de Almada Negreiros.

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Fig. 17: The image on the right: António Homem Cristo, 1956. Image source [22]. The two images of the painted murals: Photo by M. Ribeiro 2022. Project Almada ©All rights reserved

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Received: August 02, 2024

Accepted: February 04, 2025