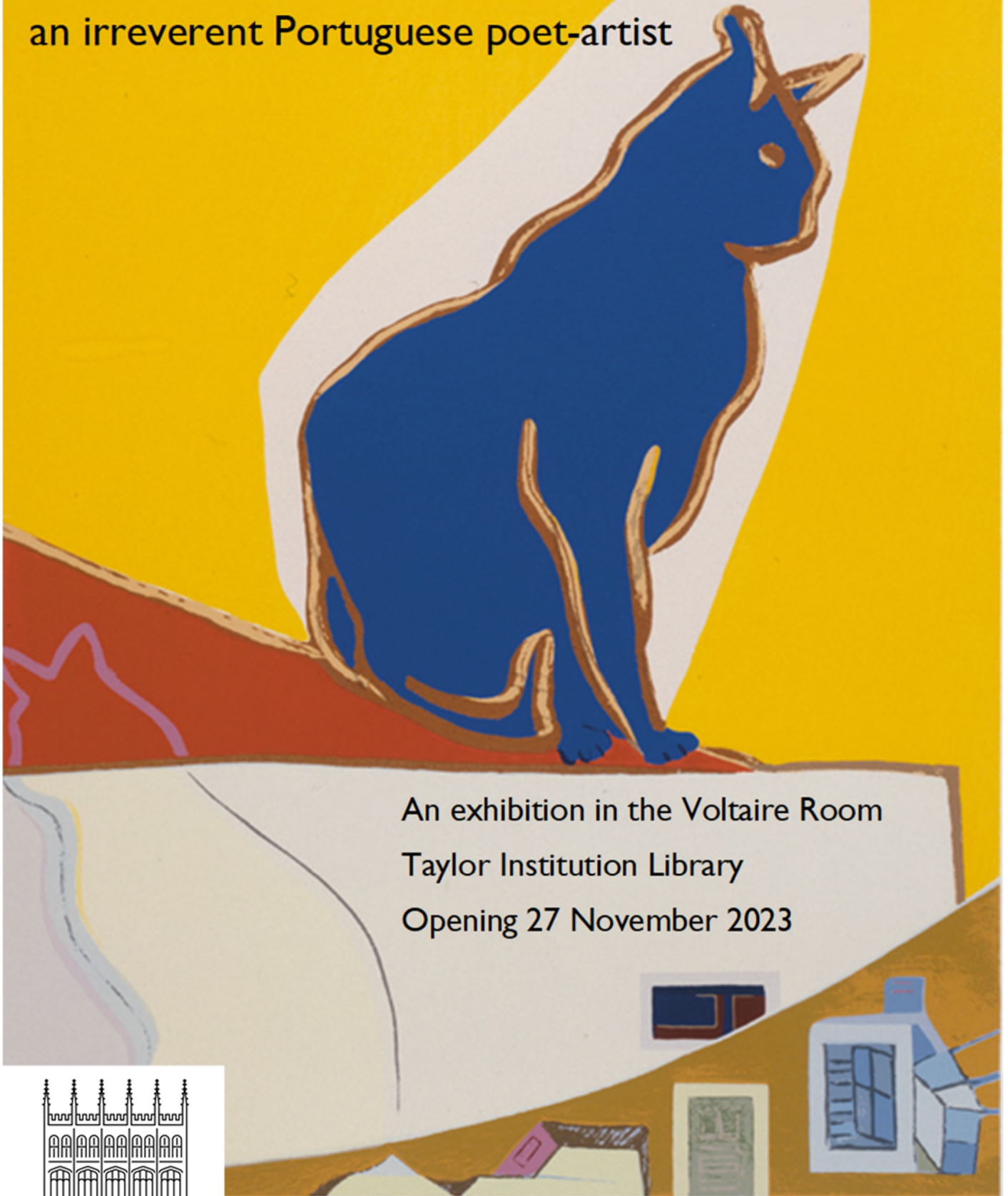


Mário Cesariny (1923-2023)

an irreverent Portuguese poet-artist



An exhibition in the Voltaire Room
Taylor Institution Library
Opening 27 November 2023



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Exhibition opening times: Mon-Fri, 9:00-18:30; Sat, 10:00-17:30

Mário Cesariny (09/08/1923 – 26/11/ 2006)

An enfant terrible of Portuguese Letters, irreverent iconoclast, and, above all, lover of freedom (in all the different hues that the word entails), Mário Cesariny's life is inseparable from his work as poet, artist, critic and scholar; his legacy is thus that of an 'absolute poet' (as opportunely labelled by Perfecto Cuadrado), who deeply influenced a younger generation of artists and writers, admirers of his avant-garde work and his determination to live according to his own rules (or should we say, lack of them).

Born Mário Cesariny de Vasconcelos in 1923, in Lisbon, to a well-off family, Cesariny very early displayed a rebellious spirit and a hunger for exploring different creative avenues. The petty, grey and oppressive existence of life under the Estado Novo (as the Portuguese dictatorial regime came to be known) was too small and stifling for the young Cesariny, who left for Paris in 1947, where he met the father of surrealism André Breton. Upon his return to Portugal, he helped to establish the Grupo Surrealista de Lisboa, along with others who were part of the informal groups that, in the Lisbon cafés of the 1940s, dreamt of a new country as much as about novel forms of art and creativity. Always averse to labels and rules, Cesariny later abandoned the group, but never stopped believing in and living by the principles of the surrealist movement, which release humankind from rational, aesthetic and moral judgements. During this period, he created a dissident movement called Os Surrealistas and dedicated himself to art and poetry, introducing new techniques into his art works, such as surrealist collages and automatism, as well as publishing his most famous collections of poetry – *Corpo Visível* (1950), *Manual de Prestidigitação* (1956), *Pena Capital* (1957) and *Nobilíssima Visão* (1959).

His nonconformist lifestyle and not-so-secret homosexuality brought him several times face to face with agents of the PIDE (the International and State Defence Police), encounters that he would later recall with derision and caustic humour. It was also in this period that he regularly visited London and even managed to get one of his poems translated and published in the literary journal *Agenda* (in 1968). While in London, Cesariny was an observer of London life and worked on his poetry and art whilst staying with other Portuguese artists and writers who had taken refuge in the British capital from political persecution and oppression at home (Paula Rego, Alberto de Lacerda, Luís Amorim de Sousa and Helder Macedo, to mention just a few). Those days would eventually be recorded in the collection *Poemas de Londres*, where Cesariny, who prayed constantly at the altar of freedom, ponders on the birds of London and witnesses the journey of a pigeon crossing Piccadilly Circus.

Like many other artists of his generation, Cesariny exuberantly celebrated the Carnation Revolution of 1974 that put an end to 48 years of dictatorship, and participated in a plethora of events, one example of which is on display in this exhibition. After this pivotal experience, Cesariny focused mostly on his visual work ("Poetry was a big fire that burnt out. It's over," we hear him saying in *Autobiografia*, the 2004 documentary by Miguel Gonçalves Mendes on Cesariny's life and work), but continued to refuse coteries and to express his sometimes outrageous opinions or tactless remarks, a stance that earned him enemies throughout his life, as well as a legion of admirers who increasingly saw him as the father of the Portuguese avant-garde. This position was certainly consolidated in the last decade of his life but did not save him from dying alone and in poverty, in what can be seen as a re-enactment of the myth of the damned artist: 'I am placed on a high plinth, they clap and then they let me go home alone. This is what we call literary glory Portuguese-style,' he used to scathingly reply to the applause he received in later life.

The Portuguese Sub-faculty and the Taylor Institution Library at the University of Oxford invite you to discover Mário Cesariny, a truly irreverent Portuguese artist. By displaying the books that are part of the Library's collection, as well as the works, photographs and memorabilia kindly made available by friend and fellow writer Luís Amorim de Sousa, we join in with the celebrations of the centenary of Cesariny's birth, which ultimately counteract, even if posthumously, the poet-artist's self-deprecation; in so doing, we also hope to shed light on the links that bound Mário Cesariny's life and oeuvre to England.

Luísa Coelho, Sub-Faculty of Portuguese, University of Oxford

Mário

The items in this display come from a territory of friendship. Friendship and admiration. A level of admiration that came from the first reading of the poems published in the first edition of *Pena Capital*. Mário Cesariny was then using his full name. Mário Cesariny de Vasconcelos, a name that gave him material for one of his best-known poems: "To Antonin Artaud". I have attempted a translation of the opening lines:

There must be folks with names that suit them well.

Not so with me.

Whenever I am called Mário

When they call me Cesariny

When I'm called de Vasconcelos

I feel that my teeth contract

that a violent imposition is forced on me

I suffer a dreadful blow that is dreadfully unfair

Why Mário, why Cesariny, why good Lord, de Vasconcelos?

Besides a sense of identity, these lines address questions of randomness, rebelliousness, and alternatives. Life alternatives, that the poet is open to. In the original Portuguese, they are also irresistibly quotable. Mário Cesariny's poetry is irresistibly quotable. Mário the surrealist, the anti-fascist, the artist, the irreverent individual that he was throughout his life, occupies a special place among the writers of his generation.

Mário Cesariny liked London. I met him there in 1964 through our common friend Alberto de Lacerda. He came back a few years later and stayed in London for a while. I inherited him as a house guest from Helder Macedo who had a previous commitment to host a travelling Jorge de Sena. Portuguese poets came to London.

Mário stayed with me and my young family for an extended period of time. Four months, to be exact. As a guest he was discreet, as a friend he was attentive and generous. Back in Lisbon, during a short visit of mine, he made a point of taking me to his house to meet his mother. Mother of poetry, as he famously called her.

There he gave me souvenirs that I have kept ever since. Together with other mementos that were gathered with affection.

Together with a few items from Alberto de Lacerda's estate, they are here now, on show. I am happy to share them with the Taylor Institution.

Luís Amorim de Sousa

Exhibition catalogue

Case 1 - Cesariny: A total poet-artist

1. Mário Cesariny, London, 1965. Photograph by João Cutileiro
2. Mário Cesariny, *Pena Capital*. Lisbon: Contraponto, 1957.
1st edition
1. Mário Cesariny and Luís Amorim de Sousa by the Thames in Chelsea, London, July 1964. Photograph by Alberto de Lacerda.
2. Luís Amorim de Sousa, *Mário*.
3. Mário Cesariny, *Palácio*, undated. Oil on paper, 21 x 29 cm, signed.

Case 2 - Mário Cesariny (Portugal, 1923-2023): A centenary

1. *Jornal de Letras*, issue 1378, July-August 2023. Special issue on the occasion of the centenary of Mário Cesariny's birth.
2. Mário Cesariny. Photograph by Eduardo Tomé.
3. Mário Cesariny. Photograph by Eduardo Tomé.
4. Mário Cesariny. Photograph by Susana Paiva.
5. *Visão*, issue 1588, 10-16 August 2023. Special issue on the occasion of the centenary of Mário Cesariny's birth.
6. Mário Cesariny, *Sombra de Almagre*. Lisbon: Centro Português de Serigrafia, 1983. Art album with unpublished poems and a screen print by Mário Cesariny in 25 colors, 8.5 x 16.5 cm.
7. Screen print from the album dedicated to Alberto de Lacerda from Mário Cesariny.
8. Poem from the album with correction by Mário Cesariny.

Case 3 - Cesariny: The irreverent artist

1. Mário Cesariny, *Untitled*, 1963. Mixed media, 34 x 21 cm. Work offered to Luís Amorim de Sousa in 1969.
2. Mário Cesariny, print from the album *António, António*, dedicated to the Azorean poet and artist António Dacosta. Angra do Heroísmo (Azores): Secretaria Regional da Educação e Cultura, 1996.
3. Mário Cesariny, *Pastor – Evangelho em 1 Prólogo e 3 Quadros – al*, s.d. Book-object. Offered to Luís Amorim de Sousa in 1969.
4. Miguel Gonçalves Mendes (dir.), *Autografia*, 2004. Documentary on Mário Cesariny, released two years before the poet's death and containing interviews with the artist.
5. Miguel Gonçalves Mendes (ed.) *Verso de Autografia*. Lisbon: Assírio e Alvim, 2004. Taylor Institution Library TNR64557. Interview with Mário Cesariny to accompany the documentary film.
6. Mário Cesariny, *O Juiz de Fora*, 1980. Paint on paper, 50 x 35 cm, signed.
7. *Maias para o 25 de Abril*. Signed by Mário Cesariny and dated 1975. Catalogue for the exhibition held at Galeria S. Mamede, Lisbon, in June 1974, with an introduction by Mário Cesariny. The exhibition presented works, including by Cesariny, that had been banned by Estado Novo [Portugal's conservative 'New State' installed in 1933].
8. *O Mar-I-O Cesariny o navio de espelhos. Aquamotos e pinturas circulares*. Exhibition catalogue. Galeria EMI Valentim de Carvalho, May 1988.

Case 4 - Cesariny in London

1. Letter from Mário Cesariny to Luís Amorim de Sousa where the poet mentions his plans to visit London again, undated.
2. Poem by Mário Cesariny, translated by Luís Amorim de Sousa and Michael Hamburger and published in the literary journal *Ágenda*, vol 6, n.3-4, 1968.
3. Mário Cesariny, Paula Rego and Alberto Lacerda, London, undated. Cesariny would often visit his Portuguese friends in London in the 1960s.
4. Alberto Lacerda and Mário Cesariny by the Thames in Chelsea, London, July 1964, London.
5. New Year Greeting card, sent from Lisbon by Mário Cesariny to Luís Amorim de Sousa, who was living in London, undated.
6. Letter from Mário Cesariny to Luís Amorim de Sousa mentioning the poems Cesariny wrote in London in the 1960s. The poet also mentions the possibility of these poems being translated into English and published in the UK. Letter written from Lisbon, dated 7 August 1969.
7. Proof reading of "Ode a Vieira da Silva e a Outros", a poem included in the volume *Poemas de Londres*. The excerpt mentions poet and friend Luís [Amorim] de Sousa.

8. Poem "Piccadilly Circus", published in the magazine *Artes e Letras*, 28th May 1970.
9. Mário Cesariny de Vasconcelos, *19 Projectos de Prémio Aldonso Ortigão Seguidos de Poemas de Londres*. Lisbon: Quadrante, 1970s. Here the poet was still signing with both his surnames.
10. Luís Amorim de Sousa, Alberto Lacerda and Mário Cesariny, in Chelsea, London, 1964. Photograph by Christopher Middleton. In 1964, Cesariny stayed at Amorim de Sousa's house in Hampstead, London.
11. Column by Mário Cesariny in Portuguese newspaper *A Capital* – Literature and Art Supplement, 8th January 1969, where the poet describes his visit to London.

Case 5 - Cesariny: A selected bibliography

1. Mário Cesariny de Vasconcelos, *Nobilíssima Visão*. Lisbon: Guimarães Editores, 1959. Copy signed by the author.
2. Mário Cesariny de Vasconcelos *Manual de prestidigitação*. Lisbon: Contraponto, 1956. Signed by the author.
3. Mário Cesariny de Vasconcelos, *Alguns Mitos Maiores, Alguns Mitos Menores Propostos à Circulação pelo Autor*. Lisbon: self-published, 1958. Frontispiece illustration by surrealist artist Cruzeiro Seixas.
4. Mário Cesariny de Vasconcelos, *Louvor e Simplificação de Álvaro de Campos*. Lisbon: Contraponto, undated.
5. Mário Cesariny de Vasconcelos, *O Virgem Negra: Fernando Pessoa explicado às criancinhas naturais & estrangeiras, por M. C. V., who knows enough about it. Seguido de, Louvor e Desratização de Álvaro de Campos pelo Mesmo no mesmo lugar*. Lisbon: Assírio e Alvim, 1989.

Taylor Institution Library MPL.101.A.1.

6. Mário Cesariny, *As Mãos na Água a Cabeça no Mar*. Lisbon: Assírio e Alvim, 2015.
7. Mário Cesariny and Artur Manuel do Cruzeiro Seixas (eds.), *50º Aniversário do Primeiro Manifesto Surrealista*. Lisbon: Artes Gráficas, 1974. Catalogued as *Contribuição ao registo de nascimento, existência e extinção do Grupo Surrealista de Lisboa : doze cartas de Alexandre O'Neill [et al.]*.

Taylor Institution Library HPA.734.B.1

8. Mário Cesariny (ed.), *Antologia Surrealista do Cadáver Esquisito*. With an illustration by Mário Cesariny. Lisbon: Guimarães Editores, 1961.

Taylor Institution Library HPA.734.A.4

This book entered the Library collections only a few years after it was published in Portugal.

9. Luís Amorim de Sousa (ed.), *Um Sol Esplendente nas Coisas: Cartas de Mário Cesariny para Alberto de Lacerda*. Lisbon, Documenta: 2015.

Cesariny was a close friend of the poet Alberto de Lacerda, who lived in London for extens

ive periods of his life.

10. *Relâmpago: Revista de Poesia*, vol. 26, April 2010. Special volume dedicated to Mário Cesariny.

Taylor Institution Library

11. Maria Silva Prado Lessa (ed.), *Mário Cesariny: A obra ou a vida*. Lisbon: Documenta, 2022.

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With special thanks to Luís Amorim de Sousa for loaning items from his private collection to make this exhibition possible.

