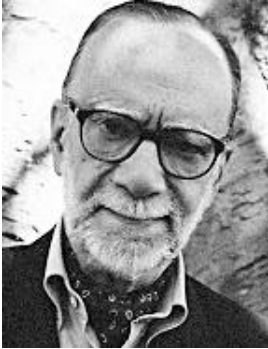


# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

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**FRANÇA, José-Augusto Rodrigues** (Tomar, 1922 - Jarzé (France), 2021)

**José-Augusto França (JAF)** was born in Tomar into a petty bourgeois family with rural origins. The family held modest positions in public administration and commerce, a field in which his father would garner considerable success after settling permanently in Lisbon when JAF was just a few months of age. Influenced by his father, he acquired an early taste for reading (novels, poetry and newspapers), theatre and cinema. He attended the *Liceu Gil Vicente* in Graça and, during those years, got used to walking around and falling in love with Lisbon, which would become a fundamental component of his work. He took a degree in History and Philosophy of Science at the Faculty of Arts in Lisbon, still housed at the time in the former Convent of Jesus (1941/45). Highly critical of the type of teaching delivered, he singled out Francisco Vieira de Almeida, a philosophy professor, among the teaching staff. He never finished his degree, but it was a period of intense self-education and writing and, briefly, painting. The death of his father when JAF was twenty forced him to take on the family business and accept the possibility of a career in Angola, which he quickly abandoned. However, from that one-year experience, he wrote his first novel, *Natureza Morta* [Still Life] published in 1949.

From 1946, already married at this stage and supported by his wife's family (Casa Leonel, in Chiado), he began travelling, first to Madrid and then to Paris. Over the next two decades, he engaged in diverse activities, writing film and art criticism for *Horizonte* and *Jornal das Artes*. From 1947 to 1949, he was one of the founders of the Lisbon Surrealist Group (with António Pedro, Fernando de Azevedo, Marcelino Vespeira, Fernando Lemos, and others), a key gathering in shaping a number of fundamental aspects of his future career: the choice of surrealism as a determining trend in 20th-century art, which in the case of Portugal, was in perpetual conflict with Neo-Realism. In the 1950s, he became involved in regular publishing activities, co-directing the second and third series of the *Cadernos de Poesia* [Poetry Journals] with Jorge de Sena, José Blanc de Portugal, and Ruy Cinatti, directing the journal *Córnio* (author-published, 5 issues, 1951-56), and writing regularly for *O Comércio do Porto* [The Commerce of Porto](1952-54).

He left for Paris on a French state scholarship in 1959 (until 1962), studying with Pierre Francastel at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*. He earned his PhD in History from the University of Paris in 1962 (*Une Ville des Lumières: la Lisbonne de Pombal*) and a PhD in Letters and Human Sciences from the same



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university (*Le Romantisme au Portugal: Étude de Faits Socio-Culturels*).

Regularly writing for newspapers and journals remained one of JAF's permanent activities, including the "Artistic Feuilletons" in the *Diário de Lisboa* (500 articles between 1968 and 1987), "Pintura e Não!" (part of the magazine *Arquitectura*, 7 issues, 1969/70), as part of the reorganisation of the Portuguese section of the A.I.C.A (Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art), of which he was elected the first president; *Art d'Aujourd'hui* (1960/70); and *Colóquio/Artes*, which he directed from 1970 to 1996, publishing hundreds of articles. He co-organised, directed, and contributed numerous articles to the *Dicionário da Pintura Universal* [Dictionary of Universal Painting] (Estúdios Cor, 1959/73). He also founded the *Galeria de Março* [March Gallery] (1952/54) with Fernando Lemos, where he presented numerous exhibitions, including the first national salon dedicated to abstract art.

After the revolution of 25 April 1974, JAF embarked on a prolific academic career as a full professor at the newly established Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at the *Universidade Nova de Lisboa* [New University of Lisbon] where he created a specialised Art History programme from scratch, offering master's (the first in Portugal across all scientific fields), doctoral, and undergraduate degrees. He supervised dozens of dissertations and theses, resulting in many of his students becoming art historians in Portugal.

He curated several exhibitions (António Carneiro Retrospective Exhibition, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1973; *Os Anos 40 na Arte Portuguesa* [The 1940s in Portuguese Art], Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1982; José Malhoa Retrospective Exhibition, Lisbon SNBA, 1983; *Soleil et Ombres: l'Art Portugaise du XIXème siècle*, Musée du Petit Palais, Paris, and later, the National Palace of Ajuda, 1987/88), all accompanied by catalogues, some authored solely by himself or with expert collaboration, which remain important references in the history of Portuguese art. He served as president of the *Instituto de Cultura e Língua Portuguesa* [Portuguese Language and Culture Institute]– ICALP (1976-79), where he directed the "Biblioteca Breve", with around 100 titles. He directed the C. Gulbenkian Foundation's Portuguese Cultural Centre in Paris (1985-89), where he organised numerous colloquia and exhibitions.

From 1972, he spent much of the year in Jarzé, in Anjou (France), in the family home of his second wife, art historian Marie Thérèse Mandroux, taking up permanent residence there from 2001. In 1992, he donated his bibliographic collection to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Library; in 2004, he donated part of his art collection to create the Contemporary Art Centre at the Municipal Museum of Tomar, which he directed until 2015; in 2005, he donated his literary archive to the National Library of Portugal. A member of the National Academy of Fine Arts (of which he was president) and the Academy of Sciences, he received the following honours: Medal of Honor of the City of Lisbon (1992); Grand Officer of the Order of Infante D. Henrique (10 June 1991); Grand Cross of the Order of Public Instruction (10 November 1992); Grand Cross of the Order of Infante D. Henrique (30 January 2006).

The most remarkable feature of JAF's intellectual personality is the sheer scope of his interests, militantly accomplished in a body of work exceeding one hundred books and many hundreds of articles which he divided



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into "history of culture, history of art, *olisipographic* studies, monographs, essays, and fiction." And although it is in the field of Art History that he has gained most recognition, it is worth noting that his first book was a remarkable novel (*Natureza Morta*, 1949). He constantly reaffirmed that he had the "imagination of a novelist," which he fully embraced after his retirement in 1992. Among his successively published works of fiction, the most notable are *Buridan* (2002), *A Bela Angevina* (2005), *José e os Outros* (2006), *Ricardo Coração de Leão* (2007), *João sem Terra* (2008), and *A Guerra e a Paz* (2010). Also noteworthy are his memoirs — *Memórias para o ano 2000* and *Memórias para após 2000*, the latter published in 2012 — which constitute an impressive wealth of material on Portuguese cultural life for over 70 years, naturally filtered through the author's subjectivity.

In 1949, at the age of 27 years, he published the booklet *Balanço das Actividades Surrealistas em Portugal* [Assessment of Surrealist Activities in Portugal] where he reported on the activities of the Surrealist Group of which he was one of the founders, thus entering Art History via art criticism. As is typical in this field, his "assessment" was partial (he would always consider his painter friends to be key figures on the art scene) and militant, against the culture of the *Estado Novo*, but also against Neo-Realism, which was supported by the Communist Party. In his view, the core of art was imagination, which could not be subordinated to political programmes or ideological militancy. Throughout the 1950s, he deepened his reflection on contemporary art in Portugal, still rooted in his commitment to the art of his time. In 1957, he published the first systematic study on *Amadeo de Souza Cardoso*, relaunching the work of the almost forgotten painter and considering him the only Portuguese avant-garde artist. Within the activities of the *Galeria de Março*, he engaged with many artists, from the oldest (Almada and Botelho, for example) to the youngest. Regarding the latter artists, extending his enthusiasm for the surrealism of his youth, he became particularly interested in Abstract painters, which he came to look upon as the supreme expression of Modernism, in accordance with international art theory at the time. During this period of great creativity, he published the journal *Córnio* (*Unicórnio*, *Bicórnio*, *Tricórnio*, *Tetracórnio*, and *Pentacórnio*), which included the participation of figures such as António Sérgio, Eduardo Lourenço, and Jorge de Sena. Also noteworthy was his essay *Charles Chaplin: Self-Made Myth*, published in Paris in 1957, which reflects his ongoing passion for cinema. This eclectic and comprehensive career reveals a desire to understand the present as a springboard for the discovery of History. Thus, when he became a French government fellow in 1959 to fully dedicate himself to Art History, JAF was already self-educated: art interested him as a fact of civilisation, and it is through contemporary production that the cycles of the past are constructed. As a disciple of Pierre Francastel (Paris, 1900-1970), founder of the Sociology of Art, he earned a PhD in History in 1962, with his study *Une Ville des Lumières: la Lisbonne de Pombal*, a foundational work in the new History of Portuguese Art, due to its methodological rigour and the innovative nature of the thesis: "Pombal's Lisbon" represented an epistemological break with the old city, partially destroyed by the 1755 earthquake, and an artistic fact that, almost unexpectedly, allowed Portugal to occupy a prestigious place in the international culture of the Enlightenment. In 1969, he earned a Doctorate in Letters with *Le Romantisme*



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*au Portugal*, in which he affirmed other important aspects of his *praxis*: the importance of literature in Portuguese culture, seen as indispensable for understanding artistic cycles; the centrality of the 19th century for understanding the failures of the 20th century; and the thoroughness of research centred on key facts and personalities of painters, sculptors, and architects. Alongside this academic path, JAF continued to write art criticism for *L'Art d'Aujourd'hui*, which required him to see exhibitions, become familiar with artists, and take positions, stimulating an increasingly agile and sharp writing style that energised academic reflection. This solid interplay between History and Criticism also manifested itself in the brilliance with which he directed the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's journal *Colóquio Artes* (1971-1997): especially during its first decade, it was the repository of the dynamics of contemporary art in Portugal, particularly in painting and sculpture. It was in the context of this journal — also linked to the creation of the Portuguese AICA and the promotion of important exhibitions — that JAF boosted the careers of several artists (such as Noronha da Costa and Joaquim Rodrigo) and surrounded himself with his first disciples, particularly Rui Mário Gonçalves and Fernando Pernes, as well as his long-standing complicity with Fernando de Azevedo who, in addition to being a critic, remained one of the painters he most admired. It was within this network of relationships that in the 1960s he organised the first course of lectures on "Western and Portuguese Art History" at the SNBA, coinciding with the preparation of his monumental *Arte Portuguesa no Século XIX* [Portuguese Art in the 19th Century], 1967. This continues to be a key work in academia and among interested audiences, stimulating the deepening of studies and redirection of research through its exhaustive survey of printed sources.

As a typical *estrangeirado* [one who delights in what is foreign] living a troubled love relationship with his homeland, JAF crafted a complex narrative of Portuguese art that highlights the timid and insufficient approaches to Parisian centrality, but also the emergence of a kind of national genius that he celebrated in Domingos Sequeira, Columbano Bordalo Pinheiro, Amadeo de Souza Cardoso, and especially Almada Negreiros. When the revolution of 25 April 1974 occurred, JAF was considering becoming a researcher at the prestigious CNRS (*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*), but he accepted the challenge to join the teaching staff of the newly created *Universidade Nova de Lisboa*, established in 1973. He joined as a Full Professor, dedicating much of his legendary work capacity to building modern Art History education from scratch. By 1992, when he retired at the age of 70, JAF had fulfilled and exceeded his goal: at the FCSH (Faculty of Social and Human Sciences), dozens of master's students in Contemporary Art History were trained, as well as in other periods, since — with the collaboration of Artur Nobre de Gusmão, João Manuel Bairrão Oleiro, and José Eduardo Horta Correia — all the "specialisation areas" were created, marking the identity of Art History at the *Universidade Nova de Lisboa*, which has remained to this day. It was JAF who led this revolution in a hitherto marginalised sector, stimulating the dynamics that were later established at the universities of Porto, Coimbra, and the Faculty of Arts of Lisbon, in a fruitful exchange of collaborations. He was a demanding teacher in his classes and in supervising dozens of master's dissertations and doctoral theses, but he never lacked time to research and publish with unbeatable efficiency. After *A Arte em Portugal*



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*no Século XIX*, he began preparing *A Arte em Portugal no Século XX* [Art in Portugal in the 20th Century] (up to the 1960s), with an identical methodology centred on Lisbon production and printed sources. It was the first time in Portugal that "the decade" had been chosen as a relevant criterion for chronological organisation, adopting international models from art criticism and museology. As he had done with the 19th century, the comprehensive study of cultural contexts focused on key figures: the leading painters, sculptors, and architects, who shared a common desire for modernity. The system he built deepened previous works (by Diogo de Macedo and Carlos Queirós, for example), proposing a line of direction moving from figuration to abstraction and, in general, from Academia to Modernism, in an avant-garde ascension. This was the international view of the time, and therefore, JAF's work, beyond the wealth of suggestions it continues to offer, has earned itself a place in history, demanding a challenging hermeneutic approach from experts. Although it is not possible to list all the research directions, one must mention the monumental *Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro* (1981) and the monographs on António Carneiro, Columbano Bordalo Pinheiro, José Malhoa, and Almada Negreiros, as well as the constant revisiting of Amadeo de Souza Cardoso and Vieira da Silva, of whom he was the most astute historian. Moreover, there are key texts, with a broad thematic and chronological scope, collected in *Cem exposições* [One Hundred Exhibitions] (1982), and *Quinhentos folhetins* [Five Hundred Feuilletons], (2 volumes, 1984-1993). He returned to his studies on Lisbon countless times, up to *Lisboa: história física e moral* [Lisbon: physical and moral history] (2008), in which he proposes a global history of the city, from its origins to the mid-20th century.

In this vast production (which saw several, sometimes updated reissues from the 1900s onwards), JAF continued to practice an art history deeply committed to the conceptualisation of the sociology of art, influenced by Francastel but progressively gaining autonomy in a 'Francian' theorisation: art history requires its own methodologies, which distinguish the indispensability of formal analysis and aesthetic consciousness as distinct marks from other fields of history. In other words, using the concepts he cherished most, he defined three levels of a historian's work: the study of 'artistic facts,' their acknowledgement as 'social facts,' and their weaving into broader contexts he referred to as 'artistic life.' Or in his own words: 'An aesthetic reading founded on a Gestalt awareness and a sociocultural integration centred around a structuralising process, that is, dynamic and global, thus impose themselves as conditions for understanding the work of art in its dialectical relationships with society, which at the same time determines such values and is determined by them. The overlap of this reading and this integration, in varying degrees, may ultimately define the historiographical method proposed here.' (FRANÇA, 1997: 101). The most significant feature of this approach lies in the conviction that the knowledge, study, and appreciation of contemporary art is a fundamental vehicle for understanding the artistic cycles of the past. This represents a shift from the previous art history practices in Portugal, which systematically ignored or failed to understand 20th-century art, marking the inaugural act of a new historiographical cycle associated with the acknowledgement of the 'present' in the epistemology of the social sciences. It also displays a political attitude towards a vision and practice of history focused on 'noble



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periods,' be they the Middle Ages or the dawn of the Modern Age, where Portuguese art history predominantly positioned itself. JAF was always a man of opposition to the *Estado Novo* regime; he joined the Socialist Party after the 25 April, and although he was never an active militant, he was a citizen of confrontations and causes, defending the urgency of a contemporary culture in tune with the most dynamic values of Europe's major cities, while also advocating the obligation to defend and value memory and heritage. This attitude, with a deliberate ethical stance, was particularly evident in Lisbon, in various initiatives involving research, academic writing and dissemination, exhibitions, and regular collaboration with the Lisbon City Council to defend and protect 19th-century and early 20th-century architecture when it was still systematically neglected.

In his youth, between the 1940s and 1950s, JAF was involved in several controversies that serve to better understand his principles and the practice that stemmed thereof. First, there was the internal split of the Surrealist Group between his own group (with António Pedro, Fernando Azevedo, and Vespeira) and another led by Mário Cesariny; the latter, until the end of his life, considered França a false surrealist who had imposed a subjective historicization on a movement whose essence lay in the freedom of artistic experiences and practices. At the same time, JAF confronted Neo-Realism, especially the radical positions of the then-young painter Júlio Pomar against abstract art, which was considered a deviation from the cultural responsibility to affirm and represent the working class. Later, in particular following the exhibition *Os anos quarenta na arte portuguesa* [The 1940s in Portuguese Art] at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 1982, he was challenged by Fernando Guedes, who unequivocally demonstrated that JAF had underestimated the fact that abstract art had already begun in the 1940s in Porto (within the Independent Exhibitions and the pictorial work of Fernando Lanhas), and not in Lisbon, as the historian had always maintained, defending the predominance of his artist friends who, in the early 1950s, transitioned from Surrealism to Abstraction.

From the 1980s onwards, and especially at the turn of the 20th century into the 21st, other aspects of França's work began to be revisited or contested. Regarding his inaugural work, *Lisboa pombalina e o Iluminismo* [Pombaline Lisbon and the Enlightenment], new historians of architecture and urbanism (for example, Walter Rossa, a disciple of José Eduardo Horta Correia), while not questioning the foundational qualities of the research, proved that the Pombaline plans for the city's reconstruction were not a break with the past but rather a continuation and transformation of architectural and urban practices that dated back to the 16th century and had been affirmed in the construction of cities within the Portuguese empire. As for the treatment of 19th- and 20th-century art, several lines of direction that JAF shared with his mentors and peers have been increasingly challenged: the superiority of European artistic culture, generated since the Renaissance by a succession of avant-garde movements centred in Rome and later, definitively, in Paris; the prevalence of the 'Fine Arts' (i.e., Architecture, Painting, and Sculpture) over the Decorative Arts, whose craftsmanship and decorative values were predominantly conservative; the dependence of the arts in peripheral countries on the major centres, which in the case of Portugal led to the underestimation of other dynamics of cultural exchange and the devaluation of artists (almost all of them, in fact) who did not achieve



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international recognition; the lack of attention to significant aspects of Porto's cultural autonomy in relation to Lisbon; an excessively pessimistic view of the accomplishments of art in Portugal, maintaining the catastrophic attitude of the Generation of the 1870s, which he greatly admired. However, the sometimes scathing criticism directed at JAF's work does not diminish the exceptional nature of his career and his body of work, which were foundational for the history of 20th-century art in Portugal.

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