

*(para)sites*

A PARA  
SITE  
AT THE  
TABLE

RITA SENRA

a project curated by the students of The Lisbon  
Consortium, Francisco Gomes, Viktoria Lohner,  
Dora Fernandes and Galane David

## *(para)sites*

a project with Jane Jin Kaisen, Pedro Vaz, Michelle Eistrup, and Rita Senra

curated by the MA and PhD students of The Lisbon Consortium of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa under the artistic direction of Luísa Santos

*(para)sites* is the final project developed by the students of the Curatorship seminar, which is part of the International MA and PhD program in Cultural Studies, coordinated by the Lisbon Consortium and the Universidade Católica Portuguesa's Faculty of Human Sciences. Designed within the context of the *4Cs: from Conflict to Conviviality through Creativity and Culture* - a European cooperation project, co-funded by Creative Europe, Culture program of the European Union, *(para)sites* is outlined by four artistic interventions, by Jane Jin Kaisen, Pedro Vaz, Michelle Eistrup, and Rita Senra, in *Espuma Dos Dias*, a bookshop in Lisbon, in order to reflect on notions of power and hospitality.

Inspired by Michel Serres' definition of parasite (1982), the series of interventions interfere in the order of its host (the space of *Espuma dos Dias*) and generate disorder, or produce a new order. What is interesting in Serres' definition is the positive light under which he defines the parasite: a productive force from which a system is structured. The parasite — be it biological, social or informational — is what balances the systems. This idea has been adopted by various authors such as curator and researcher Janna Graham, to

whom the parasitic practices are defined as a methodology for artistic production in four dimensions: occupying; dialogic; critical/transformativa; commissioned/outsourced. What these dimensions have in common is the context in which they operate: even if made for a museum or an exhibition space in order to receive financing and legitimacy as art, the consequences of their production pervade the locations of the cultural institutions into social, economic and political domains (Graham, 2012).

While the biological parasite feeds off its host organism, the series of artistic interventions appropriate its structure from its host site; while the social parasite entertains its host in exchange of food, the series offer the production of knowledge to a public accidentally drawn into an unexpected object; while the digital parasite interferes in an information network, the series interrupts the organisation of the bookshop to create a new (dis)order.

In this parasite-host relationship — which bears as much confrontation as progress, as much disruption as transformation — the *(para)sites* invite us to look at both our surroundings and our actions in their social and civic transforming potential.

# A PARASITE AT THE TABLE

Rita Senra

Curated by Francisco Gomes, Viktoria Lohner, Dora Fernandes, Galane David.

*A Parasite at the table* (January 2022, Lisbon)

Rita Senra

Inkjet printing on paper  
30 × 45 cm each (×150)

*"The body is a parasite of the soul."* – Jean Cocteau (*La Comtesse de Noailles, oui et non*, 1963)

On the one hand, a pest with a harmful influence; on the other, a productive force living in harmony with its host. The signification of "parasite" evolves through time and assumes different connotations given the context. This duality between the positive and the negative meanings of the word leaves room for diverse interpretations, which in turn, allows exploring its many aspects. The biological parasite takes advantage of a host organism for food, shelter, and reproduction. While some feed of the host's life, others live harmoniously with it, developing a symbiotic relationship. From a modern social perspective, parasites are beings living at the expense of the others. They receive advantages and hospitality without returning the favours. A parasite can also exist within the informational sphere. It takes the form of rumours, thoughts, or noises which overlaps on a meaningful or desired signal. It is a perturbation that intercepts a message. Reflecting on this variety of definitions, we identify some common traits that seem to be shared by all types of parasites: the idea of inhabiting a space, of interference, of expansion, of generating disorder or of producing a new order.

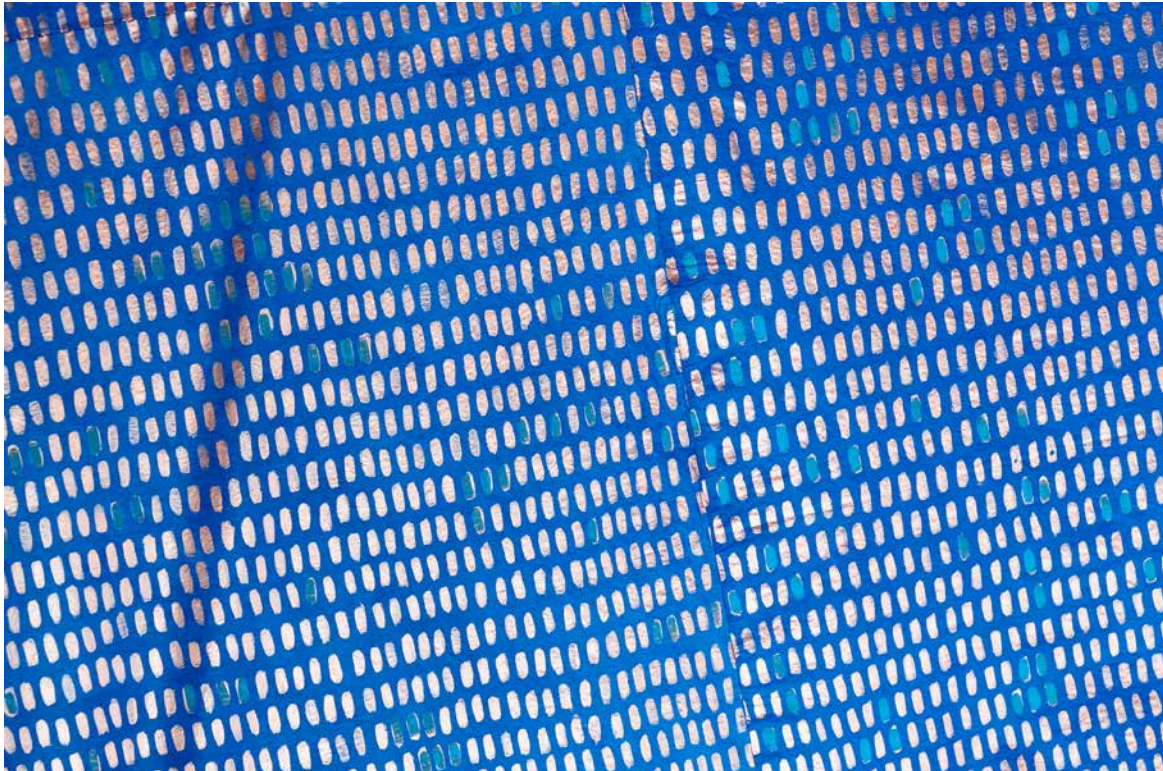
*(para)sites* is a project carried out by artists and university students that aims to meditate on these varied forms of “parasites” taking over the space. For a month, four artists, supported by the student curators, take it in turns to propose their vision of the theme and parasitize the café-library *Espuma dos Dias*. Among the artists featured in this exhibition, Rita Senra develops a reflection on the connection between parasites and food by parasitizing the café of the library. To do so, the artist prepared 150 placemats to replace the ones usually placed on the café’s tables. Fascinated by paper, Rita Senra produces many artworks with this material. For this installation, she uses a thin paper on which she printed a text utilizing an inkjet printer that enhances the impact of the ink on the paper.

The title *A Parasite at the table* is self-explanatory. The parasite is a simple paper base (placemat); it settles down at the table with the customer, not being, at first, more than a part of the normal setting for the act of eating. It becomes part of the meal. Indulging in the act of others, it works as “food for thought”.

This is not the first time that Senra works with this interest for the manifold connections between art and food. In previous works, she explored the social, political, and communicational aspects of meals. Rita viewed the preparation of a meal as a ritual, a “creative act” that “not only nourishes but also communicates” (Senra, 2021). In 2016, in her *Untitled Work*, she printed on a paper table the sentence: “Many are those who, even knowing the evil that goes on the table, eat” as “a metaphor for what [she] considered to be the condition of our days: the greed that overrides all greater goods, the collective good, in a continuous and often irremediable way” (Senra, 2021). However, for *(para)sites*, she takes a far different approach. If in her 2016 installation, the artist explored the idea of something disruptive, with a noisy and uncomfortable message that would confront the audience, in the 2022 installation, a positive and symbiotic parasite emerges. Senra’s parasite at *Espuma dos Dias* is also in itself food. The process of “feeding” takes place in multiple dimensions: just as biological food feeds the body, here the parasite feeds the soul in a subsidiary way. Color, stain, and words merge in this purpose of awakening the ego and the senses. In the same way, thick colored ink reinforces the fragility of the paper structure in the same way that food strengthens the physical body.

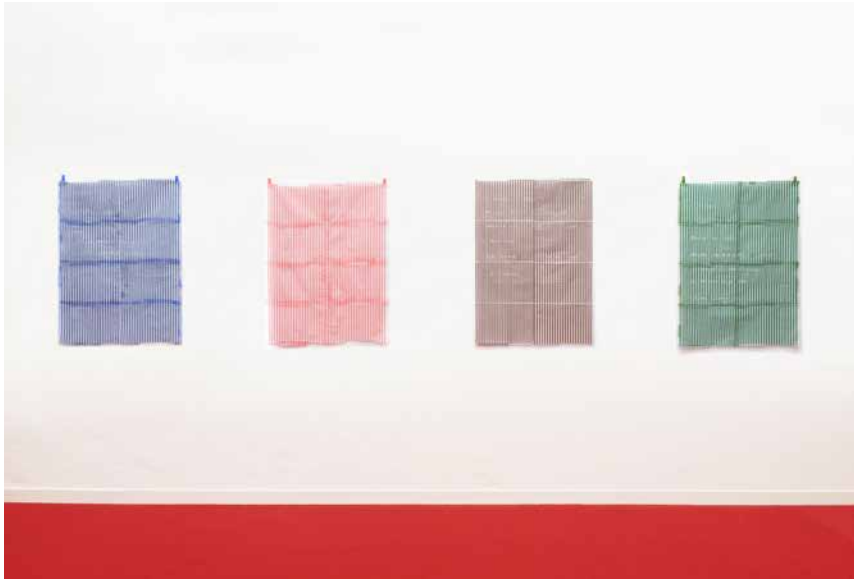


Rita Senra  
*A Terra é azul como uma laranja* (2020)  
Acrylic paint and gouache on twelve sheets of paper sewn  
with polyester thread  
233 × 126 cm  
© Dinis Santos/Galeria Municipal do Porto.



Rita Senra  
*A Terra é azul como uma laranja* (2020) (detalhes).  
© Dinis Santos/Galeria Municipal do Porto.

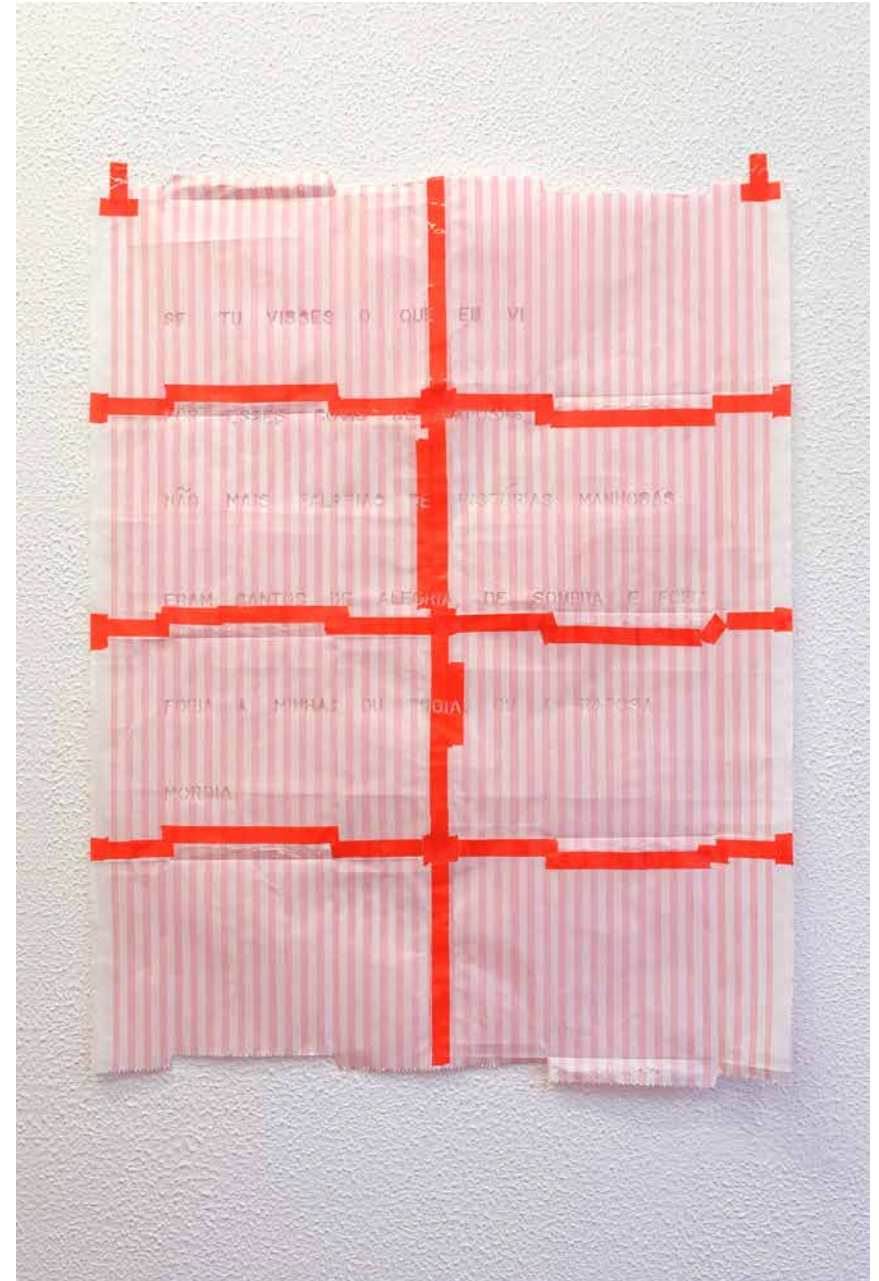




Rita Senra  
2019 - ∞  
"Se tu visses o que eu vi"  
Tape and papercuts  
97,5 × 73 cm each.

"Se tu visses o que eu vi  
Por esses covis de raposas  
Não mais falarias de histórias manhosas  
Eram cantos de alegria, de sombra e fobia  
Fobia a minha: ou fugia, ou a raposa  
mordia"

Language and writing play a major role in Rita Senra's work. One of the main characteristics of her work is the use of poor materials that seem to not have a place in our daily life - either for the lack of robustness or because of the poor appearance.





Rita Senra  
*Dois espaços, tempos vários: quantas pessoas?* (2019)  
Installation, diverse materials (pencil on wall, 140 ceramic  
glazed spoons, water paint on fabric, 20 × 10 cm, cake).  
© Mariana Vitale

This work was born out of a co-production between Rita Senra and Emmy Ols during an artistic residence in Clermont-Ferrand, France. The work was presented at Maus Hábitos gallery in OPorto in 2019.



© Mariana Vitale.



Rita Senra  
*Dois espaços, tempos vários: quantas pessoas?* (2019).

The duality of a positive and negative kind of parasite is explored in throughout those two different works. *A Parasite at the table* brings advantages and hospitality.

These reflections over the theme of parasites and food is something linked with the etymology of the word that is rooted in a food dimension. The term “parasite” takes its source from the Ancient Greek: *para* (beside/near) and *sitos* (food), literally “feeding beside”. Originally, the term *parasitos* was used as an honourable term in Ancient Greece, referring to priests attending feasts dedicated to a deity. The term reappeared in France during the Middle Ages as “a person who made a profession of eating at the table of some rich person, amusing him by flattery and jokes” (Littré French Dictionary, 1863). It is only later on that the term assumed a pejorative meaning: one who helps himself to another’s plate. An organism that feeds on what is produced or owned by another. This meaning is the most widely spread nowadays. So much so, that we have forgotten its original meaning.

Rita Senra’s *A Parasite at the table* not only refers to this original and historical aspects of a parasite, that of food, but also discusses another notion – the idea of expansion, the takeover of an organism in a space. In *(para)sites*, the interaction of the artwork with its location is at the heart of the artistic reflection. In this sense, Senra’s *parasite*, disregarding any planned specifications, follows its own way and exchanges the library space by the Café. Volatile and opportunistic, it finds in there the perfect conditions to settle its influence. As a parasite it wants to be as discreet as it is effective, so it takes on a camouflaged form. It is not, therefore, at first, identified by anyone as a foreign element to a café; nothing in the exhibition intends to highlight its discreet presence. The distraction with the food and the social space provided by the café offers the perfect context for action and efficiency: taking advantage of the alienation of the human host, the parasite launches its action, consummated by the moment when a surprised customer is confronted with his parasite placemat, that interferes in his meal natural order. Moreover, the quantity of the placemats in the café represents the multiplication of the biological parasites, spreading out within the hosts’ bodies. Here, the parasites already altered the host’s body by completely replacing the original placemats by those created by Rita Senra. However, the expansion of the parasitizing placemats might not be over just yet as clients of the café may take those placemats home, spreading their invasion beyond their original territory.

*A Parasite at the table* intercepts the clients, interfering with the normal flow and functioning of the café while growing outside of its boundaries, generating disorder inside of the host's body. Engaging the audience to think about the themes of the exhibition is also a way of interfering with their lives by inducing parasitic thoughts. Every customer participates knowingly or unknowingly to the propagation of the parasites, and therefore is actively involved in the artistic process, allowing the artwork to evolve.

## colophon

### Artists

Jane Jin Kaisen; Pedro Vaz;  
Michelle Eistrup; Rita Senra

### Curators / MA and PhD Students in Culture Studies of The Lisbon Consortium, Faculdade de Ciências Humanas and Universidade Católica Portuguesa

Galane David; Dora Fernandes;  
Laura Fersch; Francisco Gomes;  
Viktoria Lohner; Rodrigo Marcondes;  
Dela Mießen; Emma Legaye;  
Federico Rudari; Bibiana Leufgen;  
Juliette Thouin; María Gabriela Sinclair;  
Megha Shekhawat; Teresa Pinheiro;  
Valerie Rath.

### Curatorship Seminar / Artistic Direction

Professor Luísa Santos  
(FCH-UCP, CECC)

### Design

vivóeusébio

Jane Jin Kaisen is the first artist in residency (2021) of the Arts Lab of the CECC (Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Cultura) and the Campus Cultura of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa.

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