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3rd INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM  
ON BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES  
IN ARTS, MEDIA AND SOCIETY

ONLINE | MAY 28 - 29, 2026

# PROCEEDINGS

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# Reframing an Artist's Legacy: Media Art Students Narratives inspired by the Art of Henrique Silva

Ana Clara Roberti  
Universidade Portucalense,  
CITCEM, CIAUD-UPT  
Porto, Portugal  
clararoberti@upt.pt

Emília Simão  
Universidade Portucalense,  
CIAUD-UPT, CITCEM  
Porto, Portugal  
emiliasimao@upt.pt

## Abstract

*This paper presents an experimental pedagogical and artistic project developed with students in Multimedia and Arts at Universidade Portucalense, Portugal in which students were invited to create artistic narratives inspired by the life and work of Portuguese artist Henrique Silva. The project explores the potential of (auto)biographical narratives as a transmedia and intergenerational process, positioning artistic creation as a form of reinterpretation, mediation, and continuity of legacy.*

## Keywords

*Biographical Narratives; Media Arts; Transmedia; Remediation; Artist Legacy; Practice-Based-Research; Art Education; Henrique Silva*

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## I. HENRIQUE SILVA

Henrique Silva (b. 1933) is a central figure in Portuguese contemporary art and art education, whose career reflects a sustained engagement with both artistic and pedagogical practice.. A former grantee of the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, he studied at the École Supérieure de Beaux-Arts (Paris, France) during the 1960s, a formative period that exposed him to the bohemian lifestyle that shaped the artistic milieu of Paris at the time and the cultural transformations of the post-war era. He later completed a PhD in Digital Media Art - with 80 years - evidencing a continuous openness to new media and evolving artistic languages across different phases of his career. His artistic trajectory spans more than seven decades, encompassing over fifty solo exhibitions and more than two hundred group exhibitions in Portugal and

internationally, positioning him as a prolific and influential contributor to contemporary visual culture.

Alongside his artistic production, Henrique Silva has played a decisive role in shaping the Portuguese artistic and educational landscape. As executive director of the *Cooperativa Árvore* for over twenty years, he was instrumental in fostering artistic training, experimentation, and community engagement. Furthermore, as co-founder of the International Art Biennial of Cerveira - one of the oldest contemporary art biennials in Europe - alongside the artists José Rodrigues and Jaime Isidoro, both key figures in the development and decentralization of contemporary art in Portugal, he contributed to the internationalization and decentralization of contemporary art practices in Portugal.

Henrique Silva was also part of the avant-garde artistic collective VideoPorto, where he explored video art as an autonomous aesthetic language, moving beyond the mere materiality of the physical object. His work contributed to a critical rethinking of the image as a continuous flow in time, challenging traditional boundaries between art, technology, and perception. This pioneering collective emerged in Porto in the 1980s and was founded by Henrique Silva and Silvestre Pestana, later joined by Abel Mendes, Adriano Rangel, António Barros, Borges Brinquinho, Ção Pestana, Fernando Ribeiro, Rui Orfão, and Mineo Aayamagushi. More recently, some of Henrique Silva's video art works were exhibited at the Semibreve (Braga, 2019) and at Museu Zero (Tavira, 2025).

His commitment to education is equally significant. Henrique Silva was a key figure in the creation of the undergraduate programme in Multimedia and Arts at Escola Superior Gallecia, currently integrated into Universidade Portucalense, where his vision helped bridge traditional artistic practices with emerging digital media. This dual positioning - as artist and educator - makes his work particularly relevant for contemporary discussions on fine arts and media arts practices, artistic legacy, and the transmission of knowledge across generations.

## II. REFRAMING AN ARTIST'S LEGACY

The project *Reframing an Artist's Legacy: Media Art Students Narratives Inspired by the Art of Henrique Silva* emerged within the curricular unit *New Media – Techniques and Aesthetics* in collaboration with workshops promoted by *ObEMMA – Observatory of Electronic Music and Media Arts*. It was grounded in a direct encounter between students and the artist, including visits to his home and atelier, as well to exhibitions at *Atelier Gondar* and *Fundação Bienal Internacional de Arte de Cerveira*.



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This immersive experience aimed to foster proximity between young students and an artist whose trajectory spans multiple personal, historical, cultural and political contexts, encouraging students to engage with his legacy beyond conventional art historical frameworks.

Rather than adopting a documentary or descriptive approach, students were challenged to develop individual artistic responses based on their subjective interpretation of the artist's life, practice, and audiovisual universe. This approach aligns with narrative inquiry methodologies, which understand knowledge as constructed through stories and lived experiences, positioning narrative as a central mode of meaning-making (Kim, 2015). Narrative inquiry operates as an interdisciplinary framework that integrates experience and interpretation in the production of knowledge, emphasizing the subjective and relational nature of understanding.

The process privileged first-person perspectives and emphasized creative freedom, encouraging experimentation across different media and formats, including drawing through performance (Fig. 1 and 2), digital collage (Fig. 3) digital art (Fig. 4) and also video art, photography and analog artifacts.

In doing so, the project sought to transform biographical material into plural artistic narratives, highlighting the potential of transmedia as a means of reconfiguring memory and identity. This approach resonates with biographical explorations through creative work, where multimodal practices enable individuals to reinterpret lived experiences through artistic processes. From a methodological perspective, the project combined elements of practice-based research and arts-based inquiry, positioning artistic production as both a mode of inquiry and a form of knowledge generation (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). Arts-based inquiry fosters critical reflection and transformative learning by engaging participants in creative processes that expand traditional academic forms of knowledge (Garcia, 2023).



Fig. 1 Drawing by Francisco Oliveira. based on Henrique Silva's Paintings. Source: Authors



Fig. 2 Performance by Francisco Oliveira. Source: Authors



Figure 3: Digital Collage by Daniela Kellner based on Henrique Silva's Atelier. Source: Authors

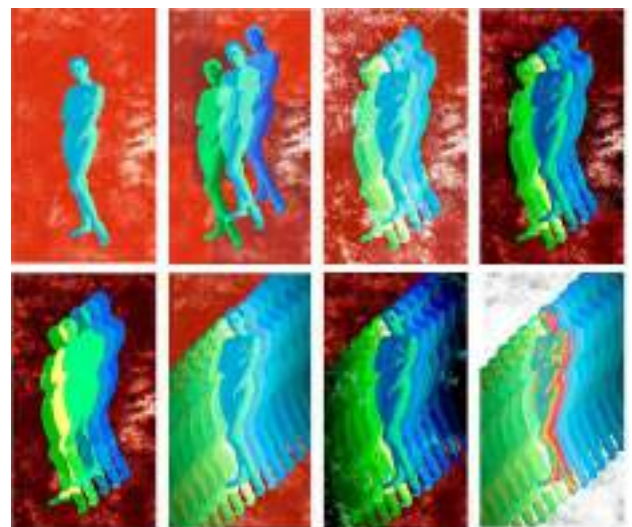


Fig. 4 Digital Art by Rafael Arantes based on Henrique Silva's original Photography and Collage. Source: Authors

In this context, the absence of prescriptive guidelines allowed students to explore diverse strategies of appropriation, remediation, and translation. The concept of remediation provides a useful framework to understand how new media reinterpret pre-existing media forms and also a mechanism for the construction of memory, identity, and cultural meaning (Bolter & Grusin, 1999; Annabell, 2023). The students' works can be seen as processes of remediation, where elements of Henrique Silva's artistic language, biography, and visual references are rearticulated through contemporary media practices.

The resulting body of work reveals a heterogeneous set of artistic outcomes, reflecting different modes of engagement with the same referential source. Some projects adopt intuitive and sensory approaches, while others develop more conceptual readings, engaging critically with themes such as memory, authorship, and temporality. This diversity becomes more evident through selected examples of the projects developed, which demonstrate different strategies for interpreting the artist's work and trajectory.

In Figure 1 and 2 some outcomes of a project exploring a performative approach to drawing can be observed. In this work, the student produced a sequence of marks while blindfolded, relying exclusively on sensory and affective memories associated with encounters with Henrique Silva's atelier and specific works. This gesture shifts drawing from a visual practice to a bodily and

intuitive experience, in which memory is not understood as a faithful reproduction but as a subjective reconstruction. The process was documented through video, capturing the action in real time and making visible moments of hesitation, error, and discovery, thereby reinforcing the processual dimension of creation. In this sense, the work does not aim to directly represent the artist's oeuvre, but rather to reenact the experience of encountering it through the body and memory. In another example, shown in Figure 3, the digital composition was constructed through the layering of multiple visual elements, each incorporating references from different works by Henrique Silva. These layers function as relatively autonomous visual spaces, developed independently yet articulated within a final composition that produces a fragmented narrative. This strategy of accumulation and recombination allows for the preservation of identifiable features from the original references, while simultaneously reconfiguring them within a new visual context. Figure 4 features a series of digital illustrations and collages based on the book *Lucubrações sobre pensamentos heterogêneos*, in which the student explores the representation of the female body—a recurring theme in the work of Henrique Silva—experimenting with different textures and intensities based on the same source material.

Across these variations, a common thread emerges: the reinterpretation of a singular artistic trajectory through multiple subjective lenses, transforming biography into a dynamic and evolving narrative field. This plurality can also be understood through Lev Manovich's theory of new media, particularly his distinction between narrative and database as cultural forms. In the context of digital media, narrative is no longer necessarily linear but may emerge from the organization and navigation of heterogeneous elements, where meaning is constructed through selection and recombination rather than fixed sequencing (Manovich, 2001). In this sense, the students' projects can be seen as database-like narrative assemblages, where fragments of the artist's life, visual language, and personal interpretation are reconfigured into new narrative structures. A key aspect of this project lies in the dialogical dimension established between generations. By engaging directly with Henrique Silva, and subsequently presenting their works in response to his legacy, students not only reinterpret the past but also contribute to its ongoing reconfiguration. This process challenges linear and static notions of biography, proposing instead a relational and processual understanding of artistic identity, shaped through encounters, mediations, and reinterpretations. Furthermore, the project foregrounds the role of media and technology in expanding the possibilities of biographical narrative. By operating across different media and formats, students produce works that exceed traditional textual or visual forms. In this sense, biography becomes a transmedia construct, articulated through multiple supports, aesthetics and sensorial experiences, reflecting the hybrid, processual, and relational nature of contemporary artistic practice.

### III. CRITICAL DISCUSSION

In conclusion, this paper argues for the relevance of pedagogical practices that integrate artistic creation, biographical narratives, and intergenerational dialogue within media arts education. The project demonstrates how the reinterpretation of an artist's legacy can function as a catalyst for critical reflection, creative experimentation and the production of new meanings. By transforming historical trajectories into contemporary narratives, students actively participate in the construction of cultural memory, ensuring its continuity through reinvention. Finally, the project is envisioned as an ongoing initiative, to be repeated periodically, allowing for the accumulation and comparison of different cohorts' responses over time. This longitudinal perspective opens up new possibilities for understanding how artistic legacies are continuously reframed across generations, reinforcing the idea that biography is not a fixed account of the past, but an open and evolving narrative shaped by collective and mediated experiences. The analysis of specific works further illustrates how these processes materialise in practice. By mobilising diverse strategies — from performative approaches grounded in embodied memory to digital compositions based on layering and recombination — students develop singular interpretations of the artist's work, reinforcing artistic creation as a space for critical interpretation and meaning.

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