



The resurgence of Figurative Art presents a compelling paradox—it simultaneously reaches back to our most ancient artistic impulses while serving as a vehicle for distinctly modern discourse. When Galeria Belard opened its doors two years ago, it did so with a clear purpose: to champion Contemporary Figurative Art as a vital, evolving force within today's cultural landscape.

Consider how our Palaeolithic ancestors used the natural contours within cave walls to enhance their animal figures, creating proto-animations when viewed by flickering firelight. These weren't mere mimetic gestures but tools for understanding, weaving observation and storytelling to engage with life's mysteries. Classical antiquity refined these impulses into a sophisticated visual language, while diverse world cultures developed their own vocabularies, often prioritising narrative and symbolism over strict realism.

In the late twentieth century, conceptual methodologies came to dominate critical discourse often prioritising ideas over visual experience. While these conceptual frameworks undoubtedly broadened Art's intellectual terrain, they sometimes alienated viewers, requiring elaborate verbal explanation to appreciate a work's meaning or merit.

Today's artists inherit not just representation techniques, but abstraction's emotional immediacy, conceptual art's philosophical rigor, and digital art's technological possibilities. While Renaissance artists used technique to convince viewers of divine or classical ideals, contemporary artists often employ their skills to destabilise certainties and raise questions. The figure becomes a site of inquiry rather than a bearer of answers.

This approach dissolves old dualities, freely combining representation and abstraction, tradition and innovation. Artists acknowledge the constructed nature of their images while using that very artificiality to express authentic truths about human experience. This is particularly evident in works whose technical precision creates an uncanny valley that speaks to our post-digital condition.

In 2.0, Galeria Belard showcases diverse approaches to visual narrative. Some artists engage traditional aesthetic systems—perspective, anatomy, chiaroscuro—while others blur established boundaries

between painting and sculpture, artifice and artefact. Others operate in the fertile space between representation and abstraction, where recognisable forms become catalysts for conceptual exploration. In our image-saturated digital era, photography itself emerges as another tool of intentional construction, challenging assumptions about vision and truth.

The artists presented illustrate how technique serves a kind of tactical authenticity - the skill draws viewers in, while the conceptual framework transforms engagement from mere appreciation to active participation in meaning-making. It isn't about proving what the artist can do - rather about expanding what art can say.

This exhibition reaffirms Galeria Belard's founding vision of representation as an ongoing, vital conversation where the figure becomes a meeting point between history and innovation, craft and concept, the personal and the political. While our cave-painting ancestors used technique to capture the world as they saw it, contemporary artists use technique to question how we see at all.

Tania Alvarez (b. 1983, Seville) completed her MFA at the New York Academy of Art and BFA at Pratt Institute. Her work has been exhibited internationally, including solo shows at Miriam Gallery. She has participated in residencies in Beijing, MASS MoCA, and Cuttyhunk Island, and is a two-time recipient of the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant. She currently lives and works in Catskill, NY.

Manuela Caicedo (Colombia) lives in New York, where she completed her MFA in Painting at the New York Academy of Art. Recipient of the Chubb Fellowship and grants including Elizabeth Greenshields Grant and Academy Scholar Award. Her work, combining painting, drawing, and performance, explores visual poetry and the human capacity to imagine.

Janis Dellarte (b. 1989, Lisbon) trained in London, earning her master's from the Royal College of Art. She has traveled extensively studying endangered traditional textile techniques. Since 2014, she has been developing activist projects in Portugal related to ecology, collaborating with artists across disciplines. She exhibits regularly in the UK, Portugal, Romania, USA, Mexico, Brazil, and Spain.

Nicole Duval (b. 1972, Johannesburg) studied art in Melbourne and earned a BA in Archaeology in Israel before moving to New York. She received her MFA from the New York Academy of Art (2017), studied at the Art Students League and National Academy. She was awarded the NYAA Merit Scholarship (2015-16) and participated in the Cuttyhunk Island Artist Residency (2017).

Joana Galego (b. 1994, Cascais) holds a degree in Painting from FBAUL and a postgraduate degree from the Royal Drawing School. She received the Sir Denis Mahon Award (2017) and is a member of the Lewisham Arthouse since 2020. Notable exhibitions include Jardins (Galeria Belard, 2024) and What I See I Will Never Tell (Wilder Gallery, London, 2021).

Mariana Horgan (b. 1985) develops a practice combining painting, drawing, sculpture, and printmaking. Her work, inspired by everyday life and nature, is characterized by recycled materials and memory exploration through color and texture, creating pieces that balance serenity and emotional turbulence.

Mariana Malheiro (b. 1995, Lisbon) studied at FBAUL and Kunsthochschule Kassel. Her work is included in collections such as the Luso-American Development Foundation. She has held solo exhibitions at Espaço Cultural Mercês and Casa do Comum (2024), and is currently in residence at Kunstraum LLC in New York.

Kenny Mendes (Belo Horizonte), a self-taught artist from Minas Gerais, Brazil, works at the intersection of rural and urban life. His multidisciplinary practice encompasses poetry, sculpture, installation, video, photography, drawing, and painting. In 2023, he presented the solo exhibition "Y" at the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Belo Horizonte.

Alex Merritt (b. 1981, Washington DC) lives and works in New York. Educated at Maryland Institute College of Art and New York Academy of Art, he received the Vasari Classic Artists' Oil Colour Award (2017). His work was featured in *The Stranger* (Booth Gallery, New York, 2019) and group exhibitions including *Disrupted Realism* (Stanek Gallery, 2018) and *P(re)view* (Galeria Belard, 2023).

Giovanna Nucci (Florianópolis) lives in São Paulo since 1994. A photography graduate specialized in Art and Culture, her landscape work shows Bauhaus influences. She published "São Paulo, cada um conta sua história" (2011) and "Rio Estado de esporte" (2012), exhibiting nationally and internationally with focus on urban and natural form.

Ana Jacinto Nunes (b. 1973, Portugal) lives in Lisbon, working in painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, and ceramics. Over two decades, she has exhibited solo shows in the USA, Germany, Macau, and Portugal. She has participated in projects at Scuola Internazionale Di Grafica (Venice), Vermont Studio Center (USA), and Banff Art Center (Canada). Her work reflects the dialogue between Portuguese and Macanese cultures.

MOM (Mafalda d'Oliveira Martins, b. 1994, Lisbon) studied Drawing at SNBA and completed her BA and MA in Painting at FBAUL, with a period at UCM, Madrid. Her artistic practice has been featured in various group exhibitions at major institutions and solo in Two Plus None (Espaço Cultural das Mercês, 2022). She is director and founder of Pousio - Arte e Cultura since 2019, coordinating the air_Pousio residency program and P.R.A.Ç.A.'s cultural programming.

Eurico Lino do Vale (b. 1966, Porto) lives and works in Lisbon. Trained in photography at AR.CO, he received Gulbenkian Foundation scholarships for the Royal College of Art and Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where he completed his master's in 1997. Portraiture is central to his work, addressing issues of identity and memory. His work is represented in collections including the Gulbenkian Foundation and Maison Européenne de la Photographie.

Jorge Vascano (b. 1982, Lima) resides in Virginia, USA. He holds an MFA from the New York Academy of Art and has participated in international residencies in Giverny, Kylemore Abbey, and Carrara. His work, which explores complexity beneath the surface, was featured at the Golden Globes and Oscars during the nomination of If Beale Street Could Talk.