

REVIEW / ART

‘Their relationship was a marriage between the literary and art world’

A series of gifts the artist Paula Rego gave to her principal male model Anthony Rudolf form a unique exhibition at the Ben Uri Gallery. Dan Carrier reports

Friday, 1st August — By [Dan Carrier](#)



Anthony Rudolf and Paula Rego in Venice

IT required the ability to sit still for long periods, to strike the occasional pose. No day was the same – once, the artist asked her model to pretend to be suckling the breast of a papier-mâché mannequin – but for Anthony Rudolf, following the directions of artist Paula Rego was all in a day's work.

Anthony was Paula's principal male model and companion for 26 years.

Paula left Portugal in the early 1950s to live in London and study art at The Slade. She would become one of the world's most celebrated artists, creating a body of work that reflected her interests in stories and narratives, and were in her own, unmistakable style.

Paula lived in Highgate and had a studio in Kentish Town, and in the 1990s would become friends with the writer Rudolf.

Paula died in 2022, and now Anthony has put together the many art works she gifted him to loan a selection to 40 works to the Ben Uri Gallery in St John's Wood.

Accompanying the show are personal photographs that chart their relationship and life together, offering a context and a commentary to works by the celebrated painter.

Tony's life was forged in the literary world. An author of books on Primo Levi and Piotr Rawicz, he has also penned memoirs and poetry. He founded the Menard Press and has worked as a broadcaster on the BBC.



Perch [© Estate of Paula Rego]

Chair of the Ben Uri trustees David Glasser told Review of the breadth of work the Rudolf collection contains.

"They began as friends and it developed," he says. "He became her principal male model and there are many hundreds of images where he is included in the compositions."

Paula was renowned for using her art as a form of storytelling – Anthony has cited this element of her work in previous interviews, recalling how she would be inspired by plays and novels. It meant Tony's role as model also had an element of the actor in it, with Paula the director.

"Many of her important works had Tony dressed up," adds David.

"She was very invested in telling fairy tales, fiction, stories in her works and he was often camouflaged."

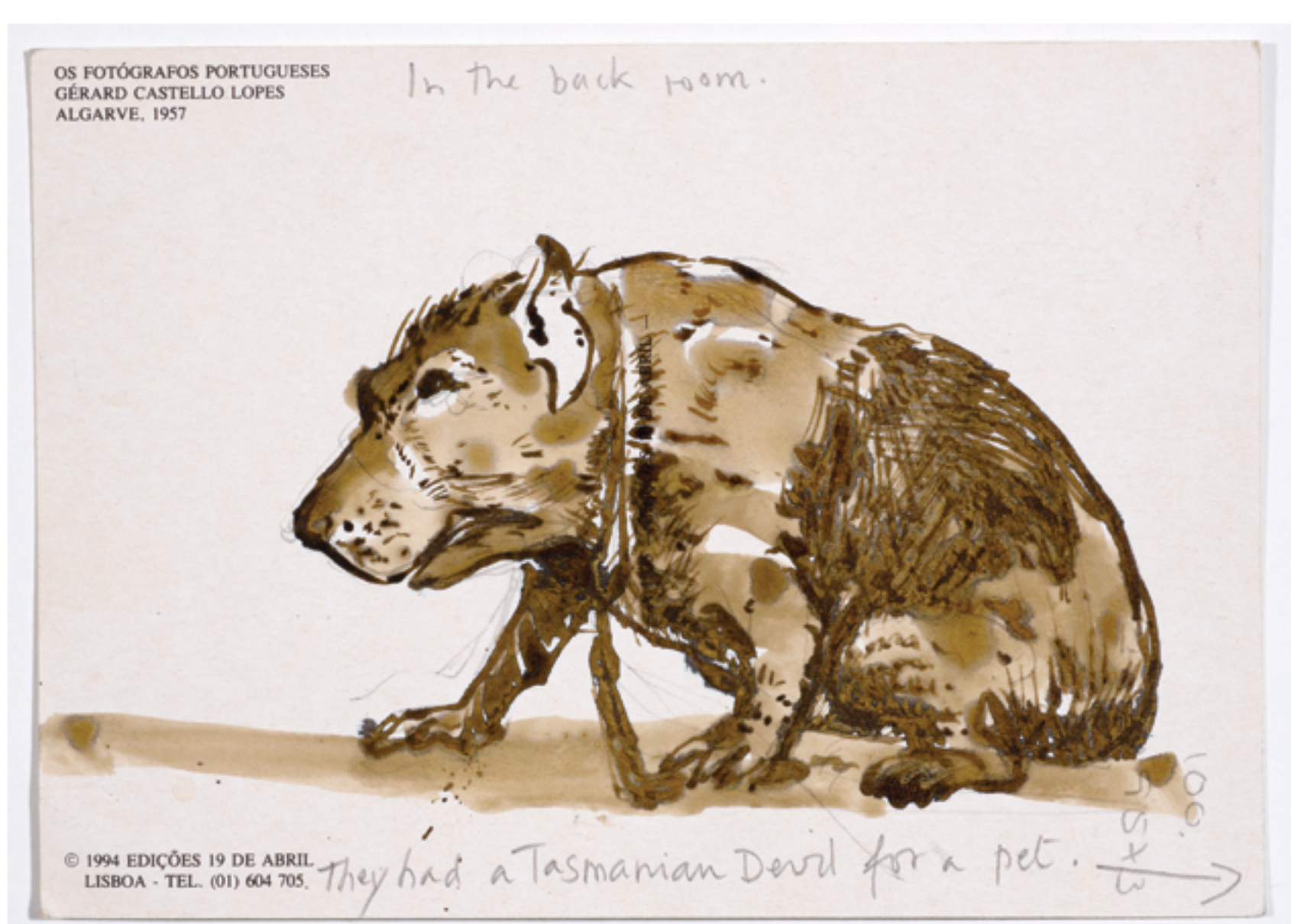
Paula would often give Anthony a piece of art that he featured in.

"We might send our loved ones a post card, or leave them a Post-it note – but an artist can communicate their affection through their work, and that's what Paula did," adds David.

"And it isn't just her drawing or painting him as a subject matter – the works have inscriptions that are poignant and moving."

He called the show not an exhibition of Paula's work, but about "an enduring and important relationship between the pair.

"Tony has loaned the pieces to Ben Uri and it is the first time the collection has been seen in its entirety," he adds.



Tasmanian Devil [Justin Piperger]

"And we have curated it in such a way that, unusually, it also contains a considerable number of photographs showing Tony and Paula, Tony's mother, too, on numerous occasions.

"People can see this relationship that endured the test of time.

"The works are a recognition of their affection for each other.

"We do not say the works are by Paula – it is not our job to authenticate them – but many are signed and inscribed by her to Tony," he adds.

"It offers a glimpse into their lives together and their relationship."

Many were completed at her studio in Kentish Town, and a few refer to her home country of Portugal.

And Paula's regard for Tony's family also shines through.

"For example, there is an art work she made of Tony's mother, Esther, and then a photograph of Paula and Esther sitting in front of the work," adds David.

The Ben Uri was founded to promote the contribution to British art of refugees since 1900, and that chimes with both Paula and Tony's backgrounds and experience. Tony's family came to London as part of the Jewish diaspora at the turn of the 1900s, while Paula left Portugal's dictatorship to settle in the UK.

"Paula was an immigrant who became an artist of great repute and distinction and she reflects the immigrant contribution to British visual culture," adds David.

"And when she met Tony, you had this merging of two immigrant cultures and British culture. Their relationship was a marriage between the literary and art world."

- **The Anthony Rudolf Collection: works given to him by the artist Paula Rego is at Ben Uri Gallery and Museum, St John's Wood, NW8 0RH until September 5. See <https://benuri.org/whats-on/>**
- **The works in the exhibition were gifted by Paula Rego to Anthony Rudolf and his close family (Sick Rabbit originally gifted by Paula to Anthony's mother Esther Rudolf) during their 26-year relationship**

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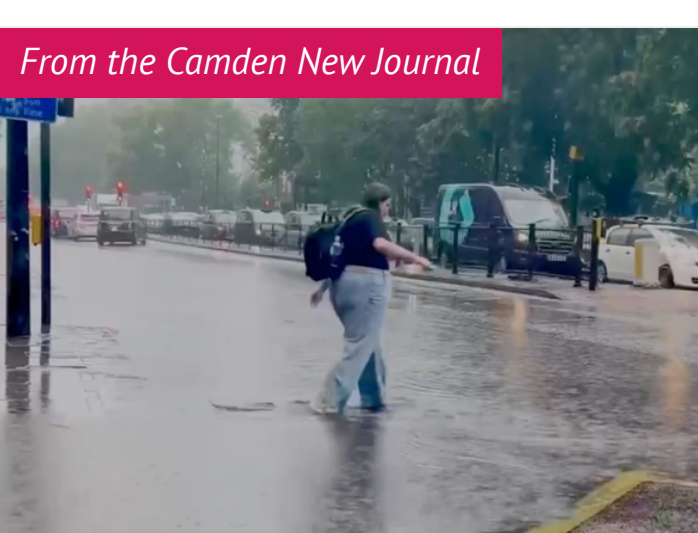


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