

The Travel Drawings of Fernando Távora: a few Brief Notes on their Exhibition and Conservation

Drawings, Ballpoint Pen, Felt-Tip Pen, Paper Conservation, Survey

/Abstract

Fernando Távora was a renowned Portuguese architect who made significant contributions to the field of architecture, both in Portugal and internationally. He was known for his unique design style and his ability to seamlessly blend traditional and modern architectural concepts.

Távora was a prolific traveller and used his travels as an opportunity to analyse and capture his surroundings through the art of drawing. His drawings, made with felt-tip and ballpoint pens, graphite and crayons, are highly regarded for expressing Távora's observations and reflections on the architecture and urbanism of different regions and cultures.

In September 2022, the Department of Architecture of the University of Bologna, in collaboration with the Marques da Silva Foundation, hosted the exhibition "Fernando Távora in Viaggio" (Cesena, from 23 September to 12 October). For this exhibition, it was necessary to assess the state of conservation of the eighty-seven drawings, the colours present and the different types of paper used by this architect. It was also an opportunity to carry out conservation work and to place the drawings in acid-free passe-partout and boxes.

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Ana Freitas, a graduate in Conservation and Restoration from the DCR FCT NOVA (2001-2006), specialising in graphic documents, has been working at the University of Porto since 2006 in the Documentation and Information Management Service of the Digital UP, where she is responsible for the operation of the Conservation and Restoration Laboratory for Graphic Documents and for the conservation of the collection held at the Library of the Ancient Fund and the Archive of the University of Porto.

As a professional in the field of conservation and restoration, she coordinates technical teams, prepares objects for exhibitions and carries out preventive conservation and restoration interventions on objects belonging to external and internal entities of the University of Porto.

Currently, her interest is focused on the conservation of architectural drawings, especially on tracing paper and its various copying processes, participating in conservation projects of collections of architects such as José Marques da Silva, Vasco Vieira da Costa, Raúl Hestnes Ferreira and Maurício de Vasconcellos, among others.

Fernando Távora's Travel Drawings

Fernando Távora drew intensely and passionately, using a variety of media and supports, everyday materials that were at hand: ballpoint pens, felt-tip pens, fountain pens, sketchbooks, loose pages from books and business cards. These drawings show the architect's perspective and understanding and were used to capture a moment in time. They were made with a certain utility in mind and certainly not with the intention of being a work of art. The drawings acquired this status because of their great quality, the documentary value they represented and the fidelity of the portrait of their author. Over the years, the works of art that Fernando Távora produced during his travels have been displayed in numerous exhibitions. The first time, in June 1982, fifty of his drawings were selected by him to be exhibited at the Escola Superior de Belas Artes do Porto, in a presentation entitled "Fernando Távora: travel to travel drawings".¹

In 1988, fifty travel drawings were again exhibited at the Quadrado Azul Gallery in Porto,² and at the Forum Galleria in Viseu.³ Although, in comparison with the catalogue of the 1982 exhibition at the ESBAP, the information in the catalogues of these other two exhibits is scarce, it is possible to see changes in relation to the fifty drawings exhibited in 1982, namely the drawings relating to the trip to Japan in 1960 (only nine drawings were exhibited this time), the trip to Paris in 1962 (three drawings were exhibited) and five new drawings relating to the trips to France (Paris) in January 1967 and to India in December 1985 (three drawings depicting Goa and Daman).⁴

In 1990, the fifty drawings exhibited in Porto and Viseu in 1988 travelled to Viana do Castelo and were presented at the Centro Cultural do Alto Minho from 22 May to 10 June.

In 1993, the Cultural Centre of Belém held the monographic exhibition "Fernando Távora – a life-long trail", designed and coordinated by Fernando Távora and José Bernardo Távora.⁵ For this exhibition, the same selection of fifty travel drawings has been mounted with double-sided tape on cream cardboard and placed in a wooden frame in direct contact with the glass [Fig. 1, 2].



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1 Fernando Távora, *Viagem ao desenho de viagem. Escola Superior de Belas Artes do Porto* (Porto: Escola Superior de Belas Artes, 1982).

2 Fernando Távora, Joaquim Matos Chaves, Jorge Barros, *Fernando Távora* (Porto: Galeria Quadrado Azul, 1988).

3 *Fernando Távora: desenhos de viagens*. Viseu: Galeria Forum, 1988. See between March 23 and April 10 1988.

4 On display were drawings from his journeys in 1960 (Washington, Philadelphia, Taliesin, Mexico City, San Francisco, Kyoto, Nara, Bangkok, Beirute, Baalbeke, Cairo, Sakara, Athens), 1962 (Paris, Mount St. Michael), 1964 (Venice, Milan, Siena, Spoleto, Assis and London), 1967 (Paris), 1970 (Barcelona), 1973 (Congonhas) and 1985 (Goa, Daman).

5 Fernando Távora, José Bernardo Távora, eds., *Fernando Távora. Percurso: a life long trail* (Lisboa: Centro Cultural de Belém, 1993).

Fig. 1-2

Drawings from various sketchbooks exhibited at the Cultural Centre of Belém in 1993.

Nine years after the exhibition at the Cultural Centre of Belém, fifty-three⁶ travel drawings were displayed in a new installation entitled “Távora: travel drawings”.⁷

In 2013, on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of his birth, the Rectorate of the University of Porto, the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto and the Marques da Silva Foundation joined forces to honour Fernando Távora. The aim of the initiative “Eminent Figure of the University of Porto – 2013” was to recall Távora figure in its different dimensions, to promote the scientific, cultural and educational aspects of his work as a knowledge, architectural, artistic, disciplinary and documentary heritage. The programme of this event included a presentation installation at the Marques da Silva Foundation entitled “A Door Can be a Novel”, curated by Professor Manuel Mendes. Interacting with the spaces of the home studio designed by José Marques da Silva, the installation was organised into seven stations, the fourth of which, entitled “Jumping Frontiers”, exhibited some of his never-before-exhibited travel drawings, from a trip to Spain in 1942, a trip to Brazil in 1994 [Fig. 3] and a trip to Celorico de Bastos with his students in 1944.



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In 2017, travel drawings were once again the focus of a new exhibition: “Travel to Travel Drawings, Guimarães-Távora revisited”. This presentation, conceived and coordinated by the architect José Bernardo Távora, brought together eighty-eight of Fernando Távora’s travel drawings and nine photographs by Luís Ferreira Alves of buildings built by the architect in Guimarães. Thirty-eight drawings have been added to the initial selection of fifty made in 1988.⁸

In 2020, the Marques da Silva Foundation hosted the exhibition “More than architecture”, curated by Luís Urbano. The exhibition included 12 drawings made during Fernando Távora’s travels in 1960.

Two years after this exhibition, the Department of Architecture of the University of Bologna, in collaboration with the Marques da Silva Foundation, has decided to hold the exhibition “Fernando Távora in Viaggio” at the Galleria del Ridotto.

6 From the selection made in 1988, three new drawings have been added: two drawings from the trip to Kyoto, 1960; one drawing of Mount St Michael, Paris, 1962.

7 *Távora (catálogo da exposição sobre a sua obra)*. Guimarães: DAA / Museu Alberto Sampaio / Asociación Primeiro Andar, 2002.

8 On display were thirty-six drawings from Fernando Távora’s travels in 1960 (Washington, Philadelphia, Taliesin, Mexico City, San Francisco, Kyoto, Nara, Bangkok, Beirute, Baalbeke, Cairo, Sakara, Athens), five drawings from 1962 (Paris, Mount St. Michael), thirteen drawings from 1964 (Venice, Milan, Spoleto, Assisi and London), one drawing from 1970 (Barcelona), two drawings from 1973 (Venice, Milan, Spoleto, Assisi and London). Michael, thirteen drawings from 1964 (Venice, Milan, Siena, Spoleto, Assisi and London), two drawings from 1967 (Paris), one drawing from 1970 (Barcelona), two drawings from 1973 (Congonhas), three drawings from 1985 (Goa, Daman), fifteen drawings from 1994 (Olinda), four drawings from 1995 (Myra, Ancara, Istambul), six drawings from 1997 (Machu Picchu) and a final drawing from 1993, which represents a map entitled “1 - The trip around the world as a Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation scholarship holder / 2 - The trip to Brazil with ESBAP students / The ‘places’ where I have been (in black); The places where my ancestors have been (in green)”.

Fig. 3
Sketchbooks from the trip to
Brazil, 1994.



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Eighty-seven⁹ original drawings by the architect Fernando Távora, selected by José Bernardo Távora in 2017, were on display in Cesena from 23 September to 12 October 2022.

Surveying the Collection

Since 1982, the travel drawings have been exhibited in many different places and environments, so it was essential to assess the state of conservation of the colours and the various paper supports used by the architect Fernando Távora.

The drawings entitled City of Mexico, Philadelphia, S. Francisco, Taliesin and Washington (1960) belonged to the “On board” diary and were made with ball-point pens of different colours (green, red, black). The paper, 148 mm high and 107 mm wide, was thin and yellowish and had four perforations on the left margin for the insertion of rings. Some of the papers in the “On board” diary had the watermark AMS REGISTERED BOND.

The remaining drawings belonged to various sketchbooks. These drawings, made on heavier paper, had no watermark and were made with a black pen, black ballpoint pen, graphite and coloured pencils. One of the sketchbooks, consisting of forty drawings, 175 mm high and 250 mm wide, was used continuously

9 Based on the selection made by Bernardo Távora only the map from 1993 was not exhibited.

Fig. 4
Drawings in the exhibition.

in Japan (Kyoto, twenty-six drawings; and Nara, eight drawings) and in Bangkok (six drawings). Another sketchbook, containing twenty drawings measuring 245 mm high and 315 mm wide, was used continuously in Lebanon (Beirut, two drawings; Balbeque, four drawings), in Egypt (Cairo, Saqqara, six drawings) and in Athens (eight drawings). They had a perforation in the left margin for the insertion of a metal spiral.

There were also drawings that belonged to sketchbooks that had already been dismantled, such as the one relating to the trip to Brazil, 125 mm high and 185 mm wide (Olinda, fifteen drawings in felt-tip and coloured pencil).

In terms of conservation, there has been some concern about the fading of the inks used by Fernando Távora in his travel drawings, as they have been exhibited countless times.

Drawings made with felt-tip and ballpoint pens are very sensitive to light, fading and colour changes.

Ballpoint pen inks are complex mixtures of several dyes and pigments, up to 50% of the total ink formulation, contained in either a glycol-based solvent or benzyl alcohol. Additional components (vehicles) include fatty acids, plasticizers and polymeric resins to improve the consistency, flow or drying characteristics of the ink.¹⁰

Felt-tip pens became popular in the mid-1940s and were quickly adopted for their quick-drying inks. The inks consisted of soluble organic dyes dispersed in a resin matrix with either water or alcohol solvent.¹¹

The conservation community was quick to recognise the transient nature of these materials and recent studies have shown that more than half of the 75 felt-tip markers tested had very low fastness to light.¹²

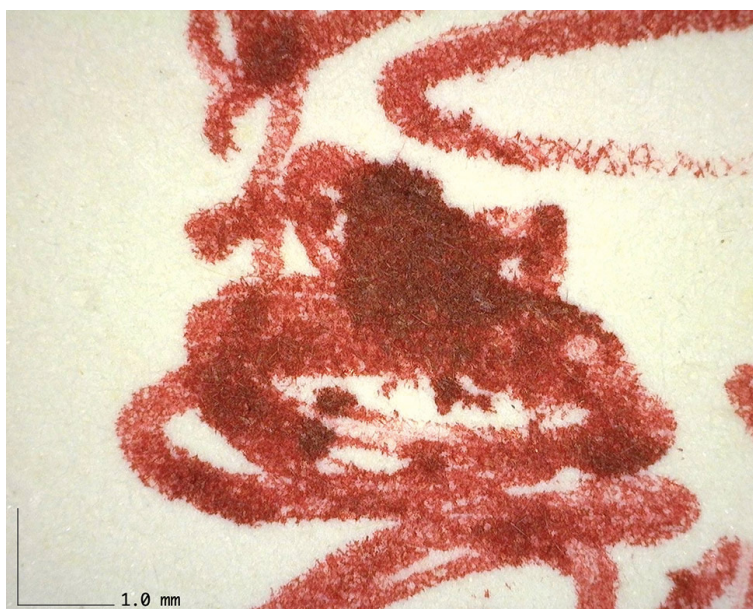
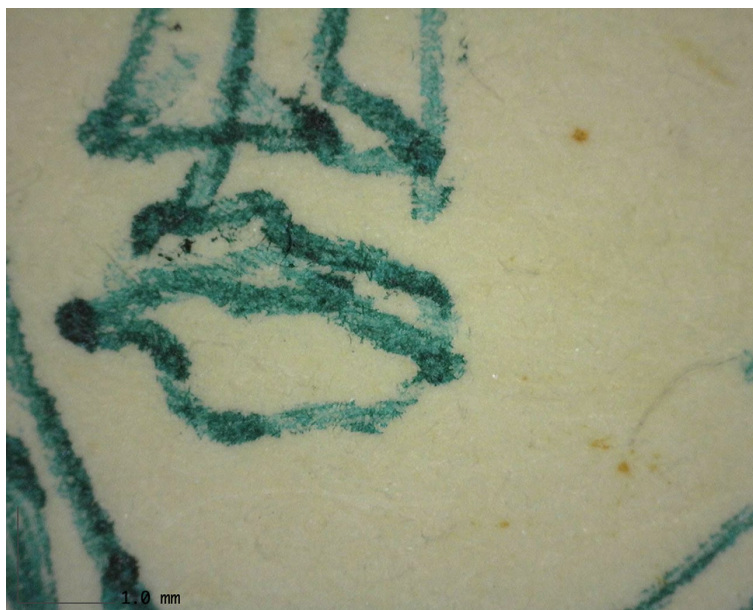


Fig. 5, 6
Dino-Lite digital microscope images of the green ink of the ballpoint pen used in the drawing of Washington sand the red ink in the drawing of San Francisco.

10 Alyami, Areej et alii, "Metal nanoinks as chemically stable surface enhanced scattering (SERS) probes for the analysis of blue BIC ballpoint pens", *Phys. Chem. Chem. Phys.*, no. 19 (2017): 14652.

11 Mirabile, Antonio et alii. "The Colors of Lina Bo Bardi: Analytical Investigations of Lina's Felt-tip Pens." In *Science and Art: The Contemporary Painted Surface*, Royal Society of Chemistry, Antonio Sgamellotti, Brunetto Giovanni Brunetto and Coatanza Milani, eds., (London: Royal Institute of Chemistry, 2020): 117-138.

12 Fenella G. France, "Fugitive modern media and challenges of long term exhibition". In *ICOM-CC 17th Triennial Conference Preprints, Melbourne, 15-19 September 2014*, Janet Bridgland ed., (Paris: International Council of Museums 2014).

With this in mind, the inks were examined using a Dino-Lite digital microscope to observe any changes in the binders, dyes and pigments [Fig. 4, 5, 6, 7].

Although the vast majority of the inks were still cohesive, very vivid and showed no signs of fading or alteration, there were doubts about the inks used in the *Congonhas* drawings [Fig. 8, 9].

The *Congonhas* drawings were probably made with a black felt-tip pen on coated paper. The drawings now show a purple hue rather than black. However, we cannot prove that black was the original colour as there are no reliable photographs of these drawings in the catalogues consulted.

After assessing the condition of the supports and the colours, minor conservation and restoration work was carried out. As most of the drawings were mounted on beige paper with double-sided tape on the reverse, it was necessary to remove all these external elements.

Crepe erasers and solvent-soaked swabs were used to remove the adhesive residue from the double-sided tape¹³ [Fig. 11]. *Hake* brushes, smoke sponges and various erasers were used to clean the surface of the drawings [Fig. 12].

Tears were mended with *Kozo* paper (5gsm) pre-coated with wheat starch paste. For the exhibition 'Fernando Távora in Viaggio', the drawings were mounted with pasted T-hinges in acid-free passe-partouts (*Mulberry*, 32gsm) and placed in Portfolio Museum boxes [Fig. 13-16]. This final housing system protects the drawings from light, heat, moisture and fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity.

Conclusions

Fernando Távora's travel drawings are valuable documents of his creative process and his exploration of different cultures and architectural traditions. As such, they have been shown in numerous exhibitions since the 1980s.

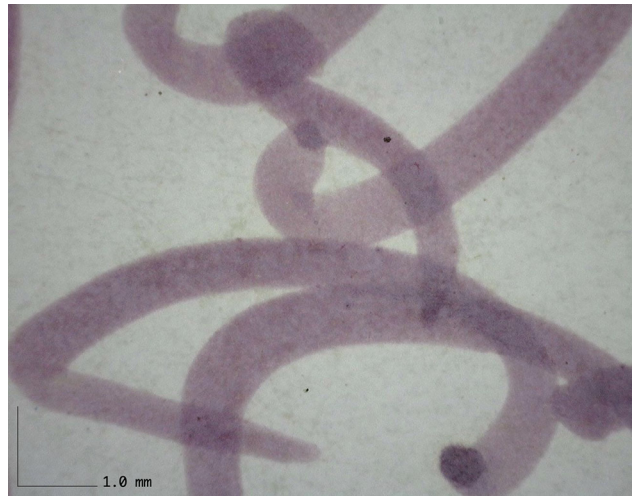


Fig. 7, 8
Dino-Lite digital microscope images of the black ink of the ballpoint pen and the blue, yellow and green inks of the coloured pencils used in the drawing *Myra Theatre* and the black ink in the drawing *Peru Ollantaytambo*.

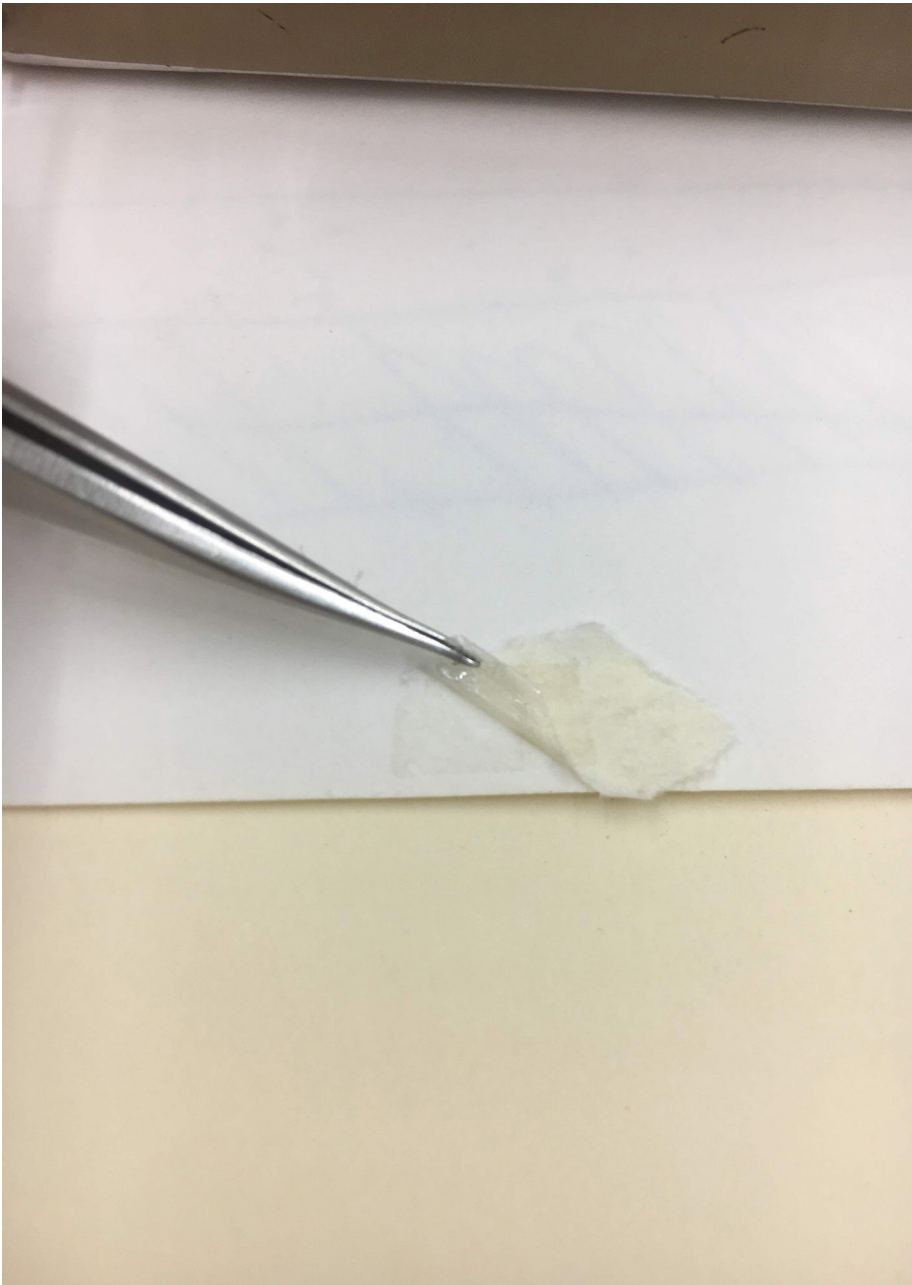
¹³ Leonie Müller et alii, "Pressure-sensitive tape removal in paper conservation: a review", *Journal of Paper Conservation*, no. 23 (February 2022): 59-75.



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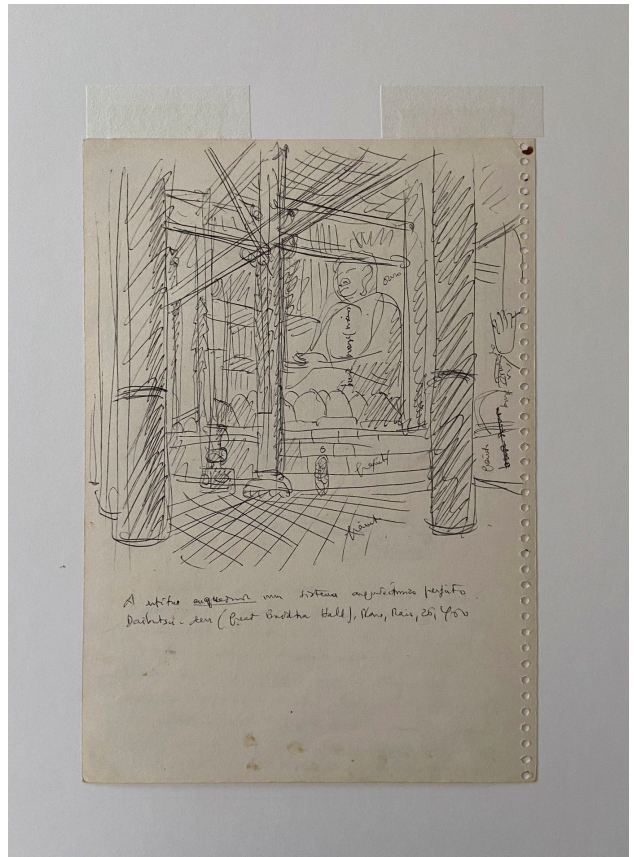
Fig. 9-10
Dino-Lite digital microscope images of the felt-tip pen used in the drawing Congonhas (detail of the cemetery with the 12 prophets sculpted by António Francisco Lisboa, Aleijadinho).

Fig. 11-12
Removing the double-sided tape from the back of the drawing and surface cleaning with a Hake brush.

Fig. 13-16
Hanging system used in the travel drawings: T-hinges made of *Mulberry* paper applied with wheat starch paste to the back of the drawings. This system allowed full access to the back of the drawings.

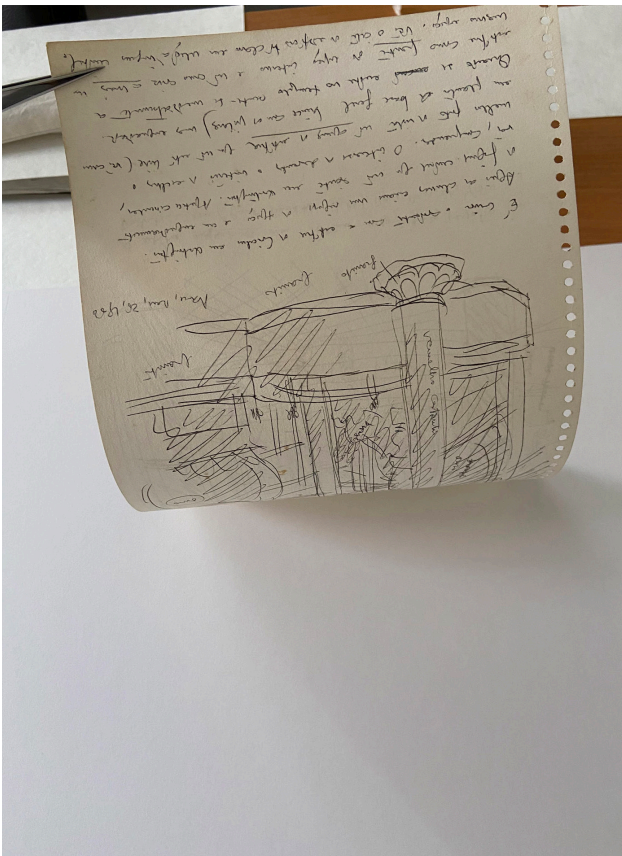


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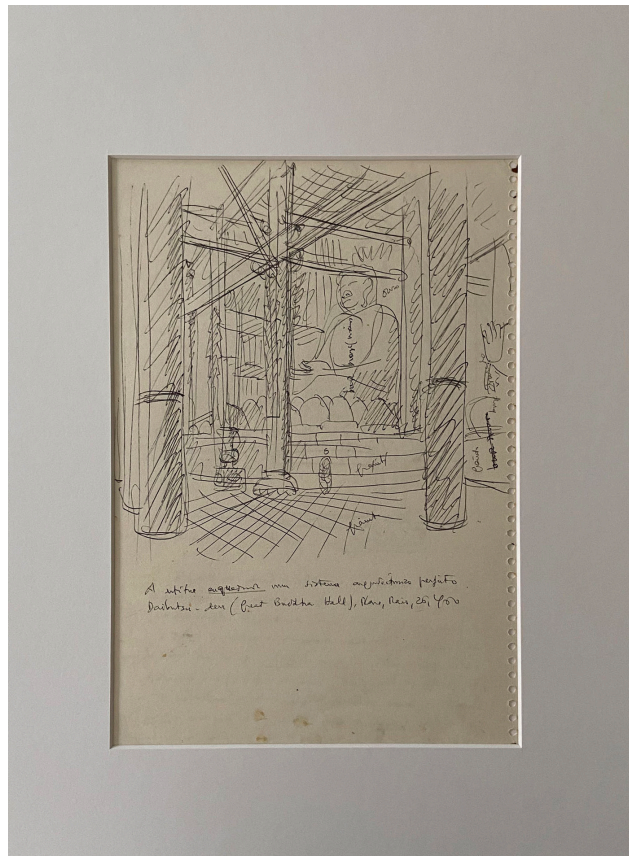


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A sketch of a system with a central figure sitting on a platform. The sketch is done in black ink on a light-colored paper.



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15

A sketch of a system with a central figure sitting on a platform. The sketch is done in black ink on a light-colored paper.



16

The materials they are made of make them particularly susceptible to fading, so the greatest care should be taken in future exhibitions. Close monitoring of environmental parameters is recommended, particularly relative humidity and light. By following proper storage, handling, maintenance and exhibiting techniques, these drawings can be accessed, enjoyed and treasured by generations to come.

Fig. 16

Dino-Lite digital microscope images of the felt-tip pen used in the drawing Congonhas (detail of the cemetery with the 12 prophets sculpted by António Francisco Lisboa, Aleijadinho).

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