

1. The history of the Cinemateca Portuguesa-Museu do Cinema's poster collection begins in the 1930s - so even before the institution existed - when its founder, Manuel Félix Ribeiro, on his own initiative and already foreseeing the need for a national Cinemateca, began collecting all kinds of documentary materials, including posters, which would, in 1948, become the primitive nucleus of the Information and Documentation Centre's archives. And it was this effort, individual but focussed on the future, that made it possible to safeguard countless documentary species that would otherwise have been irretrievably lost. So the collection continued to grow over time, albeit in a haphazard and unsystematic way, until the turning point came in 1988 when Rui Santana Brito - then coordinator of the Documentation and Information Centre, later Vice-President of the Cinemateca and a member of the FIAF's CDC - and I began cataloguing and provisionally storing the poster collection, which in 1996 would be moved to its definitive premises in the National Archive of Moving Images, where it began to be systematically catalogued in a space purposely built to safeguard it.

If I mentioned the marginal and peripheral nature of the poster collection in the Cinemateca archives, this can be explained by the absence of systematic and methodical practices for collecting and processing the objects, studying them and making them available for use in programming, exhibition and book publishing activities. Naturally, this situation was essentially due to both the lack of specialised staff to handle this type of document and the lack of knowledge of the technical requirements for conservation, restoration and storage, gaps that have been filled over time. In any case, there has always been a concern to preserve examples of Portuguese film posters and, when systematic treatment began, priority was given to these posters in the first phase, followed by the systematic treatment of posters from other cinematographies. At the moment, the collection has 31534 copies, of all nationalities.

And according to the latest calculations, there are probably twice that amount waiting to be catalogued and stored.

On the other hand, this year we started a project to restore these documents, an operation that will be carried out in the context of the institution itself and with its own staff. I myself have acquired qualifications in this area and will try to pass on this knowledge to other colleagues in order to speed up the process.

2. The existences, but above all the non-existences, make us reflect on the very nature of the poster object; on its ephemeral nature; the chance and vicissitudes of its journey; the fragile balance between what could be saved and what has been irretrievably lost in the vortex of time. If, at the moment, we can say that we have a poster for each of the sound films produced in Portugal, how many from the silent period will we never have in our collection? And even in the case of sound cinema, why do we have hundreds of posters for a single film and not a single one for another? In this regard, I present two paradigmatic examples of the perplexities we face during the process. The first refers to the poster for a film belonging to a very popular genre, for which thousands of posters must have been produced: 'Gado Bravo' (1934), directed by António Lopes Ribeiro, of which we didn't have a single copy until we received a donation of camera

negatives wrapped in a poster of the film that had been cut out for this purpose and which we came to reconstruct in this way:



The other example is a film also by António Lopes Ribeiro, entitled 'A Revolução de Maio' (1937), a propaganda film about the merits of the dictatorial regime that ruled Portugal until 1974, and for which thousands of posters must have been produced. Unbelievably, we don't have a single copy in our collection. We're still searching tirelessly.

3. In recent years I have come into contact with a new generation of young and talented researchers who are looking at the poster object from two different perspectives: one concerns the history of the cinema poster in Portugal, its specific language and its relationship with contemporary artistic movements and graphic trends; the other seeks to study and understand the cultural, social, economic, political and ideological dimensions that determine the design and conception of posters, as well as their differentiation from other advertising materials. We even have master's and doctoral theses based on posters from our collection. In a way that is very rewarding for us, these researchers want to handle and touch the objects themselves and not their digital representations, which, while on the one hand increases our concern for the conservation of these fragile objects, on the other gives us the satisfaction of being able to make this legacy available in its entirety as conceived objects to be seen and enjoyed in all their beauty and meaning.

4. This is the bright and shiny side of the movie poster universe. I will now mention the problematic side, that set of problems that all archives face. First of all, a poster collection involves a huge amount of storage space, a problem that the Cinemateca Portuguesa-Museu do Cinema solved by transferring the collection to ANIM.

The following image shows the space allocated in the building for the archive and posters and other materials supervised by the CDI:



The second problem to be noted is the lack of cabinets for posters of non-standard formats (for example, from 160x120 cm and above), which means that they have to be expressly ordered, with very high financial costs, overloading the institution's budget.



Finally, and far from exhausting the problems we face, it is necessary to mention the state in which objects often reach us, requiring intense and exhaustive operations of selection, cleaning, purging and packaging, before cataloguing and making them available, with a high demand for human and material resources.

Arnaldo Mesquita, June 2025