

# What Blue?

**PEDRO MENDES LEAL**

## BLUE IS THE COLOUR OF DISTANCE

João Paulo Serafim

In the exhibition Que Azul? (What Blue?), Pedro Mendes Leal starts from a memory reminiscent of his youth, which proved to be fundamental in his relationship with the world as an artist and human being.

“One spring afternoon, I sat on a wall gazing at the sea, the sky, the horizon and infinity.

Five hours later, I found myself unable to remember anything else, not even what had happened. It was already night and I was there, in a kind of trance, suspended in time...”

This experience of suspended time emerges as sensitive material, in which memory, body and landscape all merge together, opening up a gap — a space of distance, silence and listening, inhabited by a deep blue.

It is from this premise that Pedro Mendes Leal develops his research: to rediscover that sensation of blue, while simultaneously questioning each individual's perception of that colour. He does so by using a nineteenth-century photographic technique, cyanotype, whose etymology refers to the Greek words kyanós (dark blue, deep blue) and týpos (mark, impression, trace, mould), literally meaning 'blue print'.

Despite using a photographic medium traditionally associated with realism or documentation, Pedro creates abstract images: landscapes composed of sea, sky, light and wind. His images are phenomenological landscapes, in which these elements are 'captured' to give rise to a mental image. Like Renaissance artists, who produced their paints from pigments coming from the East, Pedro obsessively searches for his own palette of blue. He experiments with successive mixtures of emulsions, applied to different supports, with different exposure times and under different atmospheric conditions.

The work presented in this exhibition is divided into two groups. In the series À procura do azul-céu (In search of sky blue), a systematic process of chromatic experimentation is developed. Testing different emulsions, the artist exposes small sheets of paper (13x18cm) to sunlight, allowing the blue to gradually reveal itself. Similar to Goethe's theory, colour is not understood here as a fixed or purely physical given, but as a relational phenomenon that emerges from the encounter between light, matter and perception. The accumulation of these variations constitutes a sample organised as the image of a possible sky, simultaneously totality and fragment, where blue, as an experience of distance and depth, invites the visitor to linger, observe and recognise.

The second series – Moments of the sea, waves and wind – consists of images obtained in direct contact with the elements. Immersed in the sea, these large sheets of paper record the water, salt, waves, light and wind. Exposed and developed almost simultaneously, they are the result of a gesture that requires dedication and attention, a return to a slower pace: that of preparing the emulsion, drying the paper, waiting for the image to appear.

Here, the place where the images are produced takes on central importance: they were all made along the coastline of the municipality of Cascais, close to the Cultural Centre where they are exhibited; in Cabo Raso, near Guincho, at the tide gauge next to the Marina, and on Carcavelos beach. It is in these places that the artist constructs his personal mythology with the sea.

Patrocinadores:



Parceiro:



Produção:



In all these places there is a deep emotional connection, but also an ecological concern that runs through all his work. At a time when ecosystems, species and climates are profoundly altered by human action, the choice of the Cascais Tide Gauge – in operation since 1885 – highlights the importance of continuous monitoring of the tides and the study of phenomena associated with global warming.

In this sense, Que Azul? is close to Timothy Morton's idea that all art is ecological, not because it represents nature, but because it is inevitably implicated in the relationships between bodies, materials, times and environments<sup>1</sup>. Pedro Mendes Leal's images are not limited to showing the sea, the sky or the wind: they happen with them, exposing themselves to their forces, their variations and their instability.

The cyanotype process is slow and depends on the light, climate and weather, which makes that relational condition clearly visible. Each image results from an encounter between paper and water, between salt and light, between the human gesture and the rhythms of the natural world. The blue that emerges is therefore a trace of this coexistence, a mark left by a system of interdependencies that goes beyond the artist and the visitor.

By invoking blue as an experience of distance, Pedro Mendes Leal proposes a particular way of paying attention and listening to a time that is marked by increasing acceleration and ecological crisis. More than a colour, blue here becomes a space for relationship: an interval where perception slows down, where the gaze becomes involved and where art asserts itself as an integral part of the world we share.

<sup>1</sup> Morton, Timothy, All Art is Ecological, Penguin Books, London, 2018

Curator: João Paulo Serafim

Pedro Mendes Leal (Lisbon, 1966) is a visual artist whose artistic practice lies somewhere between process and representation, exploring the relationships between nature, human beings and memory. He is passionate about nature, people and social issues, which he addresses through drawing and photography, questioning Man's relationship with the environment, society and artistic discourse. He has participated in collective and individual exhibitions, residencies and global projects linked to cyanotype.

Acknowledgments: Ar.co fotografia; Isabel d'Alvarenga; João Paulo Serafim; Jorge Carvalho; Jorge Galvão; José Campos; Gisela Mascarenhas; Mariana Mendes Leal; Ondina Camilo; Sofia Segurado; Stig Weston; Família e Amigos; Fundação Dom Luís I e a toda a equipa do Centro Cultural de Cascais

**QUE AZUL ÉS TU? (1)**

Cianotipia sobre papel Fabriano 200g | 600x77 cm

**CABO RASO\_ 13 OUTUBRO 2025\_10:00\_18°C\_2UV\_76%H\_3NÓS (2)**

Cianotipia sobre papel Fabriano 200g | 172x150 cm

**MARÉGRAFO\_ 11 DEZEMBRO 2025\_09:30\_9°C\_1/2UV\_80%H\_4NÓS (3)**

Cianotipia sobre papel Fabriano 200g | 182x150 cm

**OEIRAS\_10\_JANEIRO 2026\_07:45\_10°C\_OUV\_OKN 86%H (4)**

Cianotipia sobre papel, escritos em grafite sobre parede | 192x150 cm

**AZUL DA DISTÂNCIA (5)**

Cianotipia sobre papel Fabriano 300g | 29x45,7 cm

**CABO RASO\_ 25 SETEMBRO 2025\_10:22\_19°C\_3/4UV\_62%H\_2NÓS (6)**

Cianotipia sobre papel Fabriano 200g | 214x150 cm

**AZUL CÉU (7)**

Cianotipia sobre papel Fabriano 200g | 800x210 cm

