
A Fairy-Tale that had No Happy Ending

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Ever since Charles University joined the *Europe Meets School* voluntary teaching programme in 2008/2009, the Erasmus students of Art Education and Art and Design from the Faculty of Education have been frequent participants of the programme. We have had many engaging projects introducing German, Italian, Polish, Scandinavian, Spanish and Greek art, but so far there has only been one instance when an art project was prepared by Portuguese students. On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Erasmus programme, we would like to take the opportunity to look back at this project today.

There is a simple explanation for why there has only been one time when a Portuguese art project has taken place so far; there are not many Erasmus arrivals in this particular study field from Portugal to Charles University. We were therefore delighted when not only one, but four Portuguese Art students arrived to Charles University in the summer semester of 2013/2014. Three of these students joined their forces to prepare two compelling projects on Portuguese art for our partner Basic Art School Olešská in Prague 10.

Ana Cláudia Pacheco Magalhaes, Ana Mafalda Sá Fernandes Nóbrega and Eduardo Fernando Carvalho Pacheco studied Art and Design in the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo. When searching for the best topic for their *Europe Meets School* project, they aimed for a mix of mediums for their art and design, by looking at inspirations from literature and architectural decoration. Their ideas concerned two groups; a younger group of children who they were teaching to create an illustration based on Portuguese legend, and the group of teenage students of the Art School, who they helped design a blueprint of a typical Portuguese tile.

The younger group was introduced to a popular story from medieval Portugal, a true fairy-tale that had had no typical happy end. The heroine of this story, Inés de Castro, was the illegitimate daughter of a Galician noble who moved from today's territory of Spain to Portugal around 1340 with her cousin Constanza Manuel (Constance of Castile). Constanza was to marry the Portuguese heir to the throne, Pedro (future King Pedro I) and indeed a wedding took place. Yet, Pedro actually fell in love with Constanza's lady-in-waiting, Inés, whom he took for his mistress after the death of his wife in 1345.

Despite their wish to marry, Inés was not deemed eligible to be a queen. They had several children together before Prince Pedro's father, King Alfonso IV, decided to have Inés executed in 1355. When Pedro became king, later in 1357, Inés's body was moved to a magnificent mausoleum in the Alcobaca Monastery. Pedro stated that he had secretly married Inés and proclaimed her the lawful queen. Until today, his word is the only proof of their marriage. Based on legend, King Pedro had his entire court kiss the deceased queen's hand and swear allegiance to her. The lovers were finally reunited in death; Pedro lies in a marble coffin next to the splendid tomb he had built for Inés.

It was perhaps the most difficult task for Ana, Mafalda and Eduardo to tell this story to their eager young public in such a way that the children would enjoy the fairy-tale behind the legend and not dwell in its tragedy. Judging by the charming illustrations the children made to the story, they were indeed successful.

The older group was introduced to the art of producing and decorating azulejos. *Azulejo* is the Portuguese and Spanish word for a tin-glazed, ceramic tilework. The most common white-blue tiles are typical part of Portuguese culture; they decorate both the interiors and exteriors of churches, palaces, schools, ordinary houses and even train, bus and underground stations with the material. The word *azulejo* is derived from Arabic word *zellige* meaning polished stone. Many of the geometrical or floral patterns on the tiles have also unmistakable Arab influence. There are however also figural decorations on the tiles, historically depicting allegorical, mythological and biblical scenes. Popular themes in the past for the tiles were also hunting and maritime motifs, but the *azulejos* nowadays are often more abstracted. The pupils were asked to create their own design proposal of a modern or historical tile of the *azulejo* type. Again, we believe that the project was a big success.

As it is common in the *Europe Meets School* art projects, both groups of pupils also had the opportunity to be introduced to Portuguese history, including present day common affairs, and were also taught some basic Portuguese words.

This introduction to a foreign country's culture and basics of its language makes the art projects of the *Europe Meets School* programme very attractive; we are therefore delighted that Charles University and its Erasmus students and Czech student volunteers (who translate the projects into Czech language) have the long-standing collaboration with the Basic Art School to host these kinds of projects. Perhaps in the upcoming years there will be other Portuguese projects to look forward to; at present we fondly recall the student's work we have just introduced to you.

Nicola Wheeler is a Erasmus student from the University of Kent in the United Kingdom, studying English and American Literature, and is in the Faculty of Arts at Charles University. She is passionate about literature and history, and has a keen interest in current affairs. Nicola believes that writing for the international iForum is a fantastic opportunity to broaden her editing and creative skill whilst studying on her year abroad.