



## The Cultural Heritage of Barcelos: Synergies Between Popular Art and the Teaching of Design and Visual Arts

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### Abstract

*The cultural wealth of Barcelos (in the north of Portugal) is an inexhaustible motivation for academic production, critical thinking, and experimentation. In this communication, we intend to present the manifestations, cultural productions, and festivities of the region, namely, the Barcelos figurado, a certified artisanal product, with high relevance in the artisanal activities of the municipality. We will discuss, among others, the work of the artist Rosa Ramalho (1888-1977), an artisan who influenced generations in the production of popular art, but also of erudite art, and has been invited to sessions with students from the Oporto School of Fine Arts. In fact, the morphological potential of this figurado as a transport of a load that is simultaneously realistic and imaginary, representative of the community but at the same time stylized, inspired both the artisan and the plastic artist, as well as, later, the designer. Between the religious and the pagan, between the figurative and the symbolic, the history of the figurado lends itself to multiple approaches, whether from a scientific, artistic, and patrimonial point of view.*

*Considering the imagery universe of Barcelos figurado, there were several actions developed in recent years by the Higher School of Design for its dissemination, but above all for its valorization among students and the artisan community. The recognition of tangible and non-tangible heritage has also been ensured in productions and applied research projects at the level of graphic design, illustration, and animation that we intend to present. Examples are the production of PARLA posters and the MOTIRÔ project, both in partnership with PUC in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Both with the objective of mapping local traditions and their representations. In the local context, projects were developed in class, in partnership with the local autarchy and artisans, where solutions were found to problems related to the products of these artisans, more specifically, the design of communication, packaging and other supports that help in the dissemination of this 'identity' so unique of this region.*

**Keywords:** Education, Popular Art, Design and Visual Art, Community, Academy

### 1. Introduction

This article aims to demonstrate how the links between teaching and R&D around art and design, and the identity and cultural values of the region (Barcelos - Portugal) in which they are located, can be themes of study in teaching and practices in these areas.

This interaction model is a teaching tool that enhances not only the development of academic projects, but also collaboration with the community and the development of this artisanal activity in the creation of new pieces, and new strategies for disseminating and communicating them.

We present several works developed in an academic and scientific context, between an educational institution, IPCA – Polytechnic University of Cávado and Ave, and the community of Barcelos artisans specialized in *Barcelos figurado*.

In the case studies presented, *Barcelos figurado*, was the inspiration for the development of several projects within the scope of design, illustration, animation and art.

In these case studies, the methodology was, initially, visual research and contact with artisans and their pieces (through informal conversations, interviews and visits to the *Pottery Museum of Barcelos*), which made it possible to identify the visual elements that represent the imagery of these pieces and the contextualization of the stories they tell. Secondly, in a classroom context, various proposals were developed that responded to the specificities of different contexts in which this imagery would 'live'. Finally, the results of the projects were shared with the academic community, the Barcelos community, artisans and others (mainly academic and international community) within the scope of national and international events and conferences. Therefore, we have extrapolated this cultural richness to



academic and scientific contexts, as well as to enhance the dissemination and creation of new pieces together (academia and artisans).

## 2. Contextualization

### 2.1. Craft, Figurado and Barcelos Region

The Barcelos municipality is one of the municipalities in Portugal that stands out in terms of artisanal clay work. There are more than seven dozen small companies/family businesses operating in this area, either in the context of series production using molds or in manual production with unique and often personalized pieces, these activities are the main family income.

Within this activity, there are approximately two dozen artisans who produce pieces of the *Barcelos figurado*, which has become increasingly important. Thanks to the work of the municipality, there is already quality certification [1] which values *figurado* in a very special way, alongside other productions in this municipality.

The history of *Barcelos figurado* begins as a subsidiary activity of pottery products, of a more utilitarian nature, intended for sale at fairs. *Figurado* artisans initially use small scraps of clay to make small pieces for the enjoyment of younger people, to which the attractive sound of whistling is often added, usually in cuckoos and nightingales. Musical instruments with greater melodic precision were also developed, such as *ocarinas* and *harmonicas*.

From then on, and as their importance grew, these forms, more linked to children's entertainment, with small figures resulting, in most cases, from the representation of the animal world and rural work, passed into the festive and religious world of this community and for the creation of characters linked to a mythical and surreal imaginary. It is in this context that the *Rooster of Barcelos*, a symbol of the city, originating from a local legend, also stands out.

*figurado*, painted or glazed, has a morphological characterization and a unique identity, even with the various variants linked to each artisan.

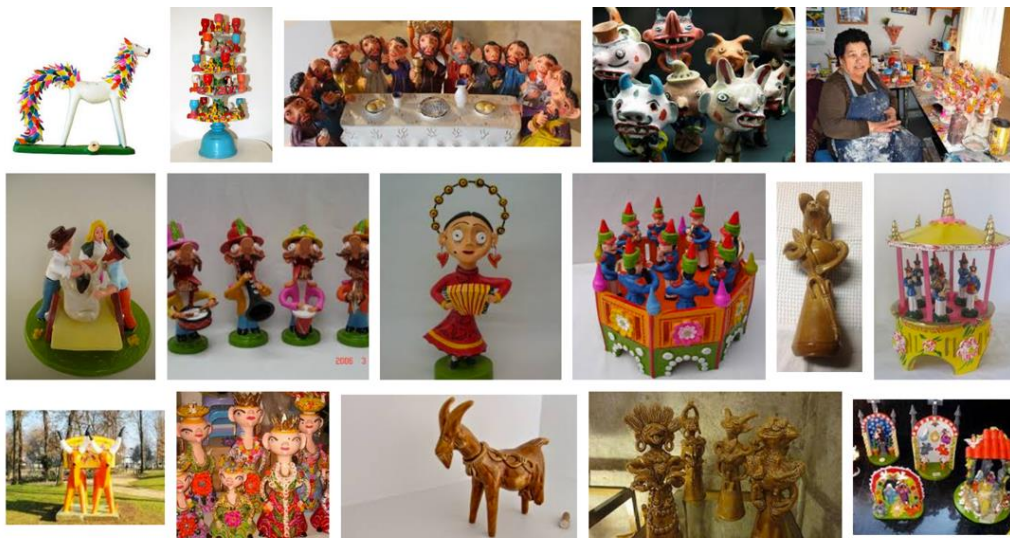


Fig. 1. Some representative pieces of the Barcelos "figurado"

### 2.2. Artisans and Craftsmanship As Enhancers of Creation in Art & Design, and in the Academic World

In the history of *Barcelos figurado*, it is essential to highlight the presence of the artist and professor *António Quadros*. Relevant personality in Portuguese culture, not only in the field of painting but also literature (poetry and theater), decoration of architectural spaces, artisanal techniques including ceramics, knowledge and dissemination of popular wisdom, agricultural knowledge and related techniques such as beekeeping, and, in the creation of reflection texts on teaching and learning. He



met *Rosa Ramalho* at the *Barcelos* fair and never stopped establishing working communication with her and publicizing its importance in the relationship between popular wisdom and university teaching. One of the most important characteristics of *Rosa Ramalho* speech about her own work, according to *António Quadros* and which fascinated him most, was the use of poetic and symbolic elements describing an enchanted universe of characters, stories and synesthetic visions of the world.

*António Quadros* was the first to transform the *Porto School of Fine Arts* into a space for relationships between *Rosa Ramalho* - a creator and heir to the region's entire heritage, based on figuration - and her students, accustomed to training strictly linked to the academic teaching. This contact, in the 60s, led to *Rosa Ramalho* work having a notable impact both on *Porto* society and on the country in general, being recognized not only as one of the artisans who most contributed to the development of *figurado* art but also as the precursor of contact between academia and popular knowledge, in this specific case, ceramics, stimulating the creative development of academic students work.



**Fig. 2. (left)** Rosa Ramalho at her working space  
**Fig. 3. (right)** "The girl and the lizard", António Quadros, 1956

### 2.3. Art & Design As Tools for the Communication of Diversified Identity and Cultural Image

"As designers, when we point our own ambitions at solving the problems that stand in the way of progress, we can play a vital catalyzing role." [2] AIGA (s.d: 6)

Part of the nature of design is its sensitivity and ability to relate form and content, respond to problem solving and develop personal, social, productive and cultural interaction in the communication of specific content. The discovery of other possible degrees of use and the articulation with the social, cultural and development forces of the regions create very rich processes of collective growth. Hence the importance of establishing partnerships of various types by schools with institutions, production sites and producers in the region where the training is taking place. Based on the manufacture of objects at a local level, and the symbologies and morphologies arising from the culture and history of this region, the protagonists of cultural heritage are fundamental interlocutors so that innovation, in design, is also a reinforcement of knowledge and development of the technical-artistic potential of the localities.

Work in the field, properly framed either in the learning of fundamental concepts for understanding and problematizing design, or associated with a sense of usefulness and citizenship, favors not only the development of capabilities, but a particularly rich connection in development, also in students, of a personality with references to a common heritage, diverse and open to contemporary times and above all not 'consumed' in a static way.

The sense of developing work that will be useful to others, to a region, to a country, is one of the fundamental ethical components in the training of a designer.

Teaching methodologies can favor, systematize and help to develop a network of communication interactions, response to problems and creation of new technical-artistic-cultural qualities of the various partners involved, within a concept of a permanent school that combines the training of young people with continuing adult education.

"A design educator will support and promote the uniqueness of different cultures recognizing that human communities are resilient because of their diversity. She/he will encourage students to make



design and messaging culturally relevant, respecting how communities manifest identity, preserve and cultivate traditions, and develop belief systems and values." [3]

### 3. Projects – Case Studies

#### 3.1. Barcelos Imagery Universe As A Reference For The Development Of Academic Events Visual Identity - Confia and Festa Mundial Da Animação

In this case, we present the visual identity of two international conferences, where *Barcelos figurado* was the reference for the development of the identity of these events: *CONFIA – International Conference on Illustration and Animation* (4th edition – 2016) and the *Festa Mundial da Animação* (2016). Both conferences took place in the city of Barcelos and were organized by teachers and students of *MIA – Masters in Illustration and Animation* at *IPCA*, and in the case of the 2nd, the organization was in partnership with government entities and *CASA DA ANIMAÇÃO*.

The figurative characters appear represented through the student's drawings and their own interpretation of *figurado*. This visual identity was created and developed by students and teachers. These characters 'jump' onto the conference stage and involve us in this story so specific to the identity and culture of a city, side by side, with the academic and scientific space.



Fig. 4. Images of the visual communication implemented in "CONFIA" and "Festa Mundial da Animação" (Barcelos 2016)

#### 3.2. Mia Illustrations: Parla!

This project was developed within the scope of the *MIA – IPCA* Master's Degree in Illustration and Animation. It was a partnership with the Department of Arts and Design from *Pontifícia* Catholic University from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (*PUC-Rio*), bringing together students and professors from universities who dedicate themselves to character design.

The theme for the 2017 exhibition was the representation of craftsmanship in popular culture and its implications for the notion of three concepts related to the theme: *experience*, *trace* and *aura*. The three concepts were taken from the work of *Walter Benjamin*, with *experience* being the function that will review the role of narrative in society; the *trace* expands the notion of experience with the relevance of the regional or temporal dimension of cultural production and the *aura* is a concept forged by the author in the study of technical image discussing the relationships between the value of the original and the industrialized copy.

The challenge was to create posters with characters that elaborate on issues directly or indirectly linked to crafts from the different cultures of each participating country.



The used techniques varied between watercolor, ink, computer graphics, collage, graphite or mixed techniques, and the materialization of these characters inhabited in different contexts (mascot, children's literature, comics, animation, puppet theater, games, toy art, theatrical character).

To complete the projects presented in this exhibition, groups of students and professors from PUC-Rio and IPCA worked during the first semester of 2017. The results were included in an itinerant exhibition in Portugal and Brazil, and a in a virtual exhibition with online access.

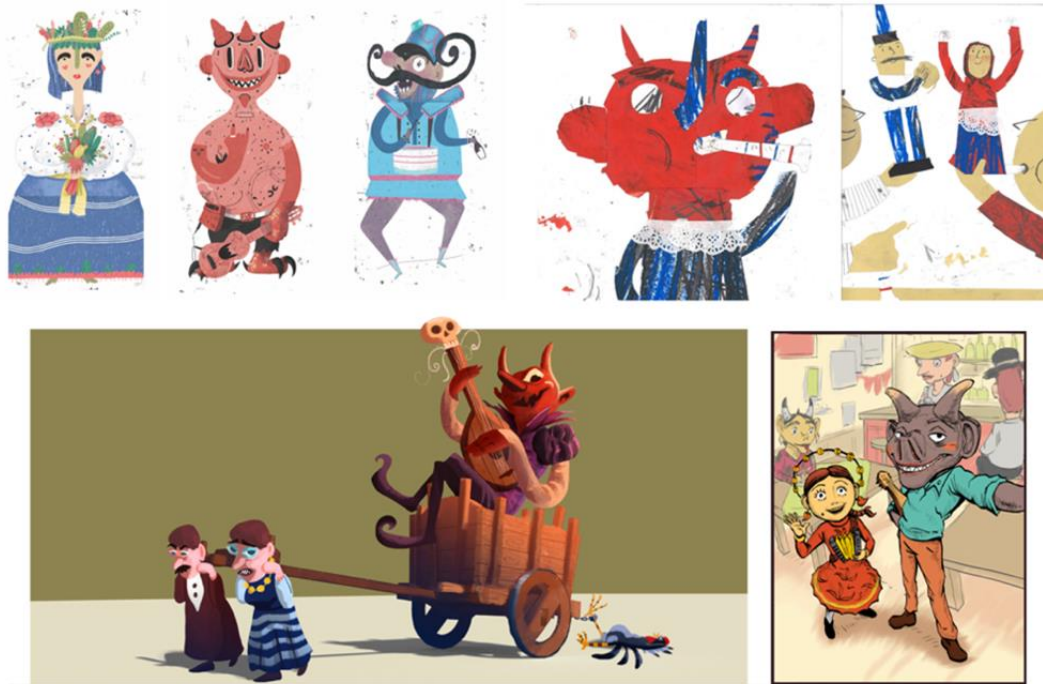


Fig. 5. Some of the "PARLA!" works, based on Barcelos "figurado" (MIA – IPCA, 2017)

### 3.3. Packaging for Artisans

Developed in an academic context, this project took place in 2014, as part of teaching the fundamentals of graphic design to students in the 1st year of Graphic Design degree at *Higher School of Design (ESD)* from the *Polytechnic University from Cávado and Ave (IPCA)*. It consisted of creating a class project whose objective was to create and develop a packaging proposal for a ceramic craft piece from Barcelos. The main challenge was to associate the creation of this packaging with the opportunity to promote the piece itself, but also the artisan who produces it and the identity of Barcelos. The packaging would thus have the complementary function of valuing the crafts, the artisan and the locality, creating added value to the object itself, boosting sales and boosting this activity in the region, contributing to greater stability and income for the artisans involved and their families.

In this way, students also can develop an academic project, in a real context, getting to know and interacting with the people involved (craftsmen and representatives of the municipality), the products and their production (ceramic pieces). This learning and project context helped to raise awareness of the needs and problems associated with this activity, especially regarding the fragility of the pieces, the limited economic resources to invest in packaging and the need to provide the packaging with a graphic image. That would help, from the point of view of graphic communication, to enhance the image of the products and, as already mentioned, the identity of the artisans and the identity very specific to this region and its culture. The project took place with great proximity and intervention from the artisans involved and access to their workplaces and their pieces. This contact was decisive for the development of a much more dynamic process of responding to the needs encountered. The human side in collecting information, questioning and creating solutions was decisive in the students' commitment and in the particularity of the packaging they created. The result was presented to the

artisans and to the representatives of the municipality. Several of the students' solutions were identified has possibilities for implementation.



Fig. 6. Images from the most relevant phases of this project (IPCA, Barcelos 2014)

### 3.4. MOTIRÔ

This participation in *MOTIRÔ – O Festejo Como Testemunho* project (2020), came from an invitation of the *Arts and Design Department* at *PUC-Rio*. *MOTIRÔ* was organized by the *Museu da Pessoa* and *PUC-Rio (DHIS – History Design laboratory)* in partnership with several universities and institutions. The main goal of this project was to record and disseminate testimonies from artists, organizers and participants, who work in the trades involved in all stages of various festivities, sacred and profane rites (Brazilian and international), highlighting the collective dimension of a region in the culture of a country.

Based on the term defended by *Didi-Huberman*, about popular culture in his work, *The Survival of Fireflies*, and the image of the *firefly* proposed by *Pasolini* to describe the local manifestations and its popular and ritualistic character, was created the virtual exhibition “*Pasolini – 100 years*” [4], where ESD-IPCA actively participated, integrating the theme within the scope of work developed in various disciplines of the degree course in *Graphic Design*, namely, design, photography, drawing, illustration and digital animation. The results were very positive and with diverse approaches and with an aesthetic richness, that came from the exploratory and enriching languages applied by students. It was a time and space, in academic context, where students and teachers researched, debated and reflected on the synergies between art, design and the culture of Barcelos region.

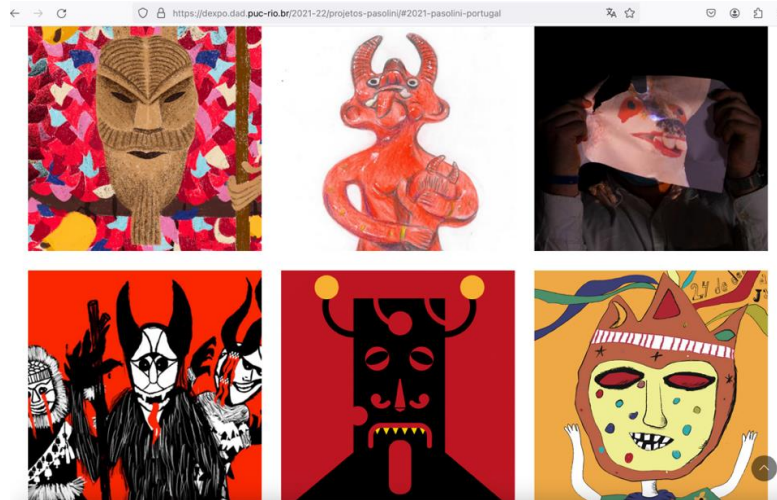


Fig. 7. Some of the ESD/IPCA student work in the “Pasolini – 100 years” exhibition (ESD/IPCA, 2020-21)

### 3.5. 7 Diabos

“7 are the devils that grow from clay and from the 7 capital sins.

A village, among many, the ideal place for the profane provocations from these 7 newborns.

*7 Diabos* is an illustration project that features characters inhabiting a universe immersed in the narratives of the popular imaginary of the Barcelos figurado. The usual popular themes with the surreal themes – profane creatures invade a rural village” [5]

*7 Diabos*, an exhibition whose pieces were created and materialized as part of the master's project by Rui Monteiro, a master's student from *MIA – Master in Illustration and Animation* (IPCA). The objective of this work was to add a contribution to the comparative analysis between *Barcelos figurado* and the activity of illustration, and, to understand where they can converge and diverge. It is also intended to understand what contaminations and synergies between the ceramic technique and the popular narratives, can contribute to the enrichment of illustration.

Initially, through reading relevant bibliography and interviews with artisans and illustrators, a collection and analysis of the history, narratives and characters of the *Barcelos figurado* was carried out, and of the Portuguese illustrators and artists who worked on this theme. With the aim of a better understanding of the pottery technique the master's student attended a postgraduate course in Pottery and Ceramics (WOC-IPCA), training that enabled the student to better understand the potential of three-dimensional illustration and the relationships between two-dimensional and three-dimensional 'as a whole' in the process of creating and constructing the illustration.

In the practical development of the pieces that make up this exhibition, the characters and the narrative were designed. The starting point was these popular narratives, adopted by the *Barcelos figurado*, to materialize two-dimensional works (gouache painting and various materials) and three-dimensional works (in ceramics). In the end, after these pieces were completed, the exhibition was built in the exhibition space of *Theatro Gil Vicente*, in Barcelos (April 2024), where people could see the results of the project and contribute to build new ideas for the artisans.



Fig. 8. Two-dimensional and three-dimensional illustrations (Rui Monteiro, 2023-4)



#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, we can say that this kind of projects, developed in an academic and R&D contexts, resulted in the reinforcement of our convictions that the disciplines of art and design, associated with new technologies, when incorporated into a theme of a strong symbolic value, rooted in a cultural experience of great artistic richness, not only adds a very special motivation to the development of an academic work, but also, the solutions represent the sign of the knowledge acquired in a specific field, but also, a contribution in the field of networking for discovery and recreation of people's culture.

The importance of the presented projects was also verified in the consolidation of possible institutional, national and international partnerships, from which everyone can benefit - academic community, artisans and local authorities - building new paths for innovation, valorization, dissemination and dynamization of this activity that is so essential and decisive in the economy, identity and culture of the region.

#### Figures: Credits & Sources

**Fig. 1.** Results from Google images research on the word "figurado", 2022

**Fig. 2.** Eduardo Gageiro, Carlos Basto, Museu de Olaria de Barcelos, in: <https://www.artepopularportuguesa.org/bio-rosa-ramalho/> (17/05/2024)

**Fig. 3.** Center for Modern Art – Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, in: <http://aarteemp Portugal.blogspot.com/2016/10/antonio-quadros-1933-1994.html> (17/05/2024)

**Fig. 4.** ESD/IPCA, 2016

**Fig. 5.** MIA/ESD/IPCA, 2017

**Fig. 6.** Cristiana Serejo, Vítor Tavares, 2014

**Fig. 7.** Some of the ESD/IPCA student work in the "Pasolini – 100 years" exhibition, 2020-21

**Fig. 8.** Paula Tavares, 2024

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