



Reinterpreting Graphic Heritage Through Design Practice: A Pedagogical Case Study

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Abstract

This article describes an academic design project developed in the undergraduate Graphic Design programme at the School of Design (ESD) of the Polytechnic University of Cávado and Ave (IPCA), in collaboration with the Municipality of Braga, as part of the Braga Capital of Culture (2025) programme and the centenary celebrations of Master José Veiga (1925 - 2002). A key figure in Braga's visual culture, Veiga produced an extensive body of work in drawing, graphic arts, and urban festive decoration, particularly for the Holy Week and St John's Day Festivities.

Two exhibitions were organised to reinterpret and disseminate Veiga's graphic heritage, combining reproductions of archival works – including posters, logos, lighting plans and urban decorative designs – with design projects developed by ESD/IPCA students. In the Graphic Design curriculum, students developed two exercises focused on visual identity and typography, aimed at creating contemporary visual systems connected to Braga's cultural identity and festive traditions.

Combining theoretical research, semiotic analysis and practical experimentation, the project was structured in three phases: analytical research into Veiga's visual language; exploratory graphic experimentation; and the synthesis and formalisation of design proposals. The results, demonstrate the pedagogical and cultural potential of design practice as a process of critical reinterpretation of visual heritage, highlighting the relationship between historical graphic identity, contemporary visual language and cultural transmission.

Keywords: Design Teaching; Visual Identity; Cultural Identity; Master José Veiga;

1. Introduction

The project, developed as part of the Graphic Design degree programme at the School of Design of the Polytechnic University of Cávado and Ave (ESD/IPCA), in collaboration with the Municipality of Braga (Portuguese Capital of Culture 2025), is a notable example of how design education can serve as a tool for cultural mediation and the reinterpretation of visual heritage. As part of the centenary celebrations of *Mestre* (Master) José Veiga and the *Braga Capital of Culture 2025* programme, the project sought to establish a critical relationship between the city's visual heritage and contemporary design practices, whilst promoting pedagogical processes of research, experimentation and visual production.

Master José Veiga is a key figure in the 20th-century Braga's visual culture, noted for his work in drawing and the graphic arts and, above all, for the design of decorative elements associated with the *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) and *São João* (St. John's Day) festivities. The identity-forming dimension of his work highlights the capacity of graphic design and visual language to construct symbolic systems linked to the city's collective memory and cultural representation. As Fernando Pinheiro (2000) notes, José Veiga's work has established itself as a visual heritage deeply rooted in the urban life of the city of Braga, reflecting simultaneously tradition, religiosity and popular spectacle.

Building on this legacy, the students were challenged to develop contemporary graphic proposals capable of reinterpreting the formal, chromatic and symbolic elements present in the artist's work. Through this semiotic approach, students explored the processes of symbolic construction present in his visual language and developed experimental exercises in visual identity and typography, applying principles of form, colour, hierarchy, and composition. This project can be understood as both a pedagogical exercise in visual communication and a critical framework for reflecting on the relationship between design, cultural memory and graphic heritage. By reinterpreting the visual legacy of Master José Veiga, the project has created a dialogue between historical references and a contemporary visual language. This allows students to explore the role of design as a cultural and symbolic practice.

2. Theoretical framework



The project's theoretical framework draws on contributions from visual communication theory, semiotics, visual syntax and identity systems, particularly the works of Joan Costa [1], Daniel Chandler [2], D. A. Dondis [3] and Fernando Pinheiro [4].

These authors provided the conceptual basis for understanding visual heritage as an active system of visual signs capable of generating new meanings within contemporary design practice, rather than simply as a historical archive.

Fernando Pinheiro's work on Master Veiga is a key historical and cultural reference for the project. In *Mestre José Veiga: O Artista Tranquilo – Vida e Obra de um Artista Consagrado Pela Cidade de Braga* (2000), Pinheiro documents the artist's contribution to Braga's visual culture, emphasising the relationship between his artistic production and the city's symbolic identity.

This understanding of visual production as a cultural system is closely linked to Daniel Chandler's thoughts on semiotics. In *Semiotics: The Basics* (2005), he argues that images operate as systems of signs whose meanings are culturally constructed and socially interpreted. From this perspective, the visual elements present in Master Veiga's work, such as ornamental structures, religious iconography, typographic forms and chromatic compositions, cannot be interpreted as mere aesthetic objects. Instead, they serve as carriers of collective meanings associated with local traditions, spirituality, celebration and urban identity.

The semiotic dimension of the project was further reinforced through the exploration of visual language and compositional principles set out by D. A. Dondis in *La Sintaxis de la Imagen* (2008). Dondis proposes that visual communication operates through a 'visual syntax', composed of formal relationships such as balance, contrast, rhythm, proportion, hierarchy and scale. These principles enable visual messages to achieve coherence, expressiveness and clarity of communication.

Dondis also emphasises that visual literacy encompasses more than just technical skill; it involves the capacity to critically interpret and construct visual meaning. This perspective was particularly important in the educational context of the project, in which students were encouraged to move beyond stylistic imitation and engage in critical design thinking.

The relationship between visual identity and symbolic construction was further developed through the theoretical contributions of Joan Costa. In *Design para os Olhos – Marca, Cor, Identidade, Sinalética* (2011), he examines how visual identity systems function as strategic instruments of communication and recognition. For Costa, identity is not restricted to logos or formal aesthetics; rather, it emerges through coherent visual systems that can express cultural values, institutional narratives and collective belonging. This perspective was particularly relevant to the students' proposals, which aimed to create contemporary visual symbols connected to Braga's festive traditions and graphic memory.

Integrating these theoretical perspectives shows how design education can be an interdisciplinary space for producing knowledge, combining historical research, cultural analysis, visual experimentation and critical interpretation. Rather than treating heritage as a static object of preservation, the project approached graphic memory as an evolving and dynamic field of visual culture. By reinterpreting Master Veiga's archive, students explored processes of cultural transmission, where contemporary design practice acts as a mediator between the past and the present.

The resulting exhibitions reinforced this dialogical relationship by placing historical works and contemporary student proposals side by side. This curatorial strategy revealed how graphic heritage can generate new visual narratives while preserving its symbolic and cultural significance. The coexistence of archival material and experimental design outcomes showed that heritage's value lies not only in conservation, but also in its ability to inspire reinterpretation, critical reflection and renewed cultural relevance.

Ultimately, the project highlights the importance of connecting design education with local cultural contexts and historical archives for pedagogical purposes. By engaging directly with Braga's visual heritage, students developed technical and conceptual design skills, as well as a deeper awareness of the social and cultural responsibilities of graphic design.

3. Methodology

The project's theoretical framework draws on contributions from visual communication theory, semiotics, visual syntax, typography and identity systems. This establishes a methodological structure that guides the analytical and practical dimensions of the design process. As the project focused on reinterpreting Master Veiga's graphic work, it adopted a methodology combining historical investigation, semiotic analysis, visual experimentation, and conceptual synthesis.

The first methodological stage focused on research and analytical observation. Students began by examining archive materials related to Master Veiga's work, including posters, typographic



compositions, decorative studies, lighting plans and urban festive designs. This involved identifying recurring visual structures, symbolic motifs, compositional systems and chromatic strategies in the artist's work. Through close visual analysis, students were encouraged to understand the formal qualities of the works and their cultural and communicative functions within Braga's visual identity.

This analytical phase was strongly influenced by semiotic theory, particularly the concept that visual artefacts function as systems of signs within social and cultural contexts. Semiotic analysis enabled the students to decode these symbolic dimensions and transform them into conceptual references for contemporary design proposals.

A second methodological component involved studying visual syntax and compositional organisation. This stage was particularly important for understanding how Master Veiga structured large-scale festive compositions and graphic systems intended for public spaces. By analysing the relationship between form, colour, typography and ornamentation, the students developed an awareness of how visual language can guide perception and produce an emotional and symbolic impact.

The project methodology incorporated exploratory and experimental design practices. Students explored how colour, typography, symbols and compositional structures could function together as elements of identity associated with Braga's festive culture. The methodology therefore extended beyond isolated graphic objects, encouraging the development of integrated visual systems that were both consistent and culturally relevant.

Another important methodological aspect of the project was the relationship between theory and practice. The design process was conceived as a reflective activity in which research, analysis, experimentation and production continuously informed one another. Students were encouraged to justify formal decisions conceptually, relating visual outcomes to the theoretical frameworks and cultural references. This pedagogical approach reinforced the idea that graphic design is a form of critical and cultural inquiry as well as a technical discipline.

The final methodological phase involved synthesis and formalisation. At this stage, students refined their proposals to create coherent visual outcomes inspired by Braga's cultural heritage.

These proposals were then presented in exhibitions alongside original works by Master José Veiga, establishing a dialogue between the historical archive and contemporary interpretation. This curatorial dimension became an extension of the methodology itself, reinforcing the continuity between research, design experimentation and public cultural dissemination.

Overall, the adopted methodology demonstrates how graphic design education can integrate historical research, theoretical reflection and creative practice into a unified pedagogical framework. By combining semiotic analysis, visual syntax, identity systems and experimental design processes, the project enabled students to critically engage with historical graphic artefacts, developing contemporary visual responses that are firmly grounded in cultural memory and local identity.

4. Practical Design Exercises – Case Study

As part of the Braga Capital of Culture 2025 programme and the centenary commemorations of Master José Veiga (1925–2002), two exhibitions were organised to disseminate and reinterpret Veiga's graphic legacy. The exhibitions brought together reproductions of original works, including posters, logos, lighting plans and urban decorative compositions, sourced from personal and municipal archives. They were displayed alongside projects and experimental exercises developed by students from the School of Design (ESD/IPCA).

This case study examines two design exercises developed in the undergraduate Graphic Design curriculum. Focusing on visual identity and typography, the projects aimed to explore the creation of visual systems that could express regional identity and critically engage with Braga's key festive traditions.

4.1. The Aim: Master Veiga's Legacy

José Veiga (1925-2002), also known as Master Veiga, occupies a significant position in the visual and cultural history of Braga. He is particularly renowned for his contributions to drawing, graphic arts, urban ornamentation and festive visual culture. Recognised locally as an artist deeply connected to the city's identity and traditions, Veiga produced an extensive body of work combining artistic sensitivity with a profound understanding of Braga's symbolic and cultural landscape. His work reflects technical skill, aesthetic refinement, and a strong capacity to translate collective memory and regional identity into visual form. Born in Braga in 1925, Veiga developed his artistic practice within a context strongly influenced by religious traditions, popular festivities and urban ceremonial culture. Throughout his



career, he became particularly associated with the visual representation of Braga's most emblematic celebrations, namely the Holy Week processions and the St. John's festivities. These events, deeply rooted in the city's collective experience, provided a context in which graphic design, scenography, ornamentation and public visual communication intersected.

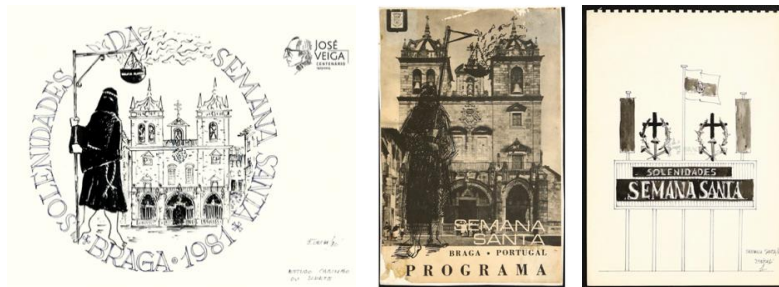


Fig. 1. Master Veiga's sketches and drawings for posters and decorations of the festivities (1980 – 1982).
(© José Veiga Fund – Braga Municipal Archive)

According to Fernando Pinheiro (2000), Veiga was widely recognised for the coherence and originality of his artistic language, characterised by precision in drawing, ornamental richness, and a strong sense of compositional balance. He demonstrated an ability to merge traditional decorative motifs with modern graphic sensibilities, producing visual systems that were simultaneously popular, symbolic and formally sophisticated. This capacity enabled his work to become deeply integrated into Braga's urban identity, transforming temporary festive decorations into lasting visual references in the city's collective memory. One of the most distinctive features of Master Veiga's work was his involvement in designing illuminated structures and decorative installations for public festivities. These large-scale urban compositions incorporated graphic rhythm, symmetry, repetition and chromatic contrast, revealing a sophisticated understanding of visual perception in architectural and public spaces. The ornamental structures created for Holy Week and St. John's celebrations often combined religious symbolism with festive exuberance, creating environments that served as both artistic compositions and shared cultural experiences. Veiga's graphic work also included posters, logos, lettering, illustrations, and visual identity elements for institutional and cultural events. His graphic language was characterised by his careful attention to typography, ornamental detail, and symbolic communication. Many of his posters and visual compositions strike a balance between figurative representation and geometric organisation, demonstrating a visual logic that anticipated contemporary concerns within graphic design and visual identity systems. Colour played a central role in his artistic practice. His colour choices often emphasised contrast and luminosity, particularly in projects intended for public celebrations and nocturnal urban settings. Light itself became an expressive medium in many of his festive installations, transforming streets and public squares into immersive visual landscapes. Through these interventions, Veiga contributed to the creation of a unique visual atmosphere that has come to symbolise Braga's cultural identity.

Another important aspect of his work was the relationship between craftsmanship and graphic composition. Although much of his work emerged in the context of festivities and was therefore ephemeral, his projects reveal rigorous planning and compositional discipline. His drawings and preparatory studies demonstrate an attention to proportion, rhythm and structural organisation, aligning his work with principles commonly associated with graphic design and visual communication. This combination of artisanal sensitivity and graphic rationality is what makes his visual language unique. His work is a prime example of how graphic and decorative arts can contribute to the development of urban identity and collective memory. By integrating artistic practice with public celebration and cultural representation, Master Veiga created a visual language that connected community, ritual and space. His archive, comprising drawings, plans, posters, decorative studies and graphic compositions, represents an invaluable artistic collection and an important document of Braga's visual culture throughout the twentieth century.

4.2. Exercise 1: Identity Signs in the Graphic Work of Master Veiga – Holy Week Posters

This exercise was developed by approximately 40 second-year students of the bachelor's degree in graphic design, in the scope of the Graphic Design Project II course, and took place over four sessions of three hours each. The students were organized into groups of two to three members.



The exercise was based on an analysis of Holy Week posters designed by Master Veiga for the city of Braga. It aims to identify the visual and identity-related elements that characterise the author's graphic language and visual aesthetics. By examining these works, students could understand how formal composition, symbolism, typography, colour and graphic synthesis contribute to creating a coherent and recognisable visual identity. Supported by a theoretical contextualisation of the formal and conceptual principles of identity design and an understanding of the theoretical and practical requirements of basic identification signs, students explored graphic solutions for different logo and brand typologies, including typography, form, and colour to develop visual systems capable of communicating Braga's cultural identity and the symbolic universe associated with its festive traditions.



Fig. 2. Master Veiga's posters for the Holy Week festivities (1957 – 2002).
(© José Veiga Fund – Braga Municipal Archive)

This visual analysis reveals a graphic language that is strongly defined by formal synthesis, symbolic expressiveness and chromatic restraint. The compositions are characterised by simplified forms, strong contrasts, balanced relationships between figure and background, and a clear visual hierarchy. Religious and cultural symbolism also plays a central role in Master Veiga's visual language. Recurring motifs, such as crosses, processional figures, candles, crowns of thorns and references to Braga's religious architecture, are stylised and integrated into highly synthesised compositions with symbolic and identitarian dimensions.

Colour is another fundamental component of the poster's visual impact. Composed predominantly of black, purple, red, white and gold tones, the chromatic palette conveys values associated with solemnity, spirituality, sacrifice, purity and tradition. The restrained use of colour and the emphasis on contrast contribute to the emotional and symbolic intensity of the graphic compositions. Meanwhile, typography assumes both informational and visual functions. The use of serif typefaces, balanced compositions and clearly structured hierarchies reinforces the posters' ceremonial and institutional character while contributing to their visual coherence.



Fig. 3. Students' proposals: colour palette; typography; abstract, figurative and typographic symbols (©IPCA).



Within this framework, students developed proposals exploring various approaches to visual identity. Typographic solutions focused on the expressive and structural potential of letterforms, while abstract proposals explored geometric and symbolic synthesis. On the other hand, figurative approaches incorporated stylised representations directly associated with the iconography of Holy Week. These exercises enabled students to investigate how visual identity design can communicate cultural, historical and emotional values through coherent and memorable graphic systems.

4.3. Exercise 2: 'Quadrícula' (Grid) Workshop

The 'Quadrícula' workshop took place in a classroom setting with 40 first-year bachelor's degree in graphic design (ESD/IPCA). The workshop began with a detailed observation and critical analysis of posters and lighting design sketches created by Master Veiga for the St. John's Festivities in Braga. During this initial phase, the students were encouraged to identify and analyse the key graphic and symbolic elements that define those festivities visual language. These elements included compositional structures, iconographic motifs and stylistic characteristics.



Fig. 4. Veiga's posters for St. John's festivities (1955 – 2002). (© José Veiga Fund – Braga Municipal Archive)



Fig. 5. Veiga's original drawings for the lightening and decorations of St. John's festivities (n.d.). (© José Veiga Fund – Braga Municipal Archive)

Building on this analytical foundation and drawing inspiration from Master Veiga's approach to constructing visual compositions, the students developed a modular grid system ('quadrícula'). This grid system served as a structural framework for organising visual elements, providing the basis for the creation of original icons and symbolic interpretations.



Fig. 6. (left) Master Veiga's graph paper drawings for planning colour lamps used in festive decorations (n.d.).
(© José Veiga Fund – Braga Municipal Archive) **Fig. 7.** (right) Students' graph paper drawings (© IPCA).

Within this system, each student translated their graphic explorations into modular units, exploring rhythm, repetition and structure as compositional principles. The grid ensured visual coherence and encouraged a systematic and controlled approach to image construction, reflecting processes commonly used in typographic and identity design.

Using *FontStruct*® software [6] (for modular typeface design), students digitally constructed their proposals, resulting in the creation of a set of symbolic typefaces designed for download and practical application. This digital translation of analogue exploration enabled students to grasp the relationship between structure and flexibility in type design, as well as the constraints and potential of modular systems.

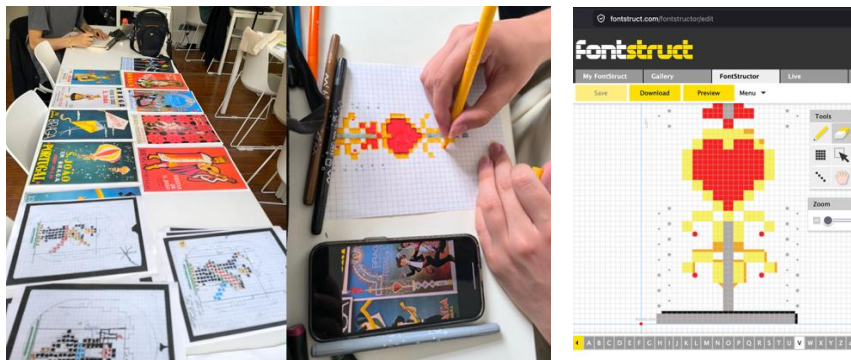


Fig. 8. (left) Process (© Cristiana Serejo). **Fig. 9.** (right) Digital drawings for VEIGA symbolic typeface.

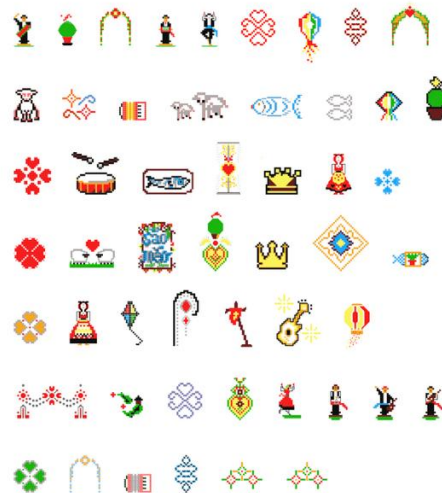
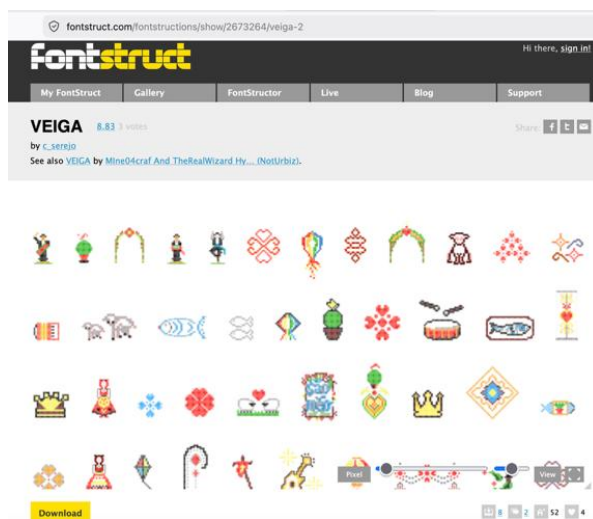


Fig. 10. (left) Final digital drawings of VEIGA symbols typeface [6], ready to download. **Fig. 11.** (right) Page with VEIGA symbols already in use.



The exercise aimed to stimulate systematic thinking and foster the creative appropriation of traditional elements, encouraging a contemporary reinterpretation of the Braga St. John's Festivities visual heritage.

5. Final Considerations

This project demonstrated how graphic design education can function as a pedagogical, cultural and critical practice simultaneously. By analysing and reinterpreting the graphic legacy of Master José Veiga, students explored the relationship between graphic heritage, cultural memory and contemporary visual communication through processes of visual research, semiotic interpretation and experimental design. Integrating theoretical frameworks related to semiotics, visual syntax and identity systems enabled students to understand visual culture as an active field of symbolic production, capable of generating new meaning through contemporary design practice, rather than simply as a historical archive. By analysing Master Veiga's work, the students developed an awareness of how visual forms, colour, typography and composition contribute to the construction of collective identity and urban cultural representation.

Practical exercises reinforced the value of connecting historical research with experimental methodologies. Through processes of observation, abstraction, synthesis and format experimentation, students produced contemporary graphic proposals based on Braga's festive traditions and visual culture. Rather than simply reproducing historical forms, the exercises encouraged critical analysis and reinterpretation, enabling students to transform historical materiality into new visual graphics adapted to current contexts of communication and design practice.

The exhibitions played a key role in establishing a dialogue between the past and the present. By presenting student projects alongside original works from Master Veiga's archive, they revealed how graphic heritage can remain culturally relevant through reinterpretation and educational engagement. This curatorial approach emphasised design's ability to bridge memory, identity, and contemporary visual language, underscoring the vital role of archives as dynamic educational and cultural resources. This case study also demonstrated the importance of collaborative work between higher education institutions and cultural organisations in promoting local heritage and public cultural participation. The collaboration between ESD/IPCA and the Municipality of Braga provided students with the opportunity to engage directly with the city's visual heritage, contributing to the dissemination and contemporary reinterpretation of a significant cultural legacy within the framework of Braga's 2025 European Capital of Culture programme.

Ultimately, this case study confirms the potential of design education to contribute to processes of cultural transmission, critical reflection, and visual innovation. By connecting design pedagogy with local heritage and collective memory, the project established a framework in which contemporary graphic practice becomes a form of cultural enquiry and a means of renewing the symbolic significance of historical visual identities in contemporary society.

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